THE LOVES OF GOYA by Marion Chapman

Tauchnitz Edition

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Hamburg · Paris

TAUCHNITZ EDITION
OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN AUTHORS
VOLUME 5306

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BY MARION CHAPMAN

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WHILE THIS IS NOT, IN THE ORDINARY SENSE OF THE word, a biography of Goya, Spain's great painter, it is a story woven around the facts of his life. And in Goya's life these facts were living values. Here, then, they are not fictitious but dramatized and based on the character of a man—a Dionysian—who dynamited his way through the raw indelicacies of the eighteenth century. It would seem impossible to do a complete biography of Goya because of certain strange interludes—gaps—disappearances really, in his life. They began in his wildest youth and lasted as long as three years at a stretch, ending when old age removed further indulgences. But it is these very disappearances which give one the right to imagine them filled with the hot spice of living his many—more than many—furious love-episodes. One historian imagined Goya in one of those several gaps occupied at Rome with his nose deep in the study of holy murals. But there is nowhere actual proof of it. Murals he did do, of course. But amours and brawls and dark adventures were more than interludes in his fertile life. They were a chronic fever. 'Where stabbing and scuffling and dancing was', there was Goya. So, considering the temper of his times, of his body, of that gargantuan bloodstream of his, these gaps may well be synonyms for brothels, prisons, intrigues, any violent experience at all in which his hot blood could be excitingly involved. There seems, too, only one way to decide—and that is by his character—this complex mass of contradictions called man.

Once Goya chose two well-known cocottes in Madrid for models, and exploding with devilish glee announced, 'I will cause the faithful to worship vice.' One Spanish apologist has felt it necessary to maintain Goya was a believer, and respectful to all that pertained to religion. Hardly—he hated the Church, but what of it? That was only part of the whole man. If his was always a land of mysticism, Goya was always Goya; Spain was his mother, but Casanova might well have been his father. The world will always disagree, especially about a man with strength enough

to make enemies, and if there should come a challenge to Goya's imagined living throughout these gaps, one is at liberty to hurl it back politely gloved in a quotation from Marcus Aurelius, 'all is opinion'. As history is a record of personal angles often imagined, often too biased, contradicted, and as often misinterpreted, one is, then, as reasonable as another.

In this story the social life of the eighteenth-century Spain, court intrigues, personal ineptitudes, vices, historical data, scandals, politicians' mud, are authentic. Some names, for biographical honesty, are disguised or invented. Goya's loves, except for one or two famous episodes, are fiction. Fiction not written to startle, but written and sincerely conceived as part-pictures of this bizarre, strange blend of hot-headed idealist and cold-headed revolutionary; a devil for love and justice, a lover of freedom who absorbed corruption, who exposed the vices of his time and moralized like Hogarth; an audacious enemy of hypocrisy, of tyranny and stupidity, 'a libertine who rebelled against all the laws of human morality, and preached equality whilst he made love to duchesses.' 'Good old Goya,' as Gautier called him, 'he was greater even as a man than as a painter, and at that he was a genius.' I have tried and I hope I have succeeded in painting his moods, hopes, ambitions, tempers, conceits, his blasting ironies and his sincere blasphemies. For this interpretation of them has been done with intense sincerity and enthusiasm, not alone for a fighter of principles, but with a nostalgic love for the beauty of Spain; not that beauty seen, but unseen, and felt: that mystic secret livingness in magic mountains still untouched, which whisper and pulse with the mysterious secrets of gods centuries old.

February, 1937 M. C.
New York

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Old Proverb: Do not Judge the Day by the Morning

JOSÉ HAD STOOD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PUENTE DE Piedra under a blazing, mounting sun, his fury seething into a black abyss of melancholy. Time meant nothing but a quantity of misery. Inwardly he was volcanic. During these two years of his apprenticeship in the atelier at Saragossa he had had to fight for his belief in himself. He always knew what he wanted. His fellow-students Beratín, Vallespín, Martínez and all the other donkeys brayed what a dumb Master taught; a Master content with his Christian glories, daubing his coy Christs and praying Virgins, teaching soft, bloodless ideas! *Jesucristo!* What reason had he, José, to copy the antique when life teemed with love, people, experience, colour; with careless women of Trastevere and *lazzaroni?* Tst! He intended to paint life, red robes, roast pigs, nakedness, in spite of the Church! In the atelier they were for war. He hated the injustice of war and this very morning he had, desperately, to illustrate his hatred, drawn a war-scene with such a ferocious fury of expression that his eyes glared and there was almost foam on his mouth. He was proud of that scene: pools of blood, piled-up bodies, condemned men in frenzied despair, dying soldiers, horses with cut veins, bloody sagging bowels, riders stabbed, crushed, blood running. He had lived that thing he drew—and been ridiculed, as before. With demoniac rage he flung himself out of the atelier, knowing he was right.

Long and lean as a sword-blade he leaned on his elbows over the stone coping, brooding, jaws locked; eyes set in unheeding gaze on the yellow sedges in the dark waters under the bridge. His fierce, penetrating eyes, black as onyx, were as brilliant and shining as the domes of El Pilar were brilliant and shining, reflecting their gold in the river. Eyes, still turned in on the outrage of the morning, glittering like an animal at bay when something at his right moved. Hand on his knife he span around and stopped stone-still, fury, desperation, rebellion oozing from him, blood running wild. Provoking curves of flesh undulated

along the river-bank, and suddenly he was rich in sensation; as if the water under the earth poured up and through him. Little pills of goose-flesh made runways along the bronzed flesh of his spine, and violent, quick breathing filled his throat to suffocation. A stone statue, he leaned further over, staring at the young goatherd like a bouquet of wild flowers in her green and yellow clothing, as she mocked him, stopping and leaning forward to stare back. 'What a wench! Who in the devil's name is she? Her dark gaze would melt a stone saint from his niche!' His hot wits adventured back into the dark alleys of the Holy City of Saragossa—then he located her. His nostrils dilated. Leaned farther over the bridge to miss nothing of those voluptuous curves that snuffed out his rage, the drawing in his hand dropped into the river Ebro and floated away.

With brutal curiosity he took in every line of that desirable body while a savage eagerness scorched his senses: the small brown bare feet, the copper-fleshed legs braced far apart, the strong, tiny hands. Her eyes, black as charcoal wet with dew, opened obliquely on him, blinking with animal innocence—and a torturing promise. He saw all her brown breasts promised, thrust provokingly forward under the coarse blouse. Suddenly the girl tossed her pretty head and flashed a bright flame over the baked earth, to him, on feet as light and cautious as those of the white goats behind her.

'*Jesucristo!*' Spasm of sensuous pain stabbed his throat. His eyes became black flames as she stopped motionless on a jagged rock, one hand on either plump hip. Then throwing back her head she laughed defiantly.

'*Buenos días*, my handsome knave!' she bawled at him, and her red, moist lips parted in an inviting smile were like pomegranates slit over a row of small, white seed-like teeth.

The fiery blood in him pounded from knees to thigh. All his joints, his spine became jelly. And then the fine, sensuous mouth widened to a smile and he sprang towards the end of the bridge, nearer her, shouting: 'Good morrow —wait—wait—I will come to you there.'

The red lips opened again on a quick tongue.

'So!' the girl bawled again. 'And who are *you?*' (she knew well enough) 'that a girl known for virtue should wait upon?' Two brown fingers snapped to prove a woman's pride. But the luminous glance she shot him proved her shuddering with life like himself and aware of his masculinity. She raised her arms and stretched her body suggestively. Contradicting that with a gesture of indifference she added, 'It is not *morning* but noon, as the sky informs you if your wits did not wander like my flock.' Flashing him another provoking glance, she got down from the rock, hips swaying, and with an exciting walk neared where he stood hesitating. 'Wicked one,' she shrilled coyly, 'the *Señor Hombre* throws flowers too soon to the unknown Pilar! Don *Hombre*—keep them for her who loves you.'

'You are that one,' he shouted hoarsely. 'I will make you love me.' As if to prove the iron of man's character he looked away and back again instantly, unable not to, and yelled, 'You cannot buy love with your eyes and pass José by!'

A mocking voice splintered the air.

'The devil fly off with you, since even a mule needs a kick to spur him on his way.'

'You brown fox!' José had to shout above the river's voice.

'A fox, *amigo*, has sharp teeth to bite its way out of a trap. And swift feet to escape the insolent.' She shrugged. 'Only the devil intrigues with the silent—and you.' She crossed herself, knowing, as all Saragossa knew, this handsome youth brought from the north a wild, rebellious soul which a few called genius, some conceit, and others catalogued among the sins against God. His originality and brazen daring were talked about everywhere. It was well known that his obstinate, arrogant self-understanding so irritated the Master in the atelier in the Plaza San Carlos he was ready to throw him to the crows. One who constantly broke out like straw in a blaze was bound to be gossiped about after Mass, in the *plaza*, at the *fonda*.

With a dignified disdain the fellow pulled down his jerkin and thrust out his chest. He was starving for approbation

since leaving his beloved mountains; and noting two dark wells brimming with admiration, he began to boast.

'The insolent, you say? I am to be the greatest painter in all Spain. The Padre up in my home in Fuendetodas assures me it is my Fate. He is a man of learning. Velázquez is dead, and he prayed and got an answer. Spain is in need of my talent and it was he who got me apprenticed here. "You have genius, my son," he told me, "use it to the glory of Spain and God, and if it be the will of heaven you shall recapture the holy spirit of Spain mutilated by unholy wars and inner decay." His very words written here.' A brown hand was laid over a pounding heart and a happy smile embraced the girl. 'But for my *señor cura* I would be instead the great Matador . . .!'

Pilar crossed herself; and mimicked his grand manner. '*Madre de Dios!* I shall lie for ever at the feet of the Virgin praying for one so great lest he fall down on the road to fame and crack his skull.' She was suddenly jealous of his fame.

'Would you have Spain lose her magnificence, Ignorant One? If God endows me with talent, then I am the one to perpetuate it! God and the Padre set me apart to be Master of Spain's future art! To create again a Spain that was once a treasure-house—Tst!' he made the noise with his teeth and laughed proudly. 'I began by drawing a pig. Then cows with soldiers' faces. But now I can draw a calf to look like the King!'

The expression on her face changed. One did not defy the King nor Fate, and the tongues of heretics were not to be loosed at will. She cast a frightened glance over her shoulder, put finger to mouth to prevent the devil entering, and impatient to bring this handsome wandering one back to her person, screamed: 'Holy Mother! My flock—they wander!' Cupping her moist, red lips she bent forward to impress on him her weighty words, and slipped.

In one bound he made for her. But when he reached her he stood breathless, wondering, without speech. The earth seemed to rock, the sky sink down on him. Boasting became ashes. But because of that deep need in him, he found tongue.

'No, stay—so—I would sketch your wonderful body!' He whipped off his cap, flattened it out on the palm of one hand and on the inside of the crown sketched her with chalk from inside his blouse. Submissive, watching through half-closed eyes, inquisitive, superstitious, she feared the strange moving of his hand, and its quick sure way: again jealous of this unknown craft that absorbed him.

Feeling the impatient blood beat in her throat, feeling pride and will slowly crumbling to surrender, she stamped her foot.

