THE FOUNTAINS *of* SILENCE

RUTA SEPETYS

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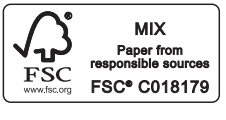

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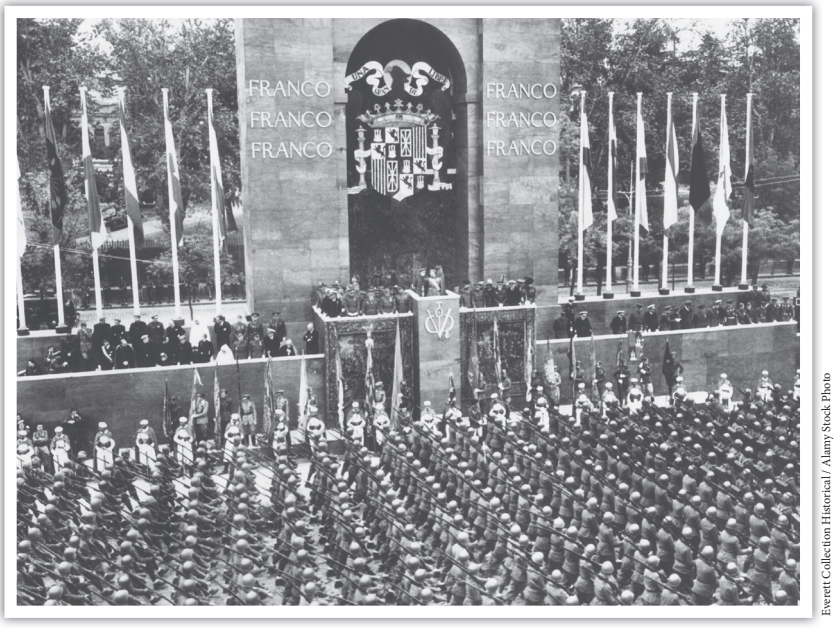
For Kristina and John



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Francisco Franco's victory parade in Madrid celebrating his triumph in the Spanish Civil War. May 1939.

The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) began as a military revolt against the democratically elected Second Spanish Republic and continued as an armed conflict between the Nationalists and the Republicans. The Nationalists were led by Generalísimo Francisco Franco and aided by Hitler and Mussolini. The Republicans were led by the democratic government at the time and aided by Mexico, the Soviet Union, and volunteers from over fifty countries, with support from academics, creatives, workers, unions, and leftists. Internally divided, the Republicans were not able to stop the Nationalist advance and surrendered in March of 1939.

Franco's dictatorship lasted thirty-six years.

We have only died if you forget us.

—anonymous epitaph
SPANISH CIVIL WAR MASS GRAVE

PART ONE

1957
MADRID, SPAIN

I've never been happy about sending an Ambassador to Spain, and I am not happy about it now, and unless Franco changes in his treatment of citizens who do not agree with him religiously I'll be sorely tempted to break off all communication with him in spite of the defense of Europe.

—Harry S. Truman, 33rd president of the United States
August 2, 1951

Memorandum from Truman to Secretary of State Dean Acheson
Acheson Papers—Secretary of State File
Truman Library Archives

1

They stand in line for blood.

June's early sun blooms across a string of women waiting patiently at *el matadero*. Fans snap open and flutter, replying to Madrid's warmth and the scent of open flesh wafting from the slaughterhouse.

The blood will be used for *morcilla*, blood sausage. It must be measured with care. Too much blood and the sausage is not firm. Too little and the sausage crumbles like dry earth.

Rafael wipes the blade on his apron, his mind miles from *morcilla*. He turns slowly from the line of customers and puts his face to the sky.

In his mind it is Sunday. The hands of the clock touch six.

It is time.

The trumpet sounds and the march of the *pasodoble* rolls through the arena.

Rafael steps onto the sand, into the sun.

He is ready to meet Fear.

In the center box of the bullring sits Spain's dictator, Generalísimo Francisco Franco. They call him *El Caudillo*—leader of armies, hero by the grace of God. Franco looks down to the ring. Their eyes meet.

You don't know me, Generalísimo, but I know you.

I am Rafael Torres Moreno, and today, I am not afraid.

"Rafa!"

The supervisor swats the back of Rafael's damp neck. "Are you

blind? There's a line. Stop daydreaming. The blood, Rafa. Give them their blood."

Rafa nods, walking toward the patrons. His visions of the bullring quickly disappear.

Give them their blood.

Memories of war tap at his brain. The small, taunting voice returns, choking daydreams into nightmares. *You do remember, don't you, Rafa?*

He does.

The silhouette is unmistakable.

Patent-leather men with patent-leather souls.

