

**SAINT MANUEL BUENO, MARTYR**  
**(San Manuel Bueno, Martir)**

**By Miguel de Unamuno**

*If it is for this life only that Christ has given us hope, we of all men are the most to be pitied.* (Saint Paul, I Corinthians XV, 19.)

Now that the Bishop of the Diocese of Renada, which includes my beloved village of Valverde de Lucerna, has started the process of beatification for our Don Manuel, or Saint Manuel Bueno, which is what he was for our parish, I want to set down here, as a confession, which only God, not I, knows what will become of, all that I remember about the blessed man who filled the deepest part of my soul, who was my true spiritual father, the spiritual father of me, Angela Carballino.

I hardly knew my real father since he died when I was just a child. I know he came to Valverde de Lucerna from somewhere else, but he settled here after marrying my mother. He brought with him a lot of books, *The Quijote*, some classical dramas, some novels, some histories, the *Bertoldo*. And from them—the only books in our village—I learned to dream as a child. My dear mother hardly said anything about the things my father did or said. The actions of Don Manuel, whom everyone adored, and my mother loved, chastely of course, had erased the memory of her husband, whom she still fervently commended to God every day when she said the rosary.

I remember Don Manuel as if it was yesterday, when I was ten years old, before they sent me to the Convent School in the cathedral city of Renada. Then our saint must have been about thirty six. He was tall, slender, and proud; he held his head like our Buzzard's Peak Mountain carried its crest, and in his eyes there was the deepest blue of our lake. He captured everyone's eyes, along with their hearts, and when he looked at us he looked through our body, as if it were crystal, right into our heart. Everyone loved him, especially the children. And the things he told us! They were ideas, not words. Soon the people began to notice his sanctity, and they felt overwhelmed and intoxicated by his presence. That was when my brother Lazaro, who was in America and was sending us enough money so we could live comfortably, told my mother to send me to the Convent School so I could complete my education outside the village, even though he did not think much of the nuns. "But since, as far as I know," he wrote to us, "there are no progressive secular schools, or schools for girls in the city, one has to take advantage of what there is. The important thing is for Angelina to learn something worthwhile, and not more of those boorish provincial ideas." So I started school, at first thinking I would like to become a teacher there, but later I lost my interest in pedagogy.

In school I met girls from the city, and I became good friends with some of them. But I still thought about the things and people in our village, and I visited there occasionally. Then even at school we began to hear about the fame of our priest, and they soon began to talk about him in the rest of the city.

Since I was young I acquired, I'm not sure how, some strange ideas, preoccupations, and concerns that, in part at least, were a product of my father's books. All this affected me while I was at school, and especially in my relations with a friend to whom I was very

attached, and it affected me even more when she proposed that we should both enter a convent and swear, even signing with our blood, to have a permanent sisterhood. Then, at other times, with her eyes half closed, she spoke to me about boyfriends, and getting married. Since those days I haven't heard from her, nor what has become of her. The time I spent with her was when they were all talking about Don Manuel, or when my mother told me something about him in her letters which she almost always did, and which I read to my friend who exclaimed with rapture, "How lucky you are to be able to live near such a saint, a real saint of flesh and blood, and be able to kiss his hand! When you go back to your village, be sure to write to me often, and tell me about him."

I spent five years in that school, five years that now have faded away like a dream in some distant memory. After that, when I was fifteen, I returned to Valverde de Lucerna. Since then everything has been about Don Manuel: Don Manuel, with the lake, and the mountain. I arrived anxious to get to know him, and to put myself under his care so that he could show me the path of my life.

They said he had entered the Seminary to become a priest, so he could look after the children of one of his sisters who had become a widow, and be a father to them. They also said that, in the Seminary, after he had distinguished himself because of his mental acuity and his talent, he rejected several offers of a brilliant ecclesiastical career because he only wanted to serve his village, Valverde de Lucerna, that was lost like a dry leaf, between the lake and the mountain that is reflected in it.

And how he cared for his people! He wanted to fix broken marriages, reunite stubborn children with their father, or the fathers with their children and, above all, to comfort those who were discouraged and weary, and console those who were about to die.

I remember, among other things, that when the hopeless, unmarried daughter of Aunt Rabona had returned from the city with her son, Don Manuel did not stop until he had convinced her former boyfriend, Perote, to marry her and recognize the child as his, saying to him:

"Please, be a father to this poor child, who only has one in heaven."

"But Don Manuel, I am not to blame for this..."

"Who knows, son, who knows...? and besides, this is not a question of blame."

And today poor Perote, who is disabled and paralytic, has as the support and the consolation of his life, the child who, influenced by the sanctity of Don Manuel, he had recognized as his own, even though he was not.

On Saint John's Night, the shortest night of the year, all the poor women and more than a few men who thought they were possessed by the Devil, but seemed to be nothing more than hysterics and epileptics, used to gather at our lake, and Don Manuel took the task of being the lake himself, a restorative bathing place, and tried to alleviate or, if possible, cure them. Such was the effect of his presence, his gaze, and the gentle authority of his words and his voice—and what a wonderful voice!—that he achieved surprising cures. His reputation grew until all the sick people of the region were attracted to the lake, and to him. One time a mother came to him and asked him to perform a miracle with her child, and he replied, smiling sadly: "I do not have permission of the Lord Bishop to perform miracles."

He was especially concerned that everyone should have clean clothes. If someone had a hole in their clothing, he would tell them:

"Go see the sacristan and get him to mend that." The sacristan was also a tailor.

And when, on the first day of the year, people went to congratulate him on his saint's day—his patron saint was Lord Jesus Christ himself—he asked that they give him new shirts, which he then gave to those who did not have one.

He showed the same affection to everyone, and if there were some who got more of his attention, it was the most unfortunate, and those who were more disobedient. And since in the village there was a poor idiot they called, Blasillo the Fool, he was the one he cared for most, and he was even able to teach him things that it seemed a miracle he was able to learn. And with the small amount of intelligence that still remained in the Fool, he was able to imitate Don Manuel like a monkey. Don Manuel had a marvelous voice, a divine voice, that made one want to weep. When he performed Mass, or said the blessing, the church trembled, and everyone was deeply moved. His words, issuing from the church, went to rest over the lake, and at the foot of the mountain. And in his Good Friday sermon, when he said the words: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” a deep tremor spread through the entire village, like one that passed through the water of the lake on days when there was a strong north wind. And it was as if they heard the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, as if it came from the old crucifix at the foot of which so many mothers had expressed their woes. Once when the mother of Don Manuel heard it in the pew where she was sitting and was not able to contain herself, she shouted “Oh my son!”, and there were tears everywhere. People thought that maternal voice had come from The Lady of Sorrows—whose heart was pierced by seven swords—located in one of the chapels. After that, Blasillo the Fool walked about through village crying, like an echo, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And when they heard it, people cried with joy at the imitative triumph of the Fool.

