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**GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ** was born in Aracataca, Colombia in 1928, but he has lived most of his life in Mexico and Europe. He attended the University of Bogotá and later worked as staff reporter and film critic for the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador*. In addition to **ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE**, he has also written two collections of short fiction, **NO ONE WRITES TO THE COLONEL** and **LEAF STORM** (both available in Bard editions).

García Márquez currently lives with his wife and children in Barcelona.

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**ONE HUNDRED YEARS  
OF SOLITUDE**

**GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH  
BY GREGORY RABASSA**

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for jomí garcía ascot  
and maría luisa elío

ONE HUNDRED YEARS  
OF SOLITUDE

### Chapter 1

**MANY YEARS LATER** as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point. Every year during the month of March a family of ragged gypsies would set up their tents near the village, and with a great uproar of pipes and kettledrums they would display new inventions. First they brought the magnet. A heavy gypsy with an untamed beard and sparrow hands, who introduced himself as Melquíades, put on a bold public demonstration of what he himself called the eighth wonder of the learned alchemists of Macedonia. He went from house to house dragging two metal ingots and everybody was amazed to see pots, pans, tongs, and braziers tumble down from their places and beams creak from the desperation of nails and screws trying to emerge, and even objects that had been lost for a long time appeared from where they had been searched for most and went dragging along in turbulent confusion behind Melquíades'

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magical irons. "Things have a life of their own," the gypsy proclaimed with a harsh accent. "It's simply a matter of waking up their souls." José Arcadio Buendía, whose unbridled imagination always went beyond the genius of nature and even beyond miracles and magic, thought that it would be possible to make use of that useless invention to extract gold from the bowels of the earth. Melquíades, who was an honest man, warned him: "It won't work for that." But José Arcadio Buendía at that time did not believe in the honesty of gypsies, so he traded his mule and a pair of goats for the two magnetized ingots. Úrsula Iguarán, his wife, who relied on those animals to increase their poor domestic holdings, was unable to dissuade him. "Very soon well have gold enough and more to pave the floors of the house," her husband replied. For several months he worked hard to demonstrate the truth of his idea. He explored every inch of the region, even the riverbed, dragging the two iron ingots along and reciting Melquíades' incantation aloud. The only thing he succeeded in doing was to unearth a suit of fifteenth-century armor which had all of its pieces soldered together with rust and inside of which there was the hollow resonance of an enormous stone-filled gourd. When José Arcadio Buendía and the four men of his expedition managed to take the armor apart, they found inside a calcified skeleton with a copper locket containing a woman's hair around its neck.

In March the gypsies returned. This time they brought a telescope and a magnifying glass the size of a drum, which they exhibited as the latest discovery of the Jews of Amsterdam. They placed a gypsy woman at one end of the village and set up the telescope at the entrance to the tent. For the price of five reales, people could look into the telescope and see the gypsy woman an arm's length away. "Science has eliminated distance," Melquíades proclaimed. "In a short time, man will be able to see what is happening in any place in the world without leaving his own house." A burning noonday sun brought out a startling demonstration with the gigantic magnifying glass: they put a pile of dry hay in the middle of the street and set it on fire by concentrating the sun's rays. José Arcadio Buendía, who had still not been consoled for the failure of big magnets, conceived the idea of using that invention as a weapon of war. Again Melquíades tried to dissuade him, but he finally accepted the two magnetized ingots and three colonial coins in exchange for the magnifying glass. Úrsula wept in consternation. That money was from a chest of gold coins that her father had put together over an entire life of privation and that she had buried underneath her bed in hopes of a proper occasion to make use of it. José Arcadio Buendía made no attempt to console her, completely absorbed in his tactical experiments with the abnegation of a scientist and even at the risk of his own life. In an attempt to show the effects of the glass on enemy troops, he exposed himself to the concentration of the sun's rays and suffered burns which turned into sores that took a long time to heal. Over the protests of his wife, who was alarmed at such a dangerous invention, at one point he was ready to set the house on fire. He would spend hours on end in his room, calculating the strategic possibilities of his novel weapon until he succeeded in putting together a manual of startling instructional clarity and an irresistible power of conviction. He sent it to the government, accompanied by numerous descriptions of his experiments and several pages of explanatory sketches; by a messenger who crossed the mountains, got lost in measureless swamps, forded stormy rivers, and was on the point of perishing under the lash of despair, plague, and wild beasts until he found a route that joined the one used by the mules that carried the mail. In spite of the fact that a trip to the capital was little less than impossible

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at that time, José Arcadio Buendía promised to undertake it as soon as the government ordered him to so that he could put on some practical demonstrations of his invention for the military authorities and could train them himself in the complicated art of solar war. For several years he waited for an answer. Finally, tired of waiting, he bemoaned to Melquíades the failure of his project and the gypsy then gave him a convincing proof of his honesty: he gave him back the doubloons in exchange for the magnifying glass, and he left him in addition some Portuguese maps and several instruments of navigation. In his own handwriting he set down a concise synthesis of the studies by Monk Hermann, which he left José Arcadio so that he would be able to make use of the astrolabe, the compass, and the sextant. José Arcadio Buendía spent the long months of the rainy season shut up in a small room that he had built in the rear of the house so that no one would disturb his experiments. Having completely abandoned his domestic obligations, he spent entire nights in the courtyard watching the course of the stars and he almost contracted sunstroke from trying to establish an exact method to ascertain noon. When he became an expert in the use and manipulation of his instruments, he conceived a notion of space that allowed him to navigate across unknown seas, to visit uninhabited territories, and to establish relations with splendid beings without having to leave his study. That was the period in which he acquired the habit of talking to himself, of walking through the house without paying attention to anyone, as Úrsula and the children broke their backs in the garden, growing banana and caladium, cassava and yams, ahuyama roots and eggplants. Suddenly, without warning, his feverish activity was interrupted and was replaced by a kind of fascination. He spent several days as if he were bewitched, softly repeating to himself a string of fearful conjectures without giving credit to his own understanding. Finally, one Tuesday in December, at lunchtime, all at once he released the whole weight of his torment. The children would remember for the rest of their lives the august solemnity with which their father, devastated by his prolonged vigil and by the wrath of his imagination, revealed his discovery to them:

“The earth is round, like an orange.”

Úrsula lost her patience. “If you have to go crazy, please go crazy all by yourself!” she shouted. “But don’t try to put your gypsy ideas into the heads of the children.” José Arcadio Buendía, impassive, did not let himself be frightened by the desperation of his wife, who, in a seizure of rage, mashed the astrolabe against the floor. He built another one, he gathered the men of the village in his little room, and he demonstrated to them, with theories that none of them could understand, the possibility of returning to where one had set out by consistently sailing east. The whole village was convinced that José Arcadio Buendía had lost his reason, when Melquíades returned to set things straight. He gave public praise to the intelligence of a man who from pure astronomical speculation had evolved a theory that had already been proved in practice, although unknown in Macondo until then, and as a proof of his admiration he made him a gift that was to have a profound influence on the future of the village: the laboratory of an alchemist.

