

La Adelita
(English Edition)

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Where should I start this story? Perhaps it is best to go back to the afternoon when Alex Sigüenza showed up to work for the first time in the newspaper. Alex had just finished the third year of journalism at the University and was coming to do an internship at El Heraldo. The boy arrived very well recommended by two of his teachers. One of them had worked with us years ago, and the newspaper's Editor, Oscar Bocanegra, came up with the idea that Alex should work with me in the red chronicle section.

From the beginning we got along very well. Alex was a young mind who had been educated in what is now known as social journalism. He loved the idea of the journalist committed to the reality of his surroundings, the journalist who tried to unveil the connection between social injustice and the dark desires that move the human being. After all that I had seen in my life as a reporter, after twenty years of work, I had my doubts about the effectiveness of social journalism. Even so, I asked Alex about his specific interests, which topic did he prefer to work during his internship at the newspaper?

He told me that he was interested in the figure of the *femme fatale*, the devouring or manipulative woman who toyed with men, and her various manifestations in the media. His answer surprised and intrigued me. I was expecting an interest in reporting the connection between social events and the forces behind politics or the economy. A typical desire for people in my generation. But times change! The character of the seductive woman capable of hypnotizing a man until he is forced to commit all kinds of crimes is quite common in film and literature. In fact, as a red chronicle reporter, I had investigated two or three cases with women who had several of the characteristics of the *femme fatale*.

Alex quoted details of a series of academic studies. According to him, in many newspaper reports the fatal woman was mostly a literary construction, a hook created to attract readers of the press, the perpetuation of a myth useful in the process of covering social inequalities and hidden desires. 'The cub has a lot of noble ideas but little experience' was my thought upon hearing Alex's arguments. I told him to be careful. Everything can be found in this world.

Three weeks after my first conversation with Alex, I was working on the patio of a cafe when I saw the person who is the main protagonist of this story. The woman who gained fame under the alias of La Adelita. Bocanegra had commissioned me an article, an exposé, about the decay of the prison system in the country. The Editor of El Heraldo was fighting one of his frequent battles with the government and I was in charge of attacking the thousand-headed dragon. After a research process of several weeks, the article denouncing the problems in the penitentiary system was almost ready. I decided to make a final revision of the text in a cafe near the newspaper.

The cafe had a nice patio that faced a street where one could find several tables with awnings that stopped the sun's rays. Three large fans, distributed along the patio, created an extremely pleasant artificial breeze on hot days. I took a table, sat in a chair, and asked the waiter for a Latte Deluxe. Before immersing myself in the review of my article, I explored the world around me.

To my left, three tables beyond, sat a woman. In a relaxed way, she read a fashion magazine and drank coffee. She was not the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life but there was something in the features of her face that made this female an exceptional beauty. Her brunette complexion had been carefully tanned under the sun's rays or artificial light. She had her hair, black, collected in a very elaborate bun. The woman wore an elegant two-piece suit in dark cream. I estimated that she was between 30 and 40 years old.

To my right was sitting an elderly couple. Happy senior citizens. As they drank their coffees, they saw a child's picture and joked. Their grandson? Probably. Finally, on the patio's edge were standing two mature men. Both were good-sized and robust. While talking of diverse topics, the two men amused themselves by throwing hot compliments to the women who were pacing near the cafe and they liked. What in the street slang is known as "dar lengua."

I tried to focus on the text of my article: A prison system full of violence where only beings coming from marginal urban areas were punished ... 'Huuy mi nena, kill me if I don't satisfy you, eliminame caramelito, but first give me a good try.' Ni modo. I raised my eyes and focused them on the place where the two galanes de calle were standing. The piropo or catcall had been addressed to a tall, skinny girl, quite pretty, who was

walking down the street in the company of her boyfriend, an athletic young man. None of them liked the “compliment.” The boyfriend engaged in a strong argument with the two galanes. With a smile, one of the men pulled a Colt 38 Special from the back of his waist and said to the young man: ‘Get lost or I’ll burn you.’ Frightened the girl convinced her boyfriend that it had been nothing. Both continued walking down the street.

