In the Time of the Butterflies

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JULIA ALVAREZ

Julia Alvarez was born to a Dominican family in New York, and they moved back to the Dominican Republic when she was three months old. Ten years later her family fled back to the U.S. after Alvarez's father took part in a failed plot to overthrow Trujillo, the real-life dictator who features in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Alvarez then experienced a difficult cultural and social transition adjusting to the U.S., and she started writing fiction and poetry and exploring Dominican culture in depth. She got her Master's degree in 1975, married Bill Eichner in 1989, and is currently the writer-in-residence at Middlebury College. Alvarez is one of the most successful contemporary Latina writers, and she has published poems, short stories, essays, children's books, and novels, including *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Her work usually focuses on cultural interconnectedness and strong female characters.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the Time of the Butterflies takes place in the Dominican Republic under the authoritarian regime of Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo took power in 1930 and ruled until 1961, as both a dictator and behind puppet presidents. During his rule an estimated 50,000 people were killed, a "personality cult" was erected around him, and any kind of dissent or political protest was brutally stifled. The Mirabal sisters ("the Butterflies") were real historical figures who worked against Trujillo's regime. They became local heroes but were assassinated by Trujillo in 1960. Alvarez invents their personalities and details of their personal lives, but the basic facts of their story are historically accurate. Trujillo's regime fell soon after the sisters' death, as they became martyrs and discontent with Trujillo grew. Trujillo was assassinated in 1961.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other notable contemporary Latina writers include Sandra Cisneros, author of *The House on Mango Street*, and Cristina García, author of *Dreaming in Cuban*. Like Alvarez, both of their works often deal with the meeting of Latin American and United States cultures. The Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz was influenced by Alvarez, and his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2008. Mario Vargas Llosa also wrote a novel about the assassination of Trujillo, *The Feast of the Goat*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *In the Time of the Butterflies*
- **When Published:** 1994
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Latina Literature
- **Genre:** Historical fiction
- **Setting:** Dominican Republic
- **Climax:** The Mirabal sisters approach their ambush
- **Antagonist:** Rafael Trujillo
- **Point of View:** Third person limited and first person, switching between the sisters

EXTRA CREDIT

November 25. The Mirabal sisters were murdered on November 25, and in their honor this has become the annual date of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Father. Alvarez's father was involved in a failed anti-Trujillo plot that was inspired by the Butterflies. This is why Alvarez's family had to flee to New York a few months before the Mirabals were killed, when Alvarez herself was only ten years old.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel takes place in the Dominican Republic, both in 1994 and under the Trujillo regime. In 1994, Dedé Mirabal lives in the house where her three sisters used to live. The dead sisters are known as the "butterflies," and they are martyrs and national heroes. In 1994 Dedé talks to an interviewer about her sisters, and her narrative is interrupted with memories.

The story shifts between the four sisters from 1943 to their deaths in 1960: Dedé's memories, Minerva's point of view, Patria's point of view, and entries from María Teresa's diaries. Minerva convinces Papá to allow them to go to a Catholic school, and there she meets Sinita, a girl whose family was killed by Trujillo. Minerva watches Trujillo seduce and abandon a girl at her school, Lina Lovatón.

Patria is the most religious sister, and she wants to become a nun until she discovers her own sexuality. She marries a farmer named Pedrito at age sixteen, and has a son Nelson and a daughter Noris, but her next baby is stillborn. This shakes her faith, and she is especially affected by a **portrait of Trujillo** located next to one of Jesus.

Dedé becomes infatuated with Virgilio Morales, a young Communist intellectual, but Virgilio and Minerva end up dating instead. Dedé settles for marrying her cousin Jaimito, and Virgilio is driven by the Trujillo regime into exile.

One day Minerva discovers that Papá has a mistress and three illegitimate daughters. Papá gets invited to a party thrown by Trujillo, and there Trujillo tries to seduce Minerva, while she tries manipulate him into letting her go to law school. She slaps him, and the Mirabals leave. The next day Papá is arrested and taken in for questioning. Minerva is asked to have a "private conference" with Trujillo, but she refuses. Papá is eventually released, and Minerva meets Trujillo again for another battle of wills.

Four years later Papá dies, and Minerva goes to law school. There she meets Manolo (another revolutionary) and gets married. She graduates, but at the last minute is denied her license by the government—this is Trujillo's revenge on her. Minerva and Manolo move in together, and María Teresa (who goes by "Mate") stays with them. Mate becomes infatuated with a young man who delivers weapons to Minerva, whom he calls by her name in the anti-Trujillo movement: "Mariposa" (Butterfly). Mate joins Minerva and Manolo's secret resistance movement and marries the young man, whose name is Leandro.

Patria remains uninvolved until her son Nelson wants to join Minerva's revolutionaries. The church is neutral regarding Trujillo, but while on a religious retreat in the mountains Patria sees Trujillo's soldiers massacring some young revolutionaries. She is traumatized by this, and she and her priest join Minerva's underground group, together forming the "Fourteenth of June Movement." Minerva, María Teresa, and Patria are now known as the "Butterflies." The group uses Patria's house to stockpile weapons.

The sisters ask Dedé to join their movement, but her courage fails her and she submits to Jaimito's demands that she refuse. Then the SIM (Trujillo's secret police force) arrest Pedrito, Nelson, Manolo, and Leandro, and then Minerva and Mate as well.

Patria stays at Mamá's house, and watches as the church finally speaks out against Trujillo. She eventually gets Trujillo to pardon Nelson. He offers Minerva and Mate a pardon, but they refuse. Mate keeps a diary from prison, where Minerva remains brave and strong but Mate starts to break down. The SIM torture Mate to get Leandro to talk. The Organization of American States comes to investigate the regime, and the sisters are released into house arrest.

By now the "butterflies" are national symbols of the resistance. A friendly driver named Rufino takes them to visit their husbands in prison. On their fourth trip, the sisters are ambushed as they drive down a lonely mountain road. Minerva's account ends, but Dedé explains what happened – the sisters and Rufino are each killed and then put back into their car, so it looks like an accident. Everyone knows that Trujillo killed them, however, and they become martyrs.

In 1994, Dedé remembers Trujillo's overthrow a year or so after the murder of the Mirabals, and the bloody revolutions that followed. She now lives with her niece Minou, Minerva's daughter, and has become a kind of "oracle" for the sisters, telling their story to the world.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Patria – Patria Mercedes Mirabal Reyes is the oldest of the Mirabal sisters and the most religious. She wants to become a nun, but she gives this idea up and marries Pedrito at age sixteen. She has three children: Nelson, Noris, and Raúl Ernesto. Patria originally resists the underground movement, but she joins Minerva after witnessing the massacre in Constanza. Patria is never imprisoned, but she is murdered along with Minerva and Mate.

Dedé – Bélgica Adela Mirabal Reyes, who goes by the nickname Dedé, is the only sister to never join the resistance movement and to survive past 1960. She falls in love with the revolutionary Virgilio but never acts on her feelings and marries her non-revolutionary cousin Jaimito instead. Dedé wants to join her sisters' movement, but she finds her courage lacking and submits to Jaimito's demands to not make trouble. After her sisters are murdered by Trujillo's regime, Dedé becomes a kind of "oracle" for the butterflies, living in their house all her life, raising their children, and telling their story to the world.

Minerva – María Argentina Minerva Mirabal Reyes is the most outspoken and rebellious of the sisters and the first to join the movement against Trujillo. She desires freedom from her father's rules and then from Trujillo's police state. Minerva encounters Trujillo in person as a young woman, when he tries to seduce her. She graduates law school but Trujillo denies her license. Minerva marries Manolo and helps start the militant resistance movement, and she becomes "Butterfly #1." She has two children, Minou and Manolito.

Mate – The youngest sister of the family, Antonia María Teresa Mirabal Reyes, who goes by María Teresa or Mate, looks up to Minerva and spends most of her time initially thinking about clothes and boys. She joins the resistance movement when she falls in love with Leandro Guzman. Mate then becomes "Butterfly #2" and helps stockpile weapons. She is imprisoned along with Minerva, and is tortured by Johnny Abbes.

Papá – Enrique Mirabal Fernandez is the father of the sisters, a wealthy farmer and merchant. He cheats on his wife and has three illegitimate daughters. Papá tries to avoid making trouble with Trujillo, but is briefly imprisoned. Minerva realizes that while Papá puts on a show of being strong, he is actually the most needy of the Mirabals. He dies in 1953.

Mamá – Mercedes Reyes Camilo is the mother of the sisters. Mamá originally avoids trouble with Trujillo and wants her daughters to get married young, but later in life she becomes

rebellious and outspoken. Originally illiterate and of the opinion that young women should get married, over time she learns to read and comes to believe that young women should be educated. She outlives the butterflies by 20 years, and helps raise their children.

Rafael Trujillo – The dictator of the Dominican Republic from 1930-61, and the antagonist of the novel. Trujillo seized power as the head of the army and then rules behind puppet presidents. He sets up a "personality cult" around himself, elevating himself almost to godhood and plastering his face and name everywhere. His rule provides economic stability, but is also a time of murder, fear, and the dissolution of civil liberties. In the novel he appears during three confrontations with Minerva. He is assassinated by his former cronies a year after, and to some extent because of, the butterflies' deaths.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Virgilio Morales (Lío) – A young Communist intellectual who fights against Trujillo. Dedé falls in love with him, but Virgilio has a romantic and intellectual relationship with Minerva before fleeing the country.

The Interview Woman – A Dominican woman from the U.S. who finds Dedé to interview her about the butterflies.

Pedrito Gonzalez – Patria's husband, a simple farmer who is devoted to his ancestral land. He joins the resistance movement at Patria's urging, and loses his land as a result.

Manolo Tavarez Justo – The official leader of the Fourteenth of June Movement and Minerva's husband. Manolo is killed three years after Minerva.

Leandro Guzman (Palomino) – An engineer who delivers weapons to Minerva and then falls in love with and marries Mate.

Sinita – A girl whose family was killed by Trujillo. Minerva befriends her at the convent school, and they end up in prison together. She also goes by the nickname Sina.

Lina Lovatón – A beautiful girl at Minerva's school whom Trujillo seduces, impregnates, and abandons.

Nelson – Patria's son, who joins Minerva's movement.

Noris – Patria's daughter, who avoids religion until the church is attacked by Trujillo.

Fela – The Mirabals' maid. After the butterflies' deaths, Fela acts as a medium channeling their spirits.

Minou – Minerva's daughter, who becomes a professor and politician.

Padre de Jesús – A young priest who joins the resistance movement with Patria.

Rufino de la Cruz – A friendly man who drives the sisters when they are under house arrest, and is murdered alongside them.

Captain Peña – A captain of the SIM who keeps track of the sisters when they are under house arrest. He seems to simultaneously feel somewhat ashamed of his actions, to want the Mirabals to like him, and to have no trouble personally stealing their land.

Manuel de Moya – The "secretary of state" whose primary job is to find pretty girls for Trujillo.

Carmen María – Papá's mistress.

Margarita Mirabal – Papá's illegitimate daughter who works at a pharmacy.

Johnny Abbes – The head of SIM. A violent, sadistic man who is fond of torturing others.

Santicló – A kind guard who smuggles things to Mate in prison.

Magdalena – A girl who befriends Mate in prison and kisses her, much to Mate's dismay.

Ramfis Trujillo – Trujillo's handsome, womanizing son.

Dinorah – A selfish woman in prison.

Sor Milagros – A nun at Minerva's school who respects Minerva's outspoken nature.

Lourdes – One of Minerva's closest friends at school.

Elsa – Another of Minerva's close friends at school, Elsa goes on to the university and marries a journalist.

Daysi and Lidia – María Teresa's two friends at the convent school.

Berto and Raúl – María Teresa's two cousins. She has a crush on both of them as a girl.

Don Horacio – A rebellious old man in trouble for refusing to hang a **portrait of Trujillo**.

Hilda – One of Minerva's first revolutionary friends.

Sor Asunción – A nun at the convent school who talks with Patria about her calling.

Mario – A distributor for Papá's store, Virgilio's cousin.

Governor de la Maza – He takes Papá for questioning and propositions Minerva on Trujillo's behalf.

Anselmo Paulino ("Magic Eye") – Trujillo's right-hand man who questions Minerva.

Chiche Reyes – Mamá's uncle, an old friend of Trujillo's.

Angelita Trujillo – Trujillo's daughter.

Sonia – Mate's roommate at the university, a member of the underground.

Raúl Ernesto – Patria's last child, named after two Cuban revolutionaries.

Jacqueline – María Teresa's child.

Manolito – Minerva's second child.

Doña Leia – Jaimito's mother, who adores Dedé.

Don Bernardo – An old Spaniard who helps the sisters.

Delia – A doctor and "political" whom Minerva visits.

Dr. Pedro Viñas – A "political" who updates Minerva on the revolution.

The Young Soldier – A seemingly innocent young soldier who hitchhikes with the sisters on the day of their deaths, but seems ultimately to be a government plant.

Camila – Minou's baby.

Olga – Dedé's friend in 1994, who warns her about living in the past.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DICTATORSHIP

In the Time of the Butterflies focuses on the authoritarian regime of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, which lasted from 1930 to 1961. As a megalomaniacal dictator, Trujillo's personality takes over every aspect of life, and he becomes the personal antagonist of the novel. Throughout the book Alvarez shows the various ways a dictator affects both politics and daily life, from the fear of saying Trujillo's name in an uncomplimentary way, to being murdered in public for threatening him. She also links Trujillo to other, more globally famous dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. As a single person and also the head of the government, Trujillo can act as both a character – a man who tries to seduce Minerva, or who takes personal revenge by not letting her use her law degree – and as a constant looming force of oppression.

Trujillo first took power as the head of the nation's army, helping to overthrow the former president Vasquez and then setting himself up as president. He ruled for 31 years after that, usually behind puppet "presidents." Trujillo set up a "personality cult" around himself, calling himself the nation's "Benefactor" and rewriting history books so that the peak of history was his birth. He renamed the country's capital "Trujillo City," statues of him were erected everywhere, and churches had to post the slogan "God in Heaven, Trujillo on Earth." Trujillo's reign was a time of economic prosperity and stability, but most of this ended up benefiting Trujillo's family and friends, and the cost of this stability was the loss of all civil liberties and a system of espionage, torture, and murder. The Mirabal sisters (the Butterflies) are then set as antagonists to this dictator, and the plot of the novel consists of their struggle against Trujillo's pervasive presence as they try to both lead personal lives of their own and also bring down the brutal dictator.

FREEDOM AND IMPRISONMENT

The idea of imprisonment or entrapment pervades both the Trujillo regime and the lives of the Mirabal sisters in the novel. The Dominican Republic as a whole is basically imprisoned by Trujillo's police state, and Minerva describes leaving home as leaving "a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country." No rival political parties are allowed to exist, and political prisoners and executions number in the thousands. The Mirabal sisters and their husbands are almost all imprisoned by Trujillo at some point, and even when they are released, Minerva and María Teresa are still kept under house arrest.

There is also a more personal kind of imprisonment for the sisters, as they are at first trapped by their restrictive home life, where they must ask their father permission to do anything, and then by the expectations of society to get married and settle down. Minerva feels this imprisonment the most, and she compares herself to the family's **rabbits** in their pens. But unlike the rabbits, who fear to leave their comfortable cages even when Minerva tries to set them free, Minerva and her sisters desperately long for freedom. This struggle against "cages" is fought with weapons and words against Trujillo, and also within the hearts of each Mirabal sister. All of them except for Dedé end up joining the resistance movement against Trujillo, and they become national symbols of freedom. The sisters themselves find freedom only in death, but their martyrdom helps bring about Trujillo's downfall. Dedé, the only survivor, still seems trapped by the memory of her sisters and their growing fame, but she also lives to see the freedom they helped bring to the Dominican Republic.

RELIGION

Religion is a powerful force in the lives of the novel's characters and in the politics of the Dominican Republic, which is a predominantly Catholic nation. Patria is the most religious of the sisters, and goes through the most personal religious struggles. She starts out wanting to be a nun, gives this up to get married, loses her faith after her baby is born dead, and then regains it with a vision of the Virgin Mary. In the political realm, the Catholic church remains neutral regarding Trujillo for years, which the sisters become bitter about. Patria's shift into resistance coincides with that of the priest Padre de Jesús and other Catholics, after they witness a massacre during a religious retreat. Soon afterward the Catholic leadership finally decides to take a stand against Trujillo, and they condemn him from the pulpit. The regime responds with a full-on war against the church, but one of the most inspiring parts of the novel is when the Catholic church finally stands up for its people and fights

Trujillo in its own way.

Alvarez also explores another interesting aspect of religion in the novel – the connection between a dictator and God. Part of Trujillo's "personality cult" involves associating himself with God – his slogan is "God and Trujillo," he is referred to as the country's "Benefactor," and people think of him as constantly watching over them, whether benevolently or malevolently. In Mamá's house there is even a **portrait of Trujillo** next to a picture of Jesus. This especially affects the religious Patria, who thinks of Jesus as divine justice and Trujillo as earthly power. They are a dichotomy of good and evil, but Patria also grows angry with God for allowing Trujillo to rule on earth. Eventually she even starts "praying" to Trujillo, asking him to spare her family. She tries to think of Trujillo as only a man, but finally concludes that he must be "the evil one become flesh like Jesus." Ultimately Trujillo's propaganda works – he does become a kind of "god" – but it is an evil god, and even the church rises up against him.

WOMEN

In the Time of the Butterflies revolves around the Mirabal sisters, women living in a very patriarchal, "macho" society. Their personal struggles are part of the power of their story, as they stand not only as symbols of rebellion against Trujillo, but at the same time as loving, independent women with husbands and children. Alvarez shows how the resistance against women in politics can even be propagated by the women themselves, as both Mamá and Patria initially express sentiments that women are inferior to men, or else are somehow "purer" and so shouldn't dirty themselves with politics. In talking to the interview woman in the present day, Dedé says that women "followed their husbands," but she knows that this is an excuse, as she is the only sister who actually did this. We also see sinister aspects of sexism in how the Trujillo regime treats women, as the "secretary of state's" real job is picking out pretty girls for Trujillo to seduce or rape.

One of Alvarez's goals for the novel is to portray the "butterflies" as real women and not just legendary martyrs, and she does this by showing the personal lives of the Mirabals as they go through traditional coming-of-age rites: menstruating, falling in love, Mate obsessing over clothes, and eventually all of them getting married and having children – all while they fight against Trujillo and become national heroes. The butterflies are icons of Dominican culture, but Alvarez also humanizes them as normal women who overcame obstacles and struggled against oppression.

COURAGE VS. COWARDICE

The Dominican populace is divided and afraid under Trujillo, and every character has their own struggle between courage and cowardice. There are spies and informers everywhere, and people distrust even their own family members. Among the Mirabal sisters, who are all normal, middle-class women encouraged to not make trouble, each sister must make her personal choice between courage and cowardice once she experiences the evils of the Trujillo regime. Minerva is the most naturally courageous and outspoken sister, and the one who leads the other sisters in political activity, but even she finds it difficult to keep up her role as a national symbol of courage. Patria struggles with the pacifism and neutrality of her faith and husband, but she ultimately chooses to risk her life and join the rebellion. María Teresa is the vainest and youngest of the girls, but she also joins the underground early and is the only sister to experience direct torture from the SIM.

Dedé is then the only sister to accept her fear and choose to avoid getting involved with the "butterflies." At first she seems like a coward for this, and her guilt haunts her for years, but in the end Alvarez shows how Dedé too has been brave. She has a martyrdom as hard as her sisters, as they all died young, but she has to live with their loss and her own guilt for decades. She then manages to overcome this and become the "oracle" of the butterflies, telling the world their story. The legend of the Mirabals grows after their deaths and they become larger-than-life figures of courage, but through Alvarez's storytelling we also see each woman's struggle with cowardice and fear, which makes them even more inspiring. The butterflies are not "naturally" brave, but are ordinary women who made the *choice* to be brave.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE RABBITS

At the beginning of Minerva's first narration she describes how she has felt caged her whole life, and she compares herself to the rabbits that her family keeps in pens. One day she opens the cage door for a female rabbit, but the rabbit doesn't want to leave her pen. Minerva then declares that she is not like the rabbits, as she desires freedom no matter what. In this way the rabbits represent Minerva – trapped by her father's overprotectiveness as a child, and then trapped by the rules and fear of the Trujillo police state. The rabbits also represent the populace of the Dominican Republic. As the rabbits are afraid to leave their comfortable pens, so the majority of Dominicans go along with the Trujillo regime, afraid for their own safety if they should try to escape their "cage."

PORTRAITS OF TRUJILLO

Part of Trujillo's personality cult is a rule that every family must have a picture of "El Jefe" (Trujillo) displayed in their home. There is a portrait of him in Mamá's house next to a picture of Jesus, and this is especially powerful for Patria, who sometimes sees the two as opposites – God and devil – but sometimes sees the faces merge, and with a later portrait she accidentally prays to Trujillo instead of to God. The portraits of Trujillo, then, represent El Jefe's aspirations to become like a god, watching over everything and having total control of the Dominican Republic. They show the pervasive fear of his police state, and also the personality cult he has built up around himself, so that children are raised to love him and everyone must praise him as their "Benefactor."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Algonquin Books edition of *In the Time of the Butterflies* published in 2010.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"It's about time we women had a voice in running our country."

"You and Trujillo," Papá says a little loudly, and in this clear peaceful night they all fall silent. Suddenly, the dark fills with spies who are paid to hear things and report them down at Security. *Don Enrique claims Trujillo needs help in running this country. Don Enrique's daughter says it's about time women took over the government.* Words repeated, distorted, words recreated by those who might bear them a grudge, words stitched to words until they are the winding sheet the family will be buried in when their bodies are found dumped in a ditch, their tongues cut off for speaking too much.

Related Characters: Dedé, Papá (speaker), Rafael Trujillo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

This moment comes during Dedé's first happy memory of her family, back when she and her sisters were young (around 1943). The girls, Papá, and Mamá are all sitting around in the yard, talking. Minerva says that she wants to go to law school, but Mamá disparages the idea of "skirts in the law." Minerva responds with this statement.

This quote introduces Minerva as the "leader" of the sisters, and shows that she was always ambitious, outspoken, and politically minded even at a young age. Her own mother thinks that women don't belong in politics—subtly reinforcing her society's sexist ideas about her own gender—but Minerva asserts that "it's about time."

The second crucial part of this passage is Papá's throwaway remark: the first mention of Trujillo's name. Rafael Trujillo, the dictator of the Dominican Republic at the time, looms over the novel as both a personal antagonist and a vast, oppressive force. As we see in the ominous final paragraph, the mere mention of Trujillo's name transforms the scene's mood from one of happiness and relaxation to one of fear and suspicion. After this, the book starts to take a darker turn, as we see just what is being risked in any kind of resistance to Trujillo's regime. In a dictatorship with a secret police, even one's friends and neighbors can't be trusted, and without civil liberties even the smallest perceived infraction can lead to torture or execution.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Sometimes, watching the rabbits in their pens, I'd think, I'm no different from you, poor things. One time, I opened a cage to set a half-grown doe free. I even gave her a slap to get her going.

But she wouldn't budge! She was used to her little pen. I kept slapping her, harder each time, until she started whimpering like a scared child. I was the one hurting her, insisting she be free.

Silly bunny, I thought. You're nothing at all like me.

Related Characters: Minerva (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Though the family's rabbits (and Minerva's thoughts about them) only appear in this passage, the rabbits are an important symbol for the novel overall. At this point (1938) Minerva still feels trapped at home, where she has to ask Papá permission to do anything, and so at first she here compares herself to the rabbits in their cage—she feels trapped and helpless just like them.

One day, however, Minerva decides to set a "half-grown doe" (a female rabbit, and so perhaps especially relatable to Minerva) free, but the rabbit is afraid to leave her pen, even

when Minerva slaps her to get her to run away. Minerva then thinks about how the rabbit is actually "nothing at all like" her. Minerva would give anything to be free (whether from Papá's overprotectiveness or Trujillo's tyranny), despite the relative safety of her "cage" at this point. Thus the rabbits more come to symbolize many of the Dominican people—trapped in the "cage" of Trujillo's police state, but also afraid to leave or fight against the only home they have ever known.