Don Manuel's influence was so powerful that no one dared to lie to him, and even when they didn't need to go to the confessional, people still went to confess with him. When a shocking crime was committed in a neighboring village, the Judge, a foolish man who didn't really know Don Manuel, went to him and said, “Don Manuel, I want to see if you might be able to make this criminal admit the truth so he can be punished” Our holy man replied, “No, Your Honor, no; I will not draw the truth from anyone when it might lead to their death. This is between him and God... Human justice does not concern me. ‘Do not judge, that ye be not judged,’ Our Lord said.”

“But Father, it's just that...”

“Please understand, if God has forgiven you, that is the only thing that matters.”

In the village everyone went to Mass, even if it was only to hear him and see him at the altar where he seemed to be transfigured, making his face light up. There was a sacred practice that he introduced to the people of the village, which was to invite everyone to the church, men and women, young and old, hundreds of people, and have them recite the Credo in unison, “I believe in God the Father, Maker of Heaven and Earth...” and so on. And it was not a chorus, but a single voice, a simple, united voice, with everyone joined in one, forming a mountain whose crest, lost in the clouds, was Don Manuel. And when they said “I believe in the resurrection of the flesh, and life everlasting,” the voice of Don Manuel dove as though into a lake, the lake of the people, and it was because he was silent. And I heard the bells of the town that people say is submerged in the bottom of the lake—bells that are heard on the night of Saint John—and they were those of the town submerged in the spiritual lake of our people. I heard the voice of our dead who arose with us, in a communion of saints. After learning the secret of our saint, I realized

it was as if a caravan traveling through the desert, whose leader had passed away when it reached the end of their long journey, and the people took him on their shoulders to the Promised Land.

Most of the people did not want to die without holding his hand, like an anchor. In his sermons, he never tried to speak against unbelievers, masons, or heretics. What for, if there weren't any in our village? Nor did he criticize the press. On the other hand, one of the frequent themes of his sermons was his disapproval of those who said bad things. Because he forgave everything, and everybody. He did not want to believe in the bad intention of anyone.

"Those who envy," he liked to repeat, "are those who think they are envied, and most persecutions are more the product of some persecution mania, than of the persecutor himself."

"But Don Manuel, just think about what he wanted to say to me..." And he replied: "We should not worry as much about what he wanted to say, as about what he said without wanting to..."

His life was active, not contemplative, and as much as possible he tried to avoid not having anything to do. When he heard the expression, idleness is the mother of all vices, he responded, "And the worst of all is idle thought." And when I asked him once what that meant, he answered: "Idle thought is thinking, in order to do nothing; thinking too much about what has been done, and not about what should be done. What's done is done, and there is nothing worse than feeling remorse without a cure." He always wanted to do something! I understood then that Don Manuel was fleeing from idle thought, and from solitary thought, because something was plaguing him.

That is why he was always busy, often inventing things to do. He wrote very little for himself, so that he left us hardly any documents or notes. However, he wrote a lot for others, and especially for mothers, he wrote letters to their absent children. He also did manual labor with his own hands, doing certain jobs of the people. When it was harvest time, he would go to the threshing place to thresh and winnow, and while he was doing that he would give people a lecture, or entertain them. Sometimes he would do the work for someone who was sick. One day in the coldest part of winter he encountered a child who was freezing, whose father had told him to bring back a cow that had wandered off to a distant part of the farm. "Look here," he said to the child, "go back home and get warmed up, and tell your father that I will run the errand." When he returned with the cow, he met the confused father who was coming to meet him. In the winter he chopped wood for poor families. With the death of that marvelous walnut tree which he called, "the matriarchal walnut tree," in whose shade he used to sit during the summer, and whose nuts he had given out for many years, he asked for the trunk. He took it to his house, and after cutting six boards from it which he kept at the foot of his bed, he cut firewood from the rest, to warm poor families.

He also made balls for the boys to play with, and more than a few toys for children.

He often accompanied the doctor during his visits, and he stressed the importance of his prescriptions. He always took a great interest in pregnancies, and in bringing up children, and he felt that one of the worst blasphemies was the expression: "Little angels to heaven." He was profoundly affected by the death of a child. Once he told me, "A child who is born dead, or one who dies soon after it is born, or a suicide, are for me the greatest mysteries: a child on a cross!"

And once after someone had taken his own life, the father of the person who had committed suicide, a foreigner, came and asked him if he could be buried in sacred ground, and he answered:

“Certainly, since in the final moment, in the moment of death, he repented for what he had done without doubt.”

He often went to the school to assist the teacher, to teach with him, and not just the catechism. It was because he was fleeing from idleness, and solitude. So, in order to be with people, and especially with young people and children, he often went to a dance. And quite often he played the tambourine so the boys and girls could dance and, what to someone else might have seemed like a grotesque profanation of the priesthood, with him was like a sacred, religious rite. When the Angelus sounded, he set aside the tambourine and the drumstick, he took off his hat, and along with everyone else prayed: “The Angel of the Lord said to Mary: Hail Mary...” And then, he told them, “Now go home and rest until tomorrow.”

“The most important thing,” he said, “is for people to be happy, and be happy to be alive. The happiness of being alive is the most important thing of all. No one should want to die, until God wants it.”

“But I want to,” a woman who had recently become a widow told him; “I want to be with my husband.”

“And why do that?” he asked. “Stay here so that you can commend his soul to God.” In a wedding he said once: “Oh, I wish I could change the water from our lake into wine, a weak wine that no matter how much one drank, they would always be happy, and never get drunk... or at least a happy drunkenness.”

One time a group of poor circus performers came to the town, and when they got there the leader of the group who came with his wife, who was pregnant and seriously ill, was performing as a clown. While he was in the village square making the children, and even the adults, laugh, his wife became very indisposed and had to leave. She left followed by a look of anguish from the clown, and a burst of laughter from the children. She was led by Don Manuel, and in a corner of her room at the inn he comforted her while she died. By the time the festival was over the people, and the clown, all knew she had died, and they went to the inn. With a sad voice the poor clown said: “Father, it is true when they say you are a saint,” and he wanted to kiss his hand. But Don Manuel was faster and, taking the clown’s hand, he said to everyone:

“The real saint here is you, honorable clown. I saw what you did, and I knew that you weren’t doing it just to feed your children, but also to give happiness to those of others. And I can tell you that the mother of your children, whom I sent to God while you were working and making people happy, is now resting with the Lord, and you will someday go to join her. And may the angels repay you by laughing, when you make others laugh, in the heaven of happiness.”

And everyone, children and adults, all wept. And though they wept with sorrow, a mysterious happiness held back the sorrow. And now, much later, when I remember that solemn rite, I have realized that the unwavering happiness of Don Manuel was the secular and worldly form of an infinite and eternal sadness that, with heroic sanctity, he hid from everyone else.