'You are a tortoise! I shall be crippled standing so for ever. Is this devil's message in your fingers more life than life itself?' It failed her, so she shrilled louder. 'My goats are more of God's nature than such evil business!' Her hips rolled teasingly beneath the coarse short skirt, to no avail. She snapped her fingers, and in an enraged but wheedling voice challenged, 'You are a great fellow. *Qué hombre! Qué valiente.*' This brought his eyes up to hers. Hers lowered. Her breasts tensed. 'Hoh, *amigo mío*,' she crooned, 'one feels the need to fly from a heart cut out of marble when one's own is warm like the body's blood.' And with a quick, carnal motion she turned and ran.

For an instant the creator in him lingering on those voluptuous lines hesitated. Then the blood of ancient Arabs, the feudal lust of the Moor in every Spaniard alike boiled up in him and he was after her. She repulsed him fiercely when he caught her; and escaped. But behind a pile of rock near a single acacia tree she stumbled, and like a young eagle he swooped down on her. With strength that matched his own she wrenched away and struck him fiercely across the mouth—a love-blow. With senses reeling, his body like water poured out, he held her in a powerful grasp to the tree, gasping, struggling, panting; beating his heaving chest with her two small hands; with eyes burning into his. He could feel the blood-heat of her throat, the hardness of her breasts; and the blood pounding in him was like the boom of cannons.

Great whorls of heat came up from the earth in all its significance. She ceased struggling and sank down into his

arms, conquered. Her thread of warmth sank into the blood running through the trunk of his body. And sunk down in the heat of the soil his trunk became as a tree entwined at the roots.

'*Mi alma!*' he whispered thickly. Their lips met and his soul was filled with wild exultation, as if he had ripped God out of heaven down into his own earthy heart.

The afternoon passed netting their senses in strange silences, symbols of the stark quivering earth about them. Caught up in a mesh of new beauty, his elated heart was calm as the sea after a great storm. Something beautiful had passed his way and he could not explain it, only feel; feel as if his mind were a sixth sense drunken with the taste of life. He had no will to move. Sensation was enough. He lay back on the April earth content with a new brooding power, the natural power of a natural being, adding himself back to Nature with the sun running down into him as into the earth, in spirals of heat.

'*Novia!*' He turned his head and met Pilar's eyes, glistening. He flung out his arms for her to creep into, to bring closer her new heat. And he felt even less will to move.

High above the mountains beyond the *vega*, the sun hung a bright pool, red as the blood of young bulls. An ass brayed and cracked the silence in his secret world; a lark beaded and silvered the broken air reclaiming it. He sat up.

'The saints in Paradise know no such bliss! Could there be holier content than ours, José *mío?*' sighed Pilar.

'Only the dumb would exchange places with the saints,' he admitted, and the salt of his tongue made her laugh uproariously.

'*Sí, sí!* Heaven cannot hold more happiness than ours.'

'Unhappiness belongs to yesterday, my pigeon. To-morrow is another day.'

Her hands were bands that held him, and he began to talk of his work in the atelier. Pride forbade him telling her how his morning's black melancholy had come from his fellow-students' ridicule. They ridiculed everything about him, his (to them) provincial habits, his talent, clothing, his northern accent. He could not tell that their con-

tinuous gibes stabbed too sharply, his despair was too deep. But now his soul was healed; and her mouth, fallen open on such new wonders, disclosed her secret.

'*Amigo!* for months past I prayed to the Holy Mother to send you to me. From the hour of your arrival in Saragossa I noticed you, my handsome rogue, and I said, "There is a strange fellow but one who knows how to love!"' And Pilar laughed loudly and made the sign of the cross with thumb and forefinger while regarding him with gleaming eyes. 'The Most Pure heard my prayers!'

Flattered, he outlined her cheek with sensitive fingers; then gestured she would have no regrets. 'When I become famous it shall be your happiness too. You shall see my mountains. I used to climb to the tallest tree to stay the wind and clasp the stars, but always the stars and wind were not there.' He laughed happily. 'You are my star, brown pigeon!'

'Handsome One!' As becomes a proud, loving woman Pilar proved a perfect audience, although one in no way understanding such high estates of mind as his. Love was enough. Her passionate heart swelled as she secretly vowed to put by her first spare *céntimo* for a flower to lay on the altar at Mass, in gratitude. Here was a great, a salty lover, who if strange words issued from his mouth, was worthy to fight more than snails. At her mother's *fonda* the gossip at night concerned the newest mistress of the duke of Infantado, or the scandalous greed of the *cortejo* of the *duquesa* of Grimaldi, or the fashionable vices at Court and how those high up in Spain enjoyed the exquisite torture of burning heretics. Pilar sighed, content as she offered sagely, 'It is not wise to let my mother know.'

'Everyone shall know.'

'No—no!' The pretty head shook in sudden anger. 'Do you always drive nails with your head? Mother of God!' (She spoke as of a deeply prized friend.) 'In the devil's household everyone for themselves, as the saying is. My mother would beat me. And then she would run tongue-wagging to the *señor cura*—and crack would go my happiness.'

'*El señor cura* would envy me.'

'*Sí, sí*, you have a salt tongue,' she laughed, 'but he would make me do penance—crawl on my knees to Seville, and they'd be all sores and you'd no longer kiss them.' She jerked tempestuously from his arms, crying, 'My mother shall not know. Is my advice light luggage?'

'Assuredly not heavy. A woman's council is not much,' he teased.

'But "he that does not take it is a fool",' came the hot retort. Then, fearing that her scornful tongue hurt her lover's pride, she sank down against him to make amends with sweet endearing flattery.

The goats long since had wandered far down the river-bank. Over the *vega* was spreading a soft lilac glow that told the lateness of the hour. But in José's mood of intoxication he was loath to leave Pilar, and began again to talk of his work.

'I am at an easel beside a dolt named Joaquim. You know him? *Santa María!* He is half ass, half sparrow. He uses his tail-feathers for a brush. Only yesterday I said to him, "You think you paint a human head there?"' José gestured. '"Turn it around and you shall see it leaves its nose behind it." *Jesucristo!* There's Beratín, an industrious mule, and a rabbit called Narciso. I told him this morning, "You paint the pig, eh? Paint the entrails, else it is not the whole pig!"'

'*Dios!*'

'All day long the Master whines organization, form, technique. I say to him, "You crush inspiration. There is more to art than technique. A picture is only finished when its effect is true! Life is art. Feeling—passion!" I know, eh, little dove?'

'What else?'

'"The classic form! . . ." Form—form—I say make new forms, *invent*. Burn into reality.'

'*Sí, sí!*' Pilar yawned.

'They are blind. Let them paint what the Master teaches. I shall paint as I see, as I feel. Feeling is living, art is feeling. . . .'

'Since you say so it must be.' Pilar yawned, again resenting her lover's choice of subjects.

'I *know!* You *feel* a tree, you don't think it. I never

compromise. I discard all rules. I have insight. And I have reason to know I am right. The Master will find it out some day. Wait! Rules play the devil with growth. One of these days I shall punch his iron head just to see the empty insides. He fawns before virgin painters like Murillo and Juan de Juanes. There's sawdust in him.'

Pilar listened open-mouthed to these unfathomable outpourings, with her attention wandering more and more since they put the personal too far behind him. Unable to stand it, with a quick jerk of the body she was on her feet, artfully protesting: '*Adiós! . . . See!* my flock! They are fleas hopping in the wrong direction.' She moved after them, her wiliness taking effect. José sprang to his feet.

'My golden *Xana*, you would leave one so enamoured? We meet to-night—at the *fonda?*'

'Son of a mule!' she screamed, stamping her foot. 'Would you have my body one black bruise? Have I not said my mother would beat me?'

'When—when?'

'To-morrow, here—at our tree. No one can disturb us.' Pilar's scream melted to honey. 'Always here, José. God give you peace. *Adiós!*'

''Tis the devil's peace since love forsakes me,' cried José —Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes—just José, since the whole of his name is a mouthful.

'*Ten paciencia, valiente*,' Pilar retreated with reluctant feet. '*Adiós. . . .*'

'Patience from the impatient? I die a thousand deaths till to-morrow.'

'*Adiós!*'

'Little brown fox, *adiós!* To-morrow!'

'To-morrow! It is God's will. *Adiós.*'

'*Adiós . . . adiós . . .* To-morrow . . . *Adiós!*'

This sweet exchange of *adiós* might have lasted for ever, but now neither could be heard: both voices mere echoes running into space. The white flock scattered so far out on the greying plain that Pilar's plump body was a violet shadow hovering between earth and sky. Reluctantly, proud and sick with love, she must return to the *fonda* kept by

her evil, half-paralysed old mother, a woman of such excesses in the past that her personal convictions concerning men were identified with the barnyard.

José became as arrogantly, tempestuously happy as he had been despairing. Since love—and Pilar—had restored his self-esteem, he flung himself down on the earth again, and in spite of the evening chill, gave himself up to an ecstasy of dreams. Feeling flowed through his heart like water. But, as the wise know, words never do for feeling, so he sang:

> 'Thine eyes, O my Beauty, are cruel spears
> That pierce hearts with a glance. . . .'

Enough! He left off, excited by the thought of her; the meeting to-morrow spurred on his impatience. How beautiful was Pilar! As beautiful as his mother, Gracia? No woman could be that. Over his senses stole an unsurpassed sweetness. Across the purpling night there was his mother as he saw her on the day he left his mountains. '*Virgen mía!*' With his soul overflowing as he flew up the mountain trail to her with the news of his apprenticeship. And there in the dark door of his home they two awaited the Padre's arrangements. 'José *mío*, if it is the will of Heaven, *hijo de mi alma*, go!' his mother said, regarding the first child of her blood with shrewd eyes as she slapped her latest infant to breast. José could hear the new child's suckling as he leaned over the always exposed, blue-veined breast to kiss his mother good-bye. She was beautiful—so! as he pushed his thumb down on the soft ball of a nose above the sucking sound. And then he was off to Saragossa and, but for the Padre, might have entered the *corrida* instead. . . .

His wits wandered from the bull-ring back to his home.

Not far from Fuendetodas, like a lone eagle in his eyrie, lived a priest destined to be a great force in the youth's life. To his aristocratic soul Spain was a cup of gall. He, with the eagle's terrifying clear sight, fastened on the vitals of Spain and ripped open the truth of its decay. A gaunt, flat-bellied æsthete, a sallow man with a beaky nose, wise and intellectual, the Padre was incarnated with the heart of a child, the spirit of a saint and the wisdom of the

serpent. Within him burned the perpetual flame of the mystic; a lamp lighted on the altar of God and country, never wavering in service to both. Though old, he held to an obstinate faith of being yet shown the way to lead his beloved land out of its spiritual rot and blasting poverty, back to the magnificent ideal that was its birthright. And certainly, if vigils, silent prayers, black fastings and paternosters would accomplish it, it would be done!