By then Melquíades had aged with surprising rapidity. On his first trips he seemed to be the same age as José Arcadio Buendía. But while the latter had preserved his extraordinary strength, which permitted him to pull down a horse by grabbing its ears, the gypsy seemed

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to have been worn down by some tenacious illness. It was, in reality, the result of multiple and rare diseases contracted on his innumerable trips around the world. According to what he himself said as he spoke to José Arcadio Buendía while helping him set up the laboratory, death followed him everywhere, sniffing at the cuffs of his pants, but never deciding to give him the final clutch of its claws. He was a fugitive from all the plagues and catastrophes that had ever lashed mankind. He had survived pellagra in Persia, scurvy in the Malayan archipelago, leprosy in Alexandria, beriberi in Japan, bubonic plague in Madagascar, an earthquake in Sicily, and a disastrous shipwreck in the Strait of Magellan. That prodigious creature, said to possess the keys of Nostradamus, was a gloomy man, enveloped in a sad aura, with an Asiatic look that seemed to know what there was on the other side of things. He wore a large black hat that looked like a raven with widespread wings, and a velvet vest across which the patina of the centuries had skated. But in spite of his immense wisdom and his mysterious breadth, he had a human burden, an earthly condition that kept him involved in the small problems of daily life. He would complain of the ailments of old age, he suffered from the most insignificant economic difficulties, and he had stopped laughing a long time back because scurvy had made his teeth drop out. On that suffocating noontime when the gypsy revealed his secrets, José Arcadio Buendía had the certainty that it was the beginning of a great friendship. The children were startled by his fantastic stories. Aureliano, who could not have been more than five at the time, would remember him for the rest of his life as he saw him that afternoon, sitting against the metallic and quivering light from the window, lighting up with his deep organ voice the darkest reaches of the imagination, while down over his temples there flowed the grease that was being melted by the heat. José Arcadio, his older brother, would pass on that wonderful image as a hereditary memory to all of his descendants. Úrsula on the other hand, held a bad memory of that visit, for she had entered the room just as Melquíades had carelessly broken a flask of bichloride of mercury.

“It’s the smell of the devil,” she said.

“Not at all,” Melquíades corrected her. “It has been proven that the devil has sulphuric properties and this is just a little corrosive sublimate.”

Always didactic, he went into a learned exposition of the diabolical properties of cinnabar, but Úrsula paid no attention to him, although she took the children off to pray. That biting odor would stay forever in her mind linked to the memory of Melquíades.

The rudimentary laboratory—in addition to a profusion of pots, funnels, retorts, filters, and sieves—was made up of a primitive water pipe, a glass beaker with a long, thin neck, a reproduction of the philosopher’s egg, and a still the gypsies themselves had built in accordance with modern descriptions of the three-armed alembic of Mary the Jew. Along with those items, Melquíades left samples of the seven metals that corresponded to the seven planets, the formulas of Moses and Zosimus for doubling the quantity of gold, and a set of notes and sketches concerning the processes of the Great Teaching that would permit those who could interpret them to undertake the manufacture of the philosopher’s stone. Seduced by the simplicity of the formulas to double the quantity of gold, José Arcadio Buendía paid court to Úrsula for several weeks so that she would let him dig up her

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colonial coins and increase them by as many times as it was possible to subdivide mercury. Úrsula gave in, as always, to her husband's unyielding obstinacy. Then José Arcadio Buendía threw three doubloons into a pan and fused them with copper filings, orpiment, brimstone, and lead. He put it all to boil in a pot of castor oil until he got a thick and pestilential syrup which was more like common caramel than valuable gold. In risky and desperate processes of distillation, melted with the seven planetary metals, mixed with hermetic mercury and vitriol of Cyprus, and put back to cook in hog fat for lack of any radish oil, Úrsula's precious inheritance was reduced to a large piece of burnt hog cracklings that was firmly stuck to the bottom of the pot.

When the gypsies came back, Úrsula had turned the whole population of the village against them. But curiosity was greater than fear, for that time the gypsies went about the town making a deafening noise with all manner of musical instruments while a hawker announced the exhibition of the most fabulous discovery of the Naciancenes. So that everyone went to the tent and by paying one cent they saw a youthful Melquíades, recovered, unwrinkled, with a new and flashing set of teeth. Those who remembered his gums that had been destroyed by scurvy, his flaccid cheeks, and his withered lips trembled with fear at the final proof of the gypsy's supernatural power. The fear turned into panic when Melquíades took out his teeth, intact, encased in their gums, and showed them to the audience for an instant—a fleeting instant in which he went back to being the same decrepit man of years past—and put them back again and smiled once more with the full control of his restored youth. Even José Arcadio Buendía himself considered that Melquíades' knowledge had reached unbearable extremes, but he felt a healthy excitement when the gypsy explained to him atone the workings of his false teeth. It seemed so simple and so prodigious at the same time that overnight he lost all interest in his experiments in alchemy. He underwent a new crisis of bad humor. He did not go back to eating regularly, and he would spend the day walking through the house. "Incredible things are happening in the world," he said to Úrsula. "Right there across the river there are all kinds of magical instruments while we keep on living like donkeys." Those who had known him since the foundation of Macondo were startled at how much he had changed under Melquíades' influence.

At first José Arcadio Buendía had been a kind of youthful patriarch who would give instructions for planting and advice for the raising of children and animals, and who collaborated with everyone, even in the physical work, for the welfare of the community. Since his house from the very first had been the best in the village, the others had been built in its image and likeness. It had a small, well-lighted living room, a dining room in the shape of a terrace with gaily colored flowers, two bedrooms, a courtyard with a gigantic chestnut tree, a well kept garden, and a corral where goats, pigs, and hens lived in peaceful communion. The only animals that were prohibited, not just in his house but in the entire settlement, were fighting cocks.

Úrsula's capacity for work was the same as that of her husband. Active, small, severe, that woman of unbreakable nerves who at no moment in her life had been heard to sing seemed to be everywhere, from dawn until quite late at night, always pursued by the soft whispering of her stiff, starched petticoats. Thanks to her the floors of tamped earth, the

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unwhitewashed mud walls, the rustic, wooden furniture they had built themselves were always dean, and the old chests where they kept their clothes exhaled the warm smell of basil.

José Arcadio Buendía, who was the most enterprising man ever to be seen in the village, had set up the placement of the houses in such a way that from all of them one could reach the river and draw water with the same effort, and he had lined up the streets with such good sense that no house got more sun than another during the hot time of day. Within a few years Macondo was a village that was more orderly and hard working than any known until then by its three hundred inhabitants. It was a truly happy village where no one was over thirty years of age and where no one had died.

Since the time of its founding, José Arcadio Buendía had built traps and cages. In a short time he filled not only his own house but all of those in the village with troupials, canaries, bee eaters, and redbreasts. The concert of so many different birds became so disturbing that Úrsula would plug her ears with beeswax so as not to lose her sense of reality. The first time that Melquíades' tribe arrived, selling glass balls for headaches, everyone was surprised that they had been able to find that village lost in the drowsiness of the swamp, and the gypsies confessed that they had found their way by the song of the birds.

That spirit of social initiative disappeared in a short time, pulled away by the fever of the magnets, the astronomical calculations, the dreams of transmutation, and the urge to discover the wonders of the world. From a clean and active man, José Arcadio Buendía changed into a man lazy in appearance, careless in his dress, with a wild beard that Úrsula managed to trim with great effort and a kitchen knife. There were many who considered him the victim of some strange spell. But even those most convinced of his madness left work and family to follow him when he brought out his tools to clear the land and asked the assembled group to open a way that would put Macondo in contact with the great inventions.

José Arcadio Buendía was completely ignorant of the geography of the region. He knew that to the east there lay an impenetrable mountain chain and that on the other side of the mountains there was the ardent city of Riohacha, where in times past—according to what he had been told by the first Aureliano Buendía, his grandfather—Sir Francis Drake had gone crocodile hunting with cannons and that he repaired hem and stuffed them with straw to bring to Queen Elizabeth. In his youth, José Arcadio Buendía and his men, with wives and children, animals and all kinds of domestic implements, had crossed the mountains in search of an outlet to the sea, and after twenty-six months they gave up the expedition and founded Macondo, so they would not have to go back. It was, therefore, a route that did not interest him, for it could lead only to the past. To the south lay the swamps, covered with an eternal vegetable scum and the whole vast universe of the great swamp, which, according to what the gypsies said, had no limits. The great swamp in the west mingled with a boundless extension of water where there were soft-skinned cetaceans that had the head and torso of a woman, causing the ruination of sailors with the charm of their extraordinary breasts. The gypsies sailed along that route for six months before they reached the strip of land over which the mules that carried the mail passed. According to

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José Arcadio Buendía's calculations, the only possibility of contact with civilization lay along the northern route. So he handed out clearing tools and hunting weapons to the same men who had been with him during the founding of Macondo. He threw his directional instruments and his maps into a knapsack, and he undertook the reckless adventure.

