

For the Revolution

By Milton Davis

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On the third day out of Benu I put a bullet in Raul's head. He understood; his leg wound was infected and he was slowing us down. Time was essential to the mission, more so to our group than others. We were Culebre, the generalissimo's personal guard; no less than our lives were we expected to give. Still, it was hard for me to do. Raul and I went back to the early days, before the generalissimo and the Revolution. We grew up in the same village, fished the same rivers, attended the same academy, loved and lost the same women, all under the eyes of the 'Beautiful Gians.' It all seemed so far away as I stared into his brown eyes, his expression steadier than I'd ever seen it. The first downpour of the rainy season enveloped us in aqueous haze, my handgun almost invisible. My hand shook; Raul grasped the gun and pulled it closer to his head.

"Not now," he said. "Not in front of the generalissimo. You are my friend. Do what you must do."

"For the Revolution," I said.

When it was done we dug a shallow grave, covering his body with mud and leaves. Bilal said a short prayer before we moved on. We were down to twenty, counting the generalissimo and the Minister of Information. I sent Thompson and Guero to point

and we marched on, cutting our way through wet foliage to the rendezvous point. I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned to see the hard face of the generalissimo.

“You are a good man, Markus,” he said. “What you did took great courage. The Revolution still burns in your heart. When our business with the Gians is finished we will return for your friend and give a proper burial, a hero’s funeral.”

For many years I avoided looking into the generalissimo’s eyes, afraid of what I might not see. So many of us had lost hope during our struggle. The fire was gone in them, the zeal which had driven us to throw the Gian burden from our backs. It was still there for the generalissimo, as it was for me, as it had been for Raul. The light was still in his eyes the way I remembered fifteen years ago. He was a desperate cuardo then, hunted by the Gians and worshipped by his followers. They came to our village for support and found it full of young men eager for the chance to fight. There was passion in his plea, and I wanted that passion. I needed to believe in something higher than a life of bitter toil and death. The generalissimo made me believe.

By morning we were thirty miles out of the city. The Sierra Kasa loomed before us, a granite wall hiding the jungle valley beyond. The rains ceased and we used the time to dig in. We managed to bring two borers along with the drones, enough to make a good sized shelter in thirty minutes. It took an hour to reinforce the dugout and assign spaces, so by the time the unit was secure the first signs of Gian reconnaissance appeared. The buzz of a seeker drone penetrated our refuge as it rushed over the forest at tree top level, its sensors scanning the forest floor for spoor. Close behind came the punchers, gouging patches of jungle with their laser barrage. We knew the routine without seeing it. Still, I found myself glancing upward with each shock, memories spilling forth in aftermath. I

saw Raul's scarred face ten years younger, a launcher strapped to his broad back, the support strap cutting into his bare chest and shoulder. We ran for the caves as the jungle ignited around us that day, the others close behind. Raul stopped and began waving the others on, impervious to the havoc around him. I grabbed his arm.

"Come on, amigo!" I shouted. "Do that from the cave!"

He turned to me and smiled. "And what example would that set?"

That was the day he should have died. It would have been a proud, noble death worth of the man he was. I stared at my hand and flexed my finger, ashamed at what I had done despite Raul's guiding hand. I looked up, away from my memories and to the generalissimo. He sat across from the information minister, his eyebrows furrowed as the two spoke. The cave shuddered with a laser blast and I looked up instinctively. When I looked down the generalissimo was looking at me. A smile parted his beard; he waved away the minister and approached me.

"Markus, how are you?" he asked.

"Fine," I replied. I noticed him staring at my right arm. I had been taking the time to check the circuits, the control center open.

"Ah, a souvenir," he commented. "Having problems with it?"

"No, sir," I said. "Just routine maintenance. It's been a while since it's been exposed to hostile conditions."

The generalissimo sat and rolled up his left pant leg. "I understand. I was concerned myself. May I?"

I handed him my circuit tester. With amazement I watched as he rolled back the olive skin from the ankle, exposing bio-synthetic muscle. He jabbed the probes in and his leg flinched. Satisfied, he rolled the skin back and returned my tester.

“Pando,” he said, answering my silent question. Pando had been bloody and costly for the Revolution. Rumor was the generalissimo was killed there, and I realized the rumors were close to truth.

He slapped his thigh. “It is good, eh? When this mess is over I will take you to Cruman. Dr. Tamil can make you a better arm than that.” He grasped my shoulder then returned to the company of the minister.

The shelling ended soon afterwards. I sat against the earthen wall, straining against the dim lights to make a head count. Twenty of fifty, sixty more miles before we reached the rendezvous. One of the drones would have to be put on point. I couldn't afford to lose any more men, though the lost of a drone would be almost as damaging. Raul hated drones, his feelings a cover of his fear of them, I believed. Mindless men, he called them. Not much difference between them and us, I always replied.