The Guardia Civil. He secretly calls them the Crows. They are servants of Generalísimo Franco and they have appeared on the street.

"Please. Not here," whispers Rafael from his hiding spot beneath the trees.

The wail of a toddler echoes above. He looks up and sees Julia at the open window, holding their youngest sister, Ana.

Their father's voice booms from inside. "Julia, close the window! Lock the door and wait for your mother. Where is Rafa?"

"Here, Papá," whispers Rafael, his small legs folded in hiding. "I'm right here."

His father appears at the door. The Crows appear at the curb.

The shot rings out. A flash explodes. Julia screams from above.

Rafa's body freezes. No breath. No air.

No.

No.

No.

They drag his father's limp corpse by an arm.

"¡Papá!"

It's too late. As the cry leaves his throat, Rafa realizes. He's given himself away.

A pair of eyes dart. "His boy's behind the tree. Grab him."

Rafa blinks, blocking the painful memories, hiding his collapsed heart beneath a smile.

"*Buenos días, señora*. How may I help you?" he asks the customer.

"Blood."

"*Sí, señora*."

Give them their blood.

For more than twenty years, Spain has given blood. And sometimes Rafa wonders—what is left to give?

2

It's a lie.

It has to be.

I know what you've done.

Ana Torres Moreno stands two levels belowground, in the second servants' basement. She rips the small note to pieces, shoves them in her mouth, and swallows.

A voice calls from the hall. "Hurry, Ana. They're waiting."

Dashing through the windowless maze of stone walls, Ana wills herself to move faster. Wills herself to smile.

A weak glow from a bare bulb whispers light onto the supply shelf. Ana spots the tiny sewing kit and throws it into her basket. She runs to the stairs and falls in step with Lorenza, who balances an assortment of cigarettes on a tray.

"You look pale," whispers Lorenza. *"¿Estás bien?"*

"I'm fine," replies Ana.

Always say you're fine, especially when you're not, she reminds herself.

The mouth of the stairway appears. Light from a crystal chandelier twinkles and beckons from the glittering hall.

Their steps slow, synchronize, and in perfect unison they emerge onto the marble floor of the hotel lobby, faces full of smile. Ana scrolls her mental list. The man from New York will want a newspaper and matches. The woman from Pennsylvania will need more ice.

Americans love ice. Some claim to have trays of cubed ice in their

own kitchens. Maybe it's possible. Ana sees advertisements for appliances in glossy magazines that hotel guests leave behind.

Frigidaire! Rustproof aluminum shelving, controlled butter-ready.

Whatever that means. Beyond Spain, all is a mystery.

Ana hears every word, but guests would never know it. She scurries, filling requests quickly so visitors have no time to glance out of their world and into hers.

Julia, the matriarch of their fractured family, issues constant reminders. "You trust too easily, Ana. You reveal too much. Stay silent."

Ana is tired of silence, tired of unanswered questions, and tired of secrets. A girl of patched pieces, she dreams of new beginnings. She dreams of leaving Spain. But her sister is right. Her dreams have proven dangerous.

I know what you've done.

"For once, follow the rules instead of your heart," pleads her sister.

Follow the rules. To be invisible in plain view and paid handsomely for it—five *pesetas* per hour—this is the plan. Her older brother, Rafael, works at both the slaughterhouse and the cemetery. Between two jobs he makes only twelve *pesetas*, twenty cents according to the hotel's exchange desk, for an entire day's work.

Ana hands the sewing kit to the concierge and heads quickly for the staff elevator. The morning is gone, but her task list is growing. Summer season has officially arrived at the hotel, pouring thousands of new visitors into Spain. The elevator doors open to the seventh floor. Ana shifts the basket to her hip and hurries down the long corridor.

"Towels for 760," whispers a supervisor who shuttles past.

"Towels for 760," she confirms.

Four years old, but to Ana, the American hotel smells new. Tucked into her basket is a stack of hotel brochures featuring a handsome bullfighter, a matador, holding a red cape. In fancy script across the cape is written:

Castellana Hilton Madrid. Your Castle in Spain.

Castles. She saw old postcards as a child. The haunting newsreel rolls behind her eyes:

The tree-lined avenue of Paseo de la Castellana—home to Spanish royalty and grand palaces. And then, the bright images fade. 1936. Civil war erupts in Spain. War drains color from the cheeks of Madrid. The grand palaces become gray ghosts. Gardens and fountains disappear. So do Ana's parents. Hunger and isolation cast a filter of darkness over the country. Spain is curtained off from the world.

And now, after twenty years of nationwide atrophy, Generalísimo Franco is finally allowing tourists into Spain. Banks and hotels wrap new exteriors over old palace interiors. The tourists don't know the difference. What lies beneath is now hidden, like the note disintegrating in her stomach.