Everyone inside the cafe saw the incident. It was far from being a simple joke. Eventually the two galanes noticed the presence of the woman sitting on my left, three tables beyond mine. ‘Tú tan santa y yo tan diablo, talk to me baby, blow me away!’ She disregarded the comment and continued reading the magazine in her hands ... Unexpectedly the woman got up and slowly walked to the sidewalk of the street. Her body was superb. Once on the sidewalk, she looked at both sides of the street. She gave the impression of waiting or looking for someone. A friend's car? A taxi?

The two galanes hurried to offer their services, they did have a car. I was greatly surprised when she accepted their offer. Some things are unpredictable in life. ‘That is a lot of female for only one lover’ said the old man on my right to his partner and laughed. After seeing how the three of them disappeared at the end of the street, I concentrated on finishing my article. Bocanegra was waiting for it.

More than a month passed. One afternoon I was discussing with the people of the sports section the scoring virtues of Leo Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, and “Chivo” Guarandini when an office-boy notified us that Bocanegra urgently needed me in his office. Visits to my Editor's office have always been an adventure. The man has three walls of his office covered with awards won by research articles done at El Heraldó. A poster of the film Citizen Kane hangs on the fourth wall. When you go to talk to Bocanegra you never know who you are going to find: A serious and responsible journalist or a materialistic and manipulative creature in the style of Charles Foster Kane.

I found him examining a fax sent by one of his contacts within the Police Department. With concise words, Bocanegra told me what the rush was all about. On the morning of that day, there had been a particularly ugly shooting in the house of the industrialist Néstor Arreaza-Bosch. The final result: Three dead men, one wounded, an old Aztec mask lost, and 650,000 dollars missing. Arreaza-Bosch had died in an exchange of shots. The police worked on the hypothesis that the industrialist had organized the purchase of

an indigenous mask illegally extracted from Mexico. Nothing new. In a country hit by drug trafficking, few pay attention to the traffic of art objects. The mask was a representation of the god Quetzalcoatl made in the fourteenth century using wood decorated with small pieces of turquoise and obsidian. During the delivery and purchase of the mask, something went wrong leaving several men dead and one injured.

The police suspected that the secretary of Arreaza-Bosch, Adela Iturbide, had fled with the Aztec mask and the 650,000 dollars for the payment. At that point, everything in the police investigation was conjecture. The fax received by Bocanegra contained four photographs. The first one showed an old man, over seventy years of age, Néstor Arreaza-Bosch. The second depicted the secretary of the industrialist. I immediately recognized the beautiful woman I saw in the cafe weeks ago. The other photos were of the two galanes de calle: Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz. They had no luck. Yonatan died during the shooting, Tomás was only wounded, but he had been captured and was being interrogated by the police. Both had criminal records for armed robbery. I whistled when I heard all this. Bocanegra did not hear or see my gesture. ‘You and Alex take care of this marvelous case’ said the Boss, ‘be careful with Nestor Arreaza-Bosch, that man was never what he claimed to be.’

Without wasting time I took the fax and went in search of Alex. He was fascinated by the history and the possibility that Adela Iturbide was a *femme fatale*. Was she? Had she manipulated Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz to take the Aztec mask and the money from Arreaza-Bosch? I told Alex not to rush to draw conclusions. In this business, things can change drastically from one day to another. The truth is that, after seeing her in the cafe, I had a hard time believing that Adela Iturbide was responsible for the shooting in the house of Arreaza-Bosch. Weakness for a pretty face and a very nice body? Maybe.

Using my cell phone, I called the Comisario Augusto Valladares in the Police Department. Augusto enjoyed my full confidence. He had been my sister's boyfriend many years ago and, like me, was a die-hard fan of the New York Yankees. Together we had seen the Yankees crush the Philadelphia Phillies in the Baseball World Series of the previous year. Augusto confirmed all the information contained in the fax received by Bocanegra.