Spain was still suffering a long bloody agony. The Padre had known altars and church and sacristy pillaged and defiled by foreign soldiers who stole the most sacred treasures. 'Except,' he always reminded himself, 'except those murals and frescoes that could not be carried off without the church going with them.' Talking one day he said, 'Human suffering is the Christ agony. Poverty of intent is poverty of soul. The crucifix was once the symbol of Spain. Now lust and the dagger have assassinated the Most Pure. Spain crucifies herself.' He spoke at José, and there had come such a light of understanding into those black, penetrating eyes before him, that he set him apart for further study. Then for a time grim thoughts continued to scourge his despairing mind. . . . Could every dame indulge in the popular, fashionable vice of having her *cortejo* without uncontrolled disease following? Could the court continue its lascivious debauchery indifferent to all else but erotic pleasures without Spain losing her virility? Could—(he dwelt long and earnestly on his secret informer's documents)—could a dissolute aristocracy debauch its politics without sapping the soul of the country? Without producing poverty of spirit and apathy and rebellion? *It could not!* Nor was it possible to prosper with every man in the country becoming a politician, thus leaving the fields to plough themselves. No, he told himself sternly, this is a tragic hour for Spain. And in his heart he cursed the man who taught Spain to sin.

As if to restore his serenity, the Padre was wishing it had been his fate to be born to the glory of the gorgeous era past rather than into this decadence, when God directed him to the boy José and his genius. Gracia, José's mother, a fruitful, billowing woman, stopped at his door one morn-

ing. She informed him that the son of her soul was stealing whitewash from her man's, big José's tub. With a brow furrowed with superstition she told how with her own eyes she had seen strange signs on a flat rock behind the ass's crib which José had made with a long pointed stick. *Sí, sí!* There were other strange signs, too, and if her man should find them—her shrug told the rest. Would the reverend *señor cura* talk to her young devil of a son and save him from becoming a cripple at his father's hand? Or from a life of sin? The priest went with her. And barely able to conceal his joy, he beheld a wash drawing of a donkey in breeches with a forked tail and the long blank face of José's father. Brilliant inspired satire! Rejoicing secretly, the Padre, wrapping his thin cassock about him and refraining from blasting God for sending the bitter wind that chilled his bones, walked away. Praying that God would send the sun to warm him to-morrow, he turned a corner and came upon the boy, José, beside an old Roman wall, returned from the mill where he had brought a sack of wheat. His brown toes were bluish, his nose pinched with cold, but he was fiercely intent with a lump of charcoal, drawing a pig on those age-old grey-green stones. The priest's hand swung him about. He was inspired by the passionate ferocious honesty in those eyes confronting him, and by the correct free lines of the drawing.

'Who instructed you, my son?' inquired the Padre.

'I have no instructor, your Reverence,' José replied, hot with suspicion. 'It is not my fault. I cannot keep from drawing.'

Far into the waning day they talked. The Padre saw in the boy the way to a new Spain; a curious mixture of Iberian gloom, lust, bloody-minded but gallant and honest. The quick darting eyes showed more. In the smudged countenance now shining from the holy father's praise and determination to find a patron, there appeared the dream quality of Andalusia. The priest was joyful, José happy, and Gracia proud. Big José was consulted. Instead of punishment that long cautious peasant scratched his thick skull slowly, grinned and handed José a gold coin. It was to go far,

that coin; to be handled carefully, admonished the father. The priest, back in his lonely hovel, prayed, 'Some there be who have no memorial, Most Holy Father, but thanks to Thee this youth is not one. If it be Thy will, through him the soul of Spain will quicken to new birth.' The good man rose from his knees exalted. . . .

José continued to think about his parents. He had been baptized in the Church of Our Lady of the Ascent, and it meant nothing. There was, he knew, an amiable weakness on the part of his godmother to connect great names with small families, to claim relationship with nobility. He tried to recall on the wall of his home a crumbling crest. It would not come alive. Tst! as if by the earth's alchemy up spiralled and swirled tubs of white lead and carmines and chromes into mountainous canvases to be painted with his heart's blood: bulls with black, sweating, silken hides, a hundred Pilars, a thousand forests secreting life, portraits of the King, the Queen, the Infanta. 'I shall paint all of Spain,' he promised himself, this turbulent youth sprung from a family of violent blood and only fifteen, yet, in some strange way, ageless.

Darkness gathered. An ox-cart creaked and groaned on the still air and the curses of the driver and the piercing squeaks of the axles grinding the stones of the rutty road reminded him that it might be well to be on his way. He rose and stretched his long lean legs with sensuous delight. Leisurely and with audacious unconcern linked to aggressive fearlessness, he looked about him and strode off, head up, singing. He kicked at the darkening earth from sheer exuberance as he re-lived his love-duel with the glamorous Pilar. . . .

'Thine eyes, O my Beauty, are cruel spears . . .' he sang to the dark.

The song floated away into the purple dusk. Once, thinking he heard the tread of a mule-team, he stopped and peered back into the desolate waste running darkly towards the mountains that hid the land of the French swine beyond. The plain extended yet recoiled from the furious heat of Africa so near, its roots moist with the blood of invaders as if the earth opened her mouth to receive their sacrifices as

nourishment. During summer the plain spread out a wide flat sea of parched stubble. Winter froze it hard with cruel snows; then the howling of wolves was indistinguishable from the howling of northern winds that tore down on it. In all seasons the *vega* was not safe except perhaps in the moonlight, when a fellow could see to stab back. Robbers prowling over it stealing the buttons off your jacket, the jacket with you in it, were far more likely to leave you a jacketless, bloody congealing mass with vultures gathering for the feast. This was Spain and he loved it. As far as José's eye could see the vast dim expanse was broken only by a single cross rising white against the black sky and bent towards the earth, as if reverently begging its strength back, lost with the patient Christ once nailed to it.

The metallic cry of a pheasant pierced the stillness. José walked through a trough of darkness back into the city. Already hovels and great houses alike were shuttered and barred tight against night's crimes. His boots clicked over the cobbles, rattling like dead men's bones. Every alley was still and dark with dirt and shadows, when suddenly a velvet curtain overhead parted the sky to a clear white, and the moon lighted the city. His senses bounded to the scene, and Pilar went out of his head.

The grey house of the Master's where José lived looked a slice of the moon itself with red-tiled hood. The iron balcony above the entrance was a delicate lacy black. Such contrasts are, like life itself, inspiring and exciting! He reached up to the great steel knocker after running his hand over the tendrilled oval carving about the main door, to whirl suddenly about and flatten himself tight against it, having no wish to be taken for a thief and be pinned to the door by a flying knife. . . . Into the dusty *plaza* of San Carlos at full speed galloped the King's messengers, on horse, flashing by on pounding iron hoofs like ghosts in silvered uniforms. The leader, flourishing his sword high about his head, commanding an open road (with not a living object in sight), bawled his intention to hamstring any cattle getting in his way. Straining back into the shadowy recess, José's keen eyes were sensuously scanning the

flying forms, when above the din came a piercing scream. Instantly full of fight, he sprang out of hiding and ran. The racing horsemen were thundering into the distance. Breathlessly rounding a corner he stumbled over a crumpled form heaped against a wretched hovel door! *Dead!* Trampled under the iron feet and hurled over the cobbles, a broken human in the King's way.

Death was a new experience, and indifferent to it he bent down and touched the fellow's cheek. *Cold!* It brought him upright with a sense of personal outrage, frozen with hate. He hated the King for such low mischief allowed in the name of Spain. He could feel, could see, the King, a sinister, soft-treading monarch going to Mass to arbitrate with Our Lady. For love of his people? or interest in beggars, the crippled, the starving, the poor everywhere? Not *he!* And, bursting to revenge this unknown, he strode to the hovel door, banging on it in fury until it shivered and cracked with his violence.

'*Open!*' He shouted loud enough to rouse the neighbourhood. 'Jackals! In the name of God, give succour.' His hand was suspended when a long, lean dog slunk up, a black arrow of shadow, and he kicked it with satisfaction. Then out of the depths of the alley shuffled the night-watchman, a gnarled old man in tattered brown cloak. He brought his pike down to his skeleton of a nose, blew out the flame unneeded in the light of the moon, planted it in a drying heap of offal, spat on his two hands and leaned against it. He had tough nerves and was used to violence. He looked down at the dead body, made the sign of the cross, shouldered his pike and went his way without a word. This was none of his business!

'Open! *Open!* Before your evil hearts blacken with rot and fall out.' In a fresh burst of rage, José thundered at the door.

At last from inside came a faint stirring. Then a voice, fearing to be heard, whined: 'The good sleep soundly. Be gone and leave honest folk to rest.'

'Good people give aid to the dead.'

'The dead wait on God. There is nothing to be done.'

'Jackals!' José cursed the household with thoroughness. All was darkness, silence, suspicion. Not a board creaked.

Realizing he shouted in vain, his rebel mood sobered to contempt. He bent down to the fellow again with awe and adjusted the crumpled clothing. But either because the moonlight purified evil or because of those glazed, beseeching eyes upturned to him, in another hot burst of feeling the boy dedicated his talent to humanity. Dipping his knife in a pool of congealed blood he sketched on that wretched door the head of the King, with lips curling. He crowned it with a red skull with burning faggots beneath; and then he went his way, raging, back to the atelier.

Mounting the stairs to his bare attic he passed by the Master's sumptuous apartment without glancing in. For two years it had been his delight, with its squared marble flooring, fine wool rug and brazier against the cold. An ivory Christ limp on its black wood crucifix hung above the great walnut open closet shelved with gold and blue tiles. Gravely closing his creaking door, even omitting to light the small copper lamp on the wall, he flung himself down on his mattress in the corner.

After a time his mind wandered from Death to Pilar; to his mother; to the Padre, and he was reminded of something: the day before he left his home he was making his way down the flinty slopes of his beloved mountain, hurrying, inasmuch as the fish-bellied sky had turned purple. Although unafraid, a fellow feels it wiser not to be out after dark when so far from the Santa Hermandad lately organized for the maintenance of public order. Reaching the bottom, his quick ear caught the beat of hoofs galloping along the highway and he plunged under a giant cactus. From this rather public prison he was peering out with the bright, contemplative gaze of a young crow, when up rode three hidalgos, cloaked and spurred. One spied him. With a 'hallo!' loud enough to freeze the blood he leaned far out of his saddle and playfully thrust his sword into the boy's flat buttocks. Up he leapt in a murderous rage, a deep crimson staining his bronze cheek, a healthy red staining his leg. He shook. He stamped. He thumbed his nose at

the merry gentlemen retreating laughingly. He bellowed—and stopped. A great coach rolled slowly up behind its escort. In one window, looking out, was a young angel with blue eyes deep as the sea, with flesh of gardenia freshness, with hair spun of wheat ripened in the sun. He heard her say, 'Such a beautiful boy. His tormentor shall be flogged,' and she blew him a kiss. A kiss from lips to keep both eyes on, an imperious voice to be pursued and crowned with love—if he (José thought then) searched to the end of his life.

His mind hazed over with chivalrous dreams. He stood before a melancholy old potentate who had not smiled, they said, since the massacre of St. Bartholomew. This King was knighting Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes for ridding Spain of roistering fools who pinked bloody sores into the buttocks of talented youths. . . . The pleasing sight of barrels of oil for the boiling of these same gilded knaves were being rolled into the Plaza San Carlos, when the creaking of wood brought José upright in a sitting position.

