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' 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 we'll 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 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
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 roost, 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 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 them 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 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 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 Macondo 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.”

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
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 Ursula’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 Ursula 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 Ursula’s, married to an uncle of José Arcadio Buendía, had a son who went through life 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.

“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 Anedio 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 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
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 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
they received a letter that obviously was not from the wise Catalanian. It had been mailed in Barcelona, but the envelope was addressed in conventional blue ink by an official hand and it had the innocent and impersonal look of hostile messages. Aureliano snatched it out of Amaranta Úrsula’s hands as she was about to open it.

“Not this one,” he told her. “I don’t want to know what it says.”

Just as he had sensed, the wise Catalanian did not write again. The stranger’s letter, which no one read, was left to the mercy of the moths on the shelf where Fernanda had forgotten her wedding ring on occasion and there it remained, consuming itself in the inner fire of its bad news as the solitary lovers sailed against the tide of those days of the last stages, those impenitent and ill-fated times which were squandered on the useless effort of making them drift toward the desert of disenchantment and oblivion. Aware of that menace, Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula spent the hot months holding hands, ending with the love of loyalty for the child who had his beginning in the madness of fornication. At night, holding each other in bed, they were not frightened by the sublunary explosions of the ants or the noise of the moths or the constant and clean whistle of the growth of the weeds in the neighboring rooms. Many times they were awakened by the traffic of the dead. They could hear Úrsula fighting against the laws of creation to maintain the line, and José Arcadio Buendía searching for the mythical truth of the great inventions, and Fernanda praying, and Colonel Aureliano Buendía stupefying himself with the deception of war and the little gold fishes, and Aureliano Segundo dying of solitude in the turmoil of his debauches, and then they learned that dominant obsessions can prevail against death and they were happy again with the certainty that they would go on loving each other in their shape as apparitions long after other species of future animals would steal from the insects the paradise of misery that the insects were finally stealing from man.

One Sunday, at six in the afternoon, Amaranta Úrsula felt the pangs of childbirth. The smiling mistress of the little girls who went to bed because of hunger had her get onto the dining-room table, straddled her stomach, and mistreated her with wild gallops until her cries were drowned out by the bellows of a formidable male child. Through her tears Amaranta Úrsula could see that he was one of those great Buendíass, strong and willful like the José Arcadios, with the open and clairvoyant eyes of the Aurelianos, and predisposed to begin the race again from the beginning and cleanse it of its pernicious vices and solitary calling, for he was the only one in a century who had been engendered with love.
"He’s a real cannibal.” she said. “We’ll name him Rodrigo.”

“No,” her husband countered. “We’ll name him Aureliano and he’ll win thirty-two wars.”

After cutting the umbilical cord, the midwife began to use a cloth to take off the blue grease that covered his body as Aureliano held up a lamp. Only when they turned him on his stomach did they see that he had something more than other men, and they leaned over to examine him. It was the tail of a pig.

They were not alarmed. Aureliano and Amaranta Úrsula were not aware of the family precedent, nor did they remember Úrsula’s frightening admonitions, and the midwife pacified them with the idea that the tail could be cut off when the child got his second teeth. Then they had no time to think about it again, because Amaranta Úrsula was bleeding in an uncontainable torrent. They tried to help her with applications of spider webs and balls of ash, but it was like trying to hold back a spring with one’s hands. During the first hours she tried to maintain her good humor. She took the frightened Aureliano by the hand and begged him not to worry, because people like her were not made to die against their will, and she exploded with laughter at the ferocious remedies of the midwife. But as Aureliano’s hope abandoned him she was becoming less visible, as if the light on her were fading away, until she sank into drowsiness. At dawn on Monday they brought a woman who recited cauterizing prayers that were infallible for man and beast beside her bed, but Amaranta Úrsula’s passionate blood was insensible to any artifice that did not come from love. In the afternoon, after twenty-four hours of desperation, they knew that she was dead because the flow had stopped without remedies and her profile became sharp and the blotches on her face evaporated in a halo of alabaster and she smiled again.

Aureliano did not understand until then how much he loved his friends, how much he missed them, and how much he would have given to be with them at that moment. He put the child in the basket that his mother had prepared for him, covered the face of the corpse with a blanket, and wandered aimlessly through the town, searching for an entrance that went back to the past. He knocked at the door of the pharmacy, where he had not visited lately, and he found a carpenter shop. The old woman who opened the door with a lamp in her hand took pity on his delirium and insisted that, no, there had never been a pharmacy there, nor had she ever known a woman with a thin neck and sleepy eyes named Mercedes. He wept, leaning his
brow against the door of the wise Catalanian’s former bookstore, conscious that he was paying with his tardy sobs for a death that he had refused to weep for on time so as not to break the spell of love. He smashed his fists against the cement wall of The Golden Child, calling for Pilar Ternera, indifferent to the luminous orange disks that were crossing the sky and that so many times on holiday nights he had contemplated with childish fascination from the courtyard of the curlews. In the last open salon of the tumbledown red-light district an accordion group was playing the songs of Rafael Escalona, the bishop’s nephew, heir to the secrets of Francisco the Man. The bartender, who had a withered and somewhat crumpled arm because he had raised it against his mother, invited Aureliano to have a bottle of cane liquor, and Aureliano then bought him one. The bartender spoke to him about the misfortune of his arm. Aureliano spoke to him about the misfortune of his heart, withered and somewhat crumpled for having been raised against his sister. They ended up weeping together and Aureliano felt for a moment that the pain was over. But when he was alone again in the last dawn of Macondo, he opened up his arms in the middle of the square, ready to wake up the whole world, and he shouted with all his might:

“Friends are a bunch of bastards!”