The police investigation progressed slowly. Tomás Ruiz, after being arrested, refused to speak and was being given special treatment to free his tongue. The Police Department worked under enormous pressure. At the highest level, the Mexican Ambassador had requested help to find the whereabouts of the mask representing the god Quetzalcoatl, according to him 'a national treasure', and our government could not make mistakes when dealing with this case. On the other hand, the family of Néstor Arreaza-Bosch demanded the capture of the person responsible for the death of the industrialist. More than 10,000 people worked in the Arreaza-Bosch's companies. Such a large workforce could not be ignored by government politicians. Augusto agreed to give me the specific information I needed to write an article. Tomás Ruiz was going to talk sooner or later. The Comisario recommended that I followed up with a second call to him early that night.

What to do in the meantime? A reporter's job is always against the clock. Following an old saying in the business of journalism, I decided to "shake the tree on the other side." In search of information about Néstor Arreaza-Bosch, I went with Alex to visit Guido Santamaría's desk. Guido and his wife were the ones leading the social section in El Herald. They collected mundane information, gossip in many cases, about people who moved in the highest spheres of the country. I gave Guido the news of Arreaza-Bosch's death and the details of how it had happened. He smiled. From a drawer inside the right corner of his desk, he pulled out a small bottle of whiskey, took a drink, and said: 'One big bastard has departed from this world!'

Our reporter knew many details of the life of Arreaza-Bosch. The businessman was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in the early 1930s, in a well-off family. His parents sent him to study in England where he graduated as a civil engineer. In 1953 he returned to Venezuela. The country at that time was governed by the dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez. A ruler obsessed with modernizing the urban area of Caracas and other cities in Venezuela. Arreaza-Bosch joined a group of architects and engineers who embarked on building construction projects and communication systems never seen before in Latin America. Projects that needed large amounts of cement and other construction materials. Arreaza-Bosch realized this detail, the designer of buildings died, and the great businessman was born.

With the financial help of his family, the engineer bought cement factories. To secure government contracts, Arreaza-Bosch established partnerships with high-level members of the regime. He became an informant of the secret police, La Seguridad Nacional, and betrayed his friends who were on the opposition fighting against the dictator and his thugs. Arreaza-Bosch made money, lots of money, but when Marcos Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship collapsed, in 1958, he had no choice but to flee from Venezuela to avoid reprisals.

Assuming the figure of a political refugee, he took asylum in our country and, using his money and knowledge, proceeded to create a commercial empire associated with the construction industry. According to Guido, Arreaza-Bosch never truly believed in a particular political ideology, he was only interested in accumulating money and enjoying life. He adopted a respectable businessman façade. A façade that he used to hide two great passions. He enjoyed buying stolen art objects. Using his money and tricks he managed to acquire a huge collection of pre-Columbian indigenous art. His second great passion was the purchase and sale of women.

Arreaza-Bosch bought the women in networks of human trafficking, used them in private orgies, and when he got tired of them, he resold his victims to the highest bidder. Upon hearing this, Alex and I jumped. I asked Guido if he had heard of Adela Iturbide. 'La Adelita was Arreaza-Bosch's partner in the past five years' was his reply. One day she appeared accompanying him in public events with the title of secretary but it was obvious that they were lovers. The people were so impressed with her body that they gave the woman the affectionate nickname of "La Adelita." It was rumored that Arreaza-Bosch had bought her like so many others, that he had fallen in love, and that he had no choice but to stay with her.

After talking with Guido Santamaría, Alex and I decided to split to advance faster in the investigation of the case. He concentrated on seeking additional information about Arreaza-Bosch using the databases available on the Internet. I walked around a couple of places in the city where people knew about human trafficking and how the local sale of women was operated. Something that exists and remains hidden in most of the great cities of Latin America.

Adela Iturbide's body could not go unnoticed. I asked many questions and got many answers. What Guido said was true. Arreaza-Bosch had bought Adela Iturbide after seeing her on sale in a catalog of exotic beauties. She was born in Cali, Colombia, and came from a low-income family. When she was twenty, Adela Iturbide went to a party in the company of a friend, a girl she met at the clothing store where she worked. The party was a trap, the supposed friend sold her, and Adela Iturbide fell into the hands of human traffickers. They kidnapped her. Her family and acquaintances never heard from her again.