'*Caramba!*' It was the old *quixada* from the kitchen, with a face like a rudder and the wrinkled yellow skin of a dried lemon. Her ugliness hurt the eye! She peered slyly in, put her head on one side with an ear to the stairs, holding a stump of a lighted candle in her hand. Assured of safety she lumbered across the sill carrying a bowl of egg-soup with bread and saffron in it, and a cup of black wine. The old dame grinned, showing toothless gums as he handed her back the wine. He always did this, so she always brought it. He had no desire, he told her again, to change the tempo of his sensations, they were too pleasant. 'Thieves lead themselves into the noose,' he said, laughing indolently at her.

'It is a pleasure to borrow from the greedy for the gracious,' she mumbled, cocking a dirty thick thumb towards the Master's apartment below. This magnetic one reminded her of her own youthful joys, gone these thousand years, so she lingered with gossip astride her tongue, but not before padding slyly over to the door to listen. Then pushing her long nose to one side with a bony forefinger she winked. 'The *señor* would enjoy hot spiced chocolate

in the morning, eh, with the *pan pintado?*' Her whisper cut across the room like a hiss.

'Early, *gracias.*' He nodded. 'There is much to be accomplished in the atelier.'

She grunted crossing the floor. He could hear her old bones creak, creak, creak to the bottom of the long worn stairs. He leaned back sensuously comforted, grateful to her for staving off hunger as she did, often. But for her his belly would be flatter, since the purse sent him by the Padre was not only thin but woefully infrequent. . . .

Dwelling on Pilar again, he became restless and excited, and the gnawing need of her was torture. He jumped up and made his way stealthily down the stairs and out. Once more free from the restrictions of four walls, his senses bounded like the pulse of the night. Tightening his wool jerkin against the night chill he passed out across the sleeping *plaza* alert to a living stillness, his own clumping boots shattering the silence in which he walked. He grew warm, as if the hot blood of Spain spurted up from the cobbles into his feet as he strode on, alert to danger lurking in every shadow. The stillness gave an added enchantment to his mood of ecstasy.

Reminded suddenly of the dead fellow he left crumpled up, he wheeled about. Turning a corner he came upon him thrown carelessly close to the door of the same wretched hovel, stark-naked, every vestige of clothing torn from his body. Grave and curious, José marvelled at the perfect hips, the long, clean limbs, and his ecstasy changed to savage rage. Life was the one prized possession of the world! Above all else one wanted to live, to know the ways of life, never to die. If he were to be assassinated as this fellow here? He wondered. . . . He shrugged. The answer was Fate! And not knowing what to do with death, he retraced his steps and made his way out to the *fonda* well known to him through talk in the atelier. Tst! No man of iron listens to a woman's fear!

His heart pounded as he made his way stealthily over the whitened courtyard stinking with manure and oleander —to the small window of the *fonda.* Although the moon

shed a cold white light he hid there, his head tangled in the bougainvillæa vine sprawling over the wall like ropes of purple ice. The *fonda* was full. Snatches of song reached him as he peeked in, and the smell of garlic, strong bodies and stale wine. There was Joaquim twanging away on his guitar, with loud noises issuing from his throat, supposed to be singing. Joaquim and Narciso lounged over a table under the oil-lamp slapped up on the wall of the *fonda* and next to a crucifix black with smoke. Here were the 'regulars'; many people came there for many reasons. They were gambling, drinking, gossiping. At the far end of the low, foul room in sooty darkness a row of silent corpse-like men stood against the wall looking at nothing. In winter, nearer the blackened hearth, they stood, and from time to time replenished the fire from a pile of twigs. In summer they waited for winter. Dull, despairing, downtrodden humans so spiritless life was worth less than a peseta. Flies clung to the low smoky ceiling. In another corner a merchant from Toledo leaned over a wooden table and talked to one Gaspero. Gaspero came to get his way, ultimately, with Pilar, knowing her mother would sell her. By experience Gaspero knew the chase holds more pleasure than robbing the roost. The Toledo merchant had come to get his hands on Gaspero's purse-strings, but judging by the grim smile on his sly face those strings were as hard and tight as Gaspero's head. Gaspero had light amber eyes and a mouth like a slit in a money-box. He was a low-grade fellow raised from commerce in Indulgences to princely wealth. Known as the 'Apicius' of Saragossa, he was despised. He gambled with perfumed money. He entertained by way of scented gallery and staircase. His patios were exotic and far more lavish than the King's. Boasting of fountains of black and pink marble and silver, they sprayed walks of blue and gold tiles with scented delicately-coloured waters. He fed his trout on milk, and had them cooked at the table before his guests. Himself he fed women.

But José had come for Pilar. At last in the uncertain light he found her with uprushing blood stabbing his heart like a knife-thrust. With arms akimbo, head thrown back, she

leaned against the flaking whitewashed wall, silent, alert. Wise was Pilar to her mother, '*La Viuda*' as she was called; a bunch of hard old bones with the stringy neck and glassy eye of a turkey-hen. She was limping, at the moment, over the dirty floor of straw with dirty bare feet, cackling to some patron's jest. 'There's no grain worth eating on this floor, Old Widow,' he called, baiting her for the obscenity he got back. There was a loud guffawing. Above the din, however, José could make out Joaquim blowing off his boasting while he feasted on Pilar with eyes as brilliant as black glass.

'I am disposed to think you mistaken, my friend.' The Toledo merchant talked, his brown seed-like eyes on Gaspero's light ones fastened on Pilar. 'The expansion and growth of Spain is assured for all time. I am informed so by one at Court,' he said meaningly.

Gaspero leaned over and, gazing down, traced designs with an effeminate forefinger. Said he, cold and indifferent to all interests beyond pleasures of the flesh, 'On the contrary, I am informed by those who know, politically, that the dissolution of Spain is imminent.' He shrugged as if it were of no moment, and stole a glance across the room. 'We eat, we drink, we make love and die. Life holds nothing more for any of us beyond a world we live in.' His sly glance at Pilar threw José into a jealous frenzy. He whipped out his knife, when he saw Pilar fetching Narciso a hunk of garlic sausage without a glance at Gaspero. He let go his violent grip on the tough old vine over his head and waited to hurl himself at Gaspero's throat.

'Spain is rich in acumen, in influence and in women, eh? The land of successful people, *amigo*, is built up on the welfare of the home,' persisted the Toledo merchant, putting a soft edge to his voice to counteract his discourteous insistence. 'You have heard the legend of the virtuous wife of Burguillos?' Gaspero's light, cruel eyes questioned blandly. 'She prided herself on neatness and spat in the frying-pan to see if it was hot enough!' The merchant laughed indolently, but cautiously followed Gaspero's gaze.

Joaquim put down his guitar and left off roaring an

obscene ditty. He rose and strutted over to watch Carlos the saddler get cheated by the *cebadero* playing cards on the bench by the door. The *cebadero* was blind, but not too blind to steal the barley which the mule should eat. This not being entertaining enough, the noise-loving Joaquim went back to Narciso's table, gambling with some students, Vallespín and Martínez, from the atelier. Narciso shuffled and laid out his cards as Joaquim's loud comments reached José at the window.

'Huh!' roared Joaquim, 'he makes a donkey out of our Master with his tongue for ever clapping like a bell.'

'Cling, clang!' echoed Narciso amidst another roar of laughter.

But at last, wanting Pilar to himself, José saw the Toledo merchant hold up his empty wine-goblet and beckon Pilar to fetch more wine. Knife in hand, José waited when Pilar went to the far end of the room and into the dark cellar beyond.

'In Toledo our women are called the pearls of Castilla, but here this wench'—the merchant's head jerked towards Pilar's back—'this one is a priceless red pearl of Aragon, eh?' He allowed his eyes to stray above his host's head to Pilar, who was returning with a big stone pitcher. But Gaspero, too sly to betray himself, merely nodded and called to her roughly: 'Here, wench! Must you first grow the grapes?'

Joaquim's loud bragging began again. José caught, 'He lies. He bullies us. He boasts and brays all the time how *he* is to be the greatest painter in all Spain. What has his head-piece in it that he thinks to put something greater into painting than I?' Out of his mouth issued a stream of saliva mixed with venom. It landed on the straw. 'That bull-head of his is puffed up. He will die of head-pains when I finish him some day!'

The boiling José stepped out from hiding to crack the lout's brains until they spilled on the stones. Knife ready, he moved into the open doorway, when Pilar saw him. Needing, in the uncertain light, to locate Joaquim definitely, José put one foot over the sill as Pilar disappeared. He hesitated,

still peering about, when from behind a heavy chunk of wood wove sidewise between his two knees and bowled him over, back prone on the earth. A small brown foot sealed his mouth, held him down to nail his dumb skull to the ground.

His hands groped about bare, brown ankles, and with a mighty jerk he tumbled the frightened but rapturous girl down on him. Fear lends strength, and slipping from him she threw her entire weight against his spine, and the two went rolling over and over into shadow beneath the olive trees. There they huddled like animals for warmth, Pilar silencing him with her moist red lips sealing his ear.

'Do you know more than God?' she whispered hoarsely. 'Have you not learned to hear, to see, and keep still? Let a drunken rogue go. Nothing matters but love.'

No need to answer such wisdom. Besides, he could not, for Pilar's hand was over his foolish mouth lest some sound escape it—and Pilar in his arms. They lay, unresisting a voluptuous lassitude, exulting in this renewed sensation, José agreeing in lustful whispers nothing mattered but love and pleasure. Let the fool Joaquim go!

Up from the earth to the moon ran an avenue all silver, and they and love lay bathed in it, until all earthly things were lifted high into it. Out of the white night a nightingale fluted one lush note, then a cuckoo two notes none too sweet. José heard only Pilar's shrill whisper, 'Begone for the love of God!' And to his surprise her entire weight was again thrown against him, and as before she was rolling him away behind the tree farther in shadow. She was up on her quick feet making for the *fonda* door in which her mother stood teetering and peering suspiciously out over the courtyard.

'You, Pilar! Pilar . . . get in,' screamed the wretched old creature in a voice that incarnated the night with evil. 'Damn you for the devil you are. You can't blind my eyes, dim as they are. Only evil lives in the night-time. You will finish me before my time with your dirt and black ways. Me—I have done my best by you, good mother as ever was. God knows you drank only chastity with my milk. Get in . . . before I

thrash you. . . . *Get in,*' she screamed, 'before I kill you.' She made the sign of the cross by kissing thumb and forefinger.

Pilar stopped. And then very slowly she went towards the doorway.

'Old bitch!' José peeped from behind the olive tree and saw in the knotted grasping hand a rope which, as Pilar reached the door, was snatched quickly out of it from behind.

'Good dame! Cease!' Gaspero wishing to propitiate '*La Viuda*' pushed a *real* into her hand as substitute. 'Tst!' His teeth clicked softly. 'Let a rose die a more natural death,' he said meaningly.

Pilar, who had stopped far enough away to save herself from actual violence, threw Gaspero a glance mingling contempt with gratitude. To prove her indifference and courage she shrugged, plucked a rose and leisurely fastened it in her hair. Pushing past the two, she went into the *fonda.* She refilled a *bota* with outward unconcern, whilst her mother lingered fawning on Gaspero, with a stream of mumbled '*gracias, gracias, gracias, señor*' issuing from her cruel lips. On Pilar's face was an expression of reckless ecstasy.

