

never more than begun, leaned against a concrete wall topped with shards of broken glass, and where an iguana blinked his archaic patience.

I'd never known heat like that, and more arresting than the heat itself was its implication of looseness. Always before, heat had meant relief from winter, then work and sweat as if our comfort had to be paid for. It meant sweltering in midwestern fields in midsummer, baling hay or hoeing beans and corn. Or it meant the first, suffocating early mornings in mid-August of high school football practice, when player after player would collapse nauseated against the practice field fence after wind sprints, his strength draining from arms and legs through the heavens of an insulted stomach. Getting something into shape, the fields or ourselves, we called it.

But that very shapeliness of things was here in question. Was that iguana part of the concrete wall or a wayfarer upon it? The air that seemed to cling at midday on the street corner, as if you were wrapped in cellophane and caught under strong lamps, came crossed with the scent of oleander and jasmine, which became dominant in the evening. And the loose-limbed people on the streets, in cotton dresses, baggy pants, short-sleeved shirts, and in a full spectrum of skin colors, from off-white, to caramel, to black, seemed never just walking, but sauntering or dancing. The heat was neither relief nor penalty for them; it was their medium.

Against that background, Thompson and I stood alone in the Centro's courtyard, which was basis enough for our meeting. Anyway, the courtyard was nearly empty — we could hardly ignore each other — and it wasn't long before I'd offered him a couch in the apartment I shared with two other novice teachers, each of us in his first year out of a men's liberal arts college.

Thompson was fresh from the Air Force and a sports-writing assignment for a base newspaper in Florida. Now he was launching his career in journalism. He was a correspondent for the *National Observer*, a weekly newspaper no longer with us, and a stringer for several other papers. He was giving himself most of a year to nose around South America, and Barranquilla was near his port of entry. Just that afternoon he had arrived from the Guajira peninsula in northeast Colombia with its Indians and contrabandistas.

So he set up his typewriter on a cardtable in our apartment and spent most of his week with us working on stories. Then he would set off up the Magdalena River toward Bogotá; three hundred miles or