Nigromanta rescued him from a pool of vomit and tears. She took him to her room, cleaned him up, made him drink a cup of broth. Thinking that it would console him, she took a piece of charcoal and erased the innumerable loves that he still owed her for, and she voluntarily brought up her own most solitary sadnesses so as not to leave him alone in his weeping. When he awoke, after a dull and brief sleep, Aureliano recovered the awareness of his headache. He opened his eyes and remembered the child.

He could not find the basket. At first he felt an outburst of joy, thinking that Amaranta Úrsula had awakened from death to take care of the child. But her corpse was a pile of stones under the blanket. Aware that when he arrived he had found the door to the bedroom open, Aureliano went across the porch which was saturated with the morning sighs of oregano and looked into the dining room, where the remnants of the birth still lay: the large pot, the bloody sheets, the jars of ashes, and the twisted umbilical cord of the child on an opened diaper on the table next to the shears and the fishline. The idea that the midwife had returned for the child during the night gave him a pause of rest in which to think. He sank into the rocking chair, the same one in which Rebeca had sat during the early days of the house to give embroidery lessons, and in which Amaranta had played
Chinese checkers with Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, and in which Amaranta Úrsula had sewn the tiny clothing for the child, and in that flash of lucidity he became aware that he was unable to bear in his soul the crushing weight of so much past. Wounded by the fatal lances of his own nostalgia and that of others, he admired the persistence of the spider webs on the dead rose bushes, the perseverance of the rye grass, the patience of the air in the radiant February dawn. And then he saw the child. It was a dry and bloated bag of skin that all the ants in the world were dragging toward their holes along the stone path in the garden. Aureliano could not move. Not because he was paralyzed by horror but because at that prodigious instant Melquíades’ final keys were revealed to him and he saw the epigraph of the parchments perfectly placed in the order of man’s time and space: The first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants.

Aureliano, had never been more lucid in any act of his life as when he forgot about his dead ones and the pain of his dead ones and nailed up the doors and windows again with Fernanda’s crossed boards so as not to be disturbed by any temptations of the world, for he knew then that his fate was written in Melquíades’ parchments. He found them intact among the prehistoric plants and steaming puddles and luminous insects that had removed all trace of man’s passage on earth from the room, and he did not have the calmness to bring them out into the light, but right there, standing, without the slightest difficulty, as if they had been written in Spanish and were being read under the dazzling splendor of high noon, he began to decipher them aloud. It was the history of the family, written by Melquíades, down to the most trivial details, one hundred years ahead of time. He had written it in Sanskrit, which was his mother tongue, and he had encoded the even lines in the private cipher of the Emperor Augustus and the odd ones in a Lacedemonian military code. The final protection, which Aureliano had begun to glimpse when he let himself be confused by the love of Amaranta Úrsula, was based on the fact that Melquíades had not put events in the order of man’s conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant. Fascinated by the discovery, Aureliano, read aloud without skipping the chanted encyclicals that Melquíades himself had made Arcadio listen to and that were in reality the prediction of his execution, and he found the announcement of the birth of the most beautiful woman in the world who was rising up to heaven in body and soul, and he found the origin of the posthumous twins who gave up deciphering the
parchments, not simply through incapacity and lack of drive, but also because their attempts were premature. At that point, impatient to know his own origin, Aureliano skipped ahead. Then the wind began, warm, incipient, full of voices from the past, the murmurs of ancient geraniums, sighs of disenchantment that preceded the most tenacious nostalgia. He did not notice it because at that moment he was discovering the first indications of his own being in a lascivious grandfather who let himself be frivolously dragged along across a hallucinated plateau in search of a beautiful woman who would not make him happy. Aureliano recognized him, he pursued the hidden paths of his descent, and he found the instant of his own conception among the scorpions and the yellow butterflies in a sunset bathroom where a mechanic satisfied his lust on a woman who was giving herself out of rebellion. He was so absorbed that he did not feel the second surge of wind either as its cyclonic strength tore the doors and windows off their hinges, pulled off the roof of the east wing, and uprooted the foundations. Only then did he discover that Amaranta Úrsula was not his sister but his aunt, and that Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha only so that they could seek each other through the most intricate labyrinths of blood until they would engender the mythological animal that was to bring the line to an end. Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he knew only too well, and he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchments, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror. Then he skipped again to anticipate the predictions and ascertain the date and circumstances of his death. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.