During the first days they did not come across any appreciable obstacle. They went down along the stony bank of the river to the place where years before they had found the soldier's armor, and from there they went into the woods along a path between wild orange trees. At the end of the first week they killed and roasted a deer, but they agreed to eat only half of it and salt the rest for the days that lay ahead. With that precaution they tried to postpone the necessity of having to eat macaws, whose blue flesh had a harsh and musky taste. Then, for more than ten days, they did not see the sun again. The ground became soft and damp, like volcanic ash, and the vegetation was thicker and thicker, and the cries of the birds and the uproar of the monkeys became more and more remote, and the world became eternally sad. The men on the expedition felt overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin, as their boots sank into pools of steaming oil and their machetes destroyed bloody lilies and golden salamanders. For a week, almost without speaking, they went ahead like sleepwalkers through a universe of grief, lighted only by the tenuous reflection of luminous insects, and their lungs were overwhelmed by a suffocating smell of blood. They could not return because the strip that they were opening as they went along would soon close up with a new vegetation that almost seemed to grow before their eyes. "It's all right," José Arcadio Buendía would say. "The main thing is not to lose our bearings." Always following his compass, he kept on guiding his men toward the invisible north so that they would be able to get out of that enchanted region. It was a thick night, starless, but the darkness was becoming impregnated with a fresh and clear air. Exhausted by the long crossing, they hung up their hammocks and slept deeply for the first time in two weeks. When they woke up, with the sun already high in the sky, they were speechless with fascination. Before them, surrounded by ferns and palm trees, white and powdery in the silent morning light, was an enormous Spanish galleon. Tilted slightly to the starboard, it had hanging from its intact masts the dirty rags of its sails in the midst of its rigging, which was adorned with orchids. The hull, covered with an armor of petrified barnacles and soft moss, was firmly fastened into a surface of stones. The whole structure seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion, protected from the vices of time and the habits of the birds. Inside, where the expeditionaries explored with careful intent, there was nothing but a thick forest of flowers.

The discovery of the galleon, an indication of the proximity of the sea, broke José Arcadio Buendía's drive. He considered it a trick of his whimsical fate to have searched for the sea without finding it, at the cost of countless sacrifices and suffering, and to have found it all of a sudden without looking for it, as if it lay across his path like an insurmountable object. Many years later Colonel Aureliano Buendía crossed the region again, when it was already a regular mail route, and the only part of the ship he found was its burned-out frame in the midst of a field of poppies. Only then, convinced that the story had not been some product of his father's imagination, did he wonder how the galleon had been able to get inland to that spot. But José Arcadio Buendía did not concern himself with that when he found the



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sea after another four days' journey from the galleon. His dreams ended as he faced that ashen, foamy, dirty sea, which had not merited the risks and sacrifices of the adventure.

“God damn it!” he shouted. “Macondo is surrounded by water on all sides.”

The idea of a peninsular Macondo prevailed for a long time, inspired by the arbitrary map that José Arcadio Buendía sketched on his return from the expedition. He drew it in rage, evilly, exaggerating the difficulties of communication, as if to punish himself for the absolute lack of sense with which he had chosen the place. “We’ll never get anywhere,” he lamented to Úrsula. “We’re going to rot our lives away here without receiving the benefits of science.” That certainty, mulled over for several months in the small room he used as his laboratory, brought him to the conception of the plan to move Maeondo to a better place. But that time Úrsula had anticipated his feverish designs. With the secret and implacable labor of a small ant she predisposed the women of the village against the flightiness of their husbands, who were already preparing for the move. José Arcadio Buendía did not know at what moment or because of what adverse forces his plan had become enveloped in a web of pretexts, disappointments, and evasions until it turned into nothing but an illusion. Úrsula watched him with innocent attention and even felt some pity for him on the morning when she found him in the back room muttering about his plans for moving as he placed his laboratory pieces in their original boxes. She let him finish. She let him nail up the boxes and put his initials on them with an inked brush, without reproaching him, but knowing now that he knew (because she had heard him say so in his soft monologues) that the men of the village would not back him up in his undertaking. Only when he began to take down the door of the room did Úrsula dare ask him what he was doing, and he answered with a certain bitterness. “Since no one wants to leave, we’ll leave all by ourselves.” Úrsula did not become upset.

“We will not leave,” she said. “We will stay here, because we have had a son here.”

“We have still not had a death,” he said. “A person does not belong to a place until there is someone dead under the ground.”

Úrsula replied with a soft firmness:

“If I have to die for the rest of you to stay here, I will die.”

José Arcadio Buendía had not thought that his wife’s will was so firm. He tried to seduce her with the charm of his fantasy, with the promise of a prodigious world where all one had to do was sprinkle some magic liquid on the ground and the plants would bear fruit whenever a man wished, and where all manner of instruments against pain were sold at bargain prices. But Úrsula was insensible to his clairvoyance.

“Instead of going around thinking about your crazy inventions, you should be worrying about your sons,” she replied. “Look at the state they’re in, running wild just like donkeys.”

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José Arcadio Buendía took his wife's words literally. He looked out the window and saw the barefoot children in the sunny garden and he had the impression that only at that instant had they begun to exist, conceived by Úrsula's spell. Something occurred inside of him then, something mysterious and definitive that uprooted him from his own time and carried him adrift through an unexplored region of his memory. While Úrsula continued sweeping the house, which was safe now from being abandoned for the rest of her life, he stood there with an absorbed look, contemplating the children until his eyes became moist and he dried them with the back of his hand, exhaling a deep sigh of resignation.

"All right," he said. "Tell them to come help me take the things out of the boxes."

José Arcadio, the older of the children, was fourteen. He had a square head, thick hair, and his father's character. Although he had the same impulse for growth and physical strength, it was early evident that he lacked imagination. He had been conceived and born during the difficult crossing of the mountains, before the founding of Macondo, and his parents gave thanks to heaven when they saw he had no animal features. Aureliano, the first human being to be born in Macondo, would be six years old in March. He was silent and withdrawn. He had wept in his mother's womb and had been born with his eyes open. As they were cutting the umbilical cord, he moved his head from side to side, taking in the things in the room and examining the faces of the people with a fearless curiosity. Then, indifferent to those who came close to look at him, he kept his attention concentrated on the palm roof, which looked as if it were about to collapse under the tremendous pressure of the rain. Úrsula did not remember the intensity of that look again until one day when little Aureliano, at the age of three, went into the kitchen at the moment she was taking a pot of boiling soup from the stove and putting it on the table. The child, perplexed, said from the doorway, "It's going to spill." The pot was firmly placed in the center of the table, but just as soon as the child made his announcement, it began an unmistakable movement toward the edge, as if impelled by some inner dynamism, and it fell and broke on the floor. Úrsula, alarmed, told her husband about the episode, but he interpreted it as a natural phenomenon. That was the way he always was alien to the existence of his sons, partly because he considered childhood as a period of mental insufficiency, and partly because he was always too absorbed in his fantastic speculations.