Under the olive tree lay José, pondering ecstatically as to what a day brings forth; black melancholy tingeing his morning, love flooding his soul at the hour of the siesta, while death flashed into the dusk. Fate had bartered experience and enriched him. The wise know natural love lifts one out of the brutal narrowing of none at all; and thus to wider landscapes of living.

Always there are to-morrows! To-morrows in which to adventure into a deeper, fuller, wilder living, and José rose up quickly, too impatient to wait even for the to-morrow on its way. He picked up his knife from the ground; and after listening walked out into the windless night with his long, easy stride. He sang softly as he went, noting all there was to note, alive to possible dangers stealing up on each footstep. But he could not tell which seared him deepest, his enormous excitement, or a new certain power that now gave him the feeling of being able to turn rocks into bread.

Enchanted, he walked slowly, kicking at the crystal-white dust; sunk luxuriously in that well of sensuousness within

himself; sensing a roadside bush as a secret mystery like himself; feeling the cold tang of the night with an animal-like twitching of the nostrils; alive to the sharp white of a mule's nose thrust at him as he passed a field. Passing the leaning tower his piercing eyes took it in, black and upright as a cypress against the milk-white flood in the sky.

What of to-morrow? Always to-morrow takes care of itself. It is a wise fellow who leaves all to Providence!

Reaching again the square stone house of the Master in the Plaza San Carlos he paused to gaze up at the burning white of the moon, and as if in communion with reality a primitive fire flashed from the black burning eyes in his excited face. New-found happiness surcharged him. The night ran in his wild, lustful veins, quickening them. It became impossible to cramp and narrow such ecstasy within four solid material walls. He wheeled about and went back the way he had come until he reached the church of El Pilar. There, on fire with new freedom, he huddled down, hiding in the dark angle of those great carved doors, warmed by his own hot blood and sheeting emotions into an enthralled preoccupation. He stared out into all his to-morrows, designed for him. On the floor of silvered cobbles ahead his small world became a white fire of exaltation purged of his morning's gloom. He felt a strange throb as from a wound, a sweet pain that chilled as the mistral chills and fevers too. The sway of it was endless, returning and returning happily to a youth tortured by ridicule and lack of understanding who had walked up to life and, stumbling on a pearl, seized it naturally, for his own: a fellow born in a Spain wading naked in seas of sensuality as France minuetted towards delicate indecencies in conveniently shady groves. Spain was secret, pagan, phallic, and he loved every inch of it.

Spain flowed with goat's milk and honey. The intellectuals bedded in flesh, earth people in earth heat. Spain's banner was carnal red. Delicate women of the purest blue blood eloped eagerly from behind smothering traditions and iron *rejas* to end, generally, in some dark ravine for the crows to finish, a crow's paradise, not theirs. But they had lived! *Lived!* Here, then, was life for the taking, and

more of it in the silver sea of dreams ahead, and José's heart pounded like a church bell. Gradually a look of celestial serenity settled on his passionate face. And at last his hot brains stilled. His wild heart quieted. He humped forward in a comfortable relaxed heap—and slept.

BOOK TWO

Old Proverb: He who Loves Not Lives Not

'AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING', SO IT WAS IN SPAIN. GOD made great whales and little fishes and woman. He gave woman to man, so there were Adams and Eves in every lane in the land, in every *posada*, *fonda*, farmyard and patio, assuring happiness to the male and uncertainty to woman. Pilar was enveloped in a fierce joy at José's despotic affection. He pomaded his hair with goose-grease, wore a flower over his ear and swaggered about, a voluptuous lassitude running in his blood. Pilar, the earth woman out of which flowered her man's needs, rejoiced; love was a hot flame in her heart already consumed with jealousy. Yet she asked nothing of life but her stolen moments of violent Paradise at the acacia tree. José could not work. Time is a cross-section of Eternity, and there is always to-morrow! When one loves one lives. And José lived.

Away from Pilar he lost occasional work, suffered the students' innuendoes—and what was worse—the Master's lack of understanding, enraging him. But if understanding was lacking, life itself was bountiful, and for a short time José swayed from sweet inertia with Pilar to savage exertion in the atelier. This was a large, bare room at the top of the Master's house, a dusty place with few windows, worn, sagging wooden floor strewn with drawings and plaster busts and oily smudges of charcoal. Easels were placed regularly, at which the apprentices all worked.

José's growth was slow in spite of his keen, quick wits and love of work. Quarrelling spiced it; and hard at it one morning experimenting with pigment, the Master, continuously annoyed by his bizarre daring, so far from classic

tradition taught by him, stood behind his easel, pouring patient, mild criticisms into José's ear.

'"You should never look for forefeet in a cat,"' said he, taking refuge in Spain's shield and stiletto, the proverb.

'History is not made by dead historians but by the living,' José flashed back. '"And he who goes on gets there."'

'A civil tongue is not expensive and very profitable,' retorted the Master, suddenly hot.

'"He's not worth an ear full of water,"' piped Narciso, the Master's favourite.

'"Pineapple- kernels are not for donkeys,"' José snapped out.

'Rebel! You're made of brass. What next will you do? What next?' spluttered the outraged instructor.

'What indeed?' José raised his head like an untamed stallion resenting his halter. 'Tst!' He shoved back his easel, shed his work-blouse and stormed from the room with reckless contempt, ever resentful of authority and more than ever determined to fight for what was in him. Already his pride in his vision was a silent sort of immensity, wrapped about him like a cloak worn gaily or arrogantly as he pleased; repelled by these sterile apprentice minds forced on him by Fate.

Day after day he rushed storming out to the *vega* for his rendezvous with Pilar. There in open spaces he would stretch out under the acacia tree, staring silently at the red baked earth, brooding. When she came love sufficed; love soothed, and stimulated, and released him.

'Hoh! Pigeon! To live without love would be like a sky without light, earth without heat. Life couldn't exist without love.'

He pulled her close; they fed each other's need. Even when he stuck out a feverish session at the atelier, he dreamed of Pilar. Desperately, one day the Master pointed to a fly-specked orange cast, seeing José idling.

'You are behind in technique, my fine fellow. Copy that for discipline!' The instructor's usually calm voice rasped.

José's black eyes kindled; mocked. He seized charcoal

and paper, and traced half an arc, Pilar's breast, which threw him into a mad transport of desire.

'Copying the bust of the Imperial Cæsar is more perhaps to your liking,' sniffed the Master from behind.

José drew the plaster bust; drew into the rigid popping eyes of that august monarch the lustful gaze of an amorous goatherd and laughed incorrigibly. But there was much to be said for the Master, who considered José's impudent daring a menace in the atelier. The Master was a kind but hasty-minded man, and he was honestly puzzled. A travelled man, and prominent (Saragossa being an art-centre of enthusiasm), he saw much in José's talent for secret reflection. On the other hand José heckled him. He took his own art classically, painting his own sweet, heavenly marriages with such infinite, painstaking exactness that he was later created artistic censor to the Holy Inquisition. The Master loved teaching, and received no pay, but his patron supposedly belonged to the Pignatelli family, who were never behind in fostering art. He fumed at this incorrigible, and remarked with vigour: '"The only way to teach perfection in art is to teach it."' That was his daily maxim. He turned to weigh Beratín's exact copy of a steel engraving.

Night after night in the *fonda* Pilar tossed on her straw in a fever of unrest and longing. Each morning found her inventing new lies and excuses to quiet the sickly suspicious '*La Viuda*' when she was late returning with the goats or too early when leaving. Pilar grew expert in slyness. Days went by and she did not see José. Making her way around the piles of manure in the courtyard on her way out to the *vega*, she swished the backs of her goats with the tail of a dead cow and cast oblique sharp glances about to see whether she was being followed. The old woman and Gaspero had had too many talks of late. The old woman also had been sending the little sister, Nina, to spy on her.

José was waiting. They rushed into each other's arms, Pilar's short, round body lost within his savage embrace.

'Image of my soul!'

'Light of my world—José!'

'Yours, Virgin Flower!' His voice was melting sweet, his

lids lowered over blazing eyes. 'Golden Flower! My earth —my mountain—all I need—all that is beautiful. *Nonio!*' Hearing it she swooned against him and he held her savagely, caressing her. He could not leave off. She would not allow it. Her eyes closed. His hands dallied. Where they left off his hot lips pressed. At last he eased her down the rocks where they huddled together like the uneasy goats gathered under the shade of the tree. He poured out his increasing troubles.

'He is a monster of stupidity, that Master. But what can a juiceless, withered-up old fig like him know of life or what great wealth love bestows? Tst! He thinks only that three sides make a square—which is what his head is! I was greedy as a wolf for your flesh, pigeon.'

She yielded herself close, and clutching her tight they lay with backs against the tree, laughing and whispering, boisterously happy. Suddenly Pilar's fiery eyes, dark with love, changed jealously.

'They say you know my friend María? She who makes lace in the doorway near the Tower, eh?'

'María? Is she so beautiful I should know her?'

Then Pilar, seeing her foolish mistake, used her headpiece to cover it.

'José! My mother suspects me. She beat me with her rope yesterday when I said I would never give myself to any man—no man but you, *amigo!*' She added this to draw him out now her jealousy was appeased. He bent down and placed his lips to the bruised shoulder.

'My mother is a *Madoña.*'

'*Madoña?*' Pilar laughed loud and shrilly. 'Mine is two devils in one. She says Gaspero wants me.'

'Gaspero?' He flung her from him, rose, towered over her, a black tempest in his passionate eyes. 'That rooster?'

Pilar began to laugh with a sudden violent happiness:

'Holy virgin, you are salt, José.' She slipped from rock to earth and knelt before him with hands folded in mock humility, sending up a prayer of thanks for being still necessary to him. 'Most Pure, hear your Pilar who . . . *Santa María . . .!*' She was pulled roughly up on her feet and held

tight against her man's breast from which emanated a comforting heat like the earth's.

'*You* are my "Most Pure".' And her laughing mouth was sealed with wild kisses.

So love endured for a time. The way of her walking still carried excitement to him when the Devil stirred the lava of his turbulent nature into a different intensity. His need of love changed chemically to a frenzied need to create. No longer would he dally with day-dreaming and Pilar. He shut himself up in his attic for a time and worked furiously. Each dawn he would lie down on his mattress, and in an hour seize the charcoal and brush he had just dropped. With a hunk of bread in one hand furnished by the *quixada*—half a *céntimo* it cost him—he would nibble and paint voluptuous new discoveries, passionately in love with art again, working in a fever of excitement detached and content. Then the reaction. He strolled down from his garret itching to tell of his experiments and longing for approbation and appreciation. He got as far as the atelier door when he caught Martínez saying: 'He smears on colours like a mason with a trowel. What he calls art is like a bull-fight. Everywhere he sees a red rag and hurls himself upon it with the fury of a *toro!*'

He knew he had no *second* best! If he blundered he blundered with passion. Better to fall from a great height than from a small one! Tst! these species of mules that kicked against his genius! For the Master's slow, pious methods! 'He is as ugly as Picio,' he thought, no worse insult being found. *Jesucristo!* A deaf and dumb man could see he wanted his work to be so true, so human, it would be understood by all! He pondered it, tempestuously preoccupied, storming across the cobbles of the *plaza* through a cracking heat. Nearing El Pilar a beggar squatting on the lowest step of the church whined up at him, 'This poor man was made in the image of God. Can you refuse him a penny?' Now beggars, specially lousy and sore-eyed, were José's delight. Saragossa swarmed with them on one leg, on none, on crutches. He had drawn most of them, but heard nothing, not even the foul curse and the 'Friend of

God who lives in the purse of God' which stung the air following his passing. At the fountain he got a drink of cold water, never noticing the wench who tried to stop him by standing in his way, and mocking with '*Anda . . . anda* . . . Lazy heart!' because he refused her a glance.