> And that's how I got free. I don't mean just going to sleepaway school on a train with a trunkful of new things. I mean in my head after I got to Inmaculada and met Sinita and saw what happened to Lina and realized that I'd just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country.

Related Characters: Minerva (speaker), Sinita, Lina Lovatón

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

The family's rabbits aren't explicitly mentioned in this passage, but Minerva is still referring to her life in terms of various "cages." She "gets free" from one cage by leaving home and escaping Papá's overprotective presence, but once she learns the truth about Trujillo's dictatorship via her peers Sinita and Lina, Minerva realizes that she has only escaped one cage to "go into a bigger one." With this, Alvarez introduces the idea that the Dominican Republic itself is a kind of "big cage" under Trujillo's rule—no one is truly free, even if they aren't literally imprisoned by the oppressive regime. At the same time, this first level of liberation—mental liberation—is crucial for Minerva, and starts her on the path towards active political resistance and revolution.

> When we got to school that fall, we were issued new history textbooks with a picture of you-know-who embossed on the cover so even a blind person could tell who the lies were about. Our history now followed the plot of the Bible. We Dominicans had been waiting for centuries for the arrival of our Lord Trujillo on the scene. It was pretty disgusting.
> "All through nature there is a feeling ecstasy. A strange otherworldly light suffuses the house smelling of labor and sanctity. The 24th of October in 1891. God's glory made flesh in a miracle. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo has been born!"

Related Characters: Minerva (speaker), Rafael Trujillo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, Minerva has few illusions left about the true nature of Trujillo's regime. So when she goes to school and receives new textbooks with Trujillo's face on the cover, she describes them in witheringly sarcastic terms—the propaganda here seems so blatant as to be almost humorous. Here we also see how Trujillo's "cult of personality" takes on distinctly religious language, as the dictator elevates himself to the level of a god, "God's glory made flesh in a miracle." The Dominican Republic is a primarily Catholic nation at this point, and in the textbooks that Minerva is describing here Trujillo highjacks the language of Catholicism (particularly describing the birth of Jesus, the "Word made flesh") in order to build himself up as a holy figure and make his birth the supposed high point of all Dominican history.

Chapter 3 Quotes

> I see a *guardia*, and I think, who have you killed. I hear a police siren, and I think who is going to be killed. See what I mean?
> I see the picture of our president with eyes that follow me around the room, and I am thinking he is trying to catch me doing something wrong. Before, I always thought our president was like God, watching over everything I did.

Related Characters: Mate (speaker), Rafael Trujillo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

The narrative now follows María Teresa's perspective, as she describes her life in her diary entries. The first sections from each of the sisters' perspectives essentially show how they all start out naive, having grown up indoctrinated with the dictatorship's propaganda, and eventually learn the horrible truth about Trujillo's regime. Mate is heavily influenced by Minerva, the older sister she idolizes, and so she also can't help picking up on some of Minerva's increasingly radical politics. At this point, Mate still thinks of Trujillo like a stern father, but also one that she is now disappointed in (because of what Minerva has told her)—she doesn't yet see the whole truth about him. In a crucial point revealed here, however, Mate also admits that previously she had thought of Trujillo as "like God, watching over everything I did." In this she refers to the family's portrait of Trujillo (a required accessory in every Dominican home) and the fact that it is placed next to a picture of Jesus. This is one many examples of Trujillo elevating himself to a Christian kind of godhood, and also of his real presence in the characters' minds as a kind of evil god, watching all his subjects through his systems of spies and secret police.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Minerva could tell. One day, we were lying side by side on the hammock strung just outside the *galería*. She must have caught me gazing at our picture of the Good Shepherd, talking to his lambs. Beside him hung the required portrait of El Jefe, touched up to make him look better than he was. "They're a pair, aren't they?" she noted.

That moment, I understood her hatred. My family had not been personally hurt by Trujillo, just as before losing my baby, Jesus had not taken anything away from me. But others had been suffering great losses…

I had heard, but I had not believed. Snug in my heart, fondling my pearl, I had ignored their cries of desolation. How could our loving, all-powerful Father allow us to suffer so? I looked up, challenging Him. And the two faces had merged! ❞

Related Characters: Patria (speaker), Minerva, Rafael Trujillo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Patria has been losing her previously strong faith after giving birth to a stillborn baby. She has also been influenced by Minerva, who at this point is almost entirely nonreligious, as well as growing increasingly radical in her resistance against Trujillo. Patria has kept her doubts about Christianity to herself so far, but in this passage it seems that Minerva has been able to read her older sister's mind—she "could tell."

This passage also brings up the symbol of Trujillo's portrait again, and particularly its proximity to the picture of Jesus in the Mirabal family's home. Patria explicitly connects Trujillo to God here, and sees that her own disillusionment with Christianity reflects Minerva's disillusionment with Trujillo. Patria is now able to recognize that because Trujillo's regime has not hurt her directly, she has been able to ignore others' "cries of desolation." But now that she is willing to "challenge" God for allowing such suffering, she also seems more willing to challenge Trujillo himself—and indeed, when she looks up, the faces of Trujillo and Jesus have merged, as if they are both different aspects of an oppressive, omniscient, patriarchal force.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Dedé could only shake her head. She didn't really know Lío was a communist, a subversive, all the other awful things the editorial had called him. She had never known an enemy of state before. She had assumed such people would be self-serving and wicked, low-class criminals. But Lío was a fine young man with lofty ideals and a compassionate heart. Enemy of state? Why then, Minerva was an enemy of state. And if she, Dedé, thought long and hard about what was right and wrong, she would no doubt be an enemy of state as well.

"I didn't know," she said again. What she meant was she didn't understand until that moment that they were really living – as Minerva liked to say – in a police state. ❞

Related Characters: Dedé (speaker), Virgilio Morales (Lío), Minerva

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Dedé has just read a newspaper article about a protest to her Mamá, and the article lists Virgilio Morales as a

dangerous Communist and "enemy of the state." Dedé and Mamá are both shocked, as they had previously agreed with most of Lío's political ideas, but they have also been taught that all Communists are treacherous and evil. Dedé has even been in love with Lío, though she has always refrained from acting on her feelings (unlike Minerva). Furthermore, Dedé recognizes that if Lío is an "enemy of the state," then so is Minerva.

This is an important moment, one of several where Dedé is confronted with the truth—the fact that she really is living in a "police state," and that those people the government portrays as evil are often just trying to do what's right—and she doesn't yet know how to react. Dedé recognizes that if she "thought long and hard about what was right and wrong" she would probably reach the same conclusions as Minerva and Lío, but she is unwilling to even make this choice to fully confront reality. In hindsight, Dedé sees this as a sign of her cowardice, but it is also a very common mindset (getting used to one's "cage"), particularly for members of a populace living under a dictator or other corrupt power.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The floor remains empty as it must until El Jefe has danced the first dance.

He rises from his chair, and I am so sure he is going to ask me that I feel a twinge of disappointment when he turns instead to the wife of the Spanish ambassador. Lío's words of warning wash over me. This regime is seductive. How else would a whole nation fall prey to this little man?

Related Characters: Minerva (speaker), Rafael Trujillo, Virgilio Morales (Lío)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

One of Alvarez's projects in her novel is examining the nature of dictatorship and a "cult of personality"—essentially exploring how a "whole nation fall[s] prey" to a "little man" like Trujillo, as Minerva says here. There is a seductiveness to authoritarianism, Alvarez suggests. In some ways it is easier to give up one's autonomy to a "father figure," no matter how corrupt or cruel he may be, than to accept one's own independence and all the risks that it entails.

In this passage, most of the Mirabal family has been invited to a party thrown by Trujillo himself, with the implication that Trujillo has taken a romantic interest in Minerva. Minerva hates Trujillo, but she can't help feeling slighted when he doesn't choose her as his first dancing partner. Minerva isn't attracted to Trujillo, but she does want him to respect her and at least *think* about her—she wants him to see her as a worthy enemy, someone to be reckoned with.

❝ "I hope you will reconsider his offer. I'm sure General Fiallo would agree" – General Fiallo is already nodding before any mention has been made of what he is agreeing to – "that a private conference with El Jefe would be the quickest, most effective way to end all this nonsense."
"*Sí, sí, sí*," General Fiallo agrees.
Don Manuel continues. "I would like to bring you personally to him tonight at his suite at El Jaragua. Bypass all this red tape."
He gestures towards the general, who smiles inanely at his own put-down.
I stare at Manuel de Moya as if pinning him to the wall. "I'd sooner jump out that window than be forced to do something against my honor."

Related Characters: Manuel de Moya, Minerva (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Papá has been arrested because of Minerva's resistance to Trujillo's sexual advances. In this passage, Manuel de Moya, Trujillo's "secretary of state" (whose real job is finding pretty girls for Trujillo), visits Minerva and essentially tells her that Papá will be immediately freed if Minerva will just consent to a "private conference" with Trujillo in his bedroom. This quote shows Minerva's reckless courage, as well as the subservient and manipulative nature of Trujillo's surrogates.

When she was actually dancing with Trujillo, Minerva was to some degree seduced by his presence and forced to compromise her ideals in speaking with him. But as is shown here, Minerva has now reinforced her courage and refuses to give an inch of ground to Trujillo's demands—she would rather "jump out [the] window" than give in to him. Though this means continued imprisonment for Papá, and the start of a kind of "house arrest" for Mamá and Minerva herself, Minerva has now firmly taken a stand—she is Trujillo's enemy, and an equal and worthy rival even to the dictator himself.

Chapter 7 Quotes

There was a broadcast of a speech by this man Fidel, who is trying to overturn their dictator over in Cuba. Minerva has big parts memorized. Now, instead of her poetry, she's always reciting, *Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me!* I am so hoping that now that Minerva has found a special someone, she'll setttle down. I mean, I agree with her ideas and everything. I think people should be kind to each other and share what they have. But never in a million years would I take up a gun and force people to give up being mean.

Related Characters: Mate, Minerva (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

The narrative returns to Mate's perspective here, as again she examines Minerva's behavior, both fearing for and idolizing her older sister. Minerva has grown even more radical by now, inspired by Fidel Castro's attempt to overthrow Batista, the corrupt dictator of Cuba at the time. Mate, for her part, seems to agree with Minerva's views, but also lacks the conviction to attempt to *act*on them. She wants people to "be kind to each other," but also sees that to actually force this to happen would involve "taking up a gun"—something she is still unwilling to do (and which even seems counterintuitive to her).

Here Alvarez juxtaposes the personal with the political, as Mate is growing more revolutionary herself, but is still primarily concerned with boys and romance. Mate then projects this worldview onto Minerva, and hopes that a man (Manolo) will make Minerva "settle down."

There were hundreds of us, the women all together, in white dresses like we were his brides, with white gloves and any kind of hat we wanted. We had to raise our right arms in a salute as we passed by the review stand.
It looked like the newsreels of Hitler and the Italian one with the name that sounds like fettuccine.

Related Characters: Mate (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Here Mate describes her first day of class in "Trujillo City" (formerly Santo Domingo), where she and all her classmates are made to dress in white, march, and raise their arms to salute Trujillo. Mate compares the girls to "brides" showing themselves to Trujillo, a metaphor that is (as we have seen) grotesquely apt—as Trujillo has a tendency to seek out attractive students to seduce or rape. This idea could even extend to the whole country—all the women of the Dominican Republic are "fair game" in Trujillo's mind. This passage also links Trujillo to other infamous dictators of history, notably Hitler and Mussolini, emphasizing the horrors of Trujillo's regime despite its relative lack of international recognition, at least compared to these other more famous tyrants.

I admit that for me love goes deeper than the struggle, or maybe what I mean is, love is the deeper struggle. I would never be able to give up Leandro to some higher ideal the way I feel Minerva and Manolo would each other if they had to make the supreme sacrifice. And so last night, it touched me, Oh so deeply, to hear him say it was the same for him, too.

Related Characters: Mate (speaker), Leandro Guzman (Palomino), Manolo Tavarez Justo, Minerva

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Mate has now become a revolutionary as well, following in Minerva's footsteps and becoming "Butterfly #2" in the resistance group. Yet Mate is still very much her own person, and here she admits that she still leans more towards romance than revolution. She assumes that Minerva and Manolo would be willing to give each other up for the "struggle," but Mate feels that she could never sacrifice Leandro, even for a higher ideal (and she is overjoyed to hear that he feels the same way). Thus this passage shows a different kind of bravery, one that is not the straightforward, reckless courage often portrayed in idealized revolutionaries. Instead it is a courage in love as well as politics, and in struggling on whatever one's "deeper struggle" might be.

Here again Alvarez shows how the butterflies were not ideals or one-dimensional heroes, but real women with real complicated emotions and reservations about their actions.

Chapter 8 Quotes

That room was silent with the fury of avenging angels sharpening their radiance before they strike.
The priests had decided they could not wait forever for the pope and the archbishop to come around. The time was now, for the Lord had said, I come with the sword as well as the plow to set at liberty them that are bruised.
I couldn't believe this was the same Padre de Jesús talking who several months back hadn't known his faith from his fear! But then again, here in that little room was the same Patria Mercedes, who wouldn't have hurt a butterfly, shouting, "Amen to the revolution."
And so we were born in the spirit of the vengeful Lord, no longer His lambs.

Related Characters: Patria (speaker), Padre de Jesús

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163-164

Explanation and Analysis

Thus far Patria has tried to stay out of the struggle against Trujillo, instead focusing on her faith and her family. After witnessing the violence of the fourteenth of June, however, Patria, Padre de Jesús, and some other devout Catholics and priests decide to form their own resistance group. The members of this group decide that the earthly government of the Church has been too slow to act against Trujillo's atrocities, and so they will obey God's law on their own—overcoming both their fear and their natural pacifism to fight for freedom against the dictator. Alvarez shows how each of the sisters experiences their own epiphany that leads them to become a "butterfly" (or not), and this inspiring passage, which is threaded with Patria's usual religious language, shows Patria embracing her more courageous, idealistic side and finally deciding to take a stand for what is right. Furthermore, she finds that this "revolution" doesn't go against her faith, but is rather affirmed by it.

Chapter 9 Quotes

"The husbands were in prison," she adds, for the woman's face registers surprise at this change of address. "All except Jaimito."
"How lucky," her guest notes.
"It wasn't luck," Dedé says right out. "It was because he didn't get directly involved."
"And you?"
Dedé shakes her head. "Back in those days, we women followed our husbands." Such a silly excuse. After all, look at Minerva.
"Let's put it this way," Dedé adds. "*I* followed my husband. *I* didn't get involved."

Related Characters: Dedé, The Interview Woman (speaker), Leandro Guzman (Palomino), Manolo Tavarez Justo, Minerva

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171-172

Explanation and Analysis

Here Dedé is explaining herself to the interview woman. Dedé continues to use the same excuses to explain her refusal to become a "butterfly," though she knows how hollow these excuses sound in light of all that has happened. Though Dedé parrots the traditional idea that "we women followed our husbands," she then immediately compares herself to Minerva, and acknowledges that there were certainly many women who *didn't*do this—it's just an excuse for Dedé to try and ease some of her guilt. While she recognizes the essential emptiness of her excuse (that she had no choice, and couldn't go against Jaimito's wishes), Dedé also seems to see that the nature of this explanation just reinforces the same sexism and complacency her sisters were fighting against.

And she knew, right then and there, her knees shaking, her breath coming short, that she could not go through with this business. Jaimito was just an excuse. She was afraid, plain and simple, just as she had been afraid to face her powerful feelings for Lío. Instead, she had married Jaimito, although she knew she did not love him enough. And here she'd always berated him for his failures in business when the greater bankruptcy had been on her part.

Related Characters: Dedé (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184-185

Explanation and Analysis

Dedé, usually so meek and accommodating, is considering taking extreme action in her life—leaving Jaimito and joining her other sisters in their revolutionary activities. Here, she goes to town to try to talk to a priest and get advice, but then she realizes that Padre de Jesús, the priest she sought out, is a revolutionary too. In this moment, then, Dedé realizes that she is quite simply afraid. She is afraid both of leaving her overbearing husband and of risking her safety to fight Trujillo.

As with her sisters, for Dedé questions of romance are intricately tied to questions of politics. The decision to leave Jaimito is impossible to separate from the decision to become a "butterfly" (particularly as Jaimito has forbidden her to join her sisters), and so Dedé arguably has the most difficult choice of all the sisters—she must throw away everything she is used to (including, potentially, her children), and risk that the world outside her "cage" will be worth leaving the secure but oppressive cage itself. And in this moment, Dedé decides she cannot do it—she is not a coward, but she recognizes her limits and her own nature, and makes a decision once and for all.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Maybe because I was used to the Good Shepherd and Trujillo side by side in the old house, I caught myself praying a little greeting as I walked by.
Then another time, I came in from outside with my hands full of anthuriums. I looked up at him, and I thought why not. I set up a vase on the table right under his picture…
I don't know if that's how it started, but pretty soon, I was praying to him, not because he was worthy or anything like that. I wanted something from him, and prayer was the only way I knew to ask.

Related Characters: Patria (speaker), Rafael Trujillo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage we see a further development of the symbol of portraits of Trujillo. Patria still associates Trujillo with God (partly because of the previous proximity of the portraits of Trujillo and of Jesus), though she considers him a kind of evil god now. And so in this passage, Patria finds herself beginning to even "pray" to Trujillo himself—asking him to release her family members from their wrongful imprisonment.

As usual, Patria sees things in a highly religious way, her faith affecting her entire worldview and experience of reality. Thus she naturally starts praying to Trujillo, because prayer is the only way she knows how to ask something from someone powerful. The passage also shows Trujillo being portrayed as both an individual, personal antagonist and an ubiquitous, godlike figure.

❝ El Jefe entered in a wash of camera flashes. I don't know what I thought I'd see – I guess after three months of addressing him, I was sure I'd feel a certain kinship with the stocky, overdressed man before me. But it was just the opposite. The more I tried to concentrate on the good side of him, the more I saw a vain, greedy, unredeemed creature. Maybe the evil one had become flesh like Jesus! Goosebumps jumped all up and down my bare arms.

Related Characters: Patria (speaker), Rafael Trujillo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

As stated in the previous quote, Patria has been "praying" to Trujillo, asking him to release her family members, and here she sees him in person for the first time in years. Patria has been struggling to try and forgive even evil people, and to see them merely as flawed humans, but in this moment she finds that she still can't see anything redeemable in Trujillo.

In Patria's religiously-oriented mind, Trujillo is again elevated to a godlike status, but this time it is as a kind of demon or anti-Christ. As Minerva's old textbook declared, Trujillo perhaps *is* a kind of god made flesh (like Jesus, the "Word made flesh"), but in this case Trujillo is the *devil*made flesh. If Patria was hoping to find something sympathetic about her enemy, she has failed, and is instead only confirmed in her convictions that fighting Trujillo is not only right but also the proper Christian thing to do.

Chapter 11 Quotes

It happens here all the time. Every day and night there's at least one breakdown – someone loses control and starts to scream or sob or moan. Minerva says it's better letting yourself go – not that *she* ever does. The alternative is freezing yourself up, never showing what you're feeling, never letting on what you're thinking… Then one day, you're out of here, free, only to discover you've locked yourself up and thrown away the key somewhere too deep inside your heart to fish it out.

Related Characters: Mate (speaker), Minerva

Related Themes:

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, Mate and Minerva are both in prison, and dealing with all the struggles and suffering that come with their situation. As we only learn about this period from Mate's point of view, we again see Minerva as her younger sister sees her—someone almost impossibly strong, courageous, and firm in her convictions. In the case of this passage, however, it becomes clear that Minerva isn't just a superhuman revolutionary leader—she also understands the psychological pressures the other women are undergoing, and thus becomes an advocate for mental freedom even within the confines of the prison itself. As both Minerva and Mate suggest here, there is a bravery not just in "sucking it up" but also in "letting it out"—adding further nuance to Alvarez's exploration of the different kinds of courage.

Where does that sister of mine get her crazy courage?
As she was being marched down the hall, a voice from one of the cells they passed called out, *Mariposa does not belong to herself alone. She belongs to Quisqueya!* Then everyone was beating on the bars, calling out, *¡Viva la Mariposa!* Tears came to my eyes. Something big and powerful spread its wings inside me.
Courage, I told myself. And this time, I felt it.

Related Characters: Mate (speaker), Minerva

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Here Mate again describes Minerva's "crazy courage," and we also see the legend that is already growing around the sisters. Minerva is labeled "Mariposa" (butterfly) by the other prisoners, and becomes a larger-than-life figure in their defiant chant—someone who "does not belong to herself alone," but stands for all of "Quisqueya" (in this case, another name for the Dominican Republic itself).

We don't see Minerva's perspective here, and so can't tell if she really is feeling the "crazy courage" Mate projects onto her, but we do see Mate becoming a "butterfly" herself in this inspiring moment. She feels "wings" spreading out inside of her, a kind of liberation and bravery that she finds even in her imprisonment. As is shown throughout the book, forall of the sisters courage is often more an act of will than a feeling, but in this moment, Mate has the good fortune to actually *feel*it, inspired by Minerva's actions and the prisoners' call to arms.

Chapter 12 Quotes

Even in church during the privacy of Holy Communion, Father Gabriel bent down and whispered, *¡Viva la Mariposa!* My months in prison have elevated me to superhuman status. It would hardly have been seemly for someone who had challenged our dictator to suddenly succumb to a nervous attack at the communion rail.
I hid my anxieties and gave everyone a bright smile. If they had only known how frail was their iron-will heroine. How much it took to put on that hardest of all performances, being my old self again.

Related Characters: Minerva (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

Minerva and Mate have been released from prison and confined to house arrest. Ironically, Minerva now finds it harder to be brave and keep up her persona outside of prison—she no longer has something concrete and direct to struggle against, and so instead is faced with the subtler but arguably more difficult task of just maintaining a facade of strength and conviction. She is a human being, but must try to live up to her public role as a symbol.

We have seen Minerva in prison from Mate's point of view, but now that we get Minerva's narration her many doubts and internal weaknesses are revealed. This, again, is a crucial part of Alvarez's overall project in the

book—showing the butterflies not as pure heroines or idealized revolutionaries, but as real, flawed women struggling to do what is right.

I will never forget the terror on Dedé's face. How she reached for my hand. How, when we were asked to identify ourselves, what she said was – I will never forget this – she said, "My name is Minerva Mirabal."

Related Characters: Minerva, Dedé (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 277

Explanation and Analysis

While driving together one day, Minerva (still under house arrest) and Dedé are stopped by guards. When they are forced to get out of the car, Dedé tells the guards that *she* is Minerva Mirabal—clearly trying to protect her sister, who would be the obvious target of any political violence on the part of the regime.

In this touching moment Minerva realizes how brave Dedé is being, even though she is supposedly the "cowardly" sister who refused to become a butterfly. Dedé was unable to find the particular kind of courage necessary to leave Jaimito or fight Trujillo directly, but she clearly has a huge amount of bravery when it comes to defending and protecting her family.

Patria closed her purse with a decisive snap. "Let's just go." We moved quickly now towards the Jeep, hurrying as if we had to catch up with that truck. I don't know quite how to say this, but it was as if we were girls again, walking through the dark part of the yard, a little afraid, a little excited by our fears, anticipating the lighted house just around the bend – That's the way I felt as we started up the first mountain.

Related Characters: Patria, Minerva (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the moment before the butterflies' assassination—arguably the book's climax, but also an event Alvarez doesn't describe. The language of this scene, which is ironically tragic in its optimistic imagery, calls back to the first memory of the book, with the sisters as little girls in the dark yard of their house, as yet mostly untroubled by dictators, revolutions, and violence. The story thus comes full circle, and Alvarez lingers on the sisters' final moments before their tragic end.