With his constant activity while he participated in everyone’s tasks, and diversions, he seemed to want to escape from himself, and from solitude. He used to say “I’m afraid of

solitude.” But even so, from time to time he went by himself to the ruins of the old abbey on the shore of the lake where the souls of pious Cistercians are resting in the oblivion of History. The cell of the one that was called the Father Captain is there, and on the walls they say you can still see the drops of blood that splattered on them when he flagellated himself. What could our Don Manuel have been thinking there? What I do remember is that once, when we were talking about the abbey, I asked him why it was he hadn’t thought of entering the cloister, and he told me:

“It was not just so that my widowed sister and my nephews will have someone to look after them—because God takes care of the poor—but because I was not made to be a hermit, or an anchorite. Solitude would destroy my soul and, as for a monastery, my monastery is Valverde de Lucerna. I never should live by myself; I should not die by myself. I must live for my people, and I must die for my people. How will I ever save my soul, if I do not save the soul of my people?”

“But there have been saints that were hermits, or recluses...” I said.

“Yes, but God gave them the grace of solitude which has been denied to me and I have to resign myself to that. I cannot ignore my people, in order to save my soul. That is the way God made me. I cannot give in to the desire of solitude. I cannot bear the cross of being born, all by myself.”

With these memories, which now have given life to my faith, I am trying to describe Don Manuel as he was when I, a fifteen year old girl, returned from the Convent School of Renada, to our monastery of Valverde de Lucerna. And I came back to put myself at the feet of its abbot.

“Hello, daughter of Simona,” he said when he saw me. “Here you are already a young girl knowing how to speak French, to embroider, to play the piano, and who knows what else. Now you are ready to start another family. And what about your brother, Lazaro? When is he coming back? He’s still in the New World, isn’t that right?”

“Yes, he is still in America.”

“In the New World; and here we are in the Old one. Well, when you write to him, tell him, on my behalf, on behalf of the priest, that I am waiting to know when he is returning from the New World, to this Old one, bringing us the news from over there. And tell him that he will see the lake and the mountain just as he left them.”

When I went to confess with him, I was so tense I could hardly say a word. I started, “I a sinner...” stammering, and almost sobbing. And he noticed it, saying to me: “But what is wrong, little lamb? Of what, or of whom, are you afraid? Because I am sure you are not trembling under the weight of your sins, or fear of God, no; you are trembling because of me, isn’t that right?” And I started to cry.

“But what have they told you about me? What stories have you heard? Perhaps from your mother? Come now, calm yourself, and realize that you are now speaking to your brother...”

I took courage and I began to tell him about my concerns, my doubts, and my sorrows. “Now, now, now! And where have you read that, miss know-it-all. All that is just literature. Don’t pay so much attention to that, not even to Saint Teresa. And if you want to be entertained, read the Bertoldo, like your father.” I came out of that confession with the good man profoundly comforted. And that first feeling I had when I came to him, which was fear, rather than respect, changed into a profound sense of pity. I was just a young girl, little more than a child, but I was beginning to be a woman, and I felt in my

heart the essence of motherhood and there, in the confessional with this holy man, I felt something that seemed like a silent confession of his own in the sad sound of his voice. And then I remembered that time in church when he said those words of Jesus: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? ; and then his mother, the mother of Don Manuel, cried out from her pew "Oh my son!" and that cry disturbed the calm of the congregation. After that, I went back to confess with him, in order to console him.

Once in the confessional, when I asked him about one of those doubts, he answered:

"As for that, you already know the catechism: "Do not ever ask me that, because I am ignorant. The Holy Mother Church has specialists who will know how to respond to that."

"But the specialist here is you, Don Manuel!..."

"Me, me a specialist? Me a specialist? The very idea! I, little specialist, am nothing more than a poor village priest. And these doubts, do you know who gives them to you, who controls them? Well,... the Devil!"

And then, taking courage, I let the cat out of the bag:

"And if they were given to you, Don Manuel?"

"To whom? To me, from the Devil? We don't know each other child, we do not know each other."

"And if he sends them to you?"

"I wouldn't pay any attention. Now that's enough, all right?, let's be off because there are some people waiting for me who really do need my help."

I left thinking, I don't know why, that our Don Manuel, so well-known as someone who could cure those who are possessed by the Devil, did not believe in the Devil. And as I was going home, I saw Blasillo the Fool who was probably prowling around the church and, when he saw me, to show me what he could do, he repeated Don Manuel's words: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I came home feeling upset and closed myself in my room in order to cry, until my mother arrived.

"With all these confessions, Angela, it looks to me like you are well on the way to becoming a nun."

"Don't worry about that, mother" I answered her, "because I have enough to do here in the village, which is my convent."

"Until you get married."

"I am not thinking about that," I told her.

Another time when I met Don Manuel I asked him, looking him straight in the eyes:

"Is there really a hell, Don Manuel?"

And without flinching, he said: "For you child? No."

"And, for others?"

"What does it matter, if you will never go there?"

"It matters, because of the others. Does it exist?"

"Believe in heaven, the heaven we see. Look at it," and he pointed at the mountain, and below it the lake where it was reflected.

"But we have to believe in hell, just like we have to believe in heaven," I replied.

"Yes, one must believe in everything that is believed and taught by the Holy Apostolic Roman Catholic Mother Church. And that's enough!"

I saw a kind of deep sadness in his eyes that were as blue as the water of the lake. Those years passed by like a dream. The effect of Don Manuel kept on growing on me,

without me realizing it, since he was such an every-day man, as common as the daily bread that we asked for in the Lord's Prayer. I helped him as much as I could with his duties; I visited his sick, our sick, the girls in the school, I cleaned out the closet in the church, I became, as he called me, his deaconess. I was invited to the city for a few days by a former school friend, but I soon had to leave because the city was stifling me, and I was missing something; I felt a need to see the waters of the lake, a hunger for the peak of the mountain, and above all, I felt a need for Don Manuel, as if his absence was calling me, as if he was in some danger, so far away from me, and now he needed me. I began to feel a sort of maternal affection for my spiritual father and I wanted to relieve him of the weight of the cross of being born.

Then, when I was almost twenty-four years old, my brother, Lazaro, returned from America with a small fortune, and with the intention of taking my mother and me with him to live in Madrid.

"In the village," he said, "you get used to foolishness, you dull your senses, and you become underprivileged." And he added:

"Civilization is the opposite of ruralization. So no more provincialism! I didn't want you to go to school so that you could deteriorate back here among these unsophisticated yokels."