The young girl became a sex slave. They told me she had already been sold and bought twice before being acquired by Arreaza-Bosch. Upon hearing all this I was stunned. It had never occurred to me that this is the ordeal that thousands of women pass through in our world. Adela Iturbide fought with what she had. She somehow managed to make Arreaza-Bosch fall in love with her and he didn't sell her again. The story of Scherezade and the almighty Sultan in *The Thousand and One Nights* came to my mind. Every night La Adelita gave Arreaza-Bosch something to keep his interest in her.

But this was not a fairy tale, it could not have a happy ending. Their relationship was a strange mixture of desire, love, and hate. When Arreaza-Bosch fell in love with Adela Iturbide, she changed the balance of power. What was once a sex slave began to emancipate. On one side we had an old man, half-finished, and on the other, a woman in her fullness, with a body exploding with life. Arreaza-Bosch came to fear that La Adelita would escape or not give him what he wanted. To control and keep her happy by his side, he offered to make her heir to a part of his immense fortune. That was what they told me in the streets.

It was almost nine o'clock at night when I returned to the newspaper building. I told Alex what I had learned. From the door of his office, Bocanegra gave me a penetrating look. I had to write an article for the next day's edition. I proceeded to make a phone call to Comisario Augusto Valladares.

The police progressed in the investigation of the case. Three hours earlier, at the city's airport, the seller of the Quetzalcoatl mask had been arrested while trying to escape on a flight to Miami. His name: Felipe Duran. With his testimony and that of Tomás Ruiz, the police tried to reconstruct what happened that morning in the house of Arreaza-Bosch.

Around 10 am, Duran and a bodyguard showed up in the house carrying a special container with the Aztec mask. Felipe Duran did not expect any kind of problem since Arreaza-Bosch was an old customer. Everything was limited to hand over the mask and collect the 650,000 dollars in payment.

Adela Iturbide met him at the front door of the house and led him to the library where Arreaza-Bosch and two men who he had never seen before, Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz, were waiting for him. The meeting began in a friendly way. In a happy mood, the owner of the house asked Adela Iturbide to serve drinks to everyone present. Arreaza-Bosch proceeded to examine the mask and compared it to a photo of another Quetzalcoatl mask that was on display at the British Museum in London. He marveled seeing a face that attracted and frightened at the same time: A god of wisdom and justice.

Satisfied with the quality of the artwork, Arreaza-Bosch gave Tomás Ruiz the order to pay the 650,000 dollars. It was at that point that everything twisted. According to Felipe Duran, there was a strange gesture from Yonatan Blanco followed by an exchange of glances between him and Adela Iturbide. Distrust, jealousy. Arreaza-Bosch pulled out a gun and started shooting. Pandemonium. Several well-armed men were involved in an exchange of gunfire.

Horrified Felipe Duran made a run towards the main door of the house. Before leaving the library, he watched Adela Iturbide escaping through a side door, taking the mask and the briefcase with the money. Tomás Ruiz postulated a different version of what happened. According to him, the shooting was a consequence of the greed of Felipe Duran and his bodyguard who tried to take the money without delivering the mask. The bodyguard was a professional shooter. He killed Arreaza-Bosch and Yonatan Blanco before being cut down by a miraculous shot by Tomás Ruiz. Adela Iturbide had no choice but to run away with the mask and money to protect them from Felipe Duran.