But since the afternoon when he called the children in to help him unpack the things in the laboratory, he gave them his best hours. In the small separate room, where the walls were gradually being covered by strange maps and fabulous drawings, he taught them to read and write and do sums, and he spoke to them about the wonders of the world, not only where his learning had extended, but forcing the limits of his imagination to extremes. It was in that way that the boys ended up learning that in the southern extremes of Africa there were men so intelligent and peaceful that their only pastime was to sit and think, and that it was possible to cross the Aegean Sea on foot by jumping from island to island all the way to the port of Salonika. Those hallucinating sessions remained printed on the memories of the boys in such a way that many years later, a second before the regular army officer gave the firing squad the command to fire, Colonel Aureliano Buendía saw once more that warm March afternoon on which his father had interrupted the lesson in physics and stood fascinated, with his hand in the air and his eyes motionless, listening to

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the distant pipes, drums, and jingles of the gypsies, who were coming to the village once more, announcing the latest and most startling discovery of the sages of Memphis.

They were new gypsies, young men and women who knew only their own language, handsome specimens with oily skins and intelligent hands, whose dances and music sowed a panic of uproarious joy through the streets, with parrots painted all colors reciting Italian arias, and a hen who laid a hundred golden eggs to the sound of a tambourine, and a trained monkey who read minds, and the multi-use machine that could be used at the same time to sew on buttons and reduce fevers, and the apparatus to make a person forget his bad memories, and a poultice to lose time, and a thousand more inventions so ingenious and unusual that José Arcadio Buendía must have wanted to invent a memory machine so that he could remember them all. In an instant they transformed the village. The inhabitants of Macondo found themselves lost in their own streets, confused by the crowded fair.

Holding a child by each hand so as not to lose them in the tumult, bumping into acrobats with gold-capped teeth and jugglers with six arms, suffocated by the mingled breath of manure and sandals that the crowd exhaled, José Arcadio Buendía went about everywhere like a madman, looking for Melquíades so that he could reveal to him the infinite secrets of that fabulous nightmare. He asked several gypsies, who did not understand his language. Finally he reached the place where Melquíades used to set up his tent and he found a taciturn Armenian who in Spanish was hawking a syrup to make oneself invisible. He had drunk down a glass of the amber substance in one gulp as José Arcadio Buendía elbowed his way through the absorbed group that was witnessing the spectacle, and was able to ask his question. The gypsy wrapped him in the frightful climate of his look before he turned into a puddle of pestilential and smoking pitch over which the echo of his reply still floated: “Melquíades is dead.” Upset by the news, José Arcadio Buendía stood motionless, trying to rise above his affliction, until the group dispersed, called away by other artifices, and the puddle of the taciturn Armenian evaporated completely. Other gypsies confirmed later on that Melquíades had in fact succumbed to the fever on the beach at Singapore and that his body had been thrown into the deepest part of the Java Sea. The children had no interest in the news. They insisted that their father take them to see the overwhelming novelty of the sages of Memphis that was being advertised at the entrance of a tent that, according to what was said, had belonged to King Solomon. They insisted so much that José Arcadio Buendía paid the thirty reales and led them into the center of the tent, where there was a giant with a hairy torso and a shaved head, with a copper ring in his nose and a heavy iron chain on his ankle, watching over a pirate chest. When it was opened by the giant, the chest gave off a glacial exhalation. Inside there was only an enormous, transparent block with infinite internal needles in which the light of the sunset was broken up into colored stars. Disconcerted, knowing that the children were waiting for an immediate explanation, José Arcadio Buendía ventured a murmur:

“It’s the largest diamond in the world.”

“No,” the gypsy countered. “It’s ice.”

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José Arcadio Buendía, without understanding, stretched out his hand toward the cake, but the giant moved it away. “Five reales more to touch it,” he said. José Arcadio Buendía paid them and put his hand on the ice and held it there for several minutes as his heart filled with fear and jubilation at the contact with mystery. Without knowing what to say, he paid ten reales more so that his sons could have that prodigious experience. Little José Arcadio refused to touch it. Aureliano, on the other hand, took a step forward and put his hand on it, withdrawing it immediately. “It’s boiling,” he exclaimed, startled. But his father paid no attention to him. Intoxicated by the evidence of the miracle, he forgot at that moment about the frustration of his delirious undertakings and Melquíades’ body, abandoned to the appetite of the squids. He paid another five reales and with his hand on the cake, as if giving testimony on the holy scriptures, he exclaimed:

“This is the great invention of our time.”

## Chapter 2

WHEN THE PIRATE Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century, Úrsula Iguarán’s great-great-grandmother became so frightened with the ringing of alarm bells and the firing of cannons that she lost control of her nerves and sat down on a lighted stove. The burns changed her into a useless wife for the rest of her days. She could only sit on one side, cushioned by pillows, and something strange must have happened to her way of walking, for she never walked again in public. She gave up all kinds of social activity, obsessed with the notion that her body gave off a singed odor. Dawn would find her in the courtyard, for she did not dare fall asleep lest she dream of the English and their ferocious attack dogs as they came through the windows of her bedroom to submit her to shameful tortures with their red-hot irons. Her husband, an Aragonese merchant by whom she had two children, spent half the value of his store on medicines and pastimes in an attempt to alleviate her terror. Finally he sold the business and took the family to live far from the sea in a settlement of peaceful Indians located in the foothills, where he built his wife a bedroom without windows so that the pirates of her dream would have no way to get in.

In that hidden village there was a native-born tobacco planter who had lived there for some time, Don José Arcadio Buendía, with whom Úrsula’s great-great-grandfather established a partnership that was so lucrative that within a few years they made a fortune. Several centuries later the great-great-grandson of the native-born planter married the great-great-granddaughter of the Aragonese. Therefore, every time that Úrsula became exercised over her husband’s mad ideas, she would leap back over three hundred years of fate and curse the day that Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha. It was simply a way of giving herself some relief, because actually they were joined till death by a bond that was more solid than love: a common prick of conscience. They were cousins. They had grown up together in the old village that both of their ancestors, with their work and their good habits, had transformed into one of the finest towns in the province. Although their marriage was predicted from the time they had come into the world, when they expressed their desire to be married their own relatives tried to stop it. They were afraid that those two healthy products of two races that had interbred over the centuries would suffer the shame of breeding iguanas. There had already been a horrible precedent. An aunt of Úrsula’s, married to an uncle of José Arcadio Buendía, had a son who went through life

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wearing loose, baggy trousers and who bled to death after having lived forty-two years in the purest state of virginity, for he had been born and had grown up with a cartilaginous tail in the shape of a corkscrew and with a small tuft of hair on the tip. A pig's tail that was never allowed to be seen by any woman and that cost him his life when a butcher friend did him the favor of chopping it off with his cleaver. José Arcadio Buendía, with the whimsy of his nineteen years, resolved the problem with a single phrase: "I don't care if I have piglets as long as they can talk." So they were married amidst a festival of fireworks and a brass band that went on for three days. They would have been happy from then on if Úrsula's mother had not terrified her with all manner of sinister predictions about their offspring, even to the extreme of advising her to refuse to consummate the marriage. Fearing that her stout and willful husband would rape her while she slept, Úrsula, before going to bed, would put on a rudimentary kind of drawers that her mother had made out of sailcloth and had reinforced with a system of crisscrossed leather straps and that was closed in the front by a thick iron buckle. That was how they lived for several months. During the day he would take care of his fighting cocks and she would do frame embroidery with her mother. At night they would wrestle for several hours in an anguished violence that seemed to be a substitute for the act of love, until popular intuition got a whiff of something irregular and the rumor spread that Úrsula was still a virgin a year after her marriage because her husband was impotent. José Arcadio Buendía was the last one to hear the rumor.

"Look at what people are going around saying, Úrsula," he told his wife very calmly.

"Let them talk," she said. "We know that it's not true."

So the situation went on the same way for another six months until that tragic Sunday when José Arcadio Buendía won a cockfight from Prudencio Aguilar. Furious, aroused by the blood of his bird, the loser backed away from José Arcadio Buendía so that everyone in the cockpit could hear what he was going to tell him.

"Congratulations!" he shouted. "Maybe that rooster of yours can do your wife a favor."