Although I was silent, I did not like this idea of moving, but our mother, who was in her sixties, spoke out against it right away. "Change where you live, at my age?" she said at first; but then later she made it even clearer that she could not live without being able to see the lake, and the mountain, and especially her Don Manuel. "You are like cats that are locked inside a house!" my brother said. When he realized what a strong influence the devoted man of God had on all the people, and especially on my mother and me, he became angry at him. To him it seemed like another example of the theocracy that he felt Spain was immersed in. And without stopping he began to mutter all the anticlerical, and even antireligious, and progressive, clichés that he had brought with him from the New World.

"In this Spain of henpecked husbands, the priests control the women, and the women control the husbands... and then the entire country!... this feudal country..."

For him, feudal was a dreadful term; feudal and medieval were the two qualifications he used when he wanted to condemn something.

He was disconcerted when his diatribes had no effect on us, and also hardly any effect on the other people who heard them with respectful indifference. "There is no way to convince these yokels!" But since his intelligence made him a good person, he soon realized the real effect Don Manuel had on the people, and he soon became aware of the good work he was doing in our village.

"No, he's not like the others," he said. "He really is a saint!"

"But do you really know what the other priests are like," I asked him, and he answered: "I imagine it."

But in spite of that, he never went to church, nor did he cease to express his lack of belief, while always trying not to include Don Manuel. I don't know how, but soon an expectation grew that there would be some kind of duel between my brother Lazaro and Don Manuel, or else they expected the conversion of the former by the latter. No one doubted that eventually the priest would bring him into his flock. For his part, Lazaro was burning with desire to go to see and hear Don Manuel in the church, to talk with him,

and learn the secret of his spiritual influence over these souls. And he let himself be begged to do that until, out of curiosity, he finally went to hear him.

“Yes, this is something else,” he told me after having heard him; “He is not like the others. But he is not fooling me; he is too intelligent to believe all that he has to preach.”

“But, you mean he is a hypocrite?” I asked him.

“No, not a hypocrite! But it’s the religious profession he has to live with.” And for me, my brother insisted I should read the books he brought with him, as well as some others he wanted me to buy.

“So your brother Lazaro wants you to read?” Don Manuel said. “Well, my child, do what he wants, and make him happy. I know that you will only read good things, even if they are novels. What they call true histories are not always the best. It’s better for you to read, than let yourself be fed by people’s gossip and chatter. But read mostly pious books that make you happy to be alive, a calm, and tranquil happiness.” Was that how he felt?

At about that time my mother became gravely ill, and then she died. In her final days her greatest desire was that Don Manuel would convert Lazaro, whom she hoped to see one day in heaven, in a corner of the stars from which one could see the lake and the mountain of Valverde de Lucerna. She was now ready to see God.

“You are not going anywhere,” Don Manuel told her. “You are staying here, your body here in this land, and your soul in this house, seeing and hearing your children, even though they do not see and hear you.”

“But Father, I am going to see God.”

“God, my dear, is here, and every place, and you will see Him right here. And all of us in Him, and He in us.”

“God bless you,” I told him.

“The happiness with which your mother dies,” he said to me, “will be her eternal life.” And turning to Lazaro, he said:

“Her heaven is to continue seeing you, and now is the time to save her. Tell her you will pray for her.” “But...”

“But...? tell her you will pray for her, the one to whom you owe your life. And I know that once you promise you will pray for her, and I know that once you pray...”

His eyes filled with tears and my brother went to her and promised her solemnly that he would pray for her.

“And in heaven I will do the same for you,” my mother responded. Then kissing the crucifix, and with her eyes on those of Don Manuel, she gave her soul to God.

“Into your hands I commend thy spirit,” the blessed man prayed.

After that my brother and I were alone in the house. But what had happened with the death of my mother caused Lazaro to have a closer relation with Don Manuel, who sometimes seemed to neglect other people, his other needy, in order to spend more time with Lazaro. They often went for walks along the shore of the lake, or to the ruins of the old Cistercian Abbey covered with ivy.

“He is a marvelous person,” Lazaro told me. “You know, they say that at the bottom of the lake there is a sunken village, and that on the night of Saint John, one can hear the bells of its church.”

“Yes,” I answered, “a feudal and medieval village...”

Lazaro continued “Yes, and I believe that in the deepest part of the soul of our Don Manuel there is also a sunken village, and that sometimes its bells can be heard by the people.”

“Yes,” I told him, “in a village sunken in the soul of Don Manuel, and why not also in yours, is the burial place of the souls of our ancestors, those of our Valverde de Lucerna, also feudal, and medieval!”

My brother finally started going to Mass regularly to hear Don Manuel and, when he said he would take communion with the others, a feeling of joy spread through the entire village, and it was thought he had finally been saved. But it was such an honest rejoicing that Lazaro never felt defeated, or belittled.

Then the day of his communion came, before the people, and with the people. When it was Lazaro’s turn I could see that Don Manuel was as white as the snow on the mountain in January, and trembling like our lake when it is lashed by the north wind. He came to Lazaro with the Host in his hand and he trembled so much that, as he went to put it in Lazaro’s mouth, he almost fainted and it fell out of his hand. Then it was my brother himself who picked up the Host and put it in his mouth. And when the people saw that Don Manuel was weeping they also wept, thinking: “Oh, how he loves him!” And then, since it was dawn, a rooster crowed. When I returned to our house with my brother, I put my arms around his neck and kissed him saying:

“Oh, Lazaro, Lazaro, what happiness you have given to everyone, to everyone, to all the living and the dead, and especially to Mama, to our mother. Did you see how poor Don Manuel was crying with happiness? How happy you have made us all!”

“That’s why I did it,” he said.

“For that? To make us happy? You must have also done it for yourself, as part of your conversion.” And then my brother Lazaro, as pale and as trembling as Don Manuel when he gave him communion, made me sit down in the same chair where my mother used to sit, and then, like in an intimate family confession, he told me:

“Angelita, the time has come to tell you the truth, the entire truth, and I am going to do that because it is the right thing to do, because I can no longer hide it, and because sooner or later you would guess it anyway which is worse.”

And then, with a soft voice, speaking serenely and calmly, he told me a story that made me sink into an ocean of sadness. How Don Manuel had spoken to him, especially during the walks to the old Cistercian Abbey, trying to convince him to join the religious life of the people and, even if he did not believe, pretend to believe, in order to hide his thoughts. And without trying to catechize him, he converted him in a different way.

“But is that possible?” I exclaimed, dismayed.

“Yes, sister, quite possible. And when I asked, ‘Is it you, a priest, who is telling me I ought to pretend?’ And stammering, Don Manuel said: ‘Pretend? No, not pretend! That is not pretending. Like they say, take the holy water and you will start believing.’” And Lazaro said, “looking him straight in the eyes, I asked him: ‘After celebrating Mass have you started to believe?’ And he looked down at the lake, and his eyes filled with tears.”

“Oh, Lazaro,” I moaned.