As she emphasizes the mingling of fear and excitement in this passage, Alvarez again makes the point that the butterflies were ordinary women—once just girls "walking through the dark part of the yard"—who were not superhumanly brave or strong, but who simply made the choice to do extraordinary things.

Epilogue Quotes

When we got to the SIM post at the first little town, I cried out, "Assassins! Assassins!"
Jaimito gunned the motor to drown out my cries. When I did it again at the next town, he pulled over and came to the back of the pickup. He made me sit down on one of the boxes. "Dedé, *mujer*, what is it you want – to get yourself killed, too?"

I nodded. I said, "I want to be with them."

He said – I remember it so clearly – he said, "This is *your* martyrdom, Dedé, to be alive without them."

Related Characters: Dedé (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

Here Dedé remembers the day she learned of her sisters' deaths. She grows reckless and enraged in her sudden grief, and directly accuses Trujillo's SIM of being "assassins"—a very dangerous thing to yell out, to say the least. Dedé then tells Jaimito that she wants to join her sisters in death, and so she feels no fear when she antagonizes their murderers.

In response to this, Jaimito delivers a surprisingly insightful statement, as quoted here. Dedé, too, is a martyr in her own way, though she is the only sister to survive. She must suffer life instead of death, seeing the good the butterflies bring about but also witnessing all the future suffering to come to her country, and forced to live alone without her beloved sisters. This will force Dedé to show, in her own way, the kind of extraordinary courage that her sisters exhibited more dramatically.

> He was going to do all sorts of things, he told me. He was going to get rid of the old generals with their hands still dirty with Mirabal blood. All those properties they had stolen he was going to distribute among the poor. He was going to make us a nation proud of ourselves, not run by the Yanqui imperialists.
> Every time he made one of these promises, he'd look at me as if he needed me to approve what he was doing. Or really, not me, but my sisters whose pictures hung on the wall behind me. Those photos had become icons, emblazoned on posters… And I started to think, maybe it was for something that the girls had died.

Related Characters: Dedé (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 310

Explanation and Analysis

After the deaths of her sisters, Dedé is left as a kind of "speaker" for the butterflies, here describing their legend and their elevation to the status of heroes. The narrative speeds up, briefly explaining how Trujillo was assassinated by some of his cronies, and was eventually replaced by a democratically elected president. This new president (Juan Bosch) is the one quoted here, and he seemed like the kind of president the butterflies might have liked—a worthy result of their sacrifice, as Dedé suggests—but he was soon overthrown in a coup that was supported by the Church, the military, and the United States (who was afraid of Bosch's left-leaning politics).

As we can see here, the butterflies have become martyrs and national symbols, exhibiting a kind of moral standard that the new president feels he must live up to. The dictatorship is over (for now), and the people of the Dominican Republic are free of Trujillo, but their struggles are far from over.

> "The nightmare is over, Dedé. Look at what the girls have done." He gestures expansively.
> He means the free elections, bad presidents now put in power properly, not by army tanks. He means our country beginning to prosper, Free Zones going up everywhere, the coast a clutter of clubs and resorts. We are now the playground of the Caribbean, who were once its killing fields. The cemetery is beginning to flower…
> Lío is right. The nightmare is over; we are free at last. But the thing that is making me tremble, that I do not want to say out loud – and I'll say it once only and it's done.
> Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies?

Related Characters: Dedé, Virgilio Morales (Lío) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

Years later, Dedé meets Virgilio Morales again at a reception in honor of the butterflies, and Lio seems optimistic about the results of their sacrifice. The reception itself is portrayed as a reinforcement of the romanticized narrative increasingly being told about the Mirabal sisters—that their struggle consisted of three women against one evil dictator, ignoring the thousands of other people who both suffered and propagated suffering. Even Virgilio seems to accept this romanticized narrative at this point, and feels that "what the girls have done" is clear to see.

Dedé, however, has more doubts. The optimism she felt after President Bosch's visit has faded with his overthrow and the rise of new and corrupt governments in the Dominican Republic. Dedé admits that the country is free of Trujillo, and that her sisters played a large part in this victory, but she also sees that the country still isn't much better off than it was before—and it certainly hasn't achieved successes that might make her sisters' deaths seem "worth it" to her. In this passage, then, Dedé asks herself a tragic question, one central to the novel itself—was the death of the butterflies in vain? When faced with the reality that the Mirabal sisters were real, complicated women rather than one-dimensional heroes or martyrs, their sacrifice almost becomes more monumental, and it seems even more urgent that their successors try to live up to the moral imperative they have upheld.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: DEDÉ, 1994 AND CIRCA 1943

The book begins by following Dedé Mirabal in the present day (at the time of publication), 1994. Dedé gets a call from a woman who wants to interview her about the Mirabal sisters. The woman explains that she is a Dominican who has been living in the U.S. for a while, where no one has heard of the Mirabals. Dedé is used to interviews like this, especially on November 25th, the anniversary of her sisters' deaths, but this is March. She grudgingly invites the woman over.

Alvarez uses the "interview woman" as a stand-in for herself and as a way of introducing the story of the Mirabals to U.S. readers. In her "Postscript" Alvarez acknowledges the Dominicans who might be unable to read the book in English, saying that she is teaching North Americans to understand what Dominicans have endured.

Before the woman arrives Dedé goes through her usual ritual of setting up her life like an exhibit of "the sister who survived." People always end up asking why she is the only one who lived among all four sisters. Dedé now sells life insurance, which her niece Minou finds ironic. Dedé was divorced ten years ago. The interview woman arrives and slams her car door, which makes Dedé jump, as the loud noise reminds her of a gunshot.

We already know the ending of the story – the Mirabal sisters will be killed – but to build tension Alvarez only drops hints of their fate at first. Everything seems peaceful in 1994, but Dedé is still jumpy from the violent past. Dedé is the only Mirabal sister to survive, so it is ironic that she now sells life insurance, as she is a kind of life insurance policy for her sisters, ensuring that their legacy lives on.

Dedé shows the interviewer around the house (Dedé lives in the same house she used to with her sisters and parents) and exhibits the portraits of the girls. The interviewer asks where Dedé is on the wall, which makes Dedé nervous. She lists her sisters' ages and their most general traits, as she always does around "mythologizers of her sisters" – Minerva was high-minded and moral, María Teresa was young and girlish, and Patria was very religious.

Alvarez first shows us the butterflies from an outsider's perspective, giving us the information we might learn from cursory research. She will then create complex, individual characters for each sister to show the real women behind the famous martyrs. Alvarez creates personalities for the sisters, but still sticks to the basic historical facts.

Dedé and interviewer talk more, and the woman asks Dedé how she kept her head up during so much tragedy. Dedé says that she tries to "concentrate on the positive," especially on happy memories. The interviewer asks Dedé to describe one of those memories.

Alvarez now sets up the transitions between the present and the past. Dedé seems less brave than the other sisters for avoiding their martyrdom, but she had to be brave in living with their loss for decades.

The narrative shifts through Dedé's memory back to sometime around 1943. The sisters and their parents, Mamá and Papá, are all sitting around in the yard and talking. Papá is drinking rum, but everyone else is drinking juice. The three older sisters are all close in age, while María Teresa is nine years younger.

We have seen the peaceful present, and this is now the peaceful past before all the turmoil begins. The Mirabals are a wealthy family, and Papá has become a successful farmer and merchant.

Sometimes *campesinos* (peasants) come by and ask for something from Papá's store, and he always opens up the store and gives it to them. Dedé chides him that his generosity will make them poor, and Papá predicts that Dedé will be the millionaire of the family. María Teresa (who is only eight at the time) asks Papá to predict her future, and he says that she will make "men's mouths water." Patria then asks for her future, but Mamá stops Papá, saying that their priest, Padre Ignacio, disapproves of fortune telling. Minerva defends Papá while critiquing Christianity.

These half-joking predictions set up the real futures that await the girls. We also see glimpses of each sister's character – Dedé is practical, María Teresa is naïve, Patria is religious, and Minerva is outspoken and rebellious. It is significant that Dedé's future is the only one really predicted, which foreshadows the other sisters' later fates.

Minerva has been wanting to go to law school, and María Teresa says that she hopes her future will be in law too. Mamá says "just what we need, skirts in the law!" but Minerva says that that is exactly what the country needs. She says women should have a voice in politics, and then Papá says "you and Trujillo." Suddenly they all go silent, and feel that the dark woods are full of spies who will twist their words until the whole family ends up killed.

An important part of the novel is Alvarez's portrayal of the sisters as women in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. The oppression of women is even encouraged by some women themselves, as with Mamá's comment. The peaceful moment is broken with Trujillo's name, and the story moves forward into the dark future.

It starts to rain and the family hurries inside. Dedé then realizes that hers is the only future Papá really told – María Teresa's was just a joke, and Mamá stopped him before he could get to Patria and Minerva. Dedé feels a chill, as if this happy time is over and "the future is now beginning."

Trujillo is the dictator of the Dominican Republic and the antagonist of the novel. The mention of his name sets off the action of Alvarez's story, and we already see foreshadowing that Dedé is the only sister with a long future.

CHAPTER 2: MINERVA, 1938, 1941, 1944

(Complications: 1938) The story is now told from Minerva's point of view. Minerva wonders how Papá was ever convinced to send the girls away to school, as at home the sisters always had to ask him permission for everything. Minerva used to watch the family's **rabbits** in their pens and feel that she was like them. One day she tried to set one free, but the rabbit didn't want to leave its cage. Minerva then realized that the rabbit wasn't like her after all.

The rabbits only appear here, but they are an important symbol that will resonate throughout the novel. At first they seem to represent Minerva – trapped by patriarchal expectations – but they also show how she is different from many other Dominicans. Minerva desires freedom no matter what, while many people fear to leave their comfortable "cages," even when that cage is a dictatorship.

The girls leaving home starts with Patria wanting to be a nun. Papá says that this is a "waste of a pretty girl," but Mamá finally convinces him to at least send her to a convent school. Minerva then asks Papá if she can "chaperone" her older sister at the school by attending as well. Minerva seems to be Papá's favorite, though she is the one who argues the most with him. Papá half-jokingly laments what will happen when all his "little chickens go."

Alvarez moves ahead chronologically in each chapter, but we also see the same events from different sisters' perspectives. For now Patria's religious calling is just an excuse for Minerva to get free. We see more veiled sexism in Papá's comment, which implies that a girl's purpose is to get married.

Mamá doesn't know how to read, though she pretends her eyesight is just bad, and she convinces Papá to let the girls go to school so they will have a better education than their parents. The family has been making a lot of money lately, so they can afford a good school. Papá finally agrees, but says that one sister needs to stay home and help with the store. He clearly wants Minerva to volunteer, but she stays silent. Dedé volunteers.

The first motif of imprisonment or entrapment comes with the girls' strict home life, where Papá is loving but strict and overprotective. Minerva is clearly Papá's favorite, as she acts the most "masculine" of the sisters, but her forceful nature also makes her want to escape. Dedé shows herself submissive and accommodating.

Minerva says that this is how she finally "got free." It wasn't just the freedom of leaving home, but a freedom inside her head when she realized she had "just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country."

This refers back to the rabbits, and the expansion of the theme of freedom and imprisonment. Minerva has escaped Papá's rules, but then she recognizes that her whole country is still run by one dominating man.

When Minerva first goes off to school she befriends a girl named Sinita, who looks poorer and angrier than the other children. She first arrives dressed in black for mourning. Minerva offers her a button. Sinita first rejects it as charity, but accepts it when Minerva calls it a "friendship button."

Minerva shows her independent streak by immediately befriending the "outsider" at her new school. Sinita also shows herself to be proud and outspoken.

Minerva notes how few possessions Sinita brings to school. The other girls start to make fun of Sinita as a "charity student," but Minerva defends her. The girls are taken to their dormitory for the first night and assigned to their beds by Sor Milagros, one of the nuns. The mosquito nets around the beds make it like "a room of little bridal veils."

This is a convent school, where girls can train to become nuns, but the beds being described as "bridal veils" shows the other option for women in this society. As with Patria, there seem to be only two life paths for a woman: becoming a nun, or getting married and having children.

Sor Milagros arranges the bunks in alphabetical order. Minerva asks if she can bunk with Sinita, and Sor Milagros agrees. Minerva then says that she shouldn't make an exception just for her, which surprises Sor Milagros. Sor Milagros agrees to let all the girls choose their own bunks, and then she tells Minerva to "take care of our dear Sinita."

Minerva shows that she will always speak out wherever she sees unfairness. Sor Milagros respects this, but it will ultimately lead Minerva to her political rebellion and life of danger.

A few days later Sor Milagros gives the girls a vague lesson about menstruation. Sinita is confused and asks Minerva about it afterward. Minerva has already learned all about menstruation from Patria, so she explains it to Sinita. Sinita offers to trade her the "secret of Trujillo" in exchange.

Alvarez often juxtaposes innocent coming-of-age scenes (like girls first learning about menstruation) with sinister political scenes. Trujillo's name again darkens the mood.

Sinita delays telling this secret for a few weeks. Minerva and Sinita become close friends with two other girls, Lourdes and Elsa. One night Sinita is crying, and she tells Minerva that she is crying about her brother, who died soon before. He was the reason Sinita was mourning when she first came to school. Minerva asks her to tell the "secret of Trujillo." Sinita is afraid, but she finally agrees.

We see the kind of pervasive propaganda that Trujillo uses to make himself seem like a kindly, godlike figure. Even the perceptive and high-minded Minerva has no idea that Trujillo is anything less than a saint.

Sinita says that her family used to be rich and important. Three of her uncles were friends with Trujillo, but then they turned against him when "they saw he was doing bad things." Minerva is shocked at this idea, and compares Trujillo doing bad things to learning that "Jesus had slapped a baby." She thinks about the **portrait of Trujillo** that hangs in her family's house next to a picture of Jesus and a flock of cute lambs. Sinita continues – someone informed on her uncles, and then they were all shot.

By portraying the girls at a young age at first, Alvarez shows how each one discovers Trujillo's true nature. The portrait of the dictator next to Jesus will become more important later, but it already shows how he equates himself with God and how easily children can be indoctrinated into his propaganda.

Minerva asks what "bad things" Trujillo was doing, and Sinita explains his rise to power. She uses childlike terms, but explains that Trujillo was a soldier who played people's jealousies against each other and eventually became head general. He then stirred up a rebellion against the old president, and refused to help him when the president asked for the army's help. Trujillo then announced that *he* was the new president.

Through Sinita, Alvarez gives the basic facts of Trujillo's rise. He stood by while President Vasquez was overthrown by Rafael Estrella Ureña, having cut a secret deal with Ureña beforehand. Trujillo was then "elected" by 99 percent of the vote. He immediately became a dictator under the name of "president."

Minerva asks why someone didn't tell Trujillo that this wasn't right, but Sinita says that people who criticized him "didn't live very long." Her own three uncles were killed, and then two more uncles, and then her father, and then her brother. Minerva suddenly feels nauseated and asks Sinita to stop talking, but Sinita says she can't now.

With this story Minerva feels her whole world being turned upside down, but she can't resist her own strong sense of right and wrong. Trujillo managed to stay in power for so long and keep up his saintly image by killing or imprisoning his critics.

Sinita tells the story of how her brother was killed. He was the last male in the family, and had been talking about avenging his father and uncles. One day he was stabbed in front of the whole family by the man who sold them lottery tickets. The head of the convent school knew the family, so she later allowed Sinita to attend for free. Sinita finally says that "Trujillo's secret" is that he is having everyone killed.

One of the most terrifying and tragic things about Trujillo's dictatorship is how it turned civilians against each other. People were paid to spy on their friends and family, and as this story shows, ordinary merchants could be paid to murder someone whom Trujillo wanted dead.

Minerva is traumatized by this, and she sleeps very little that night. When she wakes up she thinks that she has wet the bed, but then realizes that she has begun menstruating, and her "complications had started."

Alvarez creates another poignant juxtaposition here – Minerva menstruates for the first time, beginning the "complications" of puberty and adulthood, on the same night that she learns the truth about Trujillo and begins the "complications" of her future under a dictator.

(¡Pobrecita!: 1941) Minerva describes how she is directly affected by Trujillo three years later. At school she and her friends befriend and admire an older girl named Lina Lovatón, who is very beautiful. One day the girls are playing volleyball, and Lina is the captain. One of the nuns then hurries out and says that Lina has an important visitor. Lina goes inside, and when she returns she has a medal pinned to her uniform. She says that Trujillo was her visitor. He had seen her from an official's house next door and had immediately sent for her, taken a medal from his uniform, and pinned it to hers.

We have seen how Trujillo kills those who oppose him, but now Alvarez shows another sinister part of his rule – his treatment of women. He is married, but still takes any girl he is attracted to as a mistress, or else threatens her family or rapes her. One of Trujillo's disparaging nicknames is Chapitas ("Bottlecaps") because of his love of medals. It is rumored that as a boy he strung bottlecaps across his chest to look like medals.

Every time Trujillo comes to town after that he stops by and visits Lina. He starts sending gifts to her and also to the school. Whenever he visits, all the classes are cancelled. Lina describes their encounters – Trujillo recites some poetry, and then they play a game where she takes the medals off of his chest and puts them back on. Sinita disgustedly asks Lina if she loves Trujillo, and Lina says "with all my heart."

Even as Trujillo is preying on an underage girl, everyone is still so brainwashed by his propaganda that they see his actions as noble and romantic. Only Sinita (and gradually Minerva) sees the darkness behind this "courtship."

As the girls hear more about Trujillo they all start falling in love with him through Lina – except for Sinita. Minerva chooses to forget Sinita's story of years before. When Lina turns seventeen Trujillo throws her a party and takes her away for a week. On her birthday there is a poem devoted to her in the newspaper, supposedly written by Trujillo himself.

Even Minerva chooses to forget the "complications" of the truth for a while, foreshadowing how her other sisters will also avoid actively working against Trujillo for varying amounts of time.

Then time passes and Lina doesn't return. The nuns say that she will get her degree *in absentia*, but they can't explain why. That summer Minerva is driving by a mansion with Papá, and he says that "one of Trujillo's girlfriends" lives there – Lina. Minerva asks how Trujillo can have girlfriends if he's married, and Papá says that Trujillo has girlfriends set up all over the island. Lina is especially pitiable because she actually loves him.

Papá, like most Dominicans, knows about Trujillo's rapacious nature but chooses to turn a blind eye to it or laugh it off. Minerva is struck by another hard truth about the man supposed to be the "Papá" of the country. Lina basically becomes a prisoner in her mansion.

The next year at school Minerva hears the rest of the story. Lina got pregnant, and Trujillo's wife attacked her. Trujillo then shipped Lina off to a mansion. She waits for him there, but he has moved on to another pretty girl. Minerva starts wearing bandages around her chest so her breasts won't grow, as she doesn't want to end up like Lina. Sinita says that "Trujillo is a devil," but Minerva is still convinced that he is a man who probably feels bad about what he has done.

Sinita's comment brings up an interesting theme that Alvarez will develop, the connection between a dictator and a god. In Trujillo's propaganda he appears as a kind of benevolent god, but once the sisters start hating him he seems like an evil god or devil. But they also struggle to see him as a mere human, one able to feel guilt – and to be overthrown or killed.

(The Performance: 1944) Three years later it is the country's centennial year, and they are supposed to have celebrations honoring Trujillo. The Mirabals get around this by celebrating Patria's twentieth birthday instead, but making everyone wear red, white, and blue. Patria is married and has a son now – she has given up on being a nun.

In the years before this section, Minerva has grown more jaded and sardonic, and cast off any romantic or sympathetic notions about Trujillo. It seems that the rest of the family is disillusioned with him as well.

Minerva says that the whole country is "putting on a big loyalty performance" at this point. At school they get new textbooks with Trujillo's picture on the front. The country's history books now echo the plot of the Bible, all leading up to Trujillo's birth, which they call "God's glory made flesh in a miracle."

This is some of the most explicit propaganda connecting Trujillo to a kind of god. The history of the Dominican Republic is now made to foreshadow the Christ-like arrival of Trujillo.

At school they have a new gymnasium from Trujillo's donation, which is called the "Lina Lovatón Gymnasium." The school has a contest there to celebrate the "Benefactor" (Trujillo), where the girls are supposed to put on performances. Minerva, Sinita, Elsa, and Lourdes make a symbolic play about Liberty and Glory freeing the enslaved Motherland.

Lina's life is ruined by Trujillo, but he clearly feels no shame about this and "rewards" her by naming the gym after her. One of Trujillo's approved nicknames is the "Benefactor," as he portrays himself as a benevolent father-figure providing everything for his citizens.

On the night of the contest Minerva's team wins, and they are later sent to perform their skit for Trujillo on his birthday. Minerva tries to decline, but Sinita wants to do it. Sinita says that the play is like a "hidden protest," because it is about a past when the country was free. Minerva agrees, but insists that they perform dressed as boys.

Minerva is now aligned with Sinita in her hatred of Trujillo, and already unafraid to protest against him. Any kind of history that isn't Trujillo-centric is basically going against the regime's propaganda.

On the night of the performance one of the nuns, Sor Asunción, escorts the girls to the capital and warns them to act like "jewels" and impress Trujillo. They arrive and Minerva sees Trujillo for the first time. He looks small in his big golden armchair, and he is covered with medals. His handsome son Ramfis is sitting next to him.

Trujillo appears for the first time. As a dictator, he can act as both an antagonistic single character in the novel and as the looming, oppressive force of the government. He loves dressing himself up extravagantly.

The performance begins, and Minerva is so nervous she is shaking. The skit goes smoothly, until the part where Sinita (dressed as Liberty) is supposed to free Minerva, the Fatherland. Sinita draws her bow and then points an imaginary arrow straight at Trujillo. Ramfis leaps up, grabs Sinita's bow, and breaks it over his knee.

It is Sinita, not Minerva, who takes this first real action against Trujillo. Ramfis Trujillo is a handsome playboy who dated women in Hollywood but also took part in his father's atrocities.

Minerva tries to cover for Sinita, saying that it was part of the play, but Ramfis warns them not to play that way. He then makes Sinita untie Minerva with her teeth, and calls her "bitch." When Minerva is free, she starts a chant of "Viva Trujillo!" to defuse the situation. On the way home Sor Asunción is disappointed in the girls.

The brutal underbelly of Trujillo comes out in Ramfis's burst of rage at Sinita. Minerva is a pacifying force now compared to Sinita's boldness, but Minerva is clearly inspired by her friend's bravery.

CHAPTER 3: THIS LITTLE BOOK BELONGS TO MARÍA TERESA, 1945 TO 1946

The narrative now consists of María Teresa's diary entries. She prepares for her First Communion, and is excited about her fancy new shoes. María Teresa thinks about souls, and about how her friends Daysi and Lidia have been mean to her. She often asks Minerva for advice, as they are both now at the same school. María Teresa says that she is "advanced for her age" because of her older sisters, but she purposefully doesn't win the handwriting prize at school every week so the other girls don't get jealous.

Just as Minerva's story becomes more explicitly political, Alvarez now jumps to the most "girlish" of the sisters, who has yet to have any inkling of the regime's true nature. María Teresa seems to look up to Minerva most of all, though, so her naivety about Trujillo cannot last long.

María Teresa returns home for the holidays and is excited to see her family. Her nickname at home is "Mate." She writes about Minerva making Daysi and Lidia be nicer, and Minerva telling her about menstruation and sex. One day a young man follows them, complimenting Minerva effusively. Minerva ignores him but lets him buy María Teresa some ice cream.

María Teresa is eight years younger than the next oldest sister (Minerva), so she always experiences a kind of disconnect from her older siblings and is the baby of the family.

María Teresa describes Patria's cute children, Nelson and Noris. For Three Kings day the family goes shopping in Santiago, and María Teresa gets new shoes. She compliments Minerva for being so smart and good at arguing. María Teresa talks about her cousin Berto, who brought Mamá some flowers.