José Arcadio Buendía serenely picked up his rooster. "I'll be right back," he told everyone. And then to Prudencio Aguilar:

"You go home and get a weapon, because I'm going to kill you."

Ten minutes later he returned with the notched spear that had belonged to his grandfather. At the door to the cockpit, where half the town had gathered, Prudencio Aguilar was waiting for him. There was no time to defend himself. José Arcadio Buendía's spear, thrown with the strength of a bull and with the same good aim with which the first Aureliano Buendía had exterminated the jaguars in the region, pierced his throat. That night, as they held a wake over the corpse in the cockpit, José Arcadio Buendía went into the bedroom as his wife was putting on her chastity pants. Pointing the spear at her he ordered: "Take them off." Úrsula had no doubt about her husband's decision. "You'll be responsible for what happens," she murmured. José Arcadio Buendía stuck the spear into the dirt floor.

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**“If you bear iguanas, we’ll raise iguanas,” he said. “But there’ll be no more killings in this town because of you.”**

**It was a fine June night, cool and with a moon, and they were awake and frolicking in bed until dawn, indifferent to the breeze that passed through the bedroom, loaded with the weeping of Prudencio Aguilar’s kin.**

**The matter was put down as a duel of honor, but both of them were left with a twinge in their conscience. One night, when she could not sleep, Úrsula went out into the courtyard to get some water and she saw Prudencio Aguilar by the water jar. He was livid, a sad expression on his face, trying to cover the hole in his throat with a plug made of esparto grass. It did not bring on fear in her, but pity. She went back to the room and told her husband what she had seen, but he did not think much of it. “This just means that we can’t stand the weight of our conscience.” Two nights later Úrsula saw Prudencio Aguilar again, in the bathroom, using the esparto plug to wash the clotted blood from his throat. On another night she saw him strolling in the rain. José Arcadio Buendía, annoyed by his wife’s hallucinations, went out into the courtyard armed with the spear. There was the dead man with his sad expression.**

**“You go to hell,” José Arcadio Buendía shouted at him. “Just as many times as you come back, I’ll kill you again.”**

**Prudencio Aguilar did not go away, nor did José Arcadio Buendía dare throw the spear. He never slept well after that. He was tormented by the immense desolation with which the dead man had looked at him through the rain, his deep nostalgia as he yearned for living people, the anxiety with which he searched through the house looking for some water with which to soak his esparto plug. “He must be suffering a great deal,” he said to Úrsula. “You can see that he’s so very lonely.” She was so moved that the next time she saw the dead man uncovering the pots on the stove she understood what he was looking for, and from then on she placed water jugs all about the house. One night when he found him washing his wound in his own room, José Arcadio Buendía could no longer resist.**

**“It’s all right, Prudencio,” he told him. “We’re going to leave this town, just as far away as we can go, and we’ll never come back. Go in peace now.”**

**That was how they undertook the crossing of the mountains. Several friends of José Arcadio Buendía, young men like him, excited, by the adventure, dismantled their houses and packed up, along with their wives and children, to head toward the land that no one had promised them. Before he left, José Arcadio Buendía buried the spear in the courtyard and, one after the other, he cut the throats of his magnificent fighting cocks, trusting that in that way he could give some measure of peace to Prudencio Aguilar. All that Úrsula took along were a trunk with her bridal clothes, a few household utensils, and the small chest with the gold pieces that she had inherited from her father. They did not lay out any definite itinerary. They simply tried to go in a direction opposite to the road to Riohacha so that they would not leave any trace or meet any people they knew. It was an absurd**

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journey. After fourteen months, her stomach corrupted by monkey meat and snake stew, Úrsula gave birth to a son who had all of his features human. She had traveled half of the trip in a hammock that two men carried on their shoulders, because swelling had disfigured her legs and her varicose veins had puffed up like bubbles. Although it was pitiful to see them with their sunken stomachs and languid eyes, the children survived the journey better than their parents, and most of the time it was fun for them. One morning, after almost two years of crossing, they became the first mortals to see the western slopes of the mountain range. From the cloudy summit they saw the immense aquatic expanse of the great swamp as it spread out toward the other side of the world. But they never found the sea. One night, after several months of lost wandering through the swamps, far away now from the last Indians they had met on their way, they camped on the banks of a stony river whose waters were like a torrent of frozen glass. Years later, during the second civil war, Colonel Aureliano Buendía tried to follow that same route in order to take Riohacha by surprise and after six days of traveling he understood that it was madness. Nevertheless, the night on which they camped beside the river, his father's host had the look of shipwrecked people with no escape, but their number had grown during the crossing and they were all prepared (and they succeeded) to die of old age. José Arcadio Buendía dreamed that night that right there a noisy city with houses having mirror walls rose up. He asked what city it was and they answered him with a name that he had never heard, that had no meaning at all, but that had a supernatural echo in his dream: Macondo. On the following day he convinced his men that they would never find the sea. He ordered them to cut down the trees to make a clearing beside the river, at the coolest spot on the bank, and there they founded the village.

José Arcadio Buendía did not succeed in deciphering the dream of houses with mirror walls until the day he discovered ice. Then he thought he understood its deep meaning. He thought that in the near future they would be able to manufacture blocks of ice on a large scale from such a common material as water and with them build the new houses of the village. Macondo would no longer be a burning place, where the hinges and door knockers twisted with the heat, but would be changed into a wintry city. If he did not persevere in his attempts to build an ice factory, it was because at that time he was absolutely enthusiastic over the education of his sons, especially that of Aureliano, who from the first had revealed a strange intuition for alchemy. The laboratory had been dusted off. Reviewing Melquíades' notes, serene now, without the exaltation of novelty, in prolonged and patient sessions they tried to separate Úrsula's gold from the debris that was stuck to the bottom of the pot. Young José Arcadio scarcely took part in the process. While his father was involved body and soul with his water pipe, the willful first-born, who had always been too big for his age, had become a monumental adolescent. His voice had changed. An incipient fuzz appeared on his upper lip. One night, as Úrsula went into the room where he was undressing to go to bed, she felt a mingled sense of shame and pity: he was the first man that she had seen naked after her husband, and he was so well-equipped for life that he seemed abnormal. Úrsula, pregnant for the third time, relived her newlywed terror.

Around that time a merry, foul-mouthed, provocative woman came to the house to help with the chorea, and she knew how to read the future in cards. Úrsula spoke to her about her son. She thought that his disproportionate size was something as unnatural as her

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cousin's tail of a pig. The woman let out an expansive laugh that resounded through the house like a spray of broken glass. "Just the opposite," she said. "He'll be very lucky." In order to confirm her prediction she brought her cards to the house a few days later and locked herself up with José Arcadio in a granary off the kitchen. She calmly placed her cards on an old carpenter's bench, saying anything that came into her head, while the boy waited beside her, more bored than intrigued. Suddenly she reached out her hand and touched him. "Lordy!" she said, sincerely startled, and that was all she could say. José Arcadio felt his bones filling up with foam, a languid fear, and a terrible desire to weep. The woman made no insinuations. But José Arcadio kept looking for her all night long, for the smell of smoke that she had under her armpits and that had got caught under his skin. He wanted to be with her all the time, he wanted her to be his mother, for them never to leave the granary, and for her to say "Lordy!" to him. One day he could not stand it any more and he went looking for her at her house: He made a formal visit, sitting uncomprehendingly in the living room without saying a word. At that moment he had no desire for her. He found her different, entirely foreign to the image that her smell brought on, as if she were someone else. He drank his coffee and left the house in depression. That night, during the frightful time of lying awake, he desired her again with a brutal anxiety, but he did not want her that time as she had been in the granary but as she had been that afternoon.