Turning down a narrow alley he ducked. Out of the night flashed a sword, but his own knife pinned a stranger's foot to the ground. With a scream the would-be assassin pitched headlong to the cobbles with a horrible cracking sound. José peered down at a masked man huddled in a widening pool of blood. The cracked skull was spilling. Seizing his knife he wiped it and made off to Rita's inn. For a copper he bought a candle and sat down at table and beside its stingy beam drew the dead man on the tail of his shirt. Anything served, hat-brim, shirt-tail, cuff. The inside of his blouse was already a criss-cross of chalked impressions. Gathering up sand from the floor, he sprinkled it over the table and drew in it a caricature of the lout Joaquim. It satisfied him; he ordered soup and vegetables; ate it in brooding silence; and wiping his mouth on his sleeve departed. That night he disappeared. This was not the first gap of his own making; he had disappeared before, but for not so long a time. No one knew where he was, no one ever knew. Pilar, heartbroken at his mysterious absence at the rendezvous, dared ask no questions nor show signs of tears. Each day became an eternity to her. The atelier buzzed with questions that got no answers. The Master was paralysed with fear. Had José met with foul play? His fear increased, having private reasons which must be carefully guarded. His suspicions were that José captained a recent bloody fray in which several dead lay on the field of honour, after the yearly festival of La Seo. He turned cold. The brawl had been carried on at the lower part of the city near the Ebro where José enjoyed most of his nights with the worst riff-raff in Saragossa. The heckled, worried man could prove nothing, but he knew what the Holy Office could do to José—and worse to *him!* if they had cause for suspicions like his own.

Then about the time the Master decided to go to Antonio

the Scribe and have him write secretly to that gross-witted old crow of a priest up in Fuendetodas who started this fool in his follies, in walked José. He offered no explanation and showed such ferocious scowling silence, the first question was the last.

Work, and happiness, and bickerings began all over again; likewise his nightly excursions into the stinking, filthy alleys of this Holy City of Saragossa. And his joy grew when cafés were filled with all the loose fish in the town. His ducats faded into thin air. Love was an essential part of this light-hearted, gay people, and José, a familiar figure, became a notorious one, with his flashing eye, sharp tongue and voluptuous habits: a heavy, handsome person in the insignia of Spain, the large flapping black hat and the long black cloak with sword-tip underneath jangling and gleaming with every step he took. At night he carried that sword in front of him, its sharp point forward to reach more quickly any approachnig enemy. The new magnificence suited his dramatic moods; itched his feet to greater adventure. Saragossa was a cosmopolitan, wicked, dirty, beautiful city of extreme wealth and poverty; a midway for every kind of man travellnig through Spain. Its narrow, winding alleys teemed with people hiding from life and seeking it, like himself. Night emptied dark secrets from every barred window for his shining, observant eyes. Dusk gleamed with the white teeth of fleshy, bedizened women plying their thorny trade. But, always dreaming of power, he used everything for his future. He sketched them; painted them into pictures of velvet dusks filled with skulking roisterers, sordid wenches, cowled monks, merchantmen, grandees, travellers, ploughmen, priests; the whole throng. He hated these fat-bellied priests who lived on plenty while people starved; who offered sacraments with such animal indifference. One morning he brought into the atelier sketches done the night before.

'They slumber under the cloak of idolatrous apathy,' he scoffed, holding up one caricaturing a well-known priest of La Seo.

'*Heresy!*' bleated the pious Master, utterly outraged and

frightened, remembering his recent suspicions. 'You have no control over your tools!' And heresy it was. In all Spain indifference to the Church was a matter for suspicion, to vilify it was an insult and a danger. José, laughing, tore up the drawing and went up to his attic restless and eager to create new elements. If in a kind of grandeur of soul he rose above the smug hypocritic atmosphere that surrounded him, the students had not. They were not able to understand his explosions and daring, especially Joaquim.

Until José's arrival at the easel Joaquim had been the ringleader and centre of interest. He had small talent. He was callous, mean and a coward. Being loud-mouthed he got himself heard, and from the moment he set eyes on José was bitten with vicious envy. When he found himself unable to cope with José's genius and rapier-like tongue, Joaquim's envy burned to seething hatred.

'Here comes our dandyprat—what swaggering since he comes from nothing,' sneered he to Narciso, a rabbit-faced echo of himself, as José entered one morning.

'Saving up to buy himself a title,' Narciso winked and poked the other's ribs.

'Donkey dumb.' Joaquim put his thick thumb along his nose and whispered down it. 'He gains nothing by ignoring my talent and friendship.'

'Nor mine.'

'Friendship is a help in getting on in the world, as the wise admit,' sneered Joaquim, swelling at José's imposing figure standing silently concentrated before his easel. 'I shall withdraw my help from him. He is jealous of *my* talent.' Afraid of José's giant strength, he eyed him cautiously.

'With all his grand airs our *señor caballero* lacks prestige in Saragossa. An original? Tst!' Narciso, uneasy, lowered his voice lest José hear. 'He thinks himself a grandee, the way he hovers on the outside edge of our *fiestas*. Like St. Cupid's day last—crayon in hand, sniffing about like a pig after acorns! He should join in to prove good fellowship. We would help him.'

'True,' interrupted Joaquim, so irritated by his boon-companion's windiness he forgot to keep to a whisper. 'He

thinks God sits on his right hand directing him to the King's favour.'

'He is a baby putting on wings,' tittered Narciso.

'I'll wager you an extra *bota* to-night at the *fonda* that with all his cock-strutting and crowing a hen will yet peck out his proud tail-feathers!' Joaquim was laughing considerably at his own wit when he landed where José knocked him, against the opposite wall. And there with fire in his eye and a mocking smile he was held flat with a knife pointing at his heart.

'I will slash you up—bastard! fling you to the pigs to feast on,' José raged. 'Then cut off your sour, slimy snout, you swine! Tst! But then I would have to pay the price of sharpening my dull blade. It is not worth it.'

Joaquim with a will of straw and a body of iron put up his hands to save his face, unnecessarily, for without a glance at the thunderstruck, gaping students clustering excitedly about them, José strode out of the atelier, leaving it to come to life the moment his back was turned; leaving Joaquim a martyred hero unloading his small brain in the centre of a tumult and planning to avenge this insult.

José strolled into his favourite haunts down by the river to release his melancholy and resentment. Late in the day he found himself outside the city gates on the way to the 'place of the bulls', to see his friend the keeper. During the breeding-season he went there to sketch, held by the ferocious beauty of life in its great fundamental force; studying the restlessness in the bull-corral secretly moving much like that in man. The mating-season was salt with drama. On his way back under a coverlet of dark silence over the slumbering city, he heard the watchman's cry: '*Ser-eno! Ser-eno! las once en punto y sereno!*' Feeling a friendly curiosity in the tough old man since that night he left him alone with the dead man ridden down by the King's messenger, José turned in his direction. '*Ser-eno!*' . . . The echo came out of a dark slit of a street so narrow two laden mules could not pass each other. There on a long, high pike he saw a fluttering light like a fire-fly, and going towards it he became aware of a patch of brown shadowing it, waver-

ing, separating... into three.... *Rogues!* José sprang. There was a plop like a barrel falling, a crack of splintering wood and darkness. His steel snapped against the stone wall ahead and clattered to the gutter. His fist fastened about a throat which he throttled with the strength of a bull when a faint, strangling voice reached his ears.

'*Carajo! Dios!* Allow me the pleasure to live, *señor!*' It was the tough old watchman who had dragged his own bruised body off the cobbles as the rogues fled, frightened off.

'A thousand pardons, *señor*. May God strike me dead for offering you such indignity. A million pardons.' José's embarrassment extended itself; he dusted the old one off, politely. 'A thousand pardons, *señor*.'

'I am in your debt and God's, *señor*. Though you nearly killed me, it was in kindness. *My* thanks.' The watchman felt of his throat and laughed. José laughed. They became friends. The broken pike was restored with a hempen cord which the doddering, spindle-shanked old man carried for the purpose. His flint struck a new light in the lamp, and arm-in-arm the two went off into the darkness, José storing up new values of light and shadow from the flickering flame thrown ahead; the old watchman, under his tattered brown cloak, growing garrulous, glad of an audience for the horrors of his war memories. Pausing once, he threw his tiny beam on a missing copper rosette on the crumbling cornice of a great house of stone.

'Done,' he growled his disgust, 'in the terrible defence in 1710, when the white bulls from those chalk cliffs over the seas fought the pigs from over the Pyrenees, here.' He gazed mournfully at the ruin.

'Is Spain to die ruined, *señor?*'

'If God wills it.' A stream of brown spittle issued from leathery old lips. 'That was a slaughter! I myself lost six sons, *amigo*. All Spain wore mourning then.'

'*Then?* Spain for ever wears mourning, for ever bleeds to death.'

'*Sí, sí*, yet I thank God for a crust and means of paying for it. What more does man need?' They moved on.

'What of Spain's future?' José asked after a gloomy silence.

'The future is in the hands of God.'

'Maybe—who knows?'

'*Least* of all you.' José was admonished, sternly. 'If God does not know, wherefore God? HE sends the roof to cover us from long rains, from bitter cold and a *bota* to warm my chilled, brittle bones. I bid you go with God, *señor*. We part. . . . *Ser-eno*. . . . *Ser-eno!*'

The incensed old man hobbled away, throwing a tiny length of yellow light ahead. Swept on by his restlessness, José started thoughtfully back out to the *vega* to the cave of his friend Chico, the shepherd.

'*Buenas noches*,' he called to the watchman.

'It is already dawn,' came back piously.

Being dawn Chico was already lounging in his cave door. 'Chico,' José said to him, 'I have much to ponder. And among them my pig of a Master. He thinks that to imitate Nature is art. Never imitate anything, I say. See that light of early day in the sky? See how it fuses and extends? That cannot be imitated.' He pointed. 'See the silver of that ewe's back?'

Chico agreed because that was all he could do: he saw only what the wool would bring him on market-day. He was preoccupied with the problem of separating his animals, so susceptible to the disease ravaging the country-side.

'It is all over Spain this season, *amigo*,' said Chico, 'and I must see to the breeding before the Devil attacks my animals.'