Through Mate, Alvarez gives examples of innocent girlhood which will then be contrasted with political violence. Her infatuation with shoes and boys emphasizes the fact that all the sisters are young women, not just historical revolutionary legends.

María Teresa describes a "funny little moment" when an uncle mentioned Benefactor's Day, and Minerva said they should go celebrate at the cemetery. The room went silent, but María Teresa doesn't understand why. Later María Teresa talks more about the shoes she wears for Benefactor's Day, and how happy she is to have El Jefe (Trujillo) as her president. She feels special because her birthday is in the same month as his.

Alvarez contrasts Mate – who is still thinking of Trujillo as a kindly father-figure – with Minerva, who knows the truth and is now willing to speak out against Trujillo's murders. El Jefe means "the chief" or "the boss" and was one of Trujillo's most common nicknames.

One day María Teresa is shocked to hear that Minerva has been sneaking out of school. María Teresa is called before a nun, but she affirms Minerva's lie that they have a sick uncle that she was visiting. Later María Teresa convinces Minerva to explain, and Minerva says that she has been going to secret meetings at Don Horacio's house. He is Elsa's grandfather, and is in trouble with the police for refusing to hang a **picture of Trujillo** in his house.

Mate remains naïve and childish, but her closeness to Minerva makes her the second sister to experience real action against Trujillo. Part of Trujillo's "personality cult" and godlike persona is making sure everyone has a portrait of him in their house. Mate shows her courage by lying on Minerva's behalf.

María Teresa asks why Minerva would do such a thing, and Minerva says that she wants María Teresa to grow up in a free country. María Teresa is confused, as she thinks the country is already free, but then she gets upset and starts having an asthma attack. Minerva holds her hands until she calms down.

Minerva acts as Mate's agitator but also as the stable force to calm her down – telling her the harsh truth but also soothing Mate's emotional spikes.

The next day María Teresa is more suspicious of the police and Trujillo. She had thought of Trujillo as "like God, watching over everything I did," but now when she sees a **portrait of Trujillo** she thinks that he is trying to catch her doing something bad. María Teresa affirms that she still loves the president, she is just disappointed in him.

Mate now begins to have her "complications" of realizing Trujillo's true nature, though she still associates him with a father-figure and a flawed man, not a devil. In the symbol of his portrait, Trujillo is again portrayed as a benevolent or malevolent god.

María Teresa gushes about letters she gets from her cousin Berto. She then describes Minerva's "rude" new friend Hilda who now hangs around the school a lot. Hilda goes to the secret meetings at Don Horacio's house and wears a beret and trousers. She questions God's existence, and the nuns humor her for a while because she is an orphan, but then they tell her to leave the school.

Minerva and her friends are heavily influenced by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, socialist revolutionaries in Cuba, even down to the way they dress (Che is famous for his beret). Mate has an eye-opening moment about Trujillo, but then she goes back to talking about boys and clothes.

Two months later guards start visiting the school, asking for Hilda. Minerva tells María Teresa that Hilda had suddenly appeared asking for a place to hide, and Sor Asunción had agreed to hide her. The police keep coming by, but the nuns say nothing about Hilda.

The nuns don't approve of Hilda, but they show their moral fiber in hiding her. At this point the Catholic church is still neutral regarding Trujillo, while many of its practitioners grow dissatisfied.

Minerva graduates and she and María Teresa go home for the summer. Patria has been pregnant, but she gives birth to a stillborn boy. Patria cries all the time now. On the last entry María Teresa explains that she has to bury this diary, as Hilda has been caught and everyone in Don Horacio's group now has to destroy anything that would seem suspicious. María Teresa has mentioned Hilda, so she has to dispose of the diary too. She bids it farewell.

Mate's diary is mostly comments on shoes and daily life, but it could still be damning material to a biased police officer. Again we see a major life event for one of the sisters from the perspective of another.

CHAPTER 4: PATRIA, 1946

The narrative is now told from Patria's point of view, remembering the past. She describes how she always felt an affinity for religion, and imagined herself as a nun from a very young age. She goes to the convent school and tries to ignore herself going through puberty, and she strictly follows all the religious rules. When Patria is sixteen Sor Asunción calls her in and tells her to listen for God speaking to her, in case she has a calling to become a nun.

Alvarez creates a unique voice for each sister. Minerva is straightforward and sardonic, Mate is emotional and dramatic, and Patria uses grand religious language. Patria follows convention like Dedé, but is more high-minded and idealistic like Minerva. She embraces the rules of religion instead of feeling trapped by them.

At night Patria starts touching herself, but she tries to stifle her desires with thoughts of Christ. This is successful for a while, but then she starts desiring rich foods instead. She prays hard but gets no sign from God. One day during Holy Week she is washing people's feet at the church when she is startled to see a handsome young man. She feels that this is a sign – he is to be her "earthly groom," and she will give up her dreams of being a nun. She finally confesses this to Sor Asunción, feeling guilty about it.

Patria doesn't get involved in political struggles for a while – at first all her conflicts are personal. She experiences this battle between her perceived religious calling and her budding sexuality as a woman. Jesus is called the "bridegroom" of the Church, so Patria chooses an "earthly groom" instead of symbolically marrying Jesus by becoming a nun.

Patria stays home from school the next fall and helps Papá at the store. She starts dating the young man, whose name is Pedrito González. He is from an old farming family and seems strongly connected to the earth. Patria feels an element of pity in her love for him. He is a simple man but he declares his powerful love for Patria, and they decide to get married. Only once does she almost have premarital sex with him, but she stops at the last moment.

Patria quickly gives up school along with her goal of becoming a nun. She does not feel trapped by marrying so young or giving up her education, as becoming a good mother seems as worthy a goal to her as anything else.

After she gets married, Patria goes to live with Pedrito on his family's farm. She has a son, Nelson, and then a daughter, Noris. She starts to worry about Minerva, who has been speaking out more openly against Trujillo. Patria tries to reason with her, saying that Trujillo is better than the other "bandits" who have been president. Then she tries saying that women shouldn't get involved in the "dirty business" of politics. Minerva rebuffs all her arguments.

Patria echoes another sexist argument used to keep women down – that women are somehow "purer" than men, and so shouldn't dirty themselves with politics. Patria is still being strictly conventional, following the path laid out before her – get married, have children, and don't make trouble.

Minerva stops going to church unless Mamá forces her to. Minerva says that some of the priests are on "double payroll," and Patria feels Minerva affecting her own faith. Patria then loses her religion altogether when she has the stillborn baby. Patria feels empty and despairing, and she moves back home to get her strength back.

"Double payroll" means working one's usual job and also being paid by the regime to spy on people. Patria's children are everything to her, so her baby is the most precious thing God could take from her.

Patria keeps up her facade, but Minerva recognizes that she has lost her faith. One day she notes Patria staring at the **portrait of Trujillo** next to the picture of Jesus and says "they're a pair, aren't they?" Patria then understands Minerva's hatred. Her family hasn't been personally hurt by Trujillo, but now she has been personally hurt by Jesus in losing her baby. She then thinks about all the horrible things Trujillo has done, and how God has allowed them to happen. When she looks at the pictures again, Jesus's and Trujillo's faces merge for an instant.

The portrait of Trujillo now becomes an important symbol, as Trujillo is explicitly linked with God, as an all-powerful, watchful figure. Patria's loss of faith echoes Minerva's loss of faith in Trujillo, and Trujillo's slogan: "God in Heaven, Trujillo on Earth" becomes especially poignant and true. The church (and God) remaining silent about El Jefe's atrocities suddenly seems like a sin.

Patria moves back in with Pedrito, and his strange, sexually aggressive grief for their child helps her put aside her own troubles. One night Pedrito leaves and Patria follows him and watches him dig a little grave. She worries that he has done something to their child's body, so she has the coffin exhumed. The child is still there, but Patria is horrified to see it decomposing and insect-ridden. Afterward Patria keeps up her façade of religion, and "fooled them all."

Patria keeps slipping deeper into despair, losing the things that seemed most sure, but she keeps up her outward appearance of faith. With this intimate portrait we see how flat the mythologies of the sisters actually are when they are seen solely as revolutionary heroes, with Patria as "the religious one", rather than as the complicated, conflicted people they actually were.

Mamá decides that the family should go on a pilgrimage to a town where there have been visions of the Virgin Mary lately, so they can pray to the Virgin for help. Papá stays behind, and Patria wonders what caused her mother to want to leave home and take this trip. The sisters and their mother tease each other and discuss the old war with the "Yanquis" (Americans). Mamá says that all men are scoundrels, and then she quietly adds "your father, too."

We see the first hints of the trouble between Mamá and Papá here. The family discusses the turmoil in the Dominican Republic before Trujillo, when the United States occupied the country and set up a government with their own interests in mind.

The town is full of pilgrims, and the family can't find a room so they stay with some distant relations. As they pray to the Virgin that night, Patria asks Mamá if Papá has "another woman," and Mamá doesn't deny it. Mamá laments that the Virgin has forsaken her, and Patria affirms that she, at least, is present.

The sinister misogyny of the Trujillo regime doesn't come out of nowhere – Dominican society is very "macho" at this point, with men loudly asserting their masculinity and objectifying women.

The next morning the Mirabals set out for the small chapel where the Virgin was sighted. Patria sees the portrait of the Virgin and thinks that it looks gaudy and cheap, but when she turns around and sees the devoted masses her faith stirs. She asks "where are you?" to the Virgin, and she hears a voice in response, saying "I'm here, all around you."

The Virgin Mary, or the "Virgencita," becomes a more sympathetic character to Patria than Jesus. She seems less strict, is a loving mother, and is a woman. When she hears this voice, Patria's faith is restored.

CHAPTER 5: DEDÉ, 1994 AND 1948

Back in 1994, Dedé keeps talking to the interview woman and thinks about Fela, who was the Mirabals' old servant. Recently Fela had claimed to be possessed by the spirits of the dead sisters, and she set up a shrine to them in the shed behind Dedé's house. People came from far away to consult the sisters.

We see just how mythologized the sisters have become since their deaths, as they are now almost godlike figures to be consulted from beyond the grave.

Dedé hadn't known about this until her Bishop told her. She snuck into the shed, saw the evidence, and then demanded that Fela stop it. Fela then set up her shrine down the road. Minou now consults her to "talk" to her mother, Minerva. Recently Minou had mentioned Minerva's old friend Virgilio Morales. Dedé knows where he lives, but she hasn't been to see him. Dedé tries to shame Minou about talking to spirits, but Minou angrily says that she wants to be her own person, not "the daughter of a legend."

Minou is Minerva's daughter, and is also a real person who is currently a Dominican politician and professor. Minou has her mother's desire for freedom, but in this case it is freedom from Minerva's larger-than-life legacy.

The narrative returns to the interview, but Dedé is distracted by thoughts of Virgilio Morales, or "Lío." Dedé mentions him to the interview woman, but she has never heard of him. He was a radical young man who was often thrown out of the country. The woman implies that he was Minerva's "special friend," but Dedé defensively says that he was her friend too. She recognizes that she is still "fighting with her dead sister over a beau." Dedé remembers Lío, and how she imagined his eyes accusing her whenever she went along with the Trujillo regime's insanity.

These small exchanges of the present send Dedé back into her memory and set off the narrative again. Her regrets about Virgilio are linked with her regrets about not helping her sisters, as both involve her fear and unwillingness to act, to cause trouble.

The story then jumps to 1948 in Dedé's memory. Dedé and Minerva are at their father's store, counting up an inventory. Dedé is always very precise in her counting, but today she is excited because they are about to go to their uncle's house and her cousin Jaimito will be there. Dedé and Jaimito have been jokingly paired up since childhood, but now she finds herself actually attracted to him. She is also pleased that if she marries Jaimito, her life will continue on happily in the same way she is used to.

Dedé's nickname is Miss Sonrisa, "Miss Smile," as she is always putting on a happy face and accommodating everyone. She doesn't feel an especially strong passion for Jaimito, but marrying him will cause no trouble and please everyone, including (she thinks) herself.

Suddenly two men appear – Mario, one of the distributors for the store, and with him is an intellectual-looking young man. He is introduced as Virgilio Morales, a student at the university. Minerva immediately engages him in conversation (they both know Elsa and Sinita, who are at the university now), but Dedé tries to put herself forward too. Mario tries to flirt with her, but she rebuffs him.

Minerva's forwardness and Dedé's submissiveness first show themselves in this romantic situation before they play out in the sisters' politics. They are both struck by Virgilio, but Minerva naturally strikes up a conversation with him.

Minerva suggests that they all go play volleyball and then go swimming. First she has to convince Papá to grant his permission, but he relents. They all get into the car and Dedé notices how she naturally stands back while Minerva slips in to sit next to Lío.

Dedé recognizes her own accommodating nature now that she has something she really wants – but she still hangs back and lets Minerva step forward.

A few weeks later Dedé joins the group playing volleyball again, and this time she plays. This is unusual, as she considers "sports – like politics – something for men." Dedé joins Jaimito's team, while on the other side Lío and Minerva are talking intently. They then shift teams so that it is women against men. Night falls, and Dedé notices that Minerva has disappeared. She (possibly) purposefully knocks a ball into the nearby hedges, surprising Minerva and Lío who were hidden in the hedges.

As one of the most submissive and conventional of the sisters, Dedé also sticks to the patriarchal standards of her society and decides to not "dirty" herself with politics or sports. From Dedé's perspective these scenes are all about romance, but at the same time Minerva and Virgilio are also discussing dangerous, subversive ideas.

There is then a brief quarrel between Jaimito and Lío, in which Lío criticizes Trujillo and Jaimito accuses Lío of abandoning his comrades whenever he flees the country. There is an uneasy silence when Lío mentions the regime, but finally the two men shake hands. Lío tells Jaimito that his cause "could use men like you." In the present day, Dedé wonders why this brief fight seems so important in her memory.

This quarrel is important because it is a clash between the two most important men in Dedé's life (other than Papá). Dedé's choice of Jaimito over Virgilio is inextricably linked with her choice to remain uninvolved with her sisters' resistance movement.

Dedé returns to her memories of Virgilio, and she remembers how Mamá always complimented him and talked about politics with him. Dedé was slightly resentful that Mamá never complimented Jaimito in this way. Dedé and Jaimito are a couple now, and they often sneak off to kiss. One day María Teresa is reading the newspaper to Mamá (who still pretends that her eyesight is bad, instead of admitting that she can't read) and there is a list of Communist protesters at the university. Virgilio's name is among them.

Dedé is still in the small world of her own romantic sphere, but with the newspaper the wider world of politics comes creeping in. Virgilio is not just a handsome intellectual whom Dedé is afraid to love – he is also a Communist and "enemy of state" to the Trujillo regime. The beginning of Mamá's slow shift in her positions and ideas is visible here.

Mamá gets angry at Minerva for this, and Minerva points out that Mamá had agreed with Virgilio's ideas before she knew they were Communist. Dedé realizes that she has never thought of Lío as a subversive Communist, but only as a kind, high-minded young man. Dedé then realizes that Lío and Minerva are both "enemies of state," and she suddenly understands what Minerva has been saying – that they are all living in a "police state."

There is now a personal conflict between Trujillo's propaganda and Dedé and Mamá's personal experience. They know that Minerva and Virgilio are good people as well as "enemies of state," but the propaganda portrays all Communists and protestors as evil and traitorous.

After that Dedé starts paying closer attention to the newspapers. She decides to provide Minerva with an alibi when she is meeting Lío. Minerva "chaperones" Dedé and Jaimito when they go out, and on the way they pick up Lío. After these outings Dedé excitedly wants to talk to Minerva about their suitors. Minerva claims that she isn't in love with Lío, but that they are "comrades in a struggle" instead. Dedé is doubtful of this.

Virgilio is associated with resistance against Trujillo in Dedé's mind, as she had never paid attention to politics before she became interested in Lío. Minerva's feelings for Lío don't seem to be as strong as Dedé's, but Minerva is living in a different world from Dedé at this point, focusing on rebellion more than romance.

Soon Dedé feels her courage unraveling, and she asks Lío what his practical goals are. Lío lectures her on ideals, but offers few immediate, concrete solutions. Dedé asks him where he gets his courage, and Lío says that it isn't courage, it's only common sense.

Lío has a chance to really convince Dedé to join his struggle, but she isn't swayed by his idealistic arguments. Her "common sense" is always to not make trouble.

Lío's name starts to appear more in the papers, as the Communist Party is outlawed and slandered as "a party for homosexuals and criminals." One day the police come to the Mirabal house asking for Lío, but Mamá (truthfully) says she hasn't seen him in months. Dedé gets more frightened and feels her sense of order being upended. She even doubts whether she should marry Jaimito.

Virgilio has only been meeting Minerva in secret ever since Mamá learned that he was a Communist. Dedé's sense of political order is connected to her romantic life – she worries that if she can love a rebel, then maybe she shouldn't be marrying her cousin and continuing her domestic life.

Dedé decides to stop reading the newspaper, as the regime has been passing especially ludicrous regulations lately. Jaimito thinks the rules are reasonable and tries to explain them to Dedé. Dedé knows that they are wrong, but she purposefully closes her eyes and hopes for the best. Soon afterward Lío decides to go into exile. Jaimito says that he should try to compromise instead, but Dedé defends him. She admires Lío for his courage, but accepts that she is not "grand and brave" as she wishes she was.

We see another conflict between Virgilio and Jaimito, as Jaimito defends the regime's absurd laws. Dedé has now educated herself about the political situation, but she makes the conscious decision to do nothing and ignore the news. This is the great difference between her and the other sisters. She wants to be like them, but she is simply too afraid.

Dedé remembers the night that Lío goes into hiding. They had all just come from a meeting of the Dominican Party – the only legal political party at the time, which they attended as a pacifying show of support for Trujillo. After the meeting Jaimito asks Minerva if Lío has asked her to go into hiding with him. Minerva says he hasn't, and again she denies being in love with Lío.

Soon after seizing power, Trujillo made any opposing political party illegal. People could even be discriminated against for not actively joining Trujillo's Dominican Party. Jaimito seems to feel threatened by Virgilio – Jaimito is a "macho" in the outward, bossy sense, but he doesn't risk his life like Virgilio does.

After Minerva leaves, Dedé and Jaimito sneak out to the car and Jaimito proposes to her. Just then they hear a cough, and discover that Lío is hiding in the back seat. Lío nervously apologizes, saying that he is in great danger, and he gives Dedé a note to deliver to Minerva. Jaimito gets angry, but Dedé convinces him to leave the car with her. She accepts his marriage proposal almost offhandedly, and then he drives away.

Jaimito's proposal is significantly anticlimactic for Dedé. She is focused much more on Virgilio, but in the end she settles for Jaimito, not wanting to make trouble. This decision has far-reaching effects, as it sets the standard for her future attempts (or lack thereof) at courage and independence.

Dedé then goes inside and reads Lío's letter, which is inviting Minerva to go into hiding with him. Dedé tells herself that she cannot expose her sister to such danger, especially if Minerva actually doesn't love Lío, so she burns the letter.

This is just like Dedé knocking the volleyball to expose Virgilio and Minerva in the hedges. Dedé is clearly very jealous of her sister, but she never lets herself confront or express her feelings, and so they work themselves out in these passive-aggressive acts.

CHAPTER 6: MINERVA, 1949

(What do you want, Minerva Mirabal?: Summer) Minerva narrates again, and she describes how she never paid much attention to boys as a young adult. She is stuck at home for three years after graduating from convent school, and jealously watches Elsa and Sinita go off to the university in the capital. Whenever she gets one of their letters she restlessly drives around in the family Jeep.

In contrast to Dedé's romantic woes, Minerva has trouble focusing on romance at all. She is forced to return to her "rabbit cage" after the convent school, as Papá is unwilling to let her go off to study law.

One afternoon while she is driving around, Minerva sees Papá's car parked outside of a *campesino*'s house. Minerva starts driving back by this house occasionally, and sometimes four little girls run out into the driveway and beg for mints from her. Minerva notes that they have "Mirabal eyes," and she asks them who their father is. They go silent. She asks if they have a brother, and Minerva feels "delicious revenge" when they say no. Their mother comes out and eyes Minerva warily before she drives off.

The discovery of Papá's sin is like the discovery of Trujillo's true nature (though less drastic), as Alvarez shows how Dominican children saw Trujillo as a flawless father-figure. In the same way the sisters idealized Papá until moments like this. In the patriarchal Dominican society, sons were more valuable than daughters, so Minerva feels glad that Papá failed to have a son even with his mistress.

Minerva says that she didn't know what she wanted during those years at home, and she felt like she was asleep. When she met Lío it was like waking up. She tried to decide which was more important – revolution or romance – but deep down she desired both. She wasn't in love with Lío, but she was still hurt when he left without saying goodbye.

For Dedé, Virgilio was a life-changing romance, but for Minerva he is someone to share her revolutionary ideas while she is trapped at home. They are clearly romantically involved as well, but it seems that Virgilio's feelings were stronger than Minerva's.

One day Minerva picks the lock of Papá's armoire while he is away. Inside she finds four letters addressed to her from Lío. She reads them eagerly, and he mentions his invitation to seek asylum with him. By the fourth letter he accepts that Minerva has denied his proposal. Minerva feels that she has missed a great opportunity, and that her life would have been "nobler" with Lío. She suddenly grows angry at Papá, blaming him for everything.

Minerva compares her life trapped at home, unable to affect any real change, with the glamorous life of a political outlaw, and she gets especially angry. Dedé also tried to "protect" Minerva by burning Virgilio's letter, but protection through ignorance is another kind of cage.

Minerva purposefully leaves the armoire door open, and then she drives off and finds Papá at his mistress's house. Minerva honks the horn until he comes out and sees her, and then she drives back home. When Papá returns that night, he calls her outside and suddenly hits her in the face. Minerva says "you've lost my respect" in a commanding voice, and she sees Papá's shoulders droop. She suddenly realizes that he is the weakest one in the whole family, and he needs their love. Papá apologizes, but pretends his apology pertains only to hiding Virgilio's letters. Minerva lets the fiction stand.

Minerva discovers that she is strongest in the face of immediate adversity, so she has no problem standing up to Papá and overcoming his will with her own. Papá's machismo and desire to control his daughters cannot stand up to Minerva's actual courage. Minerva recognizes that a certain façade is necessary for her to live peacefully at home, so for once she compromises.

Later Papá gets invited to a party thrown by Trujillo himself, and there is a special request that Minerva appear as well. Mamá is frightened by this, as she worries that Trujillo now desires Minerva. She agrees to let Minerva attend if Patria, Dedé, Pedrito, and Jaimito all go too. María Teresa cries and wants to go, but Minerva promises to bring her back a souvenir. At the last party she attended, Minerva brought her back a paper fan with **Trujillo's face** on one side and the Virgin on the other. Minerva kept making María Teresa turn the fan around, as Minerva couldn't stand either face depending on her mood.

Alvarez doesn't give many of Minerva's internal reactions to this invitation, which suggests that Minerva is in danger of becoming another Lina Lovatón – although Minerva would never actually fall in love with Trujillo. On the paper fan Trujillo is again associated with a religious figure, though this time it is the Virgin. Minerva has lost her religious faith as well as her respect for Trujillo, so she dislikes both images.

A week before the party, Minerva invites herself along when Papá is running "errands." He promises he isn't involved with the woman anymore, but only goes to see his children. Minerva says she wants to meet them, and he is clearly moved. He agrees to take her, and he introduces Minerva to the little girls. They and their mother now live in a new house in a nicer neighborhood. The oldest, Margarita, is ten.

Papá's illegitimate daughters are foils to the Mirabal sisters – what might have happened if they were denied all their privileges and stability. Minerva—the revolutionary who sees so much wrong with the normal social order of the Dominican Republic—is the only daughter to immediately accept her illegitimate half-sisters as real family.

On the drive back home Minerva asks Papá why he first cheated, and he responds with "things a man does." He then asks Minerva why she wanted to meet his mistress and other children, and Minerva responds with "things a woman does." Suddenly she feels her "woman's eyes" open, and on the way home she starts noticing attractive men everywhere.