Ana reads the newspapers and magazines that guests discard. She memorizes the brochure to recite on cue.

> *Formerly a palace, Castellana is the first Hilton property in Europe. Over three hundred rooms, each with a three-channel radio, and even a telephone.*

"If you are assigned to a guest in a suite, you will see to their every request," lectures her supervisor. "Remember, Americans are less formal than Spaniards. They're accustomed to conversation. You will be warm, helpful, and conversational."

"*Ay*, I'm always warm and conversational," Lorenza whispers with a wink.

Ana wants to be conversational, but her sister's call for silence contradicts hotel instruction. The constant tug in opposite directions makes her feel like a rag doll, destined to lose an arm.

A man in a crisp white shirt emerges from a door into the hallway.

Ana stops and gives a small bob. *"Buenos días, señor."*

"Hiya, doll."

Doll. Dame. Kitten. Baby. American men have many terms for women. Just when Ana thinks she has learned them all, a new one appears. In her English class at the hotel, these words are called terms of endearment.

After what happened last year, Ana knows better.

American diplomats, actors, and musicians arrive amidst the swirling dust of Barajas Airport. They socialize and mingle into the pale hours of morning. Ana secretly notes their preferences. Starlets have favorite suites. Politicians have favorite starlets. Many are unaware of what transpired in Spain decades earlier. They sip cava, romanticizing Hemingway and flamenco. On rare occasion someone asks Ana about Spain's war. She politely changes the subject. It's not only hotel policy, but also the promise she made.

She will look to the future. The past must be forgotten.

Her father executed. Her mother imprisoned. Their crime was not an action, but an ambition—teachers who hoped to develop a Montessori school with methods based on child development rather than religion. But Generalísimo Franco commands that all schools in Spain shall be controlled by the Catholic Church. Republican sympathizers must be eradicated.

Her parents' offense has left Ana rowing dark waters of dead secrets. Born into a long shadow of shame, she must never speak publicly of her parents. She must live in silence. But sometimes, from the hidden corners of her heart, calls the haunting question:

What can be built through silence?

They are calling the Hotel Castellana Hilton here "The Forty-ninth State" and with some justification, because only in America does there seem to be more Americanos. . . .

. . . There are diplomats and generals, admirals and hill jumpers, phony counts and real ones, movie actresses trying to look like movie actresses and non-actresses also trying to look like actresses. Some of the steadies have been here so long now that they have to cut them loose from the bar stools. And there is usually a magnificent assortment of weirdies.

. . . I have seen faces around here that haven't emerged since the old contract-letting days of World War II. They crowd the bar and give cocktail parties and search endlessly for "contacts," for Spain is opening up more and more to outside trade, and there is, of course, big dough to be made in the construction of the military bases here.

—Robert C. Ruark

from "Call Hotel Hilton The 49th State"
Defiance Crescent News*, Defiance, Ohio*
March 1, 1955

3

They know he's a tourist.

It's not the camera that draws their stare. It's his clothing. The eyes of the locals pull first to Daniel's mud-dulled boots. Their gaze crawls over his denims, pausing briefly at the belt buckle displaying the silhouette of Texas. A quick survey then continues north over his plaid shirt, but as soon as they see his camera, they quickly turn away.

People look at him, but no one speaks to him.

Two small boys walk by a newspaper stand. The front page of the paper features a picture of Spain's leader. The boys stop and raise their right arms in salute to the photograph.

¡Franco! El Caudillo de España.

Daniel snaps a picture.

The words and Franco's photo, in various configurations, appear everywhere. On the country's coins, postage stamps, trolley cars, and street signs. Daniel looks at the newspaper photograph. General Franco is short with a bland face and retreating hairline. His tiny mustache is perhaps his only distinguishable feature. Small in stature, his grip over the country looms tall, absolute.

"Dan's six foot one now," bragged his father recently. "Isn't that right, big man?"

Wrong. Height doesn't make a man big or powerful. He and his father look through different lenses.

* * *

As he exits Retiro Park, noise erupts like a clowder of screaming cats. Motor scooters blister down the scalding pavement, darting between wheezing buses and honking cars. A little girl in a ruffled dress sits on the handlebars of a motorcycle as her wild driver whips through traffic.

Daniel pauses on the sidewalk. Madrid roars with an exotic energy of deep colors. Cars and shoes are black, blending with street tapestries of charcoal, Goya brown, and dark currant. The churning scenes are accented by swirling exhaust and snaps of Spanish. His mother, born in Spain, is adamant he speak the language of her country. For the first five years of his life she spoke to him only in Spanish. Although the language is familiar, all else in Madrid is foreign.

