

*1975*

With a jerk that set the balcony doors shuddering, the old woman pulled open one of the leaves and stepped outside. Five floors down she could see the traffic rushing past and the usual crowd of pedestrians weaving their way past each other on the pavement and across the little square.

There they go. Every lunatic in Barcelona gathered here, scurrying all over the place, dodging about to avoid each other, every one of them anxious to be somewhere else. Fools! As if one place was any better than the next.

She leaned forward over the banister, cleared her throat, and spat into the street, hoping her spittle would land on one of the passers-by. She wasn't able to tell whether she had succeeded. Five floors is a long way, and her eyes weren't all that good any longer. But if she had hit someone they would surely stop and look up. So far she had never obtained any reaction. Still, you never know. One of these days she would hit the mark. With grim satisfaction she visualized the indignant target stopping and looking up, perhaps calling upon his fellow passers-by to witness the offence. She imagined the upturned faces, the exclamations.

And she would just stand there, looking over, saying nothing. She might, perhaps, even spit again. At any rate, she certainly wouldn't abandon her position. After all, what could they do to her? Even if they came up, even if they sent a couple of policemen, what could they do? That's the advantage of living in

hell, she told herself. I suppose I ought to thank General Franco for that. No matter what happens, things can't get worse. And when you know that, you're invulnerable. And that means you can do as you please.

'This one's for you, *Generalísimo*,' she said out loud, and again she spat into the street; but this time she turned and went back into the house right away. For this time she had spat out of scorn, not as part of her daily game. If she had hit someone she would never know. And she took a perverse pleasure in the thought that anyone else would have waited to see if she had hit the mark.

No concessions. She had spat out of scorn and she wasn't going to dilute this splendid gesture by using it in the interests of her game. No concessions, that was it. She expected none from anyone else and was not prepared to make any even in her own favour. And that, she thought, is what makes me invincible. Invulnerable and invincible.