Days later the woman suddenly called him to her house, where she was alone with her mother, and she had him come into the bedroom with the pretext of showing him a deck of cards. Then she touched him with such freedom that he suffered a delusion after the initial shudder, and he felt more fear than pleasure. She asked him to come and see her that night. He agreed, in order to get away, knowing that he was incapable of going. But that night, in his burning bed, he understood that he had to go to her, even if he were not capable. He got dressed by feel, listening in the dark to his brother's calm breathing, the dry cough of his father in the next room, the asthma of the hens in the courtyard, the buzz of the mosquitoes, the beating of his heart, and the inordinate bustle of a world that he had not noticed until then, and he went out into the sleeping street. With all his heart he wanted the door to be barred and not just closed as she had promised him. But it was open. He pushed it with the tips of his fingers and the hinges yielded with a mournful and articulate moan that left a frozen echo inside of him. From the moment he entered, sideways and trying not to make a noise, he caught the smell. He was still in the hallway, where the woman's three brothers had their hammocks in positions that he could not see and that he could not determine in the darkness as he felt his way along the hall to push open the bedroom door and get his bearings there so as not to mistake the bed. He found it. He bumped against the ropes of the hammocks, which were lower than he had suspected, and a man who had been snoring until then turned in his sleep and said in a kind of delusion, "It was Wednesday." When he pushed open the bedroom door, he could not prevent it from scraping against the uneven floor. Suddenly, in the absolute darkness, he understood with a hopeless nostalgia that he was completely disoriented. Sleeping in the narrow room were the mother, another daughter with her husband and two children, and the woman, who may not have been there. He could have guided himself by the smell if the smell had not been all over the house, so devious and at the same time so definite, as it had always been on his skin. He did not move for a long time, wondering in fright how he had ever got to that abyss of



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abandonment, when a hand with all its fingers extended and feeling about in the darkness touched his face. He was not surprised, for without knowing, he had been expecting it. Then he gave himself over to that hand, and in a terrible state of exhaustion he let himself be led to a shapeless place where his clothes were taken off and he was heaved about like a sack of potatoes and thrown from one side to the other in a bottomless darkness in which his arms were useless, where it no longer smelled of woman but of ammonia, and where he tried to remember her face and found before him the face of Úrsula, confusedly aware that he was doing something that for a very long time he had wanted to do but that he had imagined could really never be done, not knowing what he was doing because he did not know where his feet were or where his head was, or whose feet or whose head, and feeling that he could no longer resist the glacial rumbling of his kidneys and the air of his intestines, and fear, and the bewildered anxiety to flee and at the same time stay forever in that exasperated silence and that fearful solitude.

Her name was Pilar Ternera. She had been part of the exodus that ended with the founding of Macondo, dragged along by her family in order to separate her from the man who had raped her at fourteen and had continued to love her until she was twenty-two, but who never made up his mind to make the situation public because he was a man apart. He promised to follow her to the ends of the earth, but only later on, when he put his affairs in order, and she had become tired of waiting for him, always identifying him with the tall and short, blond and brunet men that her cards promised from land and sea within three days, three months, or three years. With her waiting she had lost the strength of her thighs, the firmness of her breasts, her habit of tenderness, but she kept the madness of her heart intact. Maddened by that prodigious plaything, José Arcadio followed her path every night through the labyrinth of the room. On a certain occasion he found the door barred, and he knocked several times, knowing that if he had the boldness to knock the first time he would have had to knock until the last, and after an interminable wait she opened the door for him. During the day, lying down to dream, he would secretly enjoy the memories of the night before. But when she came into the house, merry, indifferent, chatty, he did not have to make any effort to hide his tension, because that woman, whose explosive laugh frightened off the doves, had nothing to do with the invisible power that taught him how to breathe from within and control his heartbeats, and that had permitted him to understand why man are afraid of death. He was so wrapped up in himself that he did not even understand the joy of everyone when his father and his brother aroused the household with the news that they had succeeded in penetrating the metallic debris and had separated Úrsula's gold.

They had succeeded, as a matter of fact, after putting in complicated and persevering days at it. Úrsula was happy, and she even gave thanks to God for the invention of alchemy, while the people of the village crushed into the laboratory, and they served them guava jelly on crackers to celebrate the wonder, and José Arcadio Buendía let them see the crucible with the recovered gold, as if he had just invented it. Showing it all around, he ended up in front of his older son, who during the past few days had barely put in an appearance in the laboratory. He put the dry and yellowish mass in front of his eyes and asked him: "What does it look like to you?" José Arcadio answered sincerely:

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**“Dog shit.”**

**His father gave him a blow with the back of his hand that brought out blood and tears. That night Pilar Ternera put arnica compresses on the swelling, feeling about for the bottle and cotton in the dark, and she did everything she wanted with him as long as it did not bother him, making an effort to love him without hurting him. They reached such a state of intimacy that later, without realizing it, they were whispering to each other.**

**“I want to be alone with you,” he said. “One of these days I’m going to tell everybody and we can stop all of this sneaking around.”**

**She did not try to calm him down.**

**“That would be fine,” she said “If we’re alone, we’ll leave the lamp lighted so that we can see each other, and I can holler as much as I want without anybody’s having to butt in, and you can whisper in my ear any crap you can think of.”**

**That conversation, the biting rancor that he felt against his father, and the imminent possibility of wild love inspired a serene courage in him. In a spontaneous way, without any preparation, he told everything to his brother.**

**At first young Aureliano understood only the risk, the immense possibility of danger that his brother’s adventures implied, and he could not understand the fascination of the subject. Little by little he became contaminated with the anxiety. He wondered about the details of the dangers, he identified himself with the suffering and enjoyment of his brother, he felt frightened and happy. He would stay awake waiting for him until dawn in the solitary bed that seemed to have a bottom of live coals, and they would keep on talking until it was time to get up, so that both of them soon suffered from the same drowsiness, felt the same lack of interest in alchemy and the wisdom of their father, and they took refuge in solitude. “Those kids are out of their heads,” Úrsula said. “They must have worms.” She prepared a repugnant potion for them made out of mashed wormseed, which they both drank with unforeseen stoicism, and they sat down at the same time on their pots eleven times in a single day, expelling some rose-colored parasites that they showed to everybody with great jubilation, for it allowed them to deceive Úrsula as to the origin of their distractions and drowsiness. Aureliano not only understood by then, he also lived his brother’s experiences as something of his own, for on one occasion when the latter was explaining in great detail the mechanism of love, he interrupted him to ask: “What does it feel like?” José Arcadio gave an immediate reply:**

**“It’s like an earthquake.”**

**One January Thursday at two o’clock in the morning, Amaranta was born. Before anyone came into the room, Úrsula examined her carefully. She was light and watery, like a newt, but all of her parts were human: Aureliano did not notice the new thing except when the house became full of people. Protected by the confusion, he went off in search of his brother, who had not been in bed since eleven o’clock, and it was such an impulsive**

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decision that he did not even have time to ask himself how he could get him out of Pilar Ternera's bedroom. He circled the house for several hours, whistling private calls, until the proximity of dawn forced him to go home. In his mother's room, playing with the newborn little sister and with a face that drooped with innocence, he found José Arcadio.

Úrsula was barely over her forty days' rest when the gypsies returned. They were the same acrobats and jugglers that had brought the ice. Unlike Melquíades' tribe, they had shown very quickly that they were not heralds of progress but purveyors of amusement. Even when they brought the ice they did not advertise it for its usefulness in the life of man but as a simple circus curiosity. This time, along with many other artifices, they brought a flying carpet. But they did not offer it as a fundamental contribution to the development of transport, rather as an object of recreation. The people at once dug up their last gold pieces to take advantage of a quick flight over the houses of the village. Protected by the delightful cover of collective disorder, José Arcadio and Pilar passed many relaxing hours. They were two happy lovers among the crowd, and they even came to suspect that love could be a feeling that was more relaxing and deep than the happiness, wild but momentary, of their secret nights. Pilar, however, broke the spell. Stimulated by the enthusiasm that José Arcadio showed in her companionship, she confused the form and the occasion, and all of a sudden she threw the whole world on top of him. "Now you really are a man," she told him. And since he did not understand what she meant, she spelled it out to him.