There is still that easy security of the patriarchy, where Papá can defend his sins as "just being a man," but Minerva turns this excuse on its head and uses it for her own empowerment.

(Discovery Day Dance: October 12) On the day of Trujillo's party the family is an hour late, as they get lost and Jaimito (who is driving) doesn't want to ask for directions. They are afraid that their lateness will make Trujillo angry. It is raining hard, and Minerva has a theory that the old Mayan storm god always "acts up" around Discovery Day (the occasion for the party), which celebrates the *conquistador* Columbus.

Part of Trujillo's policy was the elevation of whiteness over blackness (most Dominicans are mixed-race), and it is especially telling that he has such a love for Columbus – the European who "discovered" the Caribbean and helped kill all its native inhabitants.

The family reaches the mansion's entrance and are greeted by Manuel de Moya, Trujillo's "secretary of state" whose real job is finding pretty girls for El Jefe. Luckily Trujillo is late as well, so the Mirabals are escorted inside without incident. Everyone sits down, but Manuel tells Minerva that she has been invited to sit at El Jefe's table. Dedé silently reminds Minerva not to drink anything she is offered, as there have been stories of young women being drugged and then raped by Trujillo. Then Trujillo enters, and Minerva raises her glass in a "reckless toast."

Minerva now begins her second personal confrontation with Trujillo, but this time she feels braver. Manuel de Moya is technically the secretary of state, but he is really the official procurer of women for Trujillo – a more explicit example of how the regime objectifies women.

Trujillo immediately receives a new medal from the Spanish ambassador. Minerva thinks of the rumor that as a child, El Jefe put bottle caps across his chest to look like medals. Everyone finally sits down to eat, but Trujillo doesn't sit next to Minerva. Once Minerva drops her napkin, and under the table she sees Trujillo fondling a senator's wife's leg.

Among Trujillo's detractors his nickname is "bottlecaps" because of his love of decorating himself with medals. It is almost farcical how corrupt the dictator is.

After dinner there is dancing, and Minerva can't help feeling disappointed that Trujillo doesn't invite her for his first dance. She reminds herself of Lío's warning, that "this regime is seductive," as evidenced by a whole country being seduced by "this little man." Manuel de Moya invites her to dance, and she refuses a few times but finally accepts.

One of the intriguing things Alvarez explores is how a country allows itself to be ruled by one corrupt man. Minerva doesn't want to dance with Trujillo because she is attracted to him – she wants to be important, a worthy rival.

Don Manuel is a good dancer, and Minerva suddenly finds herself led over to Trujillo. He takes her hand and Minerva gets very nervous. They start to dance and Trujillo tries to flirt with her. Minerva talks back, feeling "a dangerous sense of my own power growing." She mentions her desire to go to law school, and Trujillo indulgently says "a woman like you, a lawyer?" Minerva flatters him, but then says that she isn't interested in admirers until she has her law degree.

At first Minerva is nervous like she was for the school performance, but in the face of immediate adversity she grows strong and reckless again. When they are dancing Trujillo seems like a little man, able to be defeated, instead of like the pervasive "devil" who rules the country. Minerva plays Trujillo's power against Papá, trying to manipulate him into letting her go to law school.

Trujillo gets cross and says that women don't belong at the university these days, as it is full of "communists and agitators." Minerva accidentally lets Virgilio's name slip, and Trujillo gets suspicious. Minerva lies and says she doesn't know Virgilio personally. She feels ashamed for giving in on this "little thing," and sees how this leads to giving in on big things.

Minerva is ashamed to compromise even a little truth to Trujillo, as this makes her feel like one of his "creatures," lying to him and flattering him and allowing him to stay in power. Trujillo voices more sexist ideas.

Trujillo returns to his flirtatious mood, and he starts pulling Minerva towards him aggressively. He thrusts at her "in a vulgar way" and Minerva slaps him. At that moment it starts to rain and everyone is distracted. Few people seem to have seen the slap, and Trujillo smirks at Minerva. They move the party indoors, and Jaimito and Pedrito decide to take this opportunity to leave, now that Trujillo's intentions for Minerva are clear. As they leave Minerva notices that she left her purse behind, and too late she remembers that Virgilio's letters are inside.

Trujillo indulges Minerva for a while but then reminds her that he has total power over her and all her loved ones. Minerva strikes back, but she hasn't really changed anything except to make Trujillo notice her more. Something like this event did really occur with the historical Minerva, and the Mirabals' decision to leave the party early is what began their real troubles.

(Rainy Spell) The next morning it is still raining hard. An official shows up at the Mirabal house and says that leaving a gathering before Trujillo is against the law. Papá immediately goes off to send a telegram of apology. When he returns he looks distraught, but won't say why. There is no more trouble for the rest of the day.

This is an example of one of the absurd laws the regime keeps passing. Papá is trying to protect his family, but he also immediately submits to Trujillo.

The next morning two guards drive up and demand that Papá and Minerva come with them. They take the family to the governor's palace, where the governor informs Papá that he will be taken to the palace for questioning. Papá looks terrified, and he bids farewell to his family, whispering to Minerva to send money to his other daughters. After Papá is taken away, the governor informs Minerva that there is a way she can help her father.

This is another way Trujillo gets to the women he wants. If he can't seduce them as he did with Lina, he can drug them and rape them, or else threaten their families, like arresting Papá. There is a creepy contrast between the politeness and gentility of the governor and the brutality and torture that he represents.

The next scene is Mamá angrily condemning the governor's proposition. Minerva drops her off and then goes to see Papá's mistress. She finds Margarita first, and discovers that she is illiterate. Minerva then makes the mother (whose name is Carmen) promise to enroll her daughters in school. Minerva hugs Carmen.

This is another step on Mamá's road to disillusionment with the regime and her old ideas. Minerva's first response to this explicit objectification of women is to make sure the next generation will be better off.

Minerva and Mamá later drive to the capital to appeal on Papá's behalf. They discover that he has no official charge against him, but also that he isn't registered anywhere. They book a room for a week. The next day Minerva waits in different offices of the National Police Headquarters. She ends up having to report the "disappearance" of Papá. Minerva helps the old man in front of her in line, who has thirteen sons, all with the same name (to make the regime harder to pin a crime on one), but by the time it is Minerva's turn the day is over. The official flirts with her but tells her to come back tomorrow.

The great danger for prisoners like Papá is being "disappeared" – the government killing him and pretending like they never even saw him, instead of formally charging and executing him. Minerva cannot help taking on other people's fights as well as her own, as she sees them as all as part of one struggle against the unjust regime.

The next morning armed guards wake up Minerva and take her away for questioning. She is returned to Police Headquarters, where she is met by General Federico Fiallo and a one-eyed, toadlike man named Don Anselmo Paulino, who is nicknamed "Magic Eye." He is Trujillo's right-hand man in "security" work.

"Magic Eye" (or "Glass Eye") is also a historical figure. He was Trujillo's second-in-command until Trujillo suspected that he would try to overthrow him, so he imprisoned Magic Eye.

The general speaks kindly to Minerva, but then brings out Lío's letters from her purse. Minerva admits that she knows Lío, and Magic Eye accuses her of lying to Trujillo. Minerva apologizes and swears that she is not currently communicating with Lío. Magic Eye seems satisfied and leaves.

For now the regime treats Minerva leniently, assuming that she is not a threat because she is a woman. The regime's sexism comes back to haunt it.

Manuel de Moya then enters and makes small talk with the general and Minerva. He repeats the governor's offer, that Minerva could "end all this nonsense" with a "private conference with El Jefe." Minerva says she would rather jump out the window. Manuel de Moya looks exasperated, and the general says that Minerva is as complicated as El Jefe is.

Minerva now stops compromising and asserts herself boldly against the regime. The general's comment brings up an idea that will return: that of Trujillo and Minerva as opposites and equals, worthy rivals of each other.

Mamá and Minerva are basically imprisoned after this, as they aren't allowed to leave their hotel. Three weeks later they have an appointment with Trujillo. Just before, Papá is released from prison and the prison hospital – he had a heart attack soon after he was arrested. Papá looks thin and disturbed, and he rambles madly about the past.

It is unclear whether Papá was tortured, or if his addled state is from his heart attack and a constant state of terror. Minerva doesn't give in to the pressure and compromise herself.

The family then enters their meeting with Trujillo. On his desk is a set of scales, with dice in each tray. Manuel reads aloud the letter of apology signed by the Mirabal family, and Trujillo mentions Chiche Reyes, who is Mamá's uncle and a friend of Trujillo's. Trujillo picks up his dice and says that Chiche made them for him out of a piece of Columbus's bone.

The Mirabals are lucky to have Chiche Reyes, or else they might have been in more trouble earlier. Trujillo again shows his love of Columbus, the genocidal conqueror and "discoverer." The dice are loaded, just as Trujillo's sense of justice is skewed.

Trujillo requests that Minerva "check in" every week with the governor, and Minerva responds by reminding him of her desire to attend law school. Trujillo suggests that they toss the dice and bet his own desire against Minerva's. Minerva agrees, as she has observed that the dice are loaded. She rolls a double, but then Trujillo does as well. Minerva agrees to call it even if neither of them get their wish. Trujillo dismisses the family, and Minerva imagines the scales containing her own will evenly balanced against Trujillo's.

Alvarez now explicitly states the idea of Minerva's will evenly poised against Trujillo's. The two will not interact personally again, but after this Minerva will start building up real power and a resistance movement. Minerva again shows courage and steadiness in the face of terror and adversity.

It starts raining again as they leave the capital. Dedé and Jaimito have been trying to start a new restaurant business, so they stay on in the capital, but the rest of the family drives home. It is downpouring on every corner of the island. Minerva feels fatalistic, like "something has started none of us can stop."

Dedé and Jaimito try and fail to start several businesses during their marriage. The storm feels somehow unifying, as it covers the entire island, but it also reminds Minerva of the inevitable repercussions of her actions.

CHAPTER 7: MARÍA TERESA, 1953 TO 1958

(1953) The narrative returns to a diary from María Teresa, whose nickname is "Mate." Papá has recently died, and Mate is angry that his mistress and illegitimate daughters were at the funeral too. She can't believe that Minerva invited them. Mate declares that she hates all men. Mate writes about her mourning for Papá, and about a dream she keeps having where she is getting ready to be married. She can't find her wedding dress, so she looks in Papá's coffin. The wedding dress is torn up inside, and she removes all the pieces to find Papá smiling at her underneath. She wakes up screaming.

All the sisters except for Minerva are initially wary of their half-sisters, even to the point of scorning and hating them. Mate has this rather Freudian dream often, with different men she thinks of romantically in the place of Papá. At this point Mate claims to hate men, but she is still a romantic at heart and longs to fall in love. At the same time, the dream indicates the ways that she is trapped by men.

Mate starts consulting Fela about her future, asking about boyfriends. She is mostly trying to decide between her cousins Berto and Raúl. Mate then writes out a letter she and Mamá wrote informing Trujillo of Papá's death and thanking him for his "beneficent protection." Mate reveals that Minerva is in law school now. She got in after Mate wrote a speech for her to recite complimenting El Jefe.

Mate immediately returns to asking about boyfriends. Minerva never comments on how she compromised her ideals and flattered Trujillo for the sake of getting into law school. The historical Minerva also had to write a groveling letter to Trujillo to continue in her second year of school.

Mate asks Fela about casting spells on people, and learns to put the person's name in your left shoe to curse them, and in the right shoe for "problems with someone you love." She puts Trujillo's name in her left shoe and Papá's in her right. Mate writes down some love poetry and discusses it with Minerva, who suggests that "serious ambitions of the mind" are more important than love.

Even decades before, Fela was acting as a superstitious spiritual guide to the girls. Mate clearly had a complicated relationship with Papá, as she is both angry at him for his infidelity and devastated by his death. Minerva again chooses revolution over romance.

(1954) María Teresa confesses that she kissed Berto on the lips for the first time. She talks to Minerva about it, and Minerva says she has met a special man at law school. He is engaged to someone else, which Mate is suspicious of because of Papá. Minerva starts listening to illegal radio stations and quoting speeches from Fidel Castro. Mate hopes that she will "settle down" if she gets married. Mate declares that she wants everyone to be kind, but she would never "take up a gun and force people to give up being mean."

Berto and Raúl are Mate's young crushes, and she is still focused on romance even regarding Minerva. Mate's declaration is ironic considering her later involvement in the violent revolution, and how she herself doesn't "settle down." Minerva and her comrades are heavily influenced by Castro's revolution in Cuba.

A few weeks later Minerva comes home with her boyfriend Manolo (who has broken off his engagement). Mate has been teaching Mamá to read. She mentions that the family has lost a lot of money since Papá got in trouble with Trujillo, and says that Dedé and Jaimito have tried and failed at running two businesses.

Manolo is another historical revolutionary figure who becomes the president of Minerva's underground movement. The regime affects everything, even business success, as people are afraid to deal with someone in trouble with Trujillo.

Mate writes out the menu of what she is making for the Day of Lovers (Valentine's Day) menu. Minerva and Manolo arrive. Mate likes Manolo because he likes her food, and he is also tall and handsome. Mamá says that she is moving to a smaller house, so Dedé and Jaimito can have the family house.

Mate remains preoccupied with love and isn't interested in politics yet. This is when Dedé moves into the house she will occupy for the rest of her life, the house that will become a monument to the butterflies.

Mate describes her perfect man. Soon afterward she has the same dream she had about Papá, but with Manolo's face in the coffin instead. She starts to worry about Manolo cheating on Minerva because of this. Mate talks to her priest about this, and he warns her to not "see every man as a potential serpent."

Mate's initial inner conflict is about her feelings towards men – she distrusts them and often dislikes them because of Papá's infidelity, but she also idealized them and wants to be swept off her feet by a man and get married.

A few months later it is Mate's graduation party, and her aunt confronts her there, telling her to choose between Berto and Raúl. Mate blurts out that she wants neither. Later she writes out the gifts she got from different people, including a book of poetry from Minerva. Mate declares that she is going to the university with Minerva in the fall, and she has gotten all her inheritance from Mamá, which she plans to use on clothes and save for her future.

Mate is very different from Minerva, but she looks up to her more than to her other older sisters, so Mate becomes affected by Minerva's politics sooner than the others. Minerva and Mate share a love of poetry, though Mate as usual leans more towards love poems.

Mate says that the Mirabals have recently discovered that their yardboy is on "double payroll," being paid to spy on the Mirabals while he works for them. Mate has a brief relationship with a lawyer, but breaks up with him before she goes off to the university. She writes extensively about her outfits for classes.

In Mate's entries Alvarez juxtaposes the political with the personal, placing paid spies next to lists of outfits. The Mirabals are now a family being constantly watched by the regime.

Mate makes it to the capital and is excited about the big city. She says all the streets are named after members of Trujillo's family. She describes a section of the newspaper where people getting in trouble are mentioned, but she says that the Mirabals have been fine with the regime since Minerva's speech and Mamá's letter. Mate describes the first day of class. All the students have to march and raise their right arms to salute. This reminds her of Hitler and "the Italian one with the name that sounds like fettuccine."

Trujillo considered the whole country to be his private property, and he renamed things after himself and his family members – including the capital, which became "Trujillo City." Alvarez now explicitly links the Trujillo regime to Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy, both dictators who caused untold deaths.

Mate tries to study law like Minerva, but then gives it up and takes "Philosophy and Letters" instead. Mate goes walking with Manolo and Minerva and a friend of theirs, Armando. She is frightened because Manolo jokes aloud about Trujillo killing people, but soon she becomes infatuated with Armando and kisses him. That night she has her same nightmare, but it is Armando's face in the coffin.

Mate is trying to follow in Minerva's footsteps, but she is still more concerned with romance (as with Armando) than with revolution (as with Manolo and Minerva). Mate seems doomed to associate every man she likes with her father.

(1955) More than a year has passed since the last entry. It is Minerva's wedding day, and she is marrying Manolo. Minerva is very happy, but Mate is slightly sad because Minerva is moving out to live with Manolo. All the sisters are married now except for Mate.

With Manolo, Minerva has finally combined love and revolution. Mate is closest to Minerva, and saddened that she is now moving away.

A month later Mate vaguely describes a march for the World's Fair opening ceremony at the capital. Minerva participates even though she is now pregnant. Mate describes Angelita, Trujillo's daughter, who presides over the ceremonies dressed in fur and jewels. Mate pities Angelita and wonders if she knows how bad her father is. She wonders if Angelita thinks (like Mate once did with Papá) that her father is God.

This was an international world fair held to honor Trujillo's twenty-fifth year of rule, where Trujillo's daughter was crowned "Queen Angelita" and wore an outrageously expensive dress. Alvarez makes more connections between a dictator, a father, and a god.

(1956) Many months later Mate is writing a speech accepting her award as "Miss University." Minerva's baby Minou is crying in the background. Minerva makes sure that Mate mentions "you-know-who" early on in her speech. Mate says that recently a former professor at the university had been killed in New York for writing a book against Trujillo. Mate thinks the "Miss University" contest is stupid, but Minerva says that silly votes like this are the only remnant of democracy left in the country.

Mate's infrequent diary use seems to coincide with her maturation as a woman. Again she represents the coincidence of politics and femininity. The regime fears any kind of democracy, so the only kinds of votes left are for meaningless contests like this. Mate now seems more aware of the political situation.

(1957) More than a year later Mate is feeling lonely, as Minerva is about to graduate and move to Monte Cristi with Manolo. The next day Minerva gets her degree, and the whole extended family gathers for the occasion. They are all shocked when Minerva is then denied the license to practice. They realize that this is Trujillo's revenge against Minerva, allowing her to study for years and then giving her a useless degree. Manolo is furious on her behalf, but Mate senses that there is trouble between the couple.

Once again Trujillo asserts his power over Minerva even as she tries to gain independence and power of her own. This is an especially petty way of hurting her though, by ruining her graduation day and reminding her of his control over every aspect of Dominican life.

The next day Minerva and Manolo decide to take Mate with them to their new house. The drive is tense, and Manolo and Minerva whisper things in code to each other. When they reach the house Mate is shocked at how small and cheap it looks, but she acts excited. Mate draws a diagram of the house and yard.

Mate is still very materialistic and used to the family's former wealth, so she is especially shocked by how sparsely Minerva lives now.

A few days pass with Manolo and Minerva arguing often and Manolo disappearing for long periods. One night Minerva starts crying, and admits that Manolo is cheating on her. Mate affirms to herself that she hates men. A few days later Minerva and Manolo are "on the mend" though. Sometimes they slip off to go to secret meetings in the storage shed.

Minerva is now fully taking action with a real revolutionary group, but she is still plagued by romantic woes at the same time. Mate's dream and worries about Manolo seem fulfilled, and we see another example of men treating women badly.

A few weeks later Mate writes an excited entry. She was sleeping restlessly, having her same nightmare with all the men she'd ever known appearing in the coffin. She is then awakened by a quiet knock on the window. It is a handsome young man saying he has a delivery for Mate's older sister "Mariposa." Mate silently helps him carry in his long box and hide it under her bed. The young man asks her if she is "one of us," and she decides then that she wants to be. After he leaves Mate opens the box and finds "enough guns to start a revolution."

This is the first mention of Mariposa, which means "Butterfly," and it starts out as Minerva's code name in her movement. It is fitting that Mate is brought into the revolution through romance, as she literally falls in love with part of the movement. Minerva's idealistic talk is finally materializing in real weaponry.

The next morning Mate returns to school, but on the way she talks to Minerva and Manolo about their movement. They explain the national underground forming, which they are leaders of. Minerva's code name is Mariposa (Butterfly). They have code names for everything – Trujillo is "the goat," and the "picnic" is his overthrow. The young man from the night before is an engineer called Palomino. Mate tells Minerva that she wants to join.

"The Goat" became a common name for Trujillo among his enemies. Minerva's role in the underground was especially unique for her time and place, as women were hardly ever involved in politics, war, or leadership in the patriarchal Dominican society. Mate now becomes the second sister to fight against Trujillo.

A few weeks later Mate is back at school, but she has lost interest in her studies. She is now "Mariposa #2," and secretly working for the underground movement. She has moved into a little apartment with Sonia, another student in the movement, and they get deliveries from Palomino. Mate thinks the neighbors must think they're running a brothel because of the men always going in and out.

This is the beginning of the "butterflies," when the sisters start to symbolize something more than just themselves – a combination of delicacy and danger, of innocent girls driven to revolution in the name of justice.

The next day Mate turns twenty-two, and she spends the day building bombs. She recreates the diagram for the bomb in her diary. A few days later her landlady comes by uninvited, and Mate and Sonia forget to hide the diagrams of the bombs. They worry about the landlady reporting them, but assume that she thinks they are prostitutes, not revolutionaries.

It wasn't so long ago that Mate was saying she could never use force in the name of kindness. She still has her romantic, emotional soul but is now turning her energy to the business of violent revolution.

Palomino starts coming around more to talk to Mate. The landlady thinks he is the pimp of their operation. One day Palomino kisses Mate, and she feels that she is "deeply in love." Two day later she learns Palomino's real name – Leandro Guzmán Rodríguez. Mate says that she has to move out soon, as there have been many raids in the area.

Like Minerva with Manolo, in Leandro Mate finds a union of revolution and romance. Mate still writes in a naïve voice, so it is surprising to be reminded of the great danger she has put herself in.

Two weeks pass without Palomino coming as expected, and Sonia is out of town so Mate is alone. She still has to accept all the deliveries and stockpile the weapons, but she starts feeling very nervous and cowardly.

Mate has done the important thing – making the active choice to fight Trujillo – but she doesn't have Minerva's enduring courage in the face of adversity.

The next morning Leandro arrives and Mate is so relieved that she kisses him in the street. Leandro says he has been too worried about her to focus on his work. Mate feels sympathizes with this – she admits that love is more important to her than the struggle, or is perhaps the "deeper struggle." She feels that Minerva and Manolo could give each other up for a cause, but Mate could never give up Leandro.

The two sisters both find men who are fellow revolutionaries, but they lean in two different directions in their relationships – Minerva towards revolution, and Mate towards romance.

(1958) It is the Day of Lovers, two months later, and Mate writes out the invitation for her marriage to Leandro. Part of the date announcement includes "twenty-eighth year of the Era of Trujillo." Mate ends with "Mariposa and Palomino, for now! María Teresa and Leandro, forever!"

Mate's past fantasies about the day of lovers finally find fulfillment. Her final exclamation tragically and ironically hopes for a day when they no longer have to use code names, but can just be a happy, normal couple—a day that will never come.

CHAPTER 8: PATRIA, 1959

Patria recites the Bible verse about "building your house upon a rock," and she describes her marriage at age sixteen as this rock. She is a good wife for years, and lives with Pedrito on the "rock" of his family's ancestral farm. Her sisters, by contrast, seem to live on sand. Minerva and Manolo live in a "little nothing house," while Mate and Leandro are renters. Dedé and Jaimito have lost their money in several business ventures and moved many times. Patria, on the other hand, stays on her "rock" for eighteen years.

Once again there is a drastic change in tone as the narrative shifts from one sister to another. Mate's life is full of passion and change, while Patria is steady and conventional. Here are more mentions of Dedé and Jaimito's business failures.

During that eighteenth year – 1959 – things start to get so bad with the regime that no one can ignore them. At Jaimito's urging Dedé stays out of any trouble, but Patria at least prays for better things. Her son Nelson is growing up now and possibly sleeping with an older widow.

Patria seems closest to Dedé in temperament, but external situations and Patria's religious idealism lead the two sisters to take different paths. Trujillo has now been in power for 29 years.

One night Minerva, Manolo, Leandro, and Nelson appear and wake up Patria and Pedrito. They are all drunk and celebrating Fidel Castro's victory in Cuba. Minerva starts singing the national anthem, and they celebrate until dawn. Patria and Pedrito have sex that night, and weeks later she learns that she is pregnant. She decides (as if by divine inspiration) to name the child Raúl Ernesto, after two Cuban revolutionaries.