José stretched himself out on the earth, absorbed, heeding only the unfolding opal mystery, his senses fired; his very soul opened like a door for it to enter in. He would brook no food, no talk, no interruption, and lay content, vision after vision sweeping him like a divine wing. Out here in this vast, soothing stillness his creative whirlpool swirled and eddied up through his hot blood like sprays of moonlight. Suddenly he moved: he sprang up as if clutching at the beauty he must express. And without even bidding Chico *adiós*, off he strode back across the *vega* into the city, on fire to create. Mounting the steps to his attic on tiptoe, lest his surging dreams be distracted by the fools below, he latched his door and set to work; he never questioned

these moods; he obeyed them, as each fresh lust for living circled and flamed anew, giving him a clearer perception of colour and form. None in Saragossa could understand nor measure his curiosity and aptitude for life. No one could share the outpourings of a creative mind instinctively freeing itself from standards and academic traditions! How many know that power of consciousness bigger and greater than all book-learning? This last frenzy of work squeezed him dry as a withered fig; to a nice temper. Suddenly he was aflame for Pilar, wanting the comfort of her flattering tongue, her arms, her single-hearted sincerity. For it was Pilar who kept the ground under his restless feet as level as it was.

The sun poured down a scorching heat on the rocks and the acacia tree. Leaves white with summer dust hung limp and lifeless. There was no air to move even the stubble. Pale, shimmering waves of heat like those from hot ashes rose up about the uneasy goats, stupefied by it, huddled together like ghosts carved from marble under the still tree. Pilar, already there, had waited too many worried days for her errant, erratic lover. This was not the first time, and her pretty face was distorted unhappily with jealousy as she searched the distance for him. From the bright handkerchief tied to her belt she got out her midday meal of goat's cheese and figs; squatting on her heels, milked one of the goats into the cup tied to her belt, and refreshed herself. Throwing her crumbs to the drowsy animals standing about with mouths open for air, she lay down on the ground, cupped her cheek in one brown hand prepared for siesta. But her eyes smouldering with anger stared wide-open in the direction of the Puente de Piedra; and, at last, not in vain.

She jumped to her feet, rigid with rage, leaned against the tree, her heavy brows arched to assume indifference as José's strong, lithe body strode impatiently towards her across the *vega*, itching to make up for lost time. Noting the amorous expression on his face, hers changed. Without a word two strong hands met about her brown throat and heaving her fiercely against his breast, he demanded irritably to be loved.

'Pilar *mía!* I live in hell without you.'

Pilar's eyelids lowered to hide a gleam of triumph. Her pupils flashed to a liquid softness. She accepted the homage quietly, ready to screech at him and tear him limb from limb.

'Angel! . . . Beloved of my soul!'

'So?' Pilar jerked away from him, anger, pride and fear tangling up her shrewd wise wits. She tossed her head and her voice edged with vinegar. '*So!* Maybe the miracle of genius has been searching all this time for greater charms than Pilar's?'

'Where else would my soul find greater refreshment? Or one who gives so freely?' Her very temper excited him, bereft so long, and his eyes glassy with possessiveness poured over her. '"Cursed is the tree that gives fruit by force."'

Her strength ebbed, but still determined she answered tartly: 'Those whom God favours pluck life as one selects the ripest figs.'

'But one plump fig is more to the palate than a pannier full of green figs, eh?' He laughed, trying to caress her only partly yielding to his dalliance and waiting to spit out the jealousy burning her throat.

'You gave me your love? *For ever!*' He shook her.

'For ever?' She tried to look cool and indifferent.

'My pigeon.'

'Let me think! As long as you yourself love—but wait—wait until I beat this evil goat that nibbles my heel.' Whack! Pilar punished the goat in place of her lover, and flew back to his arms. 'A cup of milk, my soul, to refresh you? She squatted again and the goat's milk streamed a warm yellow drink into her cup.

'*Gracias! gracias!*' He drank, wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and his ingratiating smile fanned the girl's love back to hero-worship. Swooning at his touch her senses melted and flowed through her, unaware of a love that would last longer than even her body.

Her fear subsided, feeling his arm tighten about her where they sat together on the rock. Her heart lifted. Her high shrill chatter shattered the silence. The goats stirred and began munching the grass. And drinking at her one fount of happiness, Pilar talked about pigs and stews and

moss, her mother and Nina and the goats. And in the still midday heat she talked herself asleep in his arms. . . .

With a yawn she sat up, trying to remember something she had spent two wakeful nights considering. She prodded him with a plump elbow.

"'José—José! Wake up, you slug!' The thing in mind was returning. 'I have gossip concerning José the painter—hark!' He grunted lazily. 'The talk is that José, the genius, the great artist, soon goes to Madrid, summoned to appear before the King.' She leaned over and searched his face shrewdly. 'When does *el señor* grandee leave his pigeon to the sharp teeth and aching jaw of Gaspero? *Answer! Amigo!* Else I shall stick your heart with your own knife—so!' She deftly seized it from his sash and held it over him.

'Lies, my jewel, all lies. If not old women's tales.' Sensuous eyes opened full on her.

'Hoh! And what a lie. I invented it to see what you hide from me.' She laughed proudly.

He laughed and clutched her savagely and held her in his arms.

'The talk is . . .' But his lips burned her gossip to silent fire. It was, she now knew happily, an easy matter to hold him, yet a girl must use her head-piece to remind the fellow, as the wise are aware, there are others alive to her charms.

'Alas, *amigo*, it is time to part. The old woman grows . . .' She made a fierce face and tapped her head, adding with a quick sparkle, 'I cook and cook good, but soon the little Nina will bring the goats to pasture and I remain in the inn.'

'Nina? usurp our place of rendezvous?' His face darkened.

'*Sí*, *sí*, but dawn is a sweet hour for lovers' meetings.'

'Sweet, but the best of all my working hours.'

'True!' She grew thoughtful. 'Great men are little sleepers.' And she sank against him, leaving the problem of her sickly, shrewd mother's vigilance to him.

'We will meet then at the *fonda* beneath the olive tree.'

'No, no! The old one still wears her suspicion like the devil's cloak. See?' Pilar held out a plump, badly-bruised arm. 'Only this morning she beat me because I said I hated Gaspero.'

'Tst! A man rides the horse in Spain.'

Pilar regarded his face dark with frustration and once more lied for her purpose.

'Gaspero suspects us,' she sighed. 'I fear he waits to run you through.' This failed to bring the expected response, and she got down from the rock and stood before him, hips swaying. 'Even now, if you come to the *fonda*, the look on your handsome face would bring about my end.' The compliment went home. He gathered her roughly in and held her between his strong knees.

'What look should a lover wear, my bruised pigeon? A swinish look like Joaquim's, or an indecent nun's, or the horns of a bull—for what I am?'

Pilar rocked and rolled. In fact in the excess of mirth she would have fallen but for his savage grip on her.

'You will come soon, José?' she pleaded when her breath returned, eyes shining with inviting lustrous light.

'If your soft flesh pays me the price of my bargain.'

'The innocent have their hands full. There is always to-morrow for bargaining. . . . Not so long another time?'

'Every hour away from you is wasted, Little Flower.' . . . His voice thundered voluptuous music. She couldn't go now. . . . Then finally he wearied of his dalliance.

'Until another day! Leave all things to Providence,' said he, climbing down off their rock with a farewell smile. He strode away to Chico's cave, over the *vega*, stopping to call, '*Adiós*—until to-morrow!'

'Go with God,' yelled Pilar lustily, waving the usual number of farewells. But he did not turn again and she whacked the drowsy bell-goat and went off in the opposite direction.

Pilar released his hells: so went his days: lusting, adventuring, quarrelling. In the atelier the rich students ate where they pleased. Those less fortunate cooked their own food, while buxom maidservants cleaned out their belongings instead of their rooms. A few went to the kitchen for the *olla podrida* generally conceded the rottener it smelt the better it tasted. The kitchen was a dark, smoky, small-windowed place stifling with heat, heavy with the smell

of indecent bodies, fish-pies and stewing bull-meat. Flies hung on the ceiling and mosquitoes buzzed about red-earthen pots and long iron-handled dippers bright with copper bowls. Chickens pecked about and left their marks and got hopefully underfoot, beaks open from the heat. From the pot boiling over smudgy charcoals in the corner fire-place, the students would seize a hunk of meat, another hunk of bread and cheese, and eat, walking about telling windy tales of their newest wenches.

'A bold one, but worth what she cost.'

'You're a lucky dog! You pulled a ripe fig!'

After the noon meal came siesta. Occasionally there came a letter from the Padre giving news of his family or encouraging him to work; enclosing money. Sometimes a grandee whom the Master flattered into supposing himself to be a patron of the arts would arrive in pomp and a gold coach. There would be much hilarity over the hope of a purchase. But José's new magnificent apparel created a hotter, smouldering hatred on Joaquim's part. As dull as he was, Joaquim had not been slow to notice the contrast between José's raiment and his own peasant clothes which he still wore; his short jacket with the broad sash in which was thrust his knife; breeches, poor rusty affairs cut at the side and tied over leggings supposed to be white. Then he would look at José and grind his teeth with an impotent animal sense of some wrong done him. He lay awake nights brooding over it; how to get José out of his way. And a coward's course of revenge being usually through another, suddenly Joaquim saw his friend and echo, Narciso, of use. He woke up to a new purpose, and with sly, mean-souled delight soon had the other students secretly stirred up over his imaginary rival's appearance. All but Beratín, José's friend. Joaquim gloated and watched and waited. José, who ignored him, had for a long time been working hard for certain tones of white noticed in the fleece of Chico's ewes, backed away from his easel, cocked his head on one side and gazed, justly happy. The day, peacefully quiet, was heavy and hot, everyone diligently at work, when the Master, passing

behind José, took a squint at his canvas and passed on to Martínez.

'Good!' he exclaimed, 'you do me proud with your understanding of volume. And you, Vallespín,' he looked at the next easel, 'your development has been slow, but you see how real progress is only attained by patient study of the classic which I teach.'

'*Gracias, gracias,*' Vallespín sputtered, so pleased he grinned at the room, generally.

José, too concentrated to notice, hummed, at peace with the world, when the Master, arriving beside his canvas, seized the brush from his hand and put in a few strokes, saying: 'It is strange how the untutored are always the first to attempt the unattainable.' He leaned forward, and, not meaning anything but the best, brushed out the new precious light.

'Permit me the luxury of finding out what intelligence I possess myself. What it is worth.' José with ominous calm whirled and glared at his instructor.

'Well,' mused the Master, jabbing away at the luminous, ruined white, 'you cannot run until you learn to walk. And you cannot break rules.'

'How can you make new rules unless you break the old?' shouted José, cold with rage over his ruined canvas.

The Master, seeing José's face, felt uneasy as he had no reply to this last remark, when José shouted: 'Erudition is not creativeness!' The now intimidated man retreated cautiously to a safe distance from this firebrand and gathering courage, retorted: 'No greater Master than Velázquez ever lived. He painted . . .'

'To please himself! As I intend to—*the only basis for creating at all!*' José, ready to pitch into anyone, was interrupted by a tittering voice: 'Hark to the Devil's alchemist. He thinks himself God!'

This brought a burst of laughter, and with a black tempest gathering José strode forward when he saw Joaquim wink at Narciso. With a leap José was on him; gripped him by the seat of his breeches and with the strength of a young bull tossed him aside like a bit of cotton. The sur-

prised Narciso landed with a thud under the window. Whirling about José toppled his dripping ruined canvas off the easel on to the floor and furiously stamped it into an unrecognizable mass. Not content, he strode over to Narciso's canvas, seized turpentine and brush and smeared that out in exactly the manner of the Master smearing out his. The laughter stopped. The Master, at this fresh outbreak, retreated to a corner, when José stalked up to the now open-mouthed pedant, bowed and said with exaggerated courtesy: 'Now, *señor profesor*, I will teach *you* something!'