"You're going to be a father."

José Arcadio did not dare leave the house for several days. It was enough for him to hear the rocking laughter of Pilar in the kitchen to run and take refuge in the laboratory, where the artifacts of alchemy had come alive again with Úrsula's blessing. José Arcadio Buendía received his errant son with joy and initiated him in the search for the philosopher's stone, which he had finally undertaken. One afternoon the boys grew enthusiastic over the flying carpet that went swiftly by the laboratory at window level carrying the gypsy who was driving it and several children from the village who were merrily waving their hands, but José Arcadio Buendía did not even look at it. "Let them dream," he said. "We'll do better flying than they are doing, and with more scientific resources than a miserable bedspread." In spite of his feigned interest, José Arcadio must have understood the powers of the philosopher's egg, which to him looked like a poorly blown bottle. He did not succeed in escaping from his worries. He lost his appetite and he could not sleep. He fell into an ill humor, the same as his father's over the failure of his undertakings, and such was his upset that José Arcadio Buendía himself relieved him of his duties in the laboratory, thinking that he had taken alchemy too much to heart. Aureliano, of course, understood that his brother's affliction did not have its source in the search for the philosopher's stone but he could not get into his confidence. He had lost his former spontaneity. From an accomplice and a communicative person he had become withdrawn and hostile. Anxious for solitude, bitten by a virulent rancor against the world, one night he left his bed as usual, but he did not go to Pilar Ternera's house, but to mingle in the tumult of the fair. After wandering about among all kinds of contraptions without becoming interested in any of them, he spotted something that was not a part of it all: a very young gypsy girl, almost a child, who was weighted down by beads and was the most beautiful woman that José Arcadio had

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ever seen in his life. She was in the crowd that was witnessing the sad spectacle of the man who had been turned into a snake for having disobeyed his parents.

José Arcadio paid no attention. While the sad interrogation of the snake-man was taking place, he made his way through the crowd up to the front row, where the gypsy girl was, and he stooped behind her. He pressed against her back. The girl tried to separate herself, but José Arcadio pressed more strongly against her back. Then she felt him. She remained motionless against him, trembling with surprise and fear, unable to believe the evidence, and finally she turned her head and looked at him with a tremulous smile. At that instant two gypsies put the snake-man into his cage and carried him into the tent. The gypsy who was conducting the show announced:

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, we are going to show the terrible test of the woman who must have her head chopped off every night at this time for one hundred and fifty years as punishment for having seen what she should not have.”

José Arcadio and the gypsy girl did not witness the decapitation. They went to her tent, where they kissed each other with a desperate anxiety while they took off their clothes. The gypsy girl removed the starched lace corsets she had on and there she was, changed into practically nothing. She was a languid little frog, with incipient breasts and legs so thin that they did not even match the size of José Arcadio’s arms, but she had a decision and a warmth that compensated for her fragility. Nevertheless, José Arcadio could not respond to her because they were in a kind of public tent where the gypsies passed through with their circus things and did their business, and would even tarry by the bed for a game of dice. The lamp hanging from the center pole lighted the whole place up. During a pause in the caresses, José Arcadio stretched out naked on the bed without knowing what to do, while the girl tried to inspire him. A gypsy woman with splendid flesh came in a short time after accompanied by a man who was not of the caravan but who was not from the village either, and they both began to undress in front of the bed. Without meaning to, the woman looked at José Arcadio and examined his magnificent animal in repose with a kind of pathetic fervor.

“My boy,” she exclaimed, “may God preserve you just as you are.”

José Arcadio’s companion asked them to leave them alone, and the couple lay down on the ground, close to the bed. The passion of the others woke up José Arcadio’s fervor. On the first contact the bones of the girl seemed to become disjunct with a disorderly crunch like the sound of a box of dominoes, and her skin broke out into a pale sweat and her eyes filled with tears as her whole body exhaled a lugubrious lament and a vague smell of mud. But she bore the impact with a firmness of character and a bravery that were admirable. José Arcadio felt himself lifted up into the air toward a state of seraphic inspiration, where his heart burst forth with an outpouring of tender obscenities that entered the girl through her ears and came out of her mouth translated into her language. It was Thursday. On Saturday night, José Arcadio wrapped a red cloth around his head and left with the gypsies.

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When Úrsula discovered his absence she searched for him all through the village. In the remains of the gypsy camp there was nothing but a garbage pit among the still smoking ashes of the extinguished campfires. Someone who was there looking for beads among the trash told Úrsula that the night before he had seen her son in the tumult of the caravan pushing the snake-man's cage on a cart. "He's become a gypsy" she shouted to her husband, who had not shown the slightest sign of alarm over the disappearance.

"I hope it's true," José Arcadio Buendía said, grinding in his mortar the material that had been ground a thousand times and reheated and ground again. "That way he'll learn to be a man." Úrsula asked where the gypsies had gone. She went along asking and following the road she had been shown, thinking that she still had time to catch up to them. She kept getting farther away from the village until she felt so far away that she did not think about returning. José Arcadio Buendía did not discover that his wife was missing until eight o'clock at night, when he left the material warming in a bed of manure and went to see what was wrong with little Amaranta, who was getting hoarse from crying. In a few hours he gathered a group of well-equipped men, put Amaranta in the hands of a woman who offered to nurse her, and was lost on invisible paths in pursuit of Úrsula. Aureliano went with them. Some Indian fishermen, whose language they could not understand, told them with signs that they had not seen anyone pass. After three days of useless searching they returned to the village.

For several weeks José Arcadio Buendía let himself be overcome by consternation. He took care of little Amaranta like a mother. He bathed and dressed her, took her to be nursed four times a day, and even sang to her at night the songs that Úrsula never knew how to sing. On a certain occasion Pilar Ternera volunteered to do the household chores until Úrsula came back. Aureliano, whose mysterious intuition had become sharpened with the misfortune, felt a glow of clairvoyance when he saw her come in. Then he knew that in some inexplicable way she was to blame for his brother's flight and the consequent disappearance of his mother, and he harassed her with a silent and implacable hostility in such a way that the woman did not return to the house.

Time put things in their place. José Arcadio Buendía and his son did not know exactly when they returned to the laboratory, dusting things, lighting the water pipe, involved once more in the patient manipulation of the material that had been sleeping for several months in its bed of manure. Even Amaranta, lying in a wicker basket, observed with curiosity the absorbing work of her father and her brother in the small room where the air was rarefied by mercury vapors. On a certain occasion, months after Úrsula's departure, strange things began to happen. An empty flask that had been forgotten in a cupboard for a long time became so heavy that it could not be moved. A pan of water on the worktable boiled without any fire under it for a half hour until it completely evaporated. José Arcadio Buendía and his son observed those phenomena with startled excitement, unable to explain them but interpreting them as predictions of the material. One day Amaranta's basket began to move by itself and made a complete turn about the room, to the consternation of Aureliano, who hurried to stop it. But his father did not get upset. He put the basket in its place and tied it to the leg of a table, convinced that the long-awaited event was imminent. It was on that occasion that Aureliano heard him say:

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**“If you don’t fear God, fear him through the metals.**

**Suddenly, almost five months after her disappearance, Úrsula came back. She arrived exalted, rejuvenated, with new clothes in a style that was unknown in the village. José Arcadio Buendía could barely stand up under the impact. “That was it!” he shouted. “I knew it was going to happen.” And he really believed it, for during his prolonged imprisonment as he manipulated the material, he begged in the depth of his heart that the longed-for miracle should not be the discovery of the philosopher’s stone, or the freeing of the breath that makes metals live, or the faculty to convert the hinges and the locks of the house into gold, but what had just happened: Úrsula’s return. But she did not share his excitement. She gave him a conventional kiss, as if she had been away only an hour, and she told him:**