Neither of these two versions of the events was satisfactory to Comisario Valladares. Augusto looked forward to the reports of the coroner and the Police Scientific Unit. His people were combing the house of Arreaza-Bosch up and down. How to write an article with only this information? Very few concrete facts, too many unknowns. Bocanegra, Alex and I decided that it was best to present a concise first piece mentioning the people involved in the shooting, the loss of the Quetzalcoatl mask, and the disappearance of

650,000 dollars. Nothing more. I proceeded to write the article, gave Bocanegra the final product, and went home to rest. Alex stayed at his desk surfing the Internet searching for information

That night I slept badly. What I saw and heard during the day left a deep impression on my mind. The facts of the case were spinning in my head. I had a strange, chilling nightmare, which was repeated again and again. I was in a room with circular walls all painted white. At my side was standing Adela Iturbide. She looked and looked at me without saying a word. Outside, beyond the white walls, there was the sound of the wind and screams of pain. Voices of men and women alternated moaning. Restless I moved around the room and tried to talk to Adela Iturbide. Where are we? Who is screaming? She did not answer me. Her eyes moved following my movements but her lips wouldn't open. Finally, hearing screams, I was shaking and seemed to wake up from the nightmare. Actually, I kept dreaming, and after a while, I fell back into the same nightmare. This sequence was repeated several times. I woke up feeling a pair of small hands on my face. It was seven in the morning of the next day, my wife was preparing to take my son to school, and the little boy was saying goodbye to me.

On the way from my home to work, I stopped at a kiosk to read the headlines of the written press. My article was on the front page of El Heraldo. Black and white photos of Arreaza-Bosch and Adela Iturbide accompanied the written text. La Adelita looked radiant. Someone had played with the tones and contrast in the photo of Arreaza-Bosch giving the old man a somewhat sinister appearance. The intervening hand of Bocanegra? I examined the articles in other newspapers. Everyone painted a negative image of Adela Iturbide. They had taken the easy path. The legend of a *femme fatale*, La Adelita, was beginning to be born.

Upon arriving at El Heraldo's building, I found Alex working at his desk. He had been collecting information in the databases accessible through the Internet all night. His enthusiasm denoted that this was his first real case outside the School of Journalism. When Alex saw me, he smiled. He proceeded to show me what he had about Arreaza-Bosch. The young journalist had gone to Venezuela in the 1950s. He found documents associated with La Seguridad Nacional, the fearsome secret police of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, which put our dead magnate in a very bad position.

In his early years, Arreaza-Bosch was much more than a simple snitch, in fact, he participated in many torture processes, and became a good friend of the director in the political police, a man named Pedro Estrada. Arreaza-Bosch liked to watch how opponents of the regime were tortured. Members of La Seguridad Nacional gave him the nickname of "El Mirón." He and Pedro Estrada appeared together in photographs of public events where urban infrastructure works, built by the government with the cement produced at the Arreaza-Bosch's factories, were inaugurated. When Marcos Pérez Jiménez fell, Pedro Estrada secured political asylum in France together with a position as advisor to the Sûreté, the French security police. Arreaza-Bosch considered the possibility of going to France, he indeed had an offer, but in the end, the scoundrel decided to stay with us in the tropics.

He came to our country and created a precedent. Years later collaborators of the dictatorships of Anastasio Somoza, Jorge Videla and Augusto Pinochet also would come. Today we are receiving rich and corrupt men who prospered under the protection of the so-called Socialism of the 21st Century. This country of ours always so friendly to foreign visitors who come with sacks of money!

Alex found very little of Adela Iturbide on the Internet. She was a marginal being within the world in which we live. Alex decided to focus his attention on the illegal trafficking of women: The criminal activity that brought Adela Iturbide into the country. In statistics from various United Nations agencies, and other international organizations, human trafficking was and is the third most profit-making criminal activity, surpassed only by drug and arms dealing. A business that moves millions and millions of dollars.

More than 80% of the trafficked persons are women. There are places in Latin America where the sale of a woman produces more profits than the sale of marijuana or cocaine. People of all social strata, of both sexes, regardless of race or age, are dedicated to profit through this kind of trafficking. Criminal networks abduct young women who are forced into prostitution or sold to private collectors such as Arreaza-Bosch. Psychological trauma caused by sexual abuse causes the victim to attempt to withdraw from society. She becomes docile and passive, making it easier to handle her by the traffickers. From that hollow, somehow, Adela Iturbide came out and counterattacked.