I didn't remember falling asleep; when I awoke the minister the generalissimo were huddled together again, whispering as so not to disturb those around them. Again the minister was the first to notice me. He had a suspicious nature, this minister; constantly observing, perpetually judging with his deep eyes. It was no doubt a requirement of his position. Nevertheless, it made the men nervous.

The generalissimo noticed me soon afterwards. He waved me over. A map was unfolded between them, our escape route traced in red. Another line was also on the map, blue and recently drawn.

“The minister and I are discussing a change in our route,” he said. “We think this way will save us time.”

I studied the route, immediately spotting its flaw. “That will take a close to Teanad. If the Gians are there we risk discovery.”

“No,” the minister argued. “The Gians are concentrated in the capital. The remainder of their forces is combing the jungle for us. At the most Teanad holds a token force.”

What the minister said was probably true, but I wasn't convinced. “Why run the risk? We have another week before rendezvous.”

“Are you questioning the generalissimo's decision?” The minister's face took a hard façade. “Your loyalty...”

The generalissimo made a swipe with his hand and the minister fell silent. “He has a right to ask. These are his men. They fight for the Revolution, not for me. He has already lost a friend.”

He leaned close to me. His eyes almost kind in the dim light. “The rendezvous has been moved up. The Gians are consolidating their hold sooner than we anticipated. So you see, Markus, we must run the risk or we will fail. The Revolution will fail.”

“I understand,” I replied, my conviction solidified by his honesty. I began preparations immediately, waking Sergeant Jamison and rousing the men. After a quick scouting by the drone we broke camp, leaving our covered pit and setting upon our new course through the damp darkness.

The Gians ambushed us three kilometers south of Teanad, the jungle exploding with fire and light. Both drones and eleven men went down in the first ten seconds. By

the time I could call for a regrouping it was over. I was unscathed. The minister was badly wounded, a piece of his shoulder blown away. I had seen such wounds and was sure he would not last the day. As much as I tried I couldn't find the generalissimo among the carnage. I scanned the bodies as the Gians rounded up the survivors, matching names to the still faces I saw. My hands and feet were shackled; I stared into the black face plate of the Gian, shocked by my haggard appearance. I searched for the sadness and humiliation but found only Raul and his laughter. He would have made light of it all to hide his pain and to ease mine. I smiled and the Gian rammed his rifle butt into my stomach.

We were separated in Teanad, one man to a cell. I was taken to another building, a structure that was too inviting to be a prison. I was led to a room which was quite comfortable in appearance; a small bed rested in the corner under a spacious window, a desk and writing lamp sat opposite it. There was even a bathroom and a shower. It became obvious to me that I was to be tortured. Offering such comforts would make suffering pain all the more unbearable later. But it didn't matter. The Gians had me and I would talk eventually. I decided to make the best of what was left of my life, knowing that Raul would have done the same. I stripped off my clothes and took a long shower.

That evening I received a visitor, the generalissimo. I expected him to be despondent; instead he seemed quite buoyant. He strode in, surveying the room and nodded approvingly.

“Are they treating you well, Markus,” he asked. I nodded.

“Good,” he said, a broad grin slicing his beard. “The Gians are still men of their words.”

He sat at the desk and crossed his legs. His casual attitude disturbed me. He was too relaxed. My mood was forced; eighty of my men were dead. Raul was dead.

“The revolution will continue,” he said. “Teanad was a bad option, though I assure you I knew nothing of the ambush.”

My fingers slowly folded inward, my nails biting into my palms. Raul was dead.

“There was no chance of victory,” he continued. “Not like the last time. When we revolted ten years ago the Gians were preoccupied with the Galatans. But now, my son, they had more time for us.”

Raul was dead. I killed him.

The generalissimo leaned towards me. “The best we could hope for was a guerilla war we would eventually lose. The Gians have the resources of a universe at their disposal, Markus. They always win, eventually.

Raul was dead and I had killed him for the Revolution.

“But we accomplished our goal,” he continued. “The Gians wished an end to this conflict just as much as I did, so we compromised.”

He stood and walked to me, his hand falling on my shoulder with the weight of betrayal.

“Everything will be as it was, Markus. The Gians were lenient in their terms.”

He embraced me then walked towards the door. Turning at the last moment, he smiled again.

“Oh yes, I’ll be forming a new cabinet and I want you to be my defense minister. Please think about it.”

He saluted me and walked out the door.

I fell back against the wall, my mind in a maelstrom. So many were dead. Raul's body lay rotting in an unmarked grave, his life ended because we both believed in the revolution and the generalissimo. A numbing fire flashed through my body, isolating me from the room, from the last two weeks. In darkness everything became clear.

The guard outside my door must have been informed I was friendly for when I killed him his face was frozen in surprise. I took his handgun, tucking it in my pants. I made my way around the building and found the generalissimo's room I knocked on his door. The generalissimo appeared, his face confused until he recognized me.

"Markus, come in," he said.

I raised the gun to his head. He seemed shocked for a moment, and then his expression settled. He closed his eyes.

"For the Revolution," he said.

"For Raul," I replied.

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