Just then, Blasillo the Fool happened to pass down the street, and once again we heard him repeat the words of Don Manuel, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” And Lazaro shuddered, thinking he heard the voice of Don Manuel, or perhaps that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Lazaro added, "I understood what his motives were and that is how I realized he is a saint. He didn't want to convert me for his saintly purpose—because it is saintly—to make himself look good, but for the peace, for the happiness, for the illusion if you wish, of all those who are entrusted to him. I accepted his reasons, and that is my conversion. And then I will not forget when I said to him: 'Don Manuel, the truth; first and foremost, the truth.' And he whispered in my ear, even though we were alone out in the country, 'The truth? Lazaro, the truth may perhaps be something terrible, something intolerable, something mortal; those poor people wouldn't be able to live with it.' And I asked him; 'So why are you saying all this to me here now, like a confession?' And he said, 'Because if I don't it would torment me constantly, so much that I would finally shout it in the middle of the plaza, and I can never let that happen, never. It's up to me to make the souls of my parishioners live, to make them happy and dream that they are immortal, not to kill them. What is needed here is for them to live with good health, to make them live all believing the same thing, and they would not be able to live with the truth, my truth. So may they live! That's what the Church does, make them live. The true religion? All religions are true insofar as they make the people that profess them live spiritually, and they console them for having been born in order to die. And for all people, the truest religion is their own, the one they believe in. And mine? Mine is being consoled by being able to console others, even though their consolation is not mine.' Yes, I will never forget those words of his."

"But this communion of yours has been a sacrilege!" I said, repenting immediately for having said that.

"A sacrilege? And him, the one who gave it to me? And his Masses?"

"What a martyr," I exclaimed.

"And now," my brother added, "there is one more person who is able to console the people."

"To deceive them?" I asked.

"No, not to deceive them, only to strengthen their faith."

"And what about the people," I said, "do they really believe?"

"What do I know?... They believe without thinking about it, by habit, by tradition. And what is important, is not to wake them up. And that they live with their poor beliefs, and do not live in torment. Blessed are the poor in spirit!"

"That, brother, is something you learned from Don Manuel. And now tell me, have you kept the promise you made our mother when she was about to die, that you would pray for her?"

"But why would I not do that? What do you think I am, sister? Do you believe me capable of failing to keep my word, to break a solemn promise, a promise made on our mother's death bed?"

"I don't know... You might have tried to deceive her so that she would die happy."

"Well, if I had not fulfilled my promise to her, it is I who would have to live without being happy."

"So did you?"

"Yes, I have always kept my promise, and I have not neglected to pray for her, not for a single day."

"Only for her?"

"Well, who else should I pray for?"

“For yourself! And from now on, for Don Manuel.”

We separated then, and each one of us went to our room; I to cry all night and pray for the conversion of my brother and Don Manuel. As for Lazaro, I don’t know what he did.

After that day I always felt very uncomfortable to find myself alone with Don Manuel, who continued to perform his pious duties. And he seemed to become aware of what I was feeling and guess what caused it. And when I finally went to see him in the Tribunal of penance—who was the judge and who the sinner?—both of us bent our head in silence and began to weep. Then, it was Don Manuel who broke that painful silence to tell me, with a voice that seemed to rise out of a tomb:

“But you, Angela, you still believe, the same as you did when you were ten. Isn’t that right, you still believe?”

“Yes, I believe, Father.”

“Well, keep on believing. And if you ever have any doubts, don’t pay any attention to them, and forget them. One must live...” And trembling, I dared to ask him:

“And you, Father, do you believe?”

He hesitated a moment, and then answered:

“I believe.”

“But what, Father; what do you believe? Do you believe in the afterlife, do you believe that when we die we do not die completely, do you believe we will see each other again, and love each other again, in another life? Do you believe in the afterlife?” The poor saint sobbed.

“Enough, child; let’s let this go!”

And now, when I write this memoir, I ask myself: Why didn’t he deceive me?; why didn’t he deceive me like he deceived others? Because he was distressed? Because he could not deceive himself, or could not deceive me? And I would like to believe that he was distressed because he could not deceive himself, in order to deceive me.

“And now,” he added, “pray for me, for your brother, for yourself, and everyone else. One must live. One must enjoy life.”

And after a pause, he asked:

“Why don’t you get married, Angelina?”

“You already know why, Father.”

“But no, no; you must get married. Lazaro and I will look for someone who will care for you.. Because you have to get married in order to stop these preoccupations.”

“Preoccupations, Don Manuel?”

“I know what I am talking about. And don’t worry too much about others, because it’s enough just to take care of oneself.”

“Is it really you who is telling me this, Don Manuel? Is it you who is telling me that I should get married to take care of myself, without thinking of others?”

“Yes, you are right, Angelina, I don’t know what I am saying; I don’t know what I am saying, now that I am confessing with you. And yes, yes, one must live, one must live.”

And when I got up and was about to leave the church, he said to me:

“And now, Angelina, in the name of the people, do you absolve me?”

Feeling as though I had been filled with some mysterious sisterhood, I told him:

“In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, I absolve you, Father.”

Then we both left the church, and as we did that my motherly heart was trembling. My brother, who had become completely devoted to the work of Don Manuel was now his

most frequent collaborator and companion. They were tied together by a common secret. Lazaro went with him on his visits to the sick, to the schools, and he put his money at the disposal of the saint. It was nearly at the point where he was ready to help him say Mass. He was entering more and more deeply into the unfathomable soul of Don Manuel. "What a man!" he told me. "The other day when we were walking along the shore of the lake he said to me: 'Here you can see my greatest temptation.' And when I looked at him questioningly, he told me, 'My poor father, who died when he was about 90, confessed to me that he spent his life tortured by the urge to commit suicide. He wasn't sure when it started, but he always had to struggle against it. He described terrible things. It seemed like madness. And now I have inherited it. And now I am tempted by this water, with its apparent calmness that mirrors the sky. My life, Lazaro, has been a sort of continuous suicide, a struggle against suicide, which is the same thing. But may others live, may our loved ones live!' And then he added: 'Here the river forms a lake; then it falls to the plateau, passing through cascades, gullies, and waterfalls, through the gorges and ravines, next to the city. And that is how life flows here, in the village. But the temptation of suicide is greater here, next to the lake that reflects the stars at night, than it is next to the cascades which only cause fear. Lazaro, you know how I have helped many people die, these poor innocent villagers who never left the village, and I have been able to hear from their lips, or guess when they didn't talk, the true cause of the pain of death. And next to their deathbed I have been able to see all the blackness of the pain of living. A thousand times worse than hunger! So Lazaro, let's continue this suicide in our work, and in our people, and let them dream their life, like the lake dreams the stars.' Another time" my brother told me, "when we were coming back to the village, we saw a shepherdess standing on a ledge on the side of the mountain facing the lake who was singing with a voice as fresh as the water in it. Don Manuel stopped me and, pointing at her, he said: 'Look, it seems as though time has stopped, as if that shepherdess has always been there singing like this, as if she will always continue to be there like she was when my consciousness began, and like she will be when it ends. That shepherdess, along with the rocks, the clouds, the trees, and the waters, is part of nature, and not of history.' How much Don Manuel feels, and how he brightens, the natural environment! I will never forget the day of the snowstorm when he said, 'Lazaro, have you ever seen a mystery greater than the snow falling upon the lake and dying in it, while it covers the mountain with its bonnet?'"