I was discussing with Alex how to include all this information in our report,

organizing the material, when I received a phone call from Commissioner Valladares. The story made up by Tomás Ruiz was falling apart. Tests from a ballistics lab indicated that Arreaza-Bosch had been shot dead by two bullets from the Colt 38 Special carried by Yonatan Blanco in the day of the shooting. 'Ruiz is now singing good and clear notes' told me Augusto. It was time to go to the Police Department in search of information.

The entrance hall to the Police Department was a huge bululu. The usual! People explaining why they had killed, the reasons which forced them to steal valuable goods, the obscure desires which motivated sex with the wife of a friend or a brother, and many other cardinal sins. After seeing Alex and me coming through the main door, a young lawyer in need of work came up and offered us his services. I told him that we were just visiting. Together with Alex, I went straight to Comisario Valladares' office.

Augusto had huge dark circles around his eyes but he was happy. The police officer had solved the case. I asked for details. He invited us to sit on two chairs located near his desk. In front of us, once seated, he placed a pack of about a hundred homemade postcard-sized photographs. His men had found them the night before hidden in a room in the Arreaza-Bosch's mansion. When we examined them, Alex and I jumped. The images showed naked or semi-naked women and men in different poses, having sex, or participating in acts of corporeal submission.

The photographs had been taken by Arreaza-Bosch in his private orgies. Augusto recommended us to examine the last dozen of photos in the pack. They featured Adela Iturbide, Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz. Adela Iturbide wore tiny panties and a black leather jacket, the typical garment of a dominatrix. Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz were completely naked. Sometimes they appeared bound by their feet and hands, lying on a bed, or resting on the floor of a room. A whip, a macana, and a big dildo. Sex with pain. Two of the photos showed close-ups of suffering on the faces of Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz. That wasn't a game. "El Mirón" loved to see other men lose their masculinity.

Putting together all the evidence we had on the case, we tried to reconstruct the facts that preceded the shooting in the Arreaza-Bosch house. Adela Iturbide hated the cement industrialist. Half the world knew that. She was not satisfied in the role of slave-lover-secretary and wanted to escape the control of her captor. Arreaza-Bosch had promised to

make her the heir to part of his immense fortune. But she didn't trust him. She needed money to run away and start a new life. The operation for the purchase of the Quetzalcoatl mask was a unique opportunity to obtain that money.

At what point did Adela Iturbide decide to strike? Before or after meeting Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz? That was a very difficult point to pin down. For Comisario Valladares, there was a 'third man involved in the plot.' Without him, the escape of La Adelita would have been impossible. That 'third man' may have helped her to plan the heist. In the plot, the active participation of Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz was essential.

Tomás Ruiz gave details to the police of his relationship with Adela Iturbide. In his first two meetings, where Yonatan Blanco was also present, there was no sex and no talk about money. They just went around the city visiting bars. In the third encounter, Adela Iturbide agreed to have sex with the two men at a motel on the outskirts of the city. 'Nothing kinky ... The woman made us fly without complicating her life too much' confessed Tomás Ruiz. It was at that meeting that the purchase of the Aztec mask and the 650,000 dollars of payment were first mentioned. It was a lot of money.

In their armed robberies, Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz had never raised more than 10,000 dollars. With the coup proposed by Adela Iturbide, each man would get a minimum of 215,000 dollars plus a third of the money to be collected by the sale of the mask. A lot of money! However, before striking, they have to gain the trust of Arreaza-Bosch, which required active participation in his private orgies and accepting his games of corporeal submission. The two galanes de calle asked for time to assess the offer calmly. They finally accepted it. 'Adela messed us in a bad way... We didn't know what we were getting into' complained Tomás Ruiz during the police interrogation.

Eventually, Yonatan Blanco and Tomás Ruiz earned the trust of Arreaza-Bosch. They went with him everywhere. He used them as bodyguards on the day of the delivery of the Quetzalcoatl mask. Both men were present that morning and heavily armed. Adela Iturbide's plan was simple. After the exchange of the mask and money, the three conspirators would take the seller Felipe Duran and Arreaza-Bosch by surprise, disarm them, and leave the two tied up in a house room which very few people visited. When the two tied men recovered their freedom, Adela Iturbide and her accomplices were

expecting to be far away hidden in a secure place. Neither Arreaza-Bosch nor Felipe Duran could go to the police or make a stir. Estaban jodidos! It was supposed to be a perfect crime.