Castro and Che Guevara overthrew the Cuban dictator Batista and set up a Communist government in Cuba (which would later grow corrupt in its own way, as well). Minerva and Manolo are clearly inspired by this victory, and even Patria is moved, as she gives her baby a quietly subversive name.

Patria is still "running scared" in her life, but now she is especially worried about Nelson, as he hangs around with Manolo and Leandro and keeps visiting Minerva and Mate. Mate now has a baby named Jacqueline, and Minerva has a new baby named Manolito. Patria decides to send Nelson to religious school in the capital, where he will feel manly but be under supervision.

Patria is first nudged towards resistance through her son Nelson, as she tries to protect him from the danger Minerva might expose him to. Most of the births of children are told from the perspective of other sisters.

It is hard to convince Pedrito to let Nelson go, as he says the best school is on the farm. Patria doesn't suggest that Nelson might not want to be a farmer, but she does say that the seminary is the safest place for young men these days. The church still refuses to "get involved in temporal matters," so Trujillo leaves it alone. The terror of his regime is now the SIM (Military Intelligence Service), headed by the brutal Johnny Abbes. Pedrito finally allows Nelson to go.

Nelson is clearly an independent spirit, and feels trapped by his "patrimonio" (inherited land). Like Minerva, he wants to leave home and join the revolution. The SIM is now Trujillo's strong arm, and the main enemies the sisters will deal with from now on. The church still stands by, passively condoning Trujillo.

At Easter Patria is frightened when Nelson mentions joining the "liberators" who are rumored to be invading from Cuba soon. Patria reminds him that God will take care of things, and she makes him promise to stay out of trouble.

Inspired by Cuba's revolution, the resistance now hopes for outside help. Patria feebly echoes the church's frightened stance, though she is starting to grow dissatisfied.

Patria goes to see Padre de Jesús, a young priest, for advice. Patria has remained religious since her vision of the Virgin, but she has noticed that Mate has given up faith like Minerva. Instead of consoling Patria, Padre de Jesús tells her that he is also lost, and doesn't know the right action to take. Patria is deeply moved by this. She prays to the Virgin, who also had to give up her little boy Jesus.

Padre de Jesús only reinforces Patria's inner turmoil, instead of offering a priest's expected advice. Patria now feels especially close to the Virgin as a fellow mother, as Patria debates giving up her son for a greater cause.

Patria gradually gets a little braver, "inching towards courage" and helping her sisters with little things. One day Minerva brings her baby Manolito and asks Patria to watch him, as Minerva will be on the road a lot. Patria tells her that she is pregnant, and tells her the name she has for the baby. Minerva recognizes this as a sign of solidarity. Patria cautiously offers her help "if there should come a time," and Minerva says "there will."

Patria's union with her sisters is gradual but steady, and she fortifies her courage with faith and motherly love. Meanwhile Minerva and Manolito's movement continues to progress in its plans.

Minerva and her group start visiting more often, and Patria lets them use her land for their meeting place. When Nelson comes home from school he is excited about the coming invasion, and Patria is excited that he will be safely back at school by the time it happens.

Patria is now putting herself in danger by allowing Minerva's group on her land, but she doesn't let them into her house yet.

A few weeks later Patria decides to take a religious retreat with Padre de Jesús and her religious group of about thirty women. Patria tries to convince Noris to go with her, but Noris wants to stay and attend parties. Patria accepts this, and she and group plan to go up to the mountain town of Constanza.

Patria continues to take her own religious path regarding political resistance. This trip will be a watershed moment for her. Noris resists her mother's religious nature.

Patria thinks of how she had written a letter to one of the priests at Nelson's school, asking him to keep Nelson safe and not let him go out. Nelson had found out about this and gotten angry, but Patria declared that she would rather have a living boy than a dead man. Patria had also talked to Mate about it, and hadn't realized how involved Mate was with the movement. She thought of how brave Mate looked, and promised to take care of Jacqueline if anything happened to her.

Patria is now starting to act more like Papá and being overprotective of Nelson. Patria is surprised to see that Mate is now a real "butterfly" along with Minerva. As the most mothering of the sisters, Patria initially takes on the responsibility of raising all the children if something goes wrong.

The rumors of the invasion make Trujillo declare a state of emergency, so Patria and her group have to delay their retreat. Eventually the invasion seems nonexistent and the state of emergency is called off, so Patria's group leaves in June. She is amazed at the beauty of the mountains, and sees some wary-looking *campesinos* watching them as they drive past. The group arrives at a cottage where they will live spartanly and pray. Patria feels a renewal of faith.

Campesinos are poor, rural farmers. In Cuba they helped Castro and the revolutionaries, but in the Dominican Republic they are still convinced by Trujillo's propaganda. Trujillo basically shuts the whole country down to protect himself from the invasion.

The fourteenth of June is the last day of Patria's retreat. She and her group are talking in the retreat house when suddenly it is rocked by explosions. Everyone falls to the ground. When the shelling ends Patria gets up and sees that part of the house is destroyed, and several of her group are injured. They bandage each other up and pray.

This is a famous date, and Patria experiences this battle and witnesses the massacre of the "invaders." They are mostly Dominican exiles returning from Cuba to fight Trujillo.

They hear gunfire and huddle in the corner. They watch men in camouflage run across the grounds towards the house, followed by the *campesinos* they saw earlier and some guards. The men in camouflage make it to the deck of the house, but then four are captured, and Patria watches the face of a young man Noris's age as he is shot and dies.

All of the "invaders" are killed except for the four that Patria sees. The campesinos do not help their liberators, but instead fight for Trujillo despite the fact that they are oppressed by him. As a mother, the young man's death is the most devastating thing Patria can witness.

After the violence is over, Patria comes down the mountain "a changed woman." She feels like the boy she watched die was her own stillborn son of years before. The mountains are all burning and smoking, and Patria tries to look up and see God but the smoke is too thick. Patria makes herself pray as she weeps, and she tells God that she won't "sit back and watch my babies die."

The death of the young man brings back all of Patria's old hurts and loss of faith from years earlier. It is after this revelation (of an entirely different kind from hearing the Virgin's voice) that she decides to act against Trujillo, with or without the church.

Patria's family meets her on the way back, but Patria is still too traumatized to speak. The next day the papers reveal that forty-nine men were killed in the mountains. They were the first wave of the rumored invasion. A week later there are more invaders, but Trujillo's planes bomb their ships and hunt them down after they land. *Campesinos* help the guards fight the invaders.

The outside help that Minerva's group had been so excited about is brutally defeated by the regime. Trujillo had beefed up the national defense budget in preparation for this invasion.

Two months later, Patria joins Padre de Jesús and a few others for a meeting of the "Church Militant." She immediately feels an electricity in the faith of the room, "the fury of avenging angels sharpening their radiance before they strike." They are all tired of waiting for the pope and archbishop to condemn Trujillo, and they decide to take action on their own.

Patria now turns her grand religious language and high-minded ideals to an inspiring call for real action. The mild, kindly churchgoers have been transformed into ready warriors.

The group calls themselves the ACC, and they plan to create a national underground, teaching the brainwashed *campesinos* to not hunt down their liberators, and reminding them that it is a deadly sin to kill a fellow human. After the meeting Padre de Jesús asks if Patria knows others who would like to join, and Patria is sure that Minerva and her group will. Padre de Jesús comments on how much Patria has changed, and she feels like her vision is "clean at last."

Patria's new courage comes with this inspiration and anger. As with the romantic, girlish Mate, the religious, peaceful Patria seems to go against her nature in joining the fight, but she also brings her own perspective to the underground. If the underground is to be successful, however, they need civilian help like Castro had.

The next week Patria has given birth to her baby, and she comes out when Minerva and her group are having their meeting. She invites them all inside for the first time. This is dangerous because there is a recent law that if anyone is caught harboring enemies of the regime, all their property will be seized. This is Pedrito's greatest fear, as his ancestral land is the center of his life.

Patria's new baby is now truly a child of revolutionary fervor, with both his name and his arrival at the time of Patria's newfound courage. Patria is now willing to put herself in danger for Minerva's group, as she has wholly committed to their cause.

When he first learns that Patria invited Minerva's group to meet in the house, Pedrito yells at Patria for the first time in their marriage. He says that her first responsibility is to her husband, children, and home. Patria pleads with him, but then suddenly grows angry and tells Pedrito that Nelson doesn't want to become a farmer – he has already applied for the university and has joined the underground. Pedrito weeps at this, but then gives his silent assent.

Patria and Dedé start out almost on parallel tracks, but they diverge not just in their fortitude but also in their husbands. Pedrito yells, but then he subdues his pride and machismo and goes along with Patria. He shows his maturity in accepting that his son wants to follow his own path.

After that Patria's house becomes the "motherhouse of the movement." Minerva and Manolo's group merges with the ACC, and Manolo becomes president after Minerva refuses to accept the position. There are about forty members. Patria is now "Mariposa #3," and they name their group the "Fourteenth of June Movement" after the massacre in the mountains. Their mission is to "effect an internal revolution rather than wait for an outside rescue."

The butterflies are finally all united, and their famous struggle begins. The name of the movement is modeled after Castro and Che Guevara's "Twenty-sixth of July Movement." Manolo is the official president—another sign of the patriarchal hierarchy—but Minerva acts as the real driving force behind the operation, an indication that the patriarchal hierarchy cannot match her will and determination.

Patria then lists the ironies of the work going on in the house – the family's breakfast table is now used to make bombs, Nelson counts ammunition on the couch where he used to play with a wooden gun, and in the chair where Patria nursed her babies Minerva now checks the viewfinders of rifles. Noris is sent off to live with Mamá, and they use her room to hide the arsenal of weapons among her toys and perfumes. Instead of planting seeds in his land, Pedrito now buries boxes of weaponry – a new kind of farming that he can share with Nelson, "seeds of destruction" from which they hope to harvest freedom.

This passage contains the heart of Alvarez's themes – the union of innocence, delicacy, and femininity with violence and revolution, and the courage and strength of average women when faced with brutality and oppression. Things are looking hopeful for the butterflies at this point, and Minerva has now gained some real power with which to fight Trujillo.

CHAPTER 9: DEDÉ, 1994 AND 1960

Back in the present, night starts to fall, and Dedé quotes some poetry that Minerva used to recite when her husband was in jail. Dedé says that all the sisters' husbands were in jail at some point, except for Jaimito. Jaimito purposefully didn't get involved in the resistance, and Dedé chose to follow her husband unlike her other sisters. She tells the interview woman that she didn't get involved until "it was already too late."

There is another shift in tone, as we see the hopeful, united sisters and then Dedé, the odd one out, the only one to survive into the present. She still uses her old excuses – politics weren't for women in those days – even though she knows they are hollow. Throughout the novel Dedé has been approaching this confession.

The interview woman gets ready to leave, and as she heads for her car Minou drives up. Dedé gets angry at Minou for driving after dark – she has a fear about all her nieces driving after dark since her sisters' deaths. When Dedé introduces Minou, the interview woman becomes ecstatic, as she has now met both the daughter and sister of the famous Minerva. Finally the woman bids them farewell and leaves.

We know the butterflies are dead, but now Alvarez gives some more foreshadowing about the situation of their deaths. Minou, who is currently a Dominican politician and professor, now appears as a character.

Minou comes inside with Dedé. Minou says that she had gone to see Fela, but Fela said the sisters were silent, and seemed to "finally be at rest." This made Minou sad, as it seemed the last connection to her mother was lost. Dedé says that she has felt the presence of the girls all afternoon, so Minou can ask her a question instead of Fela. Minou asks Dedé the question Dedé has felt and avoided her whole life – why didn't Dedé go along with her other sisters?

The interview woman was a gateway for Alvarez to insert herself and reach out to North American readers, but now she serves no more purpose and so leaves. The whole book (and most of Dedé's life) has led up to Minou's question, and Alvarez now sets her up for the memory of why she didn't become a butterfly.

Dedé then remembers a day in 1960 when her three sisters came to see her. Dedé is working in her garden, and Jaimito is away. Lately they have been having marital troubles, as Jaimito has grown bossy and demanding. When she sees her three sisters approach they seem like the three Fates, coming to snip the thread holding Dedé's life together.

Unlike Pedrito, Jaimito clings to his machismo and dominates the more submissive Dedé. The three sisters already seem like mythological figures, goddesses representing a kind of courage and sacrifice that Dedé is afraid of.

Months earlier Patria had come to Dedé asking to bury some boxes, and Dedé had suspected that Minerva put her up to it. Patria looked disappointed when Dedé said she had to ask Jaimito first. Patria explained that she had joined the movement and then convinced Pedrito. She asked Dedé if everything was okay, and Dedé couldn't help crying.

Dedé didn't realize that all her sisters were now working together. She thought it was just Minerva, and Dedé still wasn't getting along with Minerva because of Virgilio. Patria's assertiveness towards her husband seems foreign to Dedé.

After that Dedé had talked to Jaimito, but he had become enraged at the request. He pushed her onto the bed and made her swear to stay away from her sisters. Dedé had considered leaving Jaimito then and joining her sisters, but instead she allowed herself to docilely submit to his will. She had then avoided her sisters for weeks.

Jaimito is now directly contrasted with Pedrito. Pedrito yelled but then gave in to Patria's wishes, while Jaimito yells, gets violent, and makes Dedé choose him over her own sisters. He is being protective, but also putting her in a cage. And she is letting him.

When the sisters arrive Dedé (whose nickname is "Miss Sonrisa," Miss Smile) arms herself with a smile to meet them. They all make small talk for a while, and finally Mate tells Dedé that something big is going to happen. Minerva says "the goat is going to die" sometime in the next three weeks. The sisters say that together they are a cell, but they want Dedé to join too. They tell her to sleep on it and decide in the next week.

The sisters are still feeling hopeful and powerful about achieving freedom for themselves through strength. Their confidence is tragically misguided, however, as "the goat" will manage to outlive them. The sisters know Dedé's timid and accommodating nature, so they give her time to work up her courage.

Dedé mentions Jaimito, and the other sisters say that she should use her discretion around him, as they don't know his politics. Dedé defends Jaimito, saying he is no more a "*trujillista*" (Trujillo defender) than Papá was. Minerva responds that Papá was a *trujillista* in his own way, as he chose to stay scared and "kept the devil in power all these years." Dedé admits that Jaimito has threatened to leave her if she joins her sisters. Minerva starts to argue, but Patria smooths things over and says that it is Dedé's own decision.

Dedé is shocked at how idealistic the butterflies are, but Minerva has a point – Trujillo gained power and held it for 31 years only because people stood by and allowed it. Like Mate, Dedé sees her romantic life as inextricably linked to her political life. Unlike Mate, Dedé's husband is not a revolutionary and isn't very understanding.

After they leave, Dedé decides that she will leave Jaimito. This seems like a much bigger decision to her than joining the underground, but she will use the latter as a reason for the former. She plans out the arguments she will use, and she thinks about her lingering affection for Lío. Minerva tells her that he is still alive, and to listen to a certain forbidden radio station to hear him. Dedé then starts sneaking off at night to listen. She imagines Lío's reaction when he learns that she joined her sisters – he will know that "she, too, was one of the brave ones."

Dedé now has her first burst of courage, inspired by her sisters' union. She doesn't yet conceive of the danger and work of revolution, but is mostly afraid of leaving Jaimito. We start to realize just how deep Dedé's feelings for Virgilio were, and how she regrets not pursuing him. If she joins the butterflies, clearly a major impetus will be impressing Lio.

The day Dedé had planned to leave Jaimito approaches, and she starts to get cold feet. She worries about losing her three sons, and about leaving them alone with the temperamental Jaimito. She decides to go to see a new priest, Padre de Jesús, for guidance. She has to get a ride from her elderly neighbor who is taking his wife to the clinic. She lies and tells Jaimito that she is just helping her neighbor, and doesn't mention the priest. Jaimito gets angry and says that she is "going over his head." Dedé reminds herself to be brave, as she is leaving him soon.

Dedé starts to be more assertive now that she has a plan for the future, but it is hard to change her habits of years and her natural timidity. Jaimito remains overprotective and dominant, not even wanting Patria to go into town alone. She first has to escape the prison of his control if she wants to fight for freedom.

No one is at the rectory when Dedé arrives, and the longer she waits the more her courage falters. Finally she sees Padre de Jesús unloading a truck. He invites her in, and she sees the boxes he was unloading. They look the same as those Patria was looking to hide. Dedé realizes that Padre de Jesús is "one of them." Dedé then accepts that she has been using Jaimito as an excuse – the simple fact is she is afraid to join her sisters, just as she was afraid to face her love for Lío and so settled for Jaimito. She leaves the church.

We know from Patria's section that Padre de Jesús is one of the original Catholic militants, but this is a shocking revelation for Dedé, who was expecting some comforting platitudes from the priest. Dedé then has her great revelation – she simply isn't cut out for revolutionary work or asserting herself when it means hurting others.

When she returns home, Jaimito and the boys are all gone. Dedé panics, and the maid says that they went off to Jaimito's mother's house. Dedé saddles the horse and rides off to Mamá's. The other sisters are there too for a meeting, but Dedé frantically says she needs to get a ride. Manolo and Minerva drive her, and on the way she explains. Dedé confesses that she wishes she was brave, but she cannot join the sisters. Minerva says none of them come by bravery naturally, but then she says that Dedé is brave in her own way.

Dedé is not going to abandon her sisters – they are still all very close, and she is very protective – she just can't find the sustained courage to resist both Jaimito and Trujillo. Minerva's statement is another reminder to the mythologizers of the butterflies that these are ordinary women driven to great courage by their circumstances.

They reach Jaimito's mother's house and Jaimito meets them, looking angry. Dedé feels brave with Minerva by her side, and she demands to see her children. The boys and Doña Leia (Jaimito's mother) greet Dedé happily, so Jaimito clearly hasn't told them anything is wrong. Leia dotes over Dedé as usual, until Jaimito says they have to discuss something privately.

Minerva acts as a symbol of bravery even to her own sisters, though we will see that she often feels weighed down by this burden when she herself lacks courage. The meeting of so many family members seems to remove the sting from Dedé and Jaimito's fight.

Jaimito accuses Dedé of joining Minerva's group, but Manolo assures him that she has never been to a meeting. Jaimito's anger seems to deflate, and he doesn't understand when Dedé says she was visiting the "Communist" Padre de Jesús to talk about their marriage. Minerva and Manolo suggest that Dedé and Jaimito take a honeymoon trip to rekindle their romance. So Dedé ends up taking a boat trip with Jaimito instead of leaving him and joining the resistance.

Dedé can't even resist the revolutionaries themselves, once Manolo and Minerva try to help her with her marriage to Jaimito. Dedé and Jaimito's marital problems are now tied to Dedé's political activity, and as long as she stays with Jaimito she won't get involved with the butterflies.

A week later the SIM starts rounding up members of Minerva's group. Leandro is arrested first. The family gathers at Mamá's house, and Mate tearfully explains what happened: the SIM broke down their door, dragged Leandro away, trashed the house, and drove off in the family's car. Mamá finally gets suspicious of her daughters' activities and demands an explanation.

The hopefulness and confidence of the sisters is now quashed by the SIM's brutal actions. It is unclear whether someone tipped off the SIM, or if they simply decided that the Mirabals were suspicious and should be investigated.

Then Patria and her family arrive crying desperately. Patria tells her story: some neighbors warned Pedrito and Nelson that they were about to be arrested, so they hid in the hills. Patria answered the door for the SIM and told them her son and husband were away, but they ransacked the place anyway. They dug up the fields and found the boxes of weapons. Then they tore the house apart and set fire to the wreckage.

Pedrito's worst fears are realized as his "patrimonio" is taken over and destroyed. The men are arrested first, as the usual sexism makes the regime assume that the women are less of a threat. The hopes for a "harvest of freedom" are tragically destroyed.

Nelson and Pedrito saw the flames from their hiding spot, so they ran down from the hills to protect Patria and the other children. They were then arrested. Patria screams "I've been good!" to the sky, and Dedé falls to her knees and starts to recite the Creed. Patria joins her and seems to calm down slightly.

Patria clearly has a religious crisis regarding this tragedy, as she feels abandoned by God once more. Just as when she lost her baby, it now seems that God has personally taken something from her.

They try to call a doctor, but he is afraid to be seen helping the Mirabals. Dedé gets some sedatives from her elderly neighbor and gives everyone some. She calls Minerva, and when Dedé first hears her voice she recognizes that no matter what choice she makes, her life will always be inextricably bound with her sisters' lives.

The Mirabals are now basically blacklisted, and anyone who helps them risks being discriminated against by the regime. Dedé has to draw on her courage now to support her sisters, and this is a kind of courage that she has plenty of.

Minerva confirms that Manolo was arrested the night before. Minerva sounds anxious but firm, and she refuses to come home and "run scared." A few days later, however, she sends Dedé a panicked note asking for money, as she has been diagnosed with tuberculosis and needs to buy medicine. Dedé immediately drives off to the bank, but when she calls again Minerva has already been arrested. Dedé promises to come get Minou.

Minerva doesn't break down like the other sisters, and she only asks Dedé for help in secret. She already recognizes the importance of her image as the brave revolutionary. Minerva is the first butterfly, and the first to be arrested.

Dedé first goes out to find Jaimito in the fields. The power dynamic has been shifting in their marriage lately, as Dedé threatened to leave him after their boat trip and he had begged for another chance. Jaimito joins her, and she feels the "passionate project" of saving her sisters drawing her and Jaimito back together.

Dedé hasn't left Jaimito or joined the resistance, but she has at least been acting more assertive and recognizing her own power in her life. Even Dedé feels a new strength when faced with adversity, as long as it is a real project and not just a lofty ideal.

The couple drives to Mamá's house first, but they find the SIM already there. Captain Peña, head of the northern SIM, is there to arrest Mate. Mate clings to Mamá, and eventually Peña agrees to let Mamá come with her, but then he drives off with Mate before Mamá can get in the car. Dedé and Jaimito drive after them but soon lose them. They reach the police station and learn that Mate has been moved to the capital. Jaimito lashes out angrily, but Dedé pities him instead of fearing him, as he is powerless in this situation.

Peña now becomes a more practical antagonist to the sisters, as Trujillo no longer appears in person. It is unclear why Patria is not arrested but Minerva and Mate are. Alvarez reminds us of how young Mate still is, as she clings to her mother when the SIM come to arrest her. Dedé steadily gains more power in her relationship.

Dedé and Jaimito return home, where Mamá is wailing and praying – she has learned of Minerva's arrest because the SIM came to confiscate her car. Dedé suggests they go inside, as she sees the hedges move and realizes that they will always be spied upon from now on. They all go in and pray to the Virgin.

The sisters had kept Mamá in the dark about their activities, so she is overwhelmed by all this sudden information and tragedy. The three most religious family members remain, and they turn to their faith for strength.

That night Dedé cannot sleep, and she feels a temptation to "just let go" and go crazy before the SIM destroy everything she loves. But then she reminds herself of all the people relying on her, and she tells herself to have courage. It is the first time she truly understands the word. To calm herself, Dedé practices reliving a happy memory.

Dedé's courage is of a different kind from the butterflies, as it takes a special bravery to be the support system, the survivor, the one who endures to mourn and tell stories.

The present-day Dedé realizes that this exercise of reliving a happy memory actually came much later – it was something Minerva taught her after she got out of prison. Dedé remembers frantically worrying about Minerva and arguing with her, repeating all the rumors that Trujillo wanted her dead, as she was "the secret heroine of the whole nation." In those days people would always whisper to Dedé about the "butterflies," pledging their support.

Dedé's memory now becomes jumbled and with it the narrative shifts. We jump briefly to a time after Minerva is released from prison, when she is a national symbol as a butterfly and Dedé is stretched to her limit with worrying about her sisters' safety.

Minerva had refused to hole up though, as she thought that Trujillo would never "murder a defenseless woman and dig his own grave." Whenever Dedé would start weeping with worry and fear, Minerva would teach her the exercise she developed in prison, of reciting a poem over and over. In her memory, present-day Dedé had then conflated that exercise with the one of inhabiting a happy memory, as they were both necessities during times of great stress.