Don Manuel had to contain my brother because of his zeal, and his lack of experience as a neophyte. And since he suspected that he might go around preaching against certain popular superstitions, he told him:

"Just let them be! It's very difficult to make them understand where orthodox thought ends, and superstition begins. And even more for us. So let them be, as long as they are happy. It is better for them to believe something, even things that contradict themselves, than not to believe. The idea that those who believe too much eventually end up not believing anything, is a Protestant myth. Let's not complain; those who complain destroy their happiness."

My brother also told me that one night they were returning from the lake when there was a full moon; the surface was rippling under the wind while the rays of moonlight were dancing in the ripples, and Don Manuel said to Lazaro:

“Look Lazaro, the water is praying a litany, and now it is saying: ‘Ianua caeli, ora pro nobis!, Gate of heaven, pray for us!’”

And two separate tears fell from their eyes into the grass and, like the dew, they trembled in the light of the full moon.

As the time passed, both my brother and I noticed that the strength of Don Manuel was beginning to lessen, and he was no longer able to control the deep sadness that consumed him; and perhaps some mysterious sickness was eating away at his body and his soul. So in order to take his mind off things, Lazaro asked him if it wouldn’t be a good idea to have some kind of a Catholic agricultural syndicate in the church.

“A syndicate?” Don Manuel responded sadly, “A syndicate? And what would that be? I do not know of any other syndicate but the Church, and you already know the saying: ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’ Our kingdom, Lazaro, is not of this world...”

“And the other world?”

Don Manuel bowed his head.

“The other world, Lazaro, is also here, because there are two kingdoms in this world, or perhaps, in the other world... Oh my, I don’t know what I am saying. And about that idea of a syndicate, it is an aftereffect of your period of progressivism. No, Lazaro, religion is not for resolving the economic or political conflicts that God introduced into the disputes of men. Men must think and work however they want, so that they are happy they have been born, and so they can live happily with the illusion that all this has a purpose. I have not come here to make the poor submit to the rich, nor to preach that one group must submit to another. Resignation and charity for all, and in all. Because the rich also have to resign themselves to their richness, and to life; and the poor also have to feel charitable toward the rich. Social problems? You can forget that, it doesn’t concern me. If they create a new society in which there are neither rich nor poor, in which the wealth is fairly divided so it belongs to everyone, then what would you have? Don’t you think that the result of total wellbeing would be a life of total boredom? Yes, I know that one of the leaders of what they call the social revolution has said that religion is the opium of the people. Opium... opium, yes! Let’s give them opium, and let them sleep and dream. And with this crazy activity of mine, I have also been using opium. But I have not been able to sleep well and, even less, to dream well. This terrible nightmare! And I can also say, with the Divine Master, ‘My soul is sad until death.’ No, no syndicates for us. If the people want to form one, that would be fine with me, since that way they would have something to do. Let them play with their syndicate, if that makes them happy.”

And the people also began to notice that Don Manuel was losing strength, and that he was tiring. His voice, the voice that was so miraculous, now had a sort of inner tremor. His eyes filled with tears for the slightest reason. And especially when he was talking to people about the other world, or the afterlife, he had to stop for a moment and close his eyes. “It’s because he sees it,” they said. And those were the times when Blasillo the Fool cried even more. Because now Blasillo cried more than he laughed, and even his laughter sounded like crying.

And during the last Holy Week that Don Manuel celebrated with us in our world, in our village, everyone foresaw the end of the tragedy. And oh, how he sounded when he said once more: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”, the last time Don Manuel said those words in public! And when he repeated the words of Jesus to the

Good Thief, “all thieves are good,” Don Manuel usually said “tomorrow you will be with me in paradise.” Then, there was the last communion that our saint gave! And when he gave it to Lazaro, this time with a steady hand, after the liturgical “...in vitam aeternam,” he bent over and whispered in my brother’s ear: “The only eternal life is this one... let them dream that it’s eternal... eternal for a few years...” And then when he offered the communion wafer to me, he said: “Pray, my child, pray for us all.” And then he said something so extraordinary that I still think of it as the greatest mystery. And it was that, with a voice which seemed to come from the other world, he told me: “...and also pray for our Lord Jesus Christ...”

I stood up feeling weak, like a somnambulist, and everything around me seemed like a dream. Then I thought, “I will also have to pray for the lake and the mountain.” And I wondered, “am I possessed by the Devil?” When I was home, I picked up the crucifix I held in my hands when my mother gave her soul to God; looking at it through my tears, and, thinking of the words of our two Christs—the one in the Bible, and the one in our village—: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”, I prayed “Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” and I finished “and keep us from temptation, amen.” Then, I turned to the picture of Our Lady of Sorrows with her heart pierced by seven swords that had helped to give solace to the sorrows of our mother, and I prayed again: “Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death.” And right after I finished praying I thought, “sinners?... us sinners?... and what is our sin, what is it?” All day long I wondered about that question. The next day I went to see Don Manuel, who was looking like he had reached the twilight of his life, and I asked him:

“Do you remember, Father, some years ago I asked you a question, and you told me: “The Holy Mother Church has specialists that will know how to respond to that.”

“Of course I remember!... and I also remember that I told you those questions were given by the Devil.”

“Well Father, once again I am coming to ask you a question that my guardian devil has given me:

“Ask it.”

“Yesterday, when you gave me communion, you asked me to pray for all of us, and even for...”

“All right, don’t repeat that, but go on.”

“When I got home I prayed, but when I got to that part ‘pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death,’ my inner voice asked me: ‘sinners?... us sinners?... and what is our sin, what is it?’ What is our sin, Father?”

He answered, “A great doctor of the Spanish Apostolic Catholic Church, the doctor of *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*) has already told us, ‘the greatest sin of man is being born.’ That is our sin, child, being born.”

“And can it be cured, Father?”

“Go and pray again! Pray again for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death... And yes, that dream is finally cured..., life is finally cured..., the cross of being born finally comes to an end... And as Calderon said, “doing well and deceiving well is never lost, not even in dreams...”