**“Look out the door.”**

**José Arcadio Buendía took a long time to get out of his perplexity when he went out into the street and saw the crowd. They were not gypsies. They were men and women like them, with straight hair and dark skin, who spoke the same language and complained of the same pains. They had mules loaded down with things to eat, oxcarts with furniture and domestic utensils, pure and simple earthly accessories put on sale without any fuss by peddlers of everyday reality. They came from the other side of the swamp, only two days away, where there were towns that received mail every month in the year and where they were familiar with the implements of good living. Úrsula had not caught up with the gypsies, but she had found the route that her husband had been unable to discover in his frustrated search for the great inventions.**

### **Chapter 3**

**PILAR TERNERA’S son was brought to his grand parents’ house two weeks after he was born. Úrsula admitted him grudgingly, conquered once more by the obstinacy of her husband, who could not tolerate the idea that an offshoot of his blood should be adrift, but he imposed the condition that the child should never know his true identity. Although he was given the name José Arcadio, they ended up calling him simply Arcadio so as to avoid confusion. At that time there was so much activity in the town and so much bustle in the house that the care of the children was relegated to a secondary level. They were put in the care of Visitación, a Guajiro Indian woman who had arrived in town with a brother in flight from a plague of insomnia that had been scourging their tribe for several years. They were both so docile and willing to help that Úrsula took them on to help her with her household chores. That was how Arcadio and Amaranta came to speak the Guajiro language before Spanish, and they learned to drink lizard broth and eat spider eggs without Úrsula’s knowing it, for she was too busy with a promising business in candy animals. Macondo had changed. The people who had come with Úrsula spread the news of the good quality of its soil and its privileged position with respect to the swamp, so that from the narrow village of past times it changed into an active town with stores and workshops and a permanent commercial route over which the first Arabs arrived with their baggy pants and rings in their ears, swapping glass beads for macaws. José Arcadio**

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Buendía did not have a moment's rest. Fascinated by an immediate reality that came to be more fantastic than the vast universe of his imagination, he lost all interest in the alchemist's laboratory, put to rest the material that had become attenuated with months of manipulation, and went back to being the enterprising man of earlier days when he had decided upon the layout of the streets and the location of the new houses so that no one would enjoy privileges that everyone did not have. He acquired such authority among the new arrivals that foundations were not laid or walls built without his being consulted, and it was decided that he should be the one in charge of the distribution of the land. When the acrobat gypsies returned, with their vagabond carnival transformed now into a gigantic organization of games of luck and chance, they were received with great joy, for it was thought that José Arcadio would be coming back with them. But José Arcadio did not return, nor did they come with the snake-man, who, according to what Úrsula thought, was the only one who could tell them about their son, so the gypsies were not allowed to camp in town or set foot in it in the future, for they were considered the bearers of concupiscence and perversion. José Arcadio Buendía, however, was explicit in maintaining that the old tribe of Melquíades, who had contributed so much to the growth of the village with his age-old wisdom and his fabulous inventions, would always find the gates open. But Melquíades' tribe, according to what the wanderers said, had been wiped off the face of the earth because they had gone beyond the limits of human knowledge.

Emancipated for the moment at least from the torment of fantasy, José Arcadio Buendía in a short time set up a system of order and work which allowed for only one bit of license: the freeing of the birds, which, since the time of the founding, had made time merry with their flutes, and installing in their place musical clocks in every house. They were wondrous clocks made of carved wood, which the Arabs had traded for macaws and which José Arcadio Buendía had synchronized with such precision that every half hour the town grew merry with the progressive chords of the same song until it reached the climax of a noontime that was as exact and unanimous as a complete waltz. It was also José Arcadio Buendía who decided during those years that they should plant almond trees instead of acacias on the streets, and who discovered, without ever revealing it, a way to make them live forever. Many years later, when Macondo was a field of wooden houses with zinc roofs, the broken and dusty almond trees still stood on the oldest streets, although no one knew who had planted them. While his father was putting the town in order and his mother was increasing their wealth with her marvelous business of candied little roosters and fish, which left the house twice a day strung along sticks of balsa wood, Aureliano spent interminable hours in the abandoned laboratory, learning the art of silverwork by his own experimentation. He had shot up so fast that in a short time the clothing left behind by his brother no longer fit him and he began to wear his father's, but Visitación had to sew pleats in the shirt and darts in the pants, because Aureliano had not sequined the corpulence of the others. Adolescence had taken away the softness of his voice and had made him silent and definitely solitary, but, on the other hand, it had restored the intense expression that he had had in his eyes when he was born. He concentrated so much on his experiments in silverwork that he scarcely left the laboratory to eat. Worried ever his inner withdrawal, José Arcadio Buendía gave him the keys to the house and a little money, thinking that perhaps he needed a woman. But Aureliano spent the money on muriatic acid to prepare some aqua regia and he beautified the keys by plating them with gold. His

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excesses were hardly comparable to those of Arcadio and Amaranta, who had already begun to get their second teeth and still went about all day clutching at the Indians' cloaks, stubborn in their decision not to speak Spanish but the Guajiro language. "You shouldn't complain." Úrsula told her husband. "Children inherit their parents' madness." And as she was lamenting her misfortune, convinced that the wild behavior of her children was something as fearful as a pig's tail, Aureliano gave her a look that wrapped her in an atmosphere of uncertainty.

"Somebody is coming," he told her.

Úrsula, as she did whenever he made a prediction, tried to break it down with her housewifely logic. It was normal for someone to be coming. Dozens of strangers came through Macondo every day without arousing suspicion or secret ideas. Nevertheless, beyond all logic, Aureliano was sure of his prediction.

"I don't know who it will be," he insisted, "but whoever it is is already on the way."

That Sunday, in fact, Rebeca arrived. She was only eleven years old. She had made the difficult trip from Manaure with some hide dealers who had taken on the task of delivering her along with a letter to José Arcadio Buendía, but they could not explain precisely who the person was who had asked the favor. Her entire baggage consisted of a small trunk, a little rocking chair with small hand-painted flowers, and a canvas sack which kept making a cloc-cloc-cloc sound, where she carried her parents' bones. The letter addressed to José Arcadio Buendía was written in very warm terms by someone who still loved him very much in spite of time and distance, and who felt obliged by a basic humanitarian feeling to do the charitable thing and send him that poor unsheltered orphan, who was a second cousin of Úrsula's and consequently also a relative of José Arcadio Buendía, although farther removed, because she was the daughter of that unforgettable friend Nicanor Ulloa and his very worthy wife Rebeca Montiel, may God keep them in His holy kingdom, whose remains the girl was carrying so that they might be given Christian burial. The names mentioned, as well as the signature on the letter, were perfectly legible, but neither José Arcadio, Buendía nor Úrsula remembered having any relatives with those names, nor did they know anyone by the name of the sender of the letter, much less the remote village of Manaure. It was impossible to obtain any further information from the girl. From the moment she arrived she had been sitting in the rocker, sucking her finger and observing everyone with her large, startled eyes without giving any sign of understanding what they were asking her. She wore a diagonally striped dress that had been dyed black, worn by use, and a pair of scaly patent leather boots. Her hair was held behind her ears with bows of black ribbon. She wore a scapular with the images worn away by sweat, and on her right wrist the fang of a carnivorous animal mounted on a backing of copper as an amulet against the evil eye. Her greenish skin, her stomach, round and tense as a drum, revealed poor health and hunger that were older than she was, but when they gave her something to eat she kept the plate on her knees without tasting anything. They even began to think that she was a deaf-mute until the Indians asked her in their language if she wanted some water and she moved her eyes as if she recognized them and said yes with her head.



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