But Adela Iturbide's original plan didn't work. According to Tomás Ruiz: 'Yonatan screwed things up ... La cagó!' His friend got nervous, acted too soon. Arreaza-Bosch was suspicious and pulled out a gun. Yonatan Blanco shot him dead. The bodyguard that Felipe Duran was employing had no choice but to intervene. With a clean shot, he ended the life of Yonatan Blanco and then managed to wound Tomás Ruiz, before falling down victim to a Ruiz's bullet.

Trapped by all this shooting, Adela Iturbide did not lose her temper. She grabbed the mask, took the briefcase with the money, and fled. 'The third man involved in the plot was waiting for La Adelita to help her escape' reiterated Comisario Valladares. 'This accomplice, whose identity is completely unknown to us, was probably waiting for her at the wheel of a car ready to flee from the crime scene.' The anonymity of the 'third man' gave him and Adela Iturbide a huge ability to maneuver, making the police's quest much more difficult. Most likely, Adela Iturbide was well hidden inside or near the city. Why take a risk and try to cross one of the checkpoints set by the police on roads, ports and airfields? Felipe Duran made that mistake and was apprehended.

Satisfied with the information obtained, Alex and I returned to El Heraldo's offices. We met immediately with Bocanegra and carefully gave him the details of the case. The old fox heard us and looked at the Citizen Kane's poster that hanged on one wall of his office without saying a word. He was not shocked after hearing the actions of Arreaza-Bosch in the world of politics and economics. He'd heard and seen worse things. Nor was he impressed with the fact that Adela Iturbide was abducted and subsequently sold in the human trafficking market. This is Latin America! At the end of the story, when Alex mentioned the possible existence of a third man in the plot, he finally opened his mouth. 'If that man exists, he has the female and the money, we won't hear from him for a long time' predicted the Editor.

We proceeded to outline the writing of our report on the case. Alex and I were in favor of dealing with the topic as soon as possible: Hit fast and make it clear what happened. Bocanegra told us not to rush. 'Get down from that cloud gentlemen, land,

fewer emotions and more brain.' He was in favor of making the most of the case. Yes, we were going to write everything we had discovered, but we had to wait for the story of Arreaza-Bosch and Adela Iturbide to "warm up." When the reading public reached a very high level of curiosity, El Heraldo would offer a series of articles with unknown details of the case. Journalism at the highest level!

And the case "warmed up." For several days it was the most important news in the media. The people on the street were watching the whereabouts of the beautiful woman who had fled with 650,000 dollars and an old Aztec mask: La Adelita. For some strange reason, nothing was mentioned in the newspapers or the television and radio news about Arreaza-Bosch's ugly past. His heirs, two nephews and a niece, used well their contacts. They promoted the idea that our magnate was a pillar of society who had the eccentricity of collecting pre-Columbian indigenous objects to protect them and prevent any harm to these valuable pieces of art. It sounded nice!

Adela Iturbide, on the other hand, was a thankless secretary who had betrayed the trust placed on her. A *femme fatale* who manipulated two street thugs to commit a horrible crime. This faked version of reality was easily accepted by a large number of people. 'Why?' asked Alex. 'In this society, every woman is guilty until proven otherwise, the man is innocent' was my response. I had already observed similar public behavior in other cases. A pretty woman who moves without any control around the world is a subject that gives flight to people's imagination and conjectures. What is she doing? Where is she going? Why can't we control her? Besides, this woman had taken a huge amount of money, money that belonged to a supposedly respectable man. Total transgression!

A rapper noticed the similarity between the nickname given to Adela Iturbide and the name of an old corrido from the time of the Mexican Revolution. He modified the lyrics of the old song and put out a new version on the streets:

Mala bicha ... The bitch!