Then the hour of his death finally came, and all the people saw it come. And it was his greatest lesson. He never wanted to die idly or alone. So he died preaching to his people in the church. But before he asked them to carry him to the church, since he was unable

to walk, he asked Lazaro and me to come to his house. And when the three of us were there alone, he told us:

“Listen: take care of those poor sheep so they are happy to be born, so that they believe what I have not been able to believe. And you, Lazaro, when you finally die, die like me, like Angela will die, in the bosom of the Holy Apostolic Roman Catholic Mother Church, in the Holy Mother Church of Valverde de Lucerna. Until we never see each other again, since this dream of life comes to an end...”

“Oh Father!” I moaned.

“Don’t be upset, Angela, and keep on praying for all the sinners, for all of those who are born. And let them dream, let them dream. Oh, how I want to sleep, to sleep forever, for all eternity, without dreaming!, and to forget about the dream! When they bury me, have them do it in a coffin made with logs I cut from that old walnut tree, poor thing!, in whose shade I used to dream when I was a child. And then I did believe in eternal life! At least, I think that I did. For a child, believing is no more than dreaming. And for the people too. You will find those six logs that I cut with my own hands at the foot of my bed.”

He choked up for a moment, and after recovering, he continued:

“You will remember that when we all said the Credo together, when we got to the end, I was silent. When the Israelites were coming to the end of their journey through the desert, the Lord said to Aaron and Moses that they would not enter the Promised Land, and He made them climb up Mount Horeb where Aaron died, and Moses stripped him of his clothes. Later, when Moses climbed from the plateau of Moab up Mount Nebo to the top of Fasga opposite Jericho, the Lord showed him the Promised Land with his people, but telling him “you will not go there!” And then Moses died, but no one knew where he was buried. After Moses, Joshua became the leader. And Lazaro, I want you to be my Joshua, and don’t worry about progress. Like Moses, I have seen the Lord, our supreme dream, face to face, and you already know the scripture says that he who sees the face of God, he who sees the dream of the face that looks at us, dies without fail, forever. So do not let our people see God face to face, while they live. After they die, there is nothing to worry about, since they won’t see anything...”

“Oh, Father, Father!” I moaned again. And he replied:

“And you, Angela, always pray; keep praying that until they die, all those sinners will dream of the resurrection and of life everlasting...”

I was expecting him to say “And who knows...?” but Don Manuel choked up again for a moment.

“And now,” he added, “in the hour of my death, it is time to have them carry me in this chair to the church so that I can say goodbye there to my people, who are waiting.”

He was carried to the church, and his chair was placed in the chancel, at the foot of the altar. He held a crucifix in his hands. My brother and I stayed close to him, but it was Blasillo the Fool who was the closest. He wanted to take Don Manuel’s hand and kiss it. When people tried to stop him, Don Manuel scolded them, saying:

“Let him come, let him come. Come here, Blasillo, give me your hand.”

The poor Fool wept with happiness. And then Don Manuel said:

“Just a few words, my children, since I have barely enough strength left to die. And I do not have anything new to tell you, since I have already told you everything. So live with peace and happiness, waiting until we see each other someday in the Valverde de

Lucerna that is there among the stars that are reflected in the lake and shine at night over the mountain. And pray, pray to the Virgin Mary, and pray to our Lord. Just be good, and that is enough. Forgive me for any wrong I may have done without meaning to, and without realizing it. And now, after I give the blessing, everyone say the Lord's Prayer, the Ave Maria, the Salve, and finally, the Credo."

Then, with the crucifix in his hand, he gave the benediction to the people. Women and children, and quite a few men wept, and right away they began to say the prayers that Don Manuel listened to in silence, while holding the hand of Blasillo who had fallen asleep. First the Lord's Prayer with its "may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Then, the Ave Maria with its "pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death," and the Salve, with its "moaning and weeping in this valley of tears." Finally, the Credo, and by the time they got to the "resurrection of the flesh and of life ever after," everyone knew that their saint had given his soul to God. And there was no need to close his eyes, because he died with them already closed. And when they went to wake up Blasillo, they found that he had also gone to rest with the Lord forever. So then it was necessary to bury two bodies. People went immediately to the saint's house to find his relics and divide the remnants of his clothing, so they could all have a remembrance of the blessed martyr. My brother kept his prayer book, and among its pages he found a dried carnation stuck to a page where there was a cross and a date.

Nobody wanted to believe that Don Manuel was dead. Everyone hoped to see him every day, and perhaps they saw him pass along the side of the lake with the mountains reflected in it. Everyone kept hearing his voice, and everyone went to his grave, which became a place of worship. The sinful came to touch the walnut cross that was made by his hands from the same wood as that of the coffin in which he was buried. And those of us who were the most reluctant to believe he was dead were my brother and I. Lazaro continued the tradition of the saint, and began to write down the things he had heard him say, notes, which have served to help me write this memoir.

"He made me a new man, a real Lazaro who was raised from the dead," he told me. "He gave me faith."

"Faith?" I asked him.

"Yes faith, faith in the consolation of life, faith in the happiness of life. He cured me of my progressivism. Because, Angela, there are two kinds of dangerous men, and harmful men: those who are convinced of the afterlife, of the resurrection of the flesh, who torment others, like the inquisitors they are, who scorn this transitory life, thinking they will go to another, and those who only believe in this one..."

"Like you, perhaps..." I said.

"Yes, and like Don Manuel. But while they only believe in this world, they await some unknown future society, and they insist on denying people the consolation of believing in the other..."

"So then...?"

"So then we have to make sure that they live with their illusion."

The poor priest who was chosen to take Don Manuel's place in the parish came to Valverde de Lucerna overwhelmed by the reputation of the saint, and he turned to my brother and me for advice. He wanted only to follow the footsteps of the saint. And my brother advised him: "Very little theology, okay; just religion, religion." I smiled when I heard him, thinking that what we were doing was actually theological. I began then to

fear for my poor brother. Since Don Manuel died, one could hardly say he was living. He visited his grave every day, and spent hours and hours doing nothing more than staring at the lake. He longed for true peace.

“You shouldn’t look at the lake so much,” I told him.

“No, sister, don’t worry. It is not the lake that calls me, it’s not the mountain. It’s him, I can’t live without him.”

“And the happiness of living, Lazaro, the happiness of living?”

“That’s for other sinners, not for those of us who have seen the face of God, who looks at us in the dream of life.”

“What... are you preparing to go and see Don Manuel?”

“No, Angela, no. Now, here in our house, I will tell you the whole truth, no matter how bitter it is, as bitter as the sea into which the water of this lake flows, the whole truth for you who are protected from it.”

“No, no, Lazaro; that’s not the truth!”

“For me it is.”

“For you? But that of...?”

“And also his.”

“Not now, Lazaro, not now! Now he believes something else, now he believes...”

“Look, Angela, once when Don Manuel told me that there are some things you say to yourself that you should never say to others, I replied that he was saying that in order to say it to himself, and then he confessed to me that he thought that more than one of the greatest saints, perhaps the greatest of all, had died not believing in the other life.”