On the corner near the entrance to the park, tired donkeys pull lumbering carts. Vendors hawk souvenirs. A pencil of a man stands behind an assortment of Spanish folding fans. He holds several at once, flicking them open to flutter like painted butterflies. The vendor motions to the badge hanging from Daniel's camera strap, asking if he's a journalist.

"¿Periodista? ¿Americano?"

Daniel nods at the half-truth and continues walking. The camera was a high school graduation present from his mother. The badge is from a local paper back home in Dallas.

"I want to be a photojournalist," he announced recently at the dinner table.

"Trust me, you'll grow out of it," said his father.

He won't. Photographs are spontaneous and exciting, something that he creates, not inherits. They're a story of his own making, instead of an ancestral narrative steeped in oil fortune. He thinks of the typewritten letter at home in his desk drawer.

❊ ❊ ❊

Dear Mr. Matheson,

Congratulations, you have been selected as one of five finalists for the 1957 Magnum Photography Prize.

His portfolio is due in September.

His father doesn't understand. Daniel won't tire of photography, but he is tired of frugal listeners who are generous with opinion. And the opinions are many:

He should pursue football instead of boxing.
Photography's a waste of time.
The family oil business will be his happily ever after.

Those who think they know him best don't really know him at all.

Girls were no different. "Daniel Matheson. My, my, where have *you* been hiding?" joked the pretty debutantes crowding the jukebox at Nelson's.

He hadn't been hiding. He'd always been there but the girls had never noticed—until he returned as a senior, four inches taller and several yards stronger. His phone started ringing. They loved his truck, his photos, and hearing him speak Spanish with the waiters at El Fenix. Suddenly, he was "interesting." And suddenly, he was foolish enough to believe them.

After three months of dating Laura Beth, "interesting" no longer interested her.

"What about penny loafers instead of boots?" she suggested. "Let's take your father's Cadillac instead of your truck." And, "Oh, him? He's just a good friend of the family."

His school buddies at St. Mark's laughed. "What did you expect?

She rides dressage. You ride rodeo. Everyone knows she's fickle. She's not worth the whiskey." Thankfully, it was his Spanish heritage that ended the relationship with Laura Beth. He was "too ethnic." *Gracias*, *Madre*.

Daniel passes a café. The dry, windy air infuses with oil, garlic, and paprika. Heaps of prawns, eel, fried peppers, and spiced sausages fill the large glass window. He snaps a picture. The warm wind funnels through his hair. Madrid is as hot as Dallas. He turns a corner onto a narrow, cobbled street and tucks into a doorway. Daniel looks at his watch and then to the position of the sun. His parents are waiting at the hotel for lunch. His father will be annoyed with him. Again.

Approaching heels echo in the distance. Daniel raises the lens to his eye.

A nun.

Her steps are quick. Purposeful. She carries a small bundle wrapped in cloth. She looks constantly over her shoulder, as if she's being followed. Daniel remains in the doorway, unnoticed, waiting for the perfect shot. A breath of wind swirls the nun's black robes. She reaches down with a hand to tame them. As she does, the breeze lifts the cloth, revealing the contents of her bundle.

A baby's face, gray like smoke, stares at Daniel.

His breath hitches as he presses the shutter.

The child is dead.

The nun's eyes, wide with panic, snap to his lens.

Hammering the shutter produces nothing but an empty clicking. He's out of film.

His hand dives into his pocket for a new roll. He loads as fast as he can, but it's no use. When he looks up the nun has disappeared, replaced by two men in capes and wing-shaped hats. They're carrying rifles.

The Guardia Civil. The military force that serves Franco.

Daniel's favorite poet, Federico García Lorca, described them:

Who could see you and not remember you? Patent-leather men with patent-leather souls.

"Steer clear of them," warned his father.

But their sinister appearance, like human crows, curls a beckoning finger toward Daniel's lens. He slides farther into the doorway to conceal himself. It's not illegal to photograph the Guardia Civil, is it?

Just one picture. For the contest.

Daniel presses the shutter. Did he get it?

A flap of wings. A silent bomb explodes.

The men are instantly upon him, slamming him against the door, yanking the badge hanging from his camera strap.

"¿Americano?"

"Sí, señor. Americano," replies Daniel, fighting the urge to shove them away. He tries to remain polite. *"Yo hablo español."*

The guard sneers. "*¿Y qué?* Because you speak Spanish you think you have the right to photograph whatever you please? Hand over the film. Now!"

Daniel fumbles nervously to open the back of his camera and remove the roll. Are they going to arrest him?

The guard rips the film from his hand. "Your badge is worth nothing here. Where are you staying?" he demands.

"The Castellana Hilton."

Wait.

No.

As soon as the words leave his mouth, Daniel wants to grab them, take them back, and hide them.

But it's too late.