If Adelita runs away with all my money,
I would follow her by land and sea.
If by sea on a warship,
if by land in a military truck.
Mala bicha ... The bitch!

Adelita for God sake don't steal from my sack,
don't leave me all broke and
looking out to the sea ... Nooo!

The song was extremely successful. It captured the feeling of the people. Even women sang the Adelita's rap. Bocanegra decided it was time to intervene.

We wrote a three-article serial. The first article was written by Alex. He told to the public 'The True Story of Adela Iturbide.' The boy did it with great care. Se esmeró. He used everything he had learned within the school of social journalism. His article was at the same time a chronicle, a sociology essay, and a melodrama. He attacked a society that allowed the trafficking of women and turned his back on Adela Iturbide. El Herald's edition with Alex's article sold like hot bread. Many liked the article, others didn't, but they all bought the newspaper.

The second article we decided to focus it on Nestor Arreaza-Bosch. Bocanegra assigned that job to me. It was a delicate task, it had to present only well-established facts, preventing any possibility of a lawsuit by the family of Arreaza-Bosch. I got a jewel that Bocanegra and the newspaper's legal department approved without any change. It was a bomb! The headquarters of the Arreaza-Bosch's companies were stoned. His family chose to take a long holiday in Europe and let everything return to calm over time.

The audience looked excitedly for the publication of the third article that concluded our serial about the case. The night before the scheduled day for the publication of the article, Bocanegra gave the order to 'hold it.' Many of those who bought the newspaper the next day called to our offices asking why the article had not been published. Bocanegra offered a good excuse: 'We're polishing it.' Well... With the publication of the final article in the serial, El Herald reached a never-before-seen sales volume for a country newspaper. In the third article, Alex and I described in detail what happened during the shooting in the house of Arreaza-Bosch and the complex relationship that existed between the people involved. There were no saints, they were all sinners, some more and others less. Most readers liked the article.

I must confess that writing that serial gave me a lot of satisfaction. Alex entered journalism in a big way and earned a position as a reporter at El Herald. With that serial,

we were lucky enough to win two international awards in journalism. Bocanegra has the two plates hanging on one of the walls in his office and smiles when he sees them.

Over the years nothing else which can be trusted has been learned about Adela Iturbide, the Quetzalcoatl mask, and the 650,000 dollars of payment. Occasionally tabloids publish articles where La Adelita has married, has two nice children, and lives peacefully on a Caribbean island. A strong rumor suggests that the Aztec mask has gone into the hands of an art collector in Germany. There is talk of a purchase cost of 450,000 euros. Tomás Ruiz was judged for his participation in the heist organized by Adela Iturbide. A famous lawyer defended him and never revealed where he got the money that paid the defense costs. The famous lawyer obtained a one-year jail sentence for Tomás Ruiz. After all, the man did not have the mask, did not have the payment money, and killed Felipe Duran's bodyguard in self-defense after being wounded. Thanks to his good behavior in prison, Tomás Ruiz remained in jail for less than half of his sentence. I've never seen him again. I imagine that he no longer walks the streets of the city throwing hot compliments at good-looking women.

A curious fact occurred two weeks after the publication of El Heraldo's serial about the case. A medium-sized package addressed to Alex arrived at the newspaper's central offices. The boy found inside the package a gold bracelet on top of which one could see the letter "A" inscribed in the center of a circle. A note accompanied the bracelet: 'Thank you, Adela.' We thought it was a joke. Alex took the bracelet to a jeweler to estimate its cost. It was made of 24-carat gold. The bracelet was worth a fortune! "A" for Adela and Alex. We immediately went to the headquarters of the agency that had delivered the package to El Heraldo. At the agency, we were told that an ordinary man, without any particular characteristic, had paid for the delivery of the package. He hadn't left a contact address. Alex has the bracelet he received as a gift on his desk in the main newspaper room. When someone mentions the case of La Adelita, he touches the bracelet and smiles. "A" for Adela and Alex. There are things that are unpredictable in life.