“Is that possible?”

“Yes, quite possible! And now, sister, be very careful that no one else here in the village ever suspects our secret...”

“Suspects it?” I said. Even if I were crazy enough to ever try and explain it to them, they would never understand. The people do not understand words; they understand actions. Trying to tell them that would be like trying to read to some eight year old children pages from Saint Thomas of Aquinas... in Latin.”

“All right, when I am gone, pray for me, and for him, and for everyone.” And his time finally came. The illness that was destroying his robust self seemed to get worse after the death of Don Manuel.

“I do not regret having to die,” he told me in his final days, “however, along with me another piece of the soul of Don Manuel also dies. But the rest of him will continue to live in you. Until one day even the dead will also die.”

When he was close to death, as was the custom in our village, the people from the village came to see him and commend his soul to Don Manuel, to Saint Manuel Bueno, the martyr. My brother did not tell them anything, since he had nothing more to say to them; what he had already said was enough. He became one more link between the two Valverde de Lucernas, the one at the bottom of the lake, and the one on the surface that is reflected in it. He was another of our dead and also, in his own way, one of our saints. After that, I was more desolate, but still in my village, and with my people. And now after having lost my Saint Manuel, the father of my soul, and my Lazaro who, more than physical, was my spiritual brother, I realize that I have grown older, and how much older! But, have I really lost them?, have I really grown older?, am I about to die?

But one must live! Don Manuel taught me to live, he taught us to live, to enjoy life, and to appreciate the joy of living, to immerse ourselves in the soul of the mountain, in the soul of the lake, in the soul of the people of our village, to immerse ourselves in them and remain in them. With his life he taught me to become part of the soul of the people of my village, but I never felt the days and years change, any more than the waters of the lake. It seemed to me as if my life had always been the same. I never felt I was getting older. And now I was no longer living in myself, but in my people, and my people were living in me. I wanted to say what they, my people, were saying. I went out in the street, which was the main street, and since I knew them all, I lived in them and forgot about myself. But once when I was in Madrid with my brother, since I didn't know anyone, I felt like I was all alone, and was tortured by so many unknown people.

And now, as I write this memorial, this intimate confession of my contact with sainthood, I believe that my Saint Don Manuel and my brother Lazaro died thinking they did not believe, but without thinking they believed, actually did believe, in an active and resigned desolation. And I have asked myself many times, why didn't Don Manuel also try to convert my brother with a deception, or a lie, pretending to be a believer, when he wasn't? And I think now that he didn't do that because he understood that he would not have been able to deceive him, that in his case, a deception would not have worked. Only with the truth, his truth, could he convert him; he knew that he would not accomplish anything with him if he tried to act out the comedy—actually, the tragedy—that he performed for the rest of the people. And so he won him over to his pious fraud; he convinced him with the truth of death, and the reason for life. And in this way he convinced me never to reveal to others the truth of his sacred, divine, game. I believed, and I still believe, that our Lord God, for some sacred and unknown reason made them think they were unbelievers. And then perhaps at the final moment the blindfold fell off. But do I believe?

And as I write this now, here in my old maternal home when I am more than fifty years old, when my hair, along with my memories, are beginning to whiten, it is snowing over the lake and over the mountain, snowing over the memories of my father, my mother, my brother Lazaro, over my Saint Manuel, and also over the memory of poor Blasillo, my Saint Blasillo, may he watch over me from heaven. And the snow covers the streets and takes away the shadows, since snow can even illuminate the night. I don't know what is true and what is a lie, nor what I saw, or what I dreamed—or rather what I dreamed and what I only saw—nor what I knew, nor what I believed. I don't know if I am transferring my consciousness to this paper as white as snow, and if it will remain there, leaving me without it. Why should I still keep it...? Do I know anything?; do I believe anything? Has what I am writing about here really happened, and did it happen like I am telling it? Can things like these really happen? Is this just a dream, within another dream? Am I, Angela Carballino, now more than fifty years old, the only person in this village who is bothered by these strange thoughts about others? And those others around me, do they believe? What does it mean to believe? At least, they are alive. And now they believe in Saint Manuel, martyr, who without expecting immortality, supported their belief in it.

It seems that the distinguished Bishop, who has started the process of beatification of our saint from Valverde de Lucerna, is planning to write about his life, a description of the perfect parish priest, and he is trying to gather information. He has asked me about him repeatedly, and I have had several interviews with him. I have told him about many

different things, but I have never spoken of the tragic secret of Don Manuel, and my brother. It is strange that he has not suspected it. And I hope he never learns of the things I have said in this memoir. I am afraid of secular authorities, and of temporal authorities, even if they are from the church.

But here it is, and come what may, whatever becomes of it.

So how did this document, this memoir of Angela Carballino, end up in my hands? That is something, dear reader, that I must keep secret. I am giving it to you just as I received it, without changing anything except for a few, very few, minor changes in the redaction. What does it matter if it seems very similar to the other things I have written? That proves nothing against its objectivity and its originality. And besides, how do I know if I may not have created, outside of me, other real beings with an immortal soul? How can I know if Augusto Perez in my novel *Niebla*, may not be right when he claims to be more real, and more objective, than I am? And as for the reality of this Saint Manuel Bueno, martyr as he has been revealed to me by his spiritual daughter, Angela Carballino, I have no reason to doubt. I believe in her more than the saint himself; I believe in her more than in my own reality.

Now, before I finish this epilogue, I want to remind you, patient reader, of the 9<sup>th</sup> verse of the Epistle of the forgotten apostle, Saint Judas—how strange a name can be—where he tells us how my celestial patron, Archangel Michael, (Michael stands for “Who like God?”), and archangel for (great messenger), argued with the Devil (Devil stands for fiscal accuser), about what should happen to Moses, opposing the idea that he be condemned to hell, and told the Devil “the Lord reprimands you.” And whoever can figure out what that means, good for him! Since Angela Carballino mixed her own feelings with her story, and since I don’t know how else to put it, I want to say something here about what she told us, that if Don Manuel and her brother had confessed to people their lack of belief, the people would not have understood them. And I would like to add that they would not have believed them either. They would have believed what they had done, and not what they said, since words don’t help support actions, since actions are enough by themselves. And for a place like Valverde de Lucerna, there is no better confession than conduct. Nor do the people know what faith is, nor does that matter very much. I know very well that what is said in this story, or novel if you like—because a novel is the most intimate story, which is why I do not know why people are upset when the Evangel is called a novel, because, in fact, that makes it better than any chronicle—that nothing in this story ever happens; but I hope that is because everything remains, like mountains and lakes remain, and the simple, holy souls, beyond faith and desperation, are sheltered in the mountains and lakes, outside history, in a divine novel.

*THE END*