Before the frightened, bulging-eyed youths he walked leisurely back to Narciso's canvas cleansed of everything, and there he painted in one by one, with dramatic slowness, a variety of leaves. '*There!*' he declared with dazzling bravura, '*Señor* Master, you always forget something. Nature never makes two forms alike. Nor two minds. Therefore a man cannot be like someone else and continue to be himself! Is painting, I ask you, *señor*, a natural creation of passion? Or merely your respectable discovery?'

'The Master says Velázquez strove for form so you might—'

'*Jesucristo!*' The rage smothered in José's throat burst out. 'So great a master is beyond aspiring to. . . . There are many rules taught here but I find out very little save by myself. . . . Am I a parrot to scream what someone else screamed before me?' He gave a preposterous imitation of a parrot squawking and glared so fiercely no one dared titter, much less speak. 'In the name of God you teach nothing here worth my time!'

'May you rot in Hell for your insolence!' thundered the Master, finding voice, and shaking his fist, ineffectually because of his trembling.

José gestured the room out of his existence, by bellowing: 'I shall not rot alone. But if I rot, permit me, *señor*, to say there is nothing to limit a man's intelligence so much as his lack of it!' He was gone, leaving those who had neither eyes nor ears for him talking at once, all gathering to fortify the Master.

With the solid conviction, pressed on him by race and blood and calling, that he was the salt of the earth, the Master even forgot the siesta in his eagerness to carry his long-standing difficulty to the *señor cura*, for advice. He seized his hat and made his way out and across the *plaza* over the sizzling cobblestones, in stiff-legged annoyance which increased with every step, when a thought worthy of consideration presented itself to his tormented mind. Again came that matter of suspicion connected with the bloody fray which took place after the last festival of El Pilar! That alone would put one in a sweat. Did he not have hanging over him the suspicions of the Holy Office still secretly but admittedly hunting for the ringleader? How could he afford the censure of that august body . . . much less suffer the possible torture of punishment by public ridicule? Intolerable . . .! And he hastened with trembling legs. . . . Paused to ponder it, and retracing his steps, arrived at the end of the Plaza San Carlos at the booth of Antonio the scribe drowsing in his flimsy little wooden cube shaded by a red-and-yellow striped awning.

'*Señor* Antonio!' The Master mopped his apoplectic head and leaning down tapped the meatless shoulder of the old man. 'Waken, *amigo*, I am sorely in need of your experience. . . . Your services, if you please.'

At the prospect of business, Antonio, across whose prudent withered old face ran pinkish, yellowish stripes from above, giving him the look of a striped old bug under a gaudy leaf, rubbed his eyes closed in pretended sleep, and looked up cautiously. He knew from long apprenticeship to the writing of love-letters for the ignorant and indolent, that to appear too eager lessened respect for his craft, and likewise the price of labour. 'Men are as they are born,' he was apt to say, 'except those educated above it like myself.' His lips pursed. Scrutinizing the sweating red area of the drop-mouthed man before him, he replied with Christian courtesy, not untinged with cynicism: '*Señor Profesor*—another amour? You stood here only a short time ago! You are indeed favoured. God gives a long love-life to one so aged.'

At another less harassing, less puzzling moment the Master would resent this innuendo of impotence, proud of his strong years. Now business pressed hard on him and from his pocket he drew, carefully, first a peseta which he held up, allowing the sun to play full on it before the scribe's eyes. And wondering how to frame all he wished to convey, he began: '*Write!*'

'Write?' The scribe leisurely unwound his skinny legs from about his stool and studied the other as if to uproot and transplant in himself the virility within that old but still palpitating shell. Slowly, meanwhile scratching his head with his quill, he inquired, 'Write? to whom, my friend? That is of the greatest importance. To some new *señora*, eh?'

The Master had at last arrived at a decision in his bothered head-piece and he laid down on the shelf before him part of an envelope wrinkled and torn from carrying about; writing on it in the Padre's fine hand and written in Fuendetodas to José.

'Write, *Señor* Antonio, to this address! In your finest language, if you please, say to this mule of a priest in the wilderness, with my best compliment of course, that for a man of God he directs those under him in the fastest way possible to hell, instead of to glory!'

The scribe, disappointed by this bloodless theme, allowed his quill a slow scratching across his paper, hoping for something more racy to come.

'Write,' continued the Master, as the insult enlarged with airing. 'Say, in your finest speech, that one who, like himself, fosters rebellion and impudence and sedition in the young is a complete stranger to the Kingdom of God.' The slow scratching became an indignant urge to unburden his brain of other unuttered thoughts about José. 'Tell the unholy hypocrite that this spawn of evil who drank vitriol with his mother's milk has no place among the earnest, intelligent and talented in my atelier. I demand that he withdraw this bastard. With courtesy, *señor* scribe, you understand. With courtesy—but exceedingly plain.'

The scribe wrote, but in his own phrasing as one accus-

tomed to the diplomatic blandishments of intrigue, one long aware that greater profits ensue from an inky suavity, than otherwise. Wiping his quill in his hair, he sealed the document with haste lest he be forced to read aloud a script not entirely recognizable. Seeing in that rapscallion José, what the others missed, the scribe not only liked but intended to befriend him. He looked up. The Master looked down.

'Felicitations! At your age, *Señor Profesor*, you display wisdom in forgoing . . .' He shrugged with meaning, and his small bright eyes twinkled up at the Master, who smiled reminiscently. The scribe winked. . . . 'Yesterday, ah! the lovely *señorita* was a lotus—to-morrow—a broom, eh?'

'At heart, *señor*, I am a Christian gentleman.' The Master drew himself up with unctuous dignity.

'True! The godly suffer most.' The scribe changed the subject. 'I guarantee a swift dispatch, my friend, for all documents of a private nature.' But he held tight to the letter, twiddling it with gnarled fingers.

'*Gracias, gracias, señor* scribe.' The Master put down his peseta.

'*Mil gracias, señor profesor.*' The scribe dropped the letter to seize and ring the coin on the wood of his shelf, knowing this day he would eat. 'May God reward you.'

'And you, *señor, adiós!*' Antonio curled his bony legs about the stool on which he perched and, leaning his wise head against an upright, pondered the enormous virility of one reputed to be as great as a stud-bull's.

The Master, released of the tempers of the day, started back to his atelier trusting to God, to the scribe and to the priest to remove immediately this sharp thorn from his indignant bleeding heart; knowing he must possess his soul inasmuch as Time was the property of every man, and the mail-carrier the property of Time, and neither would arrive in Fuendetodas until Fate willed it. As he went his head suddenly questioned the wisdom of his act. Part of a man's capital is caution! 'Only dogs get mad'! He began to wonder how well he could trust, for political reasons, this uncouth mountain savage who might for all he knew be connected with a bag of scorpions and per-

haps unleash—what might he not unleash? It might be well to retrieve the letter and think twice at his leisure before sending it. He turned about in the grip of a new fear. Antonio, deep in siesta, was awakened with a gush of excuses, and since he knew the letter by heart without wasting energy, returned it; and went back to sleep. The Master was damply reduced to the need of a stimulant and made his way to Rita's inn near-by.

Meanwhile, dynamic with fury, José stormed over the blazing cobbles of the *plaza* which Cæsar Augustus was pleased to name in his own honour, to Pilar; to feel the warmth of her flesh steal over his outraged senses; liberation quicken in him. But he caught a young hare and for a long time dallied on a rock to study its anatomy. When he finally reached the trysting-place Pilar was driving the goats homeward, rigid with rage at his delay. He was mad for her and mad at her and in no mood to be trifled with by obstinacy—called woman.

'*Nonio* . . . little pigeon! You do not heed me? But wait —I need you!' He dangled the twitching hare in hand, shouting irritably.

Pilar, so forbearing of these crazy moods of his, was sore beset by her old evil mother and could stomach nothing more. She moved on; but she heard and undulated her hips determinedly, until José's angry shout carried to her: 'Hoh! The pigeon is capricious to-day! Then shall we meet at the *fonda* at twilight?'

Turning around, Pilar screamed: 'It is already twilight with the *vega* purpling under your stupid nose. Give me a one-eyed horse for a blind one every day!'

His voice lashed her to a fine frenzy; she turned and went on faster, but listening.

'Wait!' he shouted, furious at her stubbornness. 'It was the atelier.'

'Bah! Because of that I am always to be turned aside to drift like a goat?' Once more she turned to scream and stamp her foot.

Thoroughly enraged, he stood waving the twitching animal as if to brain her with it, flinging out that if she

kept her heart a stone between her two breasts to make him die of longing, *that* he would never do. While she, fully convinced of treachery on the part of the innocent María—or any friend for that matter—screeched back that it was no concern of hers—if he chose to wait in the pigsty —that was the place for him.

'You have stabbed my heart to indifference!'

In his surprise he dropped the hare. It scampered away. This was too much! Pilar whacked the rump of the goat in her way and raced back, screaming: 'You are lacking in wit, *loco!* Hares are good eating.' She glared at him, ready to burst into tears.

'I? José! Lack in wit? My bird with sharp beak! With hares so then with love.' He thrust out his jaw and glowered.

Pilar needed him sadly, so she wheedled: 'If not wit then . . . False One!' She dropped her eyes.

'Come, girl, a bargain!' Seeing her soften he grew more arrogant. 'To-night at the *fonda*, or I go to that loose woman Rita's *posada!*'

'Are you to be trusted?' she begged tearfully, nodding her head 'no'.

'Does a man catch fright as an infant catches fever?' he stormed. 'Or the men of Spain humble themselves before women who are weak and useless. . . .'

'*Useless*, am I? Well, *señor* painter, then my friend Gaspero . . .'

'*Caramba!*' He left her open-mouthed, quivering with surprise, her woman's pride at fever-heat. She watched him stride over the *vega* expanding into a hot violet haze like a glow from an oven. He went straight, never turning. On; at last he disappeared into the rocky distant earth.

Pilar burst into tears. Loneliness and despair battled with pride. Between sobs she told herself . . . 'He knows María as well as he knows me by now,' she lied, and knowing she lied grew bitter in the knowledge.

Wrapped in his great cloak, José lay in the hot still silence of the night. Yellow stars like candle-beams lighted the stillness, and the quiet brought calm to his furious throbbing senses lost in the drama of dark earth and the

mystery above, having no ear for Chico's rustic wisdom on wool-values, breeding, or the disease killing off a larger percentage of stock than was first supposed. Gradually the peace of the night flowed inward and restored him. And once calmed he grew restless. . . .

He began to wander about again at night, in dark, narrow streets kicking snuffling dogs; pausing before the House of Zaporta to peer in at the beautiful patio where the Infanta walked; at the gleaming gold-and-blue tiled walls of La Seo; in the *plaza* of the leaning tower, staring up in wonder. Here in the great square, each morning early, market wares were set out on stalls under gay striped awnings, or set about on the cobbles. Here passing