

wards. The business seems no worse than any other, and though the pamphlets are extraordinary, so is people's gullibility. But that's how it is, and they continued to make fun of the things Doña Rosita saw with all the conviction in the world.

The reception from the doctors wasn't over-friendly, but we gained our objective: they gave us an introduction to Molinas Luco, mayor of Valparaíso. We took our leave with all the required formality and went to the town hall. Our dazed and exhausted expressions didn't impact favorably on the man at the desk, but he'd received orders to let us in.

The secretary showed us a copy of a letter written in response to ours, explaining that our project was impossible since the only ship to Easter Island had left and that there wouldn't be another ship leaving within the year. We were ushered into the sumptuous office of Dr. Molinas Luco, who received us amicably. He gave the impression, however, of acting out a scene in a play, taking a lot of care to pronounce each word perfectly. He became enthusiastic only when talking about Easter Island, which he had wrested from the English by proving it belonged to Chile. He recommended we keep up with events and said he would take us the following year. "I may not be in this office, but I am still president of the Friends of Easter Island Society," he said, a tacit confession of González Videla's impending electoral defeat. As we left, the man at the desk told us to take our dog with us, and to our amazement showed us a puppy that had done its business on the lobby carpet and was gnawing at a chair leg. The dog had probably followed us, attracted by our hobo appearance, and the doorman imagined it was just another accessory of our eccentric attire. Anyway, the poor animal, robbed of the bond linking him to us, got a good kick up the ass and was thrown out howling. Still, it was always consoling to know that some living thing's well-being depended on our protection.

By this time we were determined that traveling by sea we could avoid the desert in northern Chile, and we fronted up to the ship-

ping companies requesting free passage to any of the northern ports. The captain at one of them promised to take us if we could arrange permission from the maritime authorities to work for our passage. The reply, of course, was negative and we found ourselves back at square one. In that split second, Alberto made a heroic decision, which went something like this: we would sneak on to the boat and hide away in the hold. For our best chance we would have to wait until nightfall, try to persuade the sailor on duty and see what would happen. We collected our things, evidently far too many for this particular plan. With great regret we farewelled all our friends and afterwards crossed through the main gates of the port; burning our bridges, we set off on our maritime adventure.