Even Minerva had underestimated Trujillo's brutality, but she was also right, as the butterflies' death did indeed "dig Trujillo's grave." This exercise of finding a happy memory or poem reoccurs several times as the sisters endure more and more ordeals.

CHAPTER 10: PATRIA, JANUARY TO MARCH 1960

Patria is crazy with grief when she first comes to Mamá's after losing everything, but soon she finds herself able to bear her "cross." She keeps repeating a hopeful verse from the Bible: "And on the third day He rose again." But instead of "rising again," after three days the SIM come for Mate. It will be three months before Patria sees her sisters, husband, or son.

Patria's vivid Biblical language now moves from hope and righteous anger to despair and abandonment. She repeats a Bible verse to herself just like Minerva repeats a poem, or Dedé a memory.

Patria slowly recovers from her grief, but sometimes she breaks down and screams "I've been good!" at the sky until Dedé comes and prays with her. It is strange living in Mamá's new house, as everything is the same but all rearranged. In the hallway she has the required **portrait of Trujillo**, but now it is a picture of El Jefe in his old age, looking fatter and worn out from doing "all the bad things in life."

Patria also finds a strength and courage within herself, and when this breaks Dedé is there to support her. The portrait of Trujillo returns as an important symbol. Mamá now hates the dictator just like her daughters do, and he no longer hangs next to Jesus's picture.

Patria is still used to having the picture of Jesus next to the **portrait of Trujillo**, so sometimes she accidentally says a prayer to El Jefe as she passes. Soon she starts to do this on purpose – she wants something from Trujillo (her family's safety), and the only way she knows how to ask is through prayer. She also hopes that if she treats El Jefe like a worthy person, he might start acting nicer. Patria even sets up some flowers under the portrait. She prays to him for her family's safety, and offers herself as a "sacrificial lamb" in their stead.

This is the culmination of the symbol of the portrait, as Trujillo is both explicitly connected to God – the religious Patria even prays to him like a Catholic icon – while also being portrayed as a flawed human being. Trujillo has truly become ubiquitous at this point, the face of oppression in the Dominican Republic, and in this way he is like an evil God, but he is also a single man and personal antagonist of the Mirabals.

Patria prays to the real God too, but she notes that she doesn't offer herself as a sacrifice to *him* – only to Trujillo. She knows what El Jefe wants from women, but she is afraid of what God might ask of her. She has children, and she doesn't want to die yet.

Patria's "prayers" to Trujillo are more like an imaginary bargain – she is willing to compromise her own honor to save her family's lives.

Captain Peña visits the house regularly, and sometimes he brings candy for the children. Once he tells Patria that Pedrito was offered his freedom if he would divorce his Mirabal wife and pledge his support to Trujillo. Pedrito refused. Peña laughs at Patria's distress and then leaves. Minou buries the candy he gave them as "bad candy."

The Mirabals now seem to be official enemies of state, as Pedrito had the option of cutting them off and then being freed. Peña is an example of a sexist bully given great power by a dictatorship.

That is the only news the family gets, until one day the girls, the men, and Nelson appear in the newspaper on a list of 372 detained prisoners. This is a relief, as at least they haven't been "disappeared." Patria goes out and cuts new flowers to put under **Trujillo's portrait**.

Patria's worry was that her family would never be actually recorded as prisoners, but would be tortured and killed without officially entering the system. Trujillo seems to have granted part of her prayers by not doing so.

One Sunday the family goes to church and the new priest (Padre de Jesús has been arrested) condemns the Trujillo regime from the pulpit, saying that it is a sin against God to take away human rights. Patria is inspired and moved, and she finally offers herself to God as a "sacrificial lamb" in exchange for Nelson's life.

The church finally takes a stance on Trujillo after 30 years. Patria now has the real support of her religious family, so as thanks for this she offers herself to God – even to die, if need be.

After that the SIM starts bothering the church, sending spies to attend services. Patria learns that this is happening all over the country, as the Catholic leaders have finally decided to speak out against Trujillo. Someone tries to assassinate the archbishop, and at Patria's church some SIM-paid prostitutes come in and act out obscenely. The next Sunday someone empties the latrines into the confessional. Noris stays to clean up, and Patria sees that her daughter has finally grown religious in these trying times.

Trujillo makes enemies with his war on the church, as the country is mostly Catholic. In the next few months more and more organizations and countries will turn against the regime. Trujillo's megalomania and aspirations to godhood now turn against him, and he seems like a devil instead of the earthly counterpart to the Christian God.

One day Patria gets a surprise visit from Margarita, her illegitimate half-sister. Patria is wary of her, but Margarita brings her a note from Mate in prison. She says that her cousin works in the prison and delivered it for Mate. Mate requests some medicine, food, and news of the children. Margarita then introduces herself, and Patria realizes that she works at the pharmacy Patria always goes to. Patria sees that God is working "several revolutions at the same time," and one of them has to do with humbling Patria's pride.

Patria, like all the sisters except Minerva, is still ashamed and angry at the existence of her half-sisters. It is then ironic that Margarita becomes the vessel of the sisters' salvation. We now see Patria's point of view of the girls' prison experience, but later we will see Mate's version.

That night Patria, Mamá, and Dedé assemble a care package for the girls. After Mamá goes to bed, Patria talks to Dedé about Margarita. She asks how Dedé is doing, and Dedé says that things are better with Jaimito. Suddenly she starts crying, and vaguely says that she might have been happier with someone else.

In this time of stress Dedé has lost her ability to accommodate everyone and keep up her smiles. She is still being more assertive with Jaimito, though.

The house is constantly surrounded by spies, who are supposed to be secret but constantly leave traces of their existence or cough next to the window. Mamá leaves out a trashcan and ashtray so they stop littering in her yard. One night she dumps dirty bathwater on their heads from the window. The spies are supposed to be secret, so they can't complain. After that they keep a more respectful distance from the house.

Mamá keeps getting more rebellious and courageous as the regime grows more personally antagonistic to her and her family. With these everyday scenes and rebellions the constant spying seem less sinister.

Patria goes to Margarita's pharmacy and delivers the care package for the prisoners. The next week Mamá and Dedé drive by the prison and see a towel they sent to Mate hanging in a window. That same day there is news of some minors and women being pardoned, and everyone feels hopeful about the sisters and Nelson. There is also news that Peña is the new owner of Pedrito's family land. Mamá starts to accuse him of stealing, but then cuts herself off, as they fear their house is bugged.

Peña sometimes seems almost sympathetic, but then he does something like confiscate Pedrito's beloved land. He is just a man, and also such a hypocrite that he is always willing to benefit himself. Patria's greatest fears are still about Nelson, as she is a devoted mother above all else. The Mirabals have spies outside but now are being recorded inside the house as well – they too are being imprisoned in a way.

The next day Patria dresses up and goes to her elderly neighbor's house – he is a Spaniard named Don Bernardo, who was brought over as part of Trujillo's campaign to "whiten the race." He is the only neighbor who doesn't actively avoid the Mirabals now that they are in trouble with the government. Patria asks him for a ride to Peña's office in the capital, and Don Bernardo agrees.

Trujillo let in many immigrants from European nations (including Jews during the Holocaust, when most nations turned them away) to try and "whiten the race" of Dominicans. As part of this racial agenda he also discriminated against and even massacred black Haitians.

They reach the capital and Peña lets Patria in immediately. Patria starts crying and asks Peña for help in getting Nelson pardoned. Peña tries to say the matter is out of his hands, and Patria prays to "soften his devil's heart," reminding herself that even Peña is a child of God. Peña finally makes a call and passes on Patria's request. As he talks Patria watches his face, and seems to see the "devil" fall away and the childish, ashamed bully emerge underneath. When he is done Patria thanks him. She says that she has nothing to repay him with, and in this way confirms that she knows he took her land.

This is another important link between religion and dictatorship, as Trujillo (and his servants like Peña) can seem almost supernaturally evil and powerful, but Patria reminds herself that they are just sinful men. Patria isn't forgiving him in any way, but is trying to look forward to a country after Trujillo, when bullies like Peña must still be treated as humans and Dominicans.

Weeks pass, and the regime starts a war against the church as condemnations of Trujillo keep issuing from the pulpit. Patria keeps praying to the **portrait of Trujillo**, warning him about fighting against God, as soon he will be dead and in a place where "you don't make the rules." There is no news about Nelson, but they get a few more notes from Mate.

Patria simultaneously treats Trujillo as a godlike figure (by praying to him) and tries to think of him as just a bad man, one who will soon have to answer for his crimes to the real God. The church keeps up its stance despite oppression.

One day Peña comes to visit, and Patria recognizes that he is making a peace offering, as he has been having trouble with her land. Mamá locks herself and the children in her room to avoid him, but Patria recognizes that Peña is both "angel and devil, like the rest of us." Patria flatters him, and he gives her three passes to visit the prisoners. He then hints that Nelson might be pardoned soon, and Patria starts to cry with joy. Peña says that the sisters were offered pardons as well, but they refused to take them. Patria promises to have Peña over for a meal when Nelson is released.

Patria is trying so hard to see Peña as human because he too is her countryman, and they must find a way to somehow reconcile Dominicans if they are ever to build a peaceful country after Trujillo. The sisters have been keeping up their courage and refusing to compromise in prison.

Mamá is overjoyed when she hears the news, but she refuses to have Peña eat a meal in her house. Finally she relents, but Patria knows that they will all cast various spells and say prayers over the "devil's" stew. Mamá later comes up with a plan: she will invite all the unfriendly neighbors for dinner, knowing that they will refuse, as they want to avoid being seen with the Mirabals. They will then be embarrassed and afraid when they see Peña's car and realize that they have refused to eat with a captain of SIM. Patria laughs and calls Mamá "*la jefa* of revenge."

Mamá has gone from advising her daughters not to make trouble, to antagonizing the SIM in her own ingenious way. Mamá's change is both amusing and an inspiring example of how Dominicans can potentially move on and change after such a long dictatorship. Mamá becomes like the anti-Trujillo, "la jefa."

A few days later Peña calls and says that Patria should come to the capital and bring a sponsor on Nelson's behalf. He asks about his dinner, and Mamá disparages him, but Patria tries to defend him as not so bad. She is worried about what will happen after Trujillo is dead – how the Dominicans will be able to forgive each other for what they allowed to happen.

Patria's worries are well-founded, as Trujillo is not actually a "devil" and everything won't automatically get better when he is overthrown. Demonizing one's opponents is the first step to a worldview like the regime's.

Jaimito agrees to sponsor Nelson, and the family's uncle who is friends with Trujillo comes along too. At the last minute Noris demands to come too. They get lost on the way to the capital, but eventually make it to the National Palace. Patria suddenly regrets bringing Noris along, worried that she will catch Trujillo's eye. As she walks down the corridor, Patria feels like she is on the way to the Discovery Day Dance, and "nothing bad had happened yet."

Noris is now becoming a young woman, and in his old age Trujillo keeps picking out younger and younger women for his affairs. Patria's déjà vu is similar to Dedé's first memory of the family in the yard, an innocent time before the Mirabals' real troubles began.

They come to a parlor full of journalists, and Trujillo enters. Patria expects to feel more sympathetic towards him after months of praying to his **portrait**, but instead he seems more evil than ever. She wonders if he is the devil incarnate, as Jesus was God incarnate. Trujillo sits down and lectures the prisoners' families. He interrupts himself to flirt with Noris when he sees her.

This is an important moment, as despite Patria's best efforts to see Trujillo as just a sinful man, he truly does seem like a supernatural devil. Trujillo's propaganda and overwhelming oppression has worked – he has become a godlike figure – but it is an evil god.

Finally the prisoners enter, and Patria falls to her knees when she sees Nelson, who is bruised and skinny. Patria thanks God for delivering her son, but is reminded of what she promised God in return. In the paper the next day the front page is a picture of Noris giving her hand to Trujillo, with the headline "Young Offender Softens El Jefe's Heart."

Patria has gotten her first prayer answered, but now it is implied that she will have to sacrifice her own life for Nelson's. We see how the regime's propaganda machine spins everything in Trujillo's favor.

CHAPTER 11: MARÍA TERESA, MARCH TO AUGUST 1960

The narrative is now Mate's diary from prison. A friendly guard named Santicló helped smuggled her the notebook along with the other gifts from her family. Mate describes the constant fear she lives with, but how she tries to fight it and retain her humanity. Writing things down makes her feel better. Sometimes they march past the mens' cells, but Mate doesn't see Leandro anywhere.

Santicló is presumably connected to Margarita, and delivers the packages to the girls. We have seen many figurative prisons so far – Papá's rules, the expectations of society, sexism, and the fears of the police state, but now the characters experience a literal prison as well.

Mate, Minerva, and the other female "politicals" are all locked up with some "nonpoliticals" – thieves, prostitutes, and murderers. Mate describes the cell and draws a diagram of it. Minerva has arranged it so that the politicals have a certain corner, and she holds discussions and meetings there. The women all take turns looking out the single little window.

Minerva is thriving in the midst of all this suffering and adversity, as she has something tangible to fight against and knows she is setting an example with her idealism and bravery.

Mate's favorite fellow prisoner is Magdalena, who is very kind and giving and also has a young daughter. One night Mate breaks down at the usual call of "Viva Trujillo!" and Minerva helps her calm down. The prisoners have breakdowns all the time, but Mate says the alternative is disappearing into a prison within yourself.

Within this physical prison there is also the more dangerous option of losing your humanity to fear and the sense of entrapment. The sisters at least maintain their emotions and love, though it causes them suffering.

Mate describes the code language developed in the prison, with nicknames for the guards and various contraband being traded. Mate has been taken downstairs for questioning twice, but Minerva and Sina (Minerva's old friend) have been taken many times. Ramfis Trujillo came to question Minerva personally, as she is the rumored "brain behind the whole movement."

Minerva is the highest-profile female prisoner, and the regime finally treats her as a real threat. Minerva keeps drawing on her courage that finds strength in conflict and suffering. Ramfis Trujillo isn't just a spoiled playboy, but also involved in his father's dirty work.

Mate wakes up crying every morning, but Minerva insists on having a "little school" every day just like Castro supposedly did in prison. The politicals then gather and rehearse their rules: "never believe them. Never fear them. Never ask them anything." Mate asks about Santicló, the kind guard, but Sina warns her about getting fond of the enemy.

Minerva is still heavily influenced by Castro's revolution, and she seems to be idealizing even her own current prison experience. Mate, on the other hand, remains more personally sentimental and sensitive.

Dinorah is a nonpolitical prisoner who is always mean and emotionless, though Minerva says she is "a victim of our corrupt system." Minerva insists on sharing all the food they get from their family with the other prisoners, so as to avoid creating a class hierarchy. Mate writes down a prayer she heard another prisoner pray: "May I never experience all that it is possible to get used to."

The nonpolitical prisoners are generally of a lower social and economic class than the politicals, so Minerva sticks to her Marxist ideals. The prisoner's prayer is chilling because it can refer to experiencing suffering, but also causing suffering.

Mate develops a schedule for each day to ward off panic and despair, though sometimes she succumbs and loses all hope. She learns that Leandro is not in the same prison, and she worries about him. Minerva encourages her to keep up her morale, and insists that they reject the pardon they are offered, as accepting a pardon would be an admission of guilt. She says they have to set an example for others. Mate keeps panicking, and Minerva keeps leading her through the exercise of concentrating on nice thoughts.

Minerva still sees everything in terms of the big picture and the overall struggle against Trujillo, while Mate is mostly concerned with interpersonal relations. We now see why the sisters refuse their pardon – Minerva has grown hard and courageous in prison, and refuses to compromise on anything.

For a while the prisoners all wear crucifixes that Patria sends as a sign of solidarity, but then the guards decide to break up the supposed "Crucifix Plot." Minerva refuses to give her crucifix up, and she attacks the guards when they try to remove it. She is put in solitary confinement for three weeks, but as she is led away the other prisoners all chant "Viva la Mariposa!" Mate feels "something big and powerful spread its wings" within her and her courage is renewed.

Minerva and Mate aren't even religious anymore, but the crucifixes are a connection to home and a sign of humanity for the prisoners. We now see how the sisters have already become national heroes, symbols of something greater than themselves and inspirations for freedom. Even Mate feels inspired to courage by Minerva's larger-than-life bravery.

A few days later Mate is allowed a brief visit with Mamá, Patria, and Pedrito, and she learns about Nelson's pardon. The next day Mate talks with Magdalena about the bond between people, and all the other prisoners start to join in. Mate feels hopeful about the connection being forged between the women, and how it will emerge into a new free nation. The next day she is depressed again though.

Like Patria, Mate also looks forward to a country after Trujillo and anticipates the interpersonal struggles that will occur then. This is the kind of courage the future country will need, not just Minerva's unyielding morality. Mate's mood swings remind us of her youth and humanity, and the tragedy of her situation.

Mate misses her periods for a while and worries that she might be pregnant. She knows that if she is, the SIM will make her carry it to full term and then give the child to some childless official's wife. Mate's next entry is an unknown amount of days later, and she says she has either "bled a baby or had a period." She has undergone some kind of torture. The next pages of her diary are ripped out.

The narrative now grows disjointed, and we don't learn the details of Mate's torture until the end of this chapter. We see more cruel practices of the regime with both the torture and the taking of prisoners' children.

On Easter Sunday Minerva is released from solitary. Mate hasn't talked about her torture to anyone but Magdalena. Finally she tells Minerva that she will write out what happened. The next pages are ripped out again. The diary then jumps to four days later, Mate's one-hundredth day in prison. She laments that there is nothing beautiful in prison – even the faces of the beautiful women have "lost their glow."

Mate grows as close to Magdalena as she does to Minerva, as Magdalena is a nonpolitical and not preoccupied with struggle and idealism like Minerva is. There are more contrasts between Mate's girlish personality and her brutal circumstances.

Twenty-five days later Mate and Minerva are taken to the courthouse for their "joke of a trial." They are both given five years in prison and a fine of 5,000 pesos each. Minerva laughs at this, while Mate cries. Another month passes, and Mate stops counting the days of her incarceration. Minerva takes up sculpting, and collects a small arsenal of sculpting tools that could be weapons. Mate wonders if revolution is now a "habit" for Minerva.

The reactions to their sentence sum up the differences between the two sisters. Mate is worried about leaving her children, and also afraid of the despair and suffering of prison. Minerva feels these things too, but she hides them under her persona of reckless bravery and righteous anger.

The OAS (Organization of American States) is rumored to be visiting to investigate Trujillo's suspected human rights violations. The guards are all worried about this, while the politicals are excited. Minerva warns Mate to describe her torture experience to the OAS and not give in to her pity for Santicló, as there have been rumors of guards being shot if accused by prisoners.

This is major blow to the regime, as outside forces keep turning against Trujillo because of his inhumane practices. Again Minerva is willing to sacrifice anything for the cause, while Mate worries about hurting the friendly guard.

Rumors abound among the politicals, and Mate hears that Leandro has been accused of treason. The men have all been tortured and many have talked, even Manolo. The women decide to focus on describing all the human rights violations to the OAS. Mate complains about Dinorah being selfish and mean, and even Minerva doesn't defend her anymore.

The women still get slightly different treatment from the men, and other than Minerva and Sina they are aren't questioned about leadership activities in the underground. Minerva's class-based worldview doesn't work for everyone.

Mate has always had a long braid, and now she uses it to hide notes in. In this way she smuggles in a newspaper clipping that says that President Betancourt of Venezuela has accused Trujillo of trying to assassinate him. Because of this the OAS is definitely coming to investigate the regime. At this news the divided politicals pull back together and feel hopeful again.

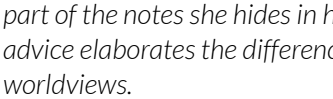
The incident with Betancourt was another major turning point against the regime, as international eyes turned to Trujillo and started investigating his crimes. Trujillo tried to have Betancourt assassinated for criticizing him and supporting his overthrow.

Mate describes a "close encounter" she has with Magdalena. One night the two are talking and Magdalena tells Mate the whole sad story of her life, how she lived in a trash heap with her baby until it was taken away from her. She was then thrown in prison for trying to take her baby back at knifepoint. Mate cries in sympathy, and then Magdalena kisses her on the lips. Mate pulls back and says she's not "that way," but Magdalena only laughs and says her body loves the people that her heart loves.

We see how privileged the Mirabals were in many ways to have had a comfortable upbringing and the opportunity to educate themselves. Mate is still naïve about many things, and is shaken by Magdalena's kiss. The friendship and love growing between the women in prison is something unique in the macho Dominican society, where men command most of the attention and power.

The OAS committee is coming soon, and Minerva talks strategy with Mate, as Mate is the one chosen to be interviewed. Minerva says to focus on principles, not on people, but Mate is worried about getting the kind guards in trouble. They know the interview room will be bugged, so Mate will have to slip notes to the OAS. Minerva gives her a written statement from the Fourteenth of June Movement, but also asks Mate to give them her diary entries describing her torture. Mate promises to do what she thinks is right.

The guards pick Mate to be interviewed, as they can tell that she is the least likely to try and get them into trouble. This is why Mate's diary entries describing her torture were ripped out, as they become part of the notes she hides in her braid for the interview. Minerva's advice elaborates the differences between the two sisters' worldviews.



At the committee Mate says she has been treated fairly. As she walks out she lets the first note fall from her braid, but at the last minute she thinks of Santicló's kindness and doesn't let the second note – her diary entry – fall. The next day the woman politicals are told they will be released, though none of the men will be. Mate is glad but also weeps to be leaving behind her new "sisters," especially Magdalena. They have a farewell party, and then are released.

Mate gives in to her emotions and seems to have made a mistake in not dropping the second note, but this might also be an example of the ends not justifying the means (Santicló's possible death). The bonds between the women have created a real sense of love and community, something that a new Dominican society will need.

The narrative is now Mate's diary entry from months before, describing her experience at the prison called "La 40." She is unexpectedly taken there one day, and is shaking with terror, as this is the prison famous for torture. Johnny Abbes and two other interrogators are there waiting for her, and they make Mate strip naked and lie down on a table.

"La 40" was Trujillo's most feared prison, and Johnny Abbes was the sadistic, brutal head of the SIM. Despite her leadership role and outspoken rebellion, Minerva is not the sister who is tortured – it is the quiet, sensitive Mate.

They then bring in a man (probably Leandro, but Mate has blacked out the name in her diary) and beat him in front of Mate. They then ask Mate to help them convince Leandro to talk, but she refuses. The interrogators tie her down and shock her with an electrical torture device. When the pain gets too intense Mate feels herself floating away, and then Leandro screams that he will talk. The guards then take Mate away, looking ashamed at what they have taken part in. Mate doesn't let them help her, and she dresses herself and walks out to the car unassisted.

The psychological torment is as important an element as the physical, as the interrogators use the couple's love to cause them both pain, and Mate is stripped naked to feel even more helpless. The guards are often portrayed sympathetically, but they still condone these atrocities by allowing and even aiding them. Mate shows strong courage and independence after this great suffering and indignity.

CHAPTER 12: MINERVA, AUGUST TO NOVEMBER 25, 1960

(House Arrest: August and September) Minerva is the narrator again, beginning just after her release from prison. All her life she has wanted to escape her family's house, but now she is put under house arrest and it seems like a blessing in disguise. Nothing seems better to her than to be with her sisters and mother, raising her children.

We have seen the outside perspectives on Minerva and how she has become the nation's heroine, a symbol of courage and strength, but the real Minerva still has moments of frailty, and is growing weary of constant struggle.

At first it is hard for Minerva to adjust to life at home after spending so much time in solitary confinement. She often goes to her room to be alone, and feels herself falling apart. She is surprised at how much braver she was able to be in prison.

The "rabbit cage" now seems almost comforting to Minerva after prison, and she seeks even more privacy within the family home. Her courage comes out best in the face of direct adversity.

She and Mate are only allowed to go out twice a week – once to visit their husbands in prison and once to go to church. Minerva is a celebrity now, and even the priest whispers "Viva la Mariposa!" to her as he gives her Communion. Ironically Minerva feels weaker than ever at this point, but she puts on a brave face, knowing that her performance as her "old self" is important to the public.

"Viva la Mariposa" (long live the butterfly) has become the slogan for Trujillo's enemies, in opposition to the constant chants of "Viva Trujillo." Minerva's struggle after prison is more subtle and difficult for her personally – the struggle to suppress her inner turmoil and put on a brave face without a direct struggle to contend with.

Minerva is especially disturbed by Peña's visits, and she tries to hide from him until Mamá fetches her. The children get used to Peña and start calling him "Uncle." One day Peña gathers everyone and says that Trujillo is planning a visit to the province, so it would be nice if the sisters wrote him a letter thanking him for releasing them from prison.

After what she has experienced at the hands of the SIM, Minerva is unnerved by watching her children call a SIM captain "uncle." Minerva is again made to flatter Trujillo in order to preserve her own safety.

After Peña leaves the sisters argue about the letter – Minerva doesn't want to do it, but eventually she is convinced by the other sisters. Mate has started standing up for herself much more. Minerva signs the letter but angrily demands that they take some kind of action. That night she goes out and complains to the guards and spies outside the house for being too loud. As she leaves they say "Viva Trujillo!" and after a long pause Minerva makes herself say it too.

Minerva puts up her act even with her sisters, but gives in more easily than she might have done otherwise. This is combined with the fact that Mate no longer always follows Minerva's lead, but has grown into her own strong person. Minerva takes the only small action available to her, but even then she is reminded of how powerless she is.

Minerva talks about her old friend Elsa, who had married a journalist assigned to the National Palace. He had once been put in prison for printing a picture showing some of Trujillo's bare leg, and once for accidentally calling a "eulogy" for Trujillo an "elegy." Elsa and her husband had originally declined to join the underground, but now Elsa visits Minerva whenever possible.

Elsa is one of Minerva's original three friends from the convent school. In her husband's stories we see more examples of how a dictatorship affects every aspect of life, and how closely guarded Trujillo's public image is.

One day Elsa brings news that the OAS has imposed sanctions on Trujillo's regime. Many American countries, including the U.S., have broken off relations with the Dominican Republic. Elsa is excited about this, and she talks to Minerva about Trujillo's overthrow. Elsa wants to reminisce, but she retells the story of their school play so that it was Minerva shooting the imaginary arrow at Trujillo, not Sinita. Minerva reminds her of the truth, but Elsa brushes it off. Elsa continues to praise Minerva for her bravery, but inside Minerva feels weak and cowardly.

This is a major blow to the regime and will cripple the economy, but Trujillo continues to cling to power even in the face of the world's disapproval. Minerva is already becoming a legendary figure, and her personal history is being reimagined to fit her current role as revolutionary leader. Even her old friend now sees her as almost superhuman.

The sisters get dressed up to visit their men in prison and tell them the good news about the sanctions. Dedé tries to guilt them into not going, saying that they are asking for an "accident" by all going together, but the sisters laugh at her melodrama. As they drive off she sobs "I don't want to have to live without you."

Dedé is right, and this is tragic foreshadowing of the sisters' future "accident." Indeed, Dedé's martyrdom is to have to live without them.

Everyone is hopeful at the prison, but Manolo looks less excited than the rest. Some of his teeth are broken off. He asks Minerva for information about the resistance, but she has no news to give him, as she is just as cut off as he is. She has to put on her "performance" even for Manolo, and pretend that she is still involved.

Under house arrest and being constantly spied upon, the butterflies are reduced to a domestic life. And yet even Minerva is vaguely comforted by this, as she has gotten tired of constant struggle.

Minerva believes that Trujillo will fall soon, as almost everyone has turned against him now, but Trujillo instead seems to use his lack of accountability to act out even more. Some young men distribute leaflets about an uprising, and the SIM capture all of them. The sisters also have their visiting rights to the prison inexplicably revoked.

Trujillo is nearing the end of his reign and he starts acting out desperately. Unfortunately this means more fear and random violence for the country under his power.

When the sisters finally get to visit their husbands again, Manolo tells Minerva that "it's over." Many male prisoners have been killed lately, and Manolo has no hope for his own survival. He insists on saying goodbye to Minerva. On the drive home the driver comments that "the butterflies are sad today," which makes Minerva suddenly regain her courage and fierceness. She discovers that adversity is what gives her strength, and she starts working to save the men.

Trujillo has no façade of human rights to present to the world anymore, so he can treat his prisoners as badly as he wants. Minerva realizes what was made clear in her past experiences – that she falls apart without a cause to fight for. The sisters' codenames are now common knowledge and part of their mystique.

(Saving the Men: October) It is a few weeks later, and the sisters (including Dedé) are riding with their favorite driver, Rufino. They are going to visit another "political," a doctor named Delia, and Dedé is very nervous about it. Delia is nervous too when they arrive, but they pretend that they are there about their "cycles." Minerva talks in code to Delia, and is shocked to hear that the old resistance cells are dead and Sina has abandoned the struggle. The only active member Delia can name is Dr. Pedro Viñas.

Rufino is working for the government as a driver, but he is sympathetic and friendly to the sisters and will ultimately join in their martyrdom. The regime continues to underestimate and misunderstand women, but here Minerva uses this to her advantage. The Fourteenth of June Movement's hopes and plans have all crumbled.

When they get home Peña gets angry at them for leaving without his permission, but he eventually agrees to let Minerva see Dr. Viñas, who is a urologist and not known as a political. Patria and Mate drop her off at a house where the doctor supposedly works. Dr. Viñas and his maid all use cutesy diminutives when talking, which makes Minerva shudder, but when Dr. Viñas is finally alone with Minerva he becomes serious.

Dr. Viñas's blend of cutesy and revolutionary is reminiscent of someone like Mate – another ordinary citizen driven to take extraordinary measures. All of Minerva's old comrades have either been arrested, killed, or have given up the struggle, even the militant Sina (Sinita), who first made Minerva hate Trujillo as a girl.

Viñas says that the "picnic" was almost ready, but then the Americans pulled out because they were afraid the revolutionaries were Communists. The Americans distrust any idealists, and would prefer a Trujillo to a Castro. They are now working with some of Trujillo's "old cronies" who want to overthrow El Jefe. Their only ideal is money, so the Americans feel that they can control them. Minerva is displeased at this solution, but Viñas says all she can do is keep up her hope and be a good example to the country. Hopefully the revolutionaries can step in after Trujillo is killed.

Minerva and Manolo's idealistic hopes for the revolution have failed, and Trujillo's overthrow has been co-opted by men similar to Trujillo himself. The U.S. was particularly paranoid about Communism at this point in history, so they would prefer an inhumane capitalist dictator to a Communist government. And the U.S. has the money and weaponry, so they control the real revolution.

Minerva visits Manolo and tells him the news, and he too is worried about the Americans taking over the revolution and the country. Minerva feels that she is so desperate to get rid of Trujillo at this point that she doesn't care how it happens. Manolo's mother offers to buy their old house so they can return there when things settle down, but soon afterward the SIM seize the property.

Minerva focuses only on Trujillo and doesn't look forward to the personal work that will follow his overthrow (like the other sisters do). The problem is that there will still be violence and oppression even after Trujillo. The U.S. occupied the country before Vasquez, so there is a real fear that it will happen again.

Minerva and Dedé take the trip to go retrieve Minerva's possessions from her property. Minerva is pleased to have some alone time with Dedé, and to convince her that the roads aren't full of murderers. Suddenly they are stopped by guards and ordered out of the cab. Dedé immediately says that she is Minerva Mirabal, trying to protect the real Minerva.

Dedé shows that her courage has been steadily growing, and she is now willing to suffer and die for her sisters' sakes. She is now "getting involved" with their movement, and though it is too late to be politically significant, it is very important personally.

The sisters and Rufino are taken to a guardhouse. An official explains that they need an escort, for when the local townspeople heard that Minerva Mirabal was coming they planned "some sort of commotion." The man asks which one is Minerva, and Dedé admits that she was only trying to protect her "little sister." Minerva decides that the official is a frightened man at heart, so she mentions Peña's name confidently. His resulting terror is like a window into the "rotten weakness at the heart of Trujillo's system."

Minerva has become so famous in the country that the regime fears a show of opposition wherever she goes, as she is now a symbol and inspiration. Minerva's insight about the official shows an important fact about dictatorships – they are built up almost entirely on fear, and so they are doomed to fail once enough people decide to stop being afraid.

After that they reach Minerva's house without trouble, and gather up her things. It is heartbreaking for her to go through her old belongings – a book Lío gave her, Mate's souvenir from the Discovery Day dance, and a picture of Lina Lovatón.

This is like a brief trip through the more innocent past, when the sisters weren't directly involved with Trujillo and constantly in danger.

When she leaves the house, Minerva sees over a hundred people dressed in black in the town square. Suddenly trucks of guards roll in. Minerva walks silently into the square, and after a moment the crowd disbands. Minerva goes back to the house and is surprised to see Dedé outside with a frying pan, ready to fight if need be.

This is a quiet, subversive gathering that shows both support for the butterflies and confuses the regime. Dedé again shows her new courage when it comes to protecting her sisters.

When they return home, Mate is upset because she has had her old nightmare about Papá's death, but with Leandro, Manolo, and Pedrito in the coffin. That same night their uncle arrives and says he has been to a reception honoring Trujillo, as El Jefe finally visited the province. At the reception Trujillo had told his admirers that he had only two problems: "the damn church and the Mirabal sisters." Their Uncle Pepe says that this was a warning to them, and they should consider not going out at all for a while.

Mate's dream reaches a fever pitch as she worries about all the men in her life, who are all in constant danger of death. The dream now seems less sexual and more like a poignant stress dream. This is the closest Trujillo comes to appearing in person in the second half of the novel, as he aims an oblique threat at the sisters.

The next day the sisters make their required stop at SIM headquarters, and Peña asks to see them. He makes a lewd proposition that infuriates Minerva, but Patria defuses the situation. Peña informs them that their husbands are being transferred from the capital to a prison in the North. The sisters are angry, but Peña says it will be less distance for the "butterflies" to go. Minerva realizes that she can't even save herself, much less the men.

Minerva is again reminded of her powerlessness in the face of the regime's brutality and sexism, and she lashes out angrily. She doesn't know that she will find real freedom and power as a martyr and symbol of courage. This transfer of the men to the northern prison is actually part of the plot to have the butterflies murdered.

(Talk of the people, Voice of God: November 25, 1960) Minerva now describes their fourth trip to visit the men in the northern prison. Rufino is driving, and they have to take a deserted mountain road to get there. On the way they pick up a young soldier who is hitchhiking. He claims to be on his way to meet his newborn son.

This is the last day of the sisters' lives, and the climax the whole novel has been leading up to. Alvarez now focuses in on one day, building up the suspense to an ending that we know is coming.

As they drive Minerva laments how the "butterflies" have fallen from their old dreams of fighting and revolution. Now they are all scared of the mountain road and the rocks below. Minerva talks to the young soldier, who seems nervous. He says he has heard a rumor that the two "politicals" in the northern prison will be shipped back to the capital soon.

These "politicals" are indeed Manolo and Leandro, and they will be shipped back to the capital after the butterflies are killed. They were only moved to the north as a trap, to get the sisters to drive on this lonely mountain road.

A storm starts up, and the sisters ask if Rufino wants to stop driving, but he reassures them that he is fine. The young soldier affirms this with "God and Trujillo willing." This is the first time all three sisters have ridden together, as Pedrito is still at the capital so Patria usually doesn't come along. Before they left Mamá and Dedé had warned them of the danger of all three traveling together, but Minerva had laughed off their worries.

Minerva and Mate have made this trip three times before, but this is the first time Patria comes along, so they are in special danger by being all together. Dedé is right in her warnings, but the butterflies still believe that even Trujillo couldn't be so stupid and evil as to murder three unarmed, beloved women.

The sisters take a brief detour to get sewing supplies, as they have started a sewing business from their home. They splurge and each buy a new purse too. The salesman recognizes them and warns them about going over the mountain pass today. He puts his business card in Minerva's purse as she takes it.

The sisters have been pursuing a kind of alternate life since their house arrest, acting like the domestic housewives they might have been if not for Trujillo. The salesman is sympathetic to the butterflies, and tries to warn them.

They keep driving, and then see Peña's car and fear an ambush. Patria starts to pray, but Minerva tells Rufino to keep driving. To keep themselves calm the sisters methodically transfer the contents of their purses, but then Minerva sees that the salesman's business card says "avoid the pass" on it. She suddenly realizes that they are about to be ambushed, and that the young hitchhiking soldier is a plant.

Minerva's reckless courage of earlier seems foolish to her now, and she has the real sense that she is about to die. The sisters again calm themselves with a repetitive, mundane activity, and the transferring of old objects into new purses implies hope for the future.

They keep driving but there is no incident, and Minerva feels more optimistic. The sisters tell jokes and riddles, and finally they reach Puerto Plata, the town where the prison is located. They visit the men and Manolo looks better, but he hasn't heard anything about being moved back to the capital. He urges Minerva not to go back tonight, but she is reassured by the weather clearing. They say their goodbyes and the men are taken away.

The sisters get many warnings and have many opportunities to avoid their fate, but we know the history and so the outcome of this trip is sadly inevitable. Minerva feels brave again, having dodged death once more.

On the way back they stop at a gas station and Minerva tries to call Mamá, but the line is busy. They delay and keep trying, and Minerva and Rufino have a beer. Minerva tries one last time, but the line is still busy. Patria is worried about going on, as the road looks especially deserted, but Minerva wants to keep going. Patria is finally reassured by seeing a Public Works truck drive ahead of them – at least they won't be alone on the road.

Throughout the novel Alvarez has moved quickly through time and summarized events, but now she lingers on these last moments, building suspense and reminding us of the real humanity of the butterflies. They aren't just martyrs and symbols, but also real women who try to call their mother for some comfort.

The sisters decide to drive on, and they feel optimistic with the truck in front of them. Minerva feels almost as if they are girls again, "a little afraid, a little excited by our fears," and they make their way up the first mountain.

The story comes full circle and Alvarez ends with this last optimistic note, as Minerva feels hopeful and excited again, like a girl untroubled by dictators and violence.

EPILOGUE: DEDÉ, 1994

Dedé describes how after her sisters' deaths, people would come to her and relay their memories of that last day. Through their testimony she can now imagine what happened on the mountain road. Rufino followed the truck for a while but then passed it. Eventually the truck driver caught back up to them, as their car had been stopped and the women were being led away by guards. Patria had broken free for a moment and yelled to the truck driver to tell her family what was happening. The truck driver had then kept driving, afraid of the soldiers.

Alvarez only describes the sisters' deaths in this secondhand way, as in death, in their martyrdom, they move beyond personal characters and become historical figures. Alvarez also makes a choice to not *show the sisters' last moments from their perspective, leaving their deaths to history and the real Dedé's memory.*

A year after Trujillo's death there were trials for the murderers of the Mirabal sisters. The defendants said that each man killed one woman, and one killed Rufino. They beat and choked them to death, put them back in their Jeep, and pushed it off the cliff so it would look like an accident.

Alvarez now moves into the realm of historical fact. No one believed the "car accident" story, and the brutal murder of the butterflies turned many more Dominicans against Trujillo.

The murderers were sentenced to twenty to thirty years in prison, but they were all released during the "spell of revolutions" following Trujillo's overthrow. Dedé had raised the sisters' children without ever mentioning the names of the murderers, as she didn't want the children to grow up hateful.

Trujillo's death is almost anticlimactic to the story, as the butterflies never live to see the change they affected. Even Trujillo's overthrow only led to more violence and fear for many years.

After her sisters' deaths, Dedé had avoided the news even when it was good. Trujillo was assassinated by seven of his former "buddies" a year after the Mirabals' deaths. Manolo, Pedrito, and Leandro were freed. Back in the present, Dedé hears Minou, who is now a professor, getting ready for bed.

Minerva's fears were correct, and Trujillo is only murdered by men just like him who cause no real revolution in the country. Alvarez jumps back and forth, contrasting this condensed, depressing history with the peaceful, relatively hopeful present.

Dedé remembers the day she first heard the bad news, when Mamá called her to her house. At first she thought it was a fire, but when she didn't see her sisters Dedé panicked and screamed. At first the family was given a telegram that seemed hopeful – telling them to come to the hospital – but then they got a second telegram confirming the sisters' deaths. Dedé cannot remember the details of what followed, but others said she was crazed with grief and pushed past the guards to the morgue. Dedé cut off Mate's braid and kept it.

Dedé's "martyrdom" is this intense grief for her sisters, the guilt that will haunt her for years, and the life she must go on to lead without her closest friends. In her grief Dedé achieves a wild courage, as she has no desire to live anymore without her sisters and so has no fear of being hurt or killed. Mate's braid still rests at the sisters' grave.

As Jaimito and Dedé drove the coffins home, people emerged from their houses. People had been told that it was a car accident, but everyone knew it was murder. People threw flowers onto the coffins as they drove past. When they passed the SIM office, Dedé screamed "Assassins!" Jaimito asked if she wanted to die too, and Dedé said yes, that she wanted to be with her sisters. Jaimito then said that her martyrdom was "to be alive without them."

The Dominican people immediately know the truth, and Trujillo's downfall is assured as more of his people turn against him. This is another touching, quiet tribute to the influence and power of the butterflies. Jaimito's statement becomes a truth for the rest of Dedé's life.

In the present, Dedé asks Minou about her baby Camila. Dedé then remembers talking to the sisters' husbands. Manolo explained that they were transferred back to the capital on the day of the murder. They were then all gathered together with Johnny Abbes and some other torturers, who told them the news of their wives' deaths.

In the present there is peace and hope – Minerva's daughter is a politician and professor in a free Dominican Republic, and she has a child of her own. But in the past there is more evil and tragedy to be played out in Dedé's memory.

After Trujillo's fall, The government built a monument to the Mirabals, and one day the new president had dropped by to visit it. He had talked to Dedé and promised to make the nation proud, and to get rid of those who had overseen the sisters' deaths. He had seemed to look at their portraits as he talked, as if asking for the butterflies' approval. This meeting gave Dedé hope that the girls had not died for nothing.

This was president Juan Bosch, a leftist scholar and poet who held power for less than one year and was the kind of progressive leader the butterflies might have been proud of. His policies angered the church, the military, the upper class, and the U.S., however, and he was soon overthrown by a military coup.

There had then been another coup, though, and Dedé had stopped receiving visitors and avoided the news. Manolo had been a revolutionary hero, but he was driven into hiding in the mountains and eventually killed. Back in the present, Minou asks Dedé why she still gives her time to all the visitors curious about the sisters.

With Bosch's overthrow the country showed that it was still deeply divided, and not ready to give up all the policies of the Trujillo era. Manolo was seen as the Dominican Castro, but he didn't get the civilian aid he needed and he was killed in the same mountains where the butterflies died.

Dedé wonders to herself how she became the "oracle," the one who tells all the stories of the Mirabal sisters for the world to hear. Sometimes she and her friend Olga have dinner, and Olga warns Dedé that she is living in the past, trapped in the same old house, surrounded by her sisters' things. Dedé responds that she doesn't feel trapped in the past, she has just kept its memory alive in the present.

Alvarez now starts looking towards the present and future, and focuses on Dedé as both the living memory of the butterflies and the storyteller for a nation in need of stories. Dedé seems physically trapped by her sisters' legacies and loss, but this past is a crucial part of her life, and important for the future of the country.

Dedé decides about herself becoming the "oracle" – the talker instead of the listener. It was after all the revolutions and violence were over, and the Dominican people needed a story to believe in. It was then that Dedé started talking about the butterflies.

Fela claims to channel the spirits of the butterflies, but Dedé is their true oracle, keeping them alive and breathing into the present where they can still teach and inspire their country.

In the present Dedé looks out at the dark garden and hears Minou talking to her husband on the phone. She sounds just like Minerva did. Dedé remembers her own breast cancer of years before. She starts to make a list of losses, just as she used to list the inventory in Papá's store. Manolo was killed three years after Minerva. Pedrito was restless, and soon married a young girl. Leandro left politics and became an architect, building many buildings in the capital.

Dedé's basic personality hasn't changed, but the tragic circumstances of her life have made her much stronger and braver than she was before. Part of her burden and gift is that she carries the weight of the complex past with her at all times, even in peaceful scenes like the one in the present.

Mamá lived for twenty years after her daughters' deaths, and Dedé and Jaimito stayed together while Mamá was alive, but separated after that. Dedé and Mamá split up raising the sisters' children. Dedé remembers when Minou first met her current husband, Doroteo. Mamá had advised her to stay in school and wait to marry, and Dedé had marveled at how her advice had totally changed from when Minerva was young.

Mamá fully changes her ideas with the times and her own experiences, and she goes from advising her daughters to marry early and not make trouble, to throwing bathwater on spies and telling Minou to go to college before getting married. In a practical way, Dedé carries on the butterflies' legacy by raising their children.

Mamá died peacefully, and her death seemed almost unreal to Dedé because it came without violence or anger. Dedé now realizes that she is the next one to die. She tries to think of the "losses" as free people each going their own way.

Dedé has lived long enough to see that freedom isn't always a perfect ideal. It can still mean more suffering and anger, and shouldn't be so easily mythologized – like her sisters.

Dedé had met Lío once at a reception honoring the butterflies. Dedé dislikes these events, with everyone blaming everyone else for past evils, or else absolving everyone so they themselves will be forgiven, until everyone seems like "one big rotten family of cowards." At this event Lío greets Dedé, who is shocked and hardly recognizes him. Lío has a young wife, and he catches up with Dedé. He reminds her of "what the girls have done," the current state where there are free elections and rising tourism, where "the cemetery has begun to flower."

These receptions are more examples of people both romanticizing the past and purposefully forgetting the difficult parts of it. The narrative they create is of three girls defeating one evil dictator, ignoring the thousands of other people involved in both the suffering and the propagation of suffering, and even the fact that the defeat of the dictator did not transform the country. Even Virgilio comes to accept this narrative.

As she drives home from the reception Dedé thinks about the current state of the Dominican Republic. It is certainly better than it was under Trujillo, but it still seems a disappointing result for the butterflies' sacrifice.

Dedé alone feels burdened with the complex, difficult truth, and the loss of her sisters—the complicated women she knew and loved—still seems to outweigh the uneasy freedom and peace of the present.

Back on the night of the interview, Dedé helps Minou to bed and they discuss Minou's child. Dedé feels that Minou's happiness is a sign of her own success, teaching Minou not to grow up bitter and vengeful, but it still seems sad that Minou can be happy in light of her parents' murders. Minou asks about Fela saying the girls are at rest, and Dedé says that they can perhaps let them go now.

Dedé's life has been defined by her sisters and their loss, and so no matter how much freedom, peace, and future happiness their deaths bring about, it still never seems worth it for Dedé.

Dedé is an excellent life insurance salesman, and she has won a prize trip this year. As she lies in bed she thinks that maybe she will ask to go to Canada. She met a man in Barcelona (last year's prize trip) who was from Canada, and he described the beautiful leaves in the autumn. He had said "it is the sweetness in them that makes them burn." Dedé thinks about her sisters, and how this could describe them as well.

This day seems to contain an important revelation for Dedé, and she now feels able to move on with her life in a more direct way. This poetic phrase captures some of the power of the butterflies – that they were kind, ordinary women whose very decency drove them to righteous anger and revolution.

Sometimes at night Dedé thinks she can hear her sisters' footsteps, but tonight all is silent. Dedé closes her eyes and can see the faces of her sisters and parents, and then she realizes that she is the one missing in her mental image – "the one who survived to tell the story."

The silence of the sisters' spirits is really a newfound peace for Dedé, as she recognizes that she has played her own part as Butterfly #4, carrying on her sisters' legacies and continuing on with quiet courage and strength for a new era. Alvarez interviewed the real Dedé extensively, and dedicated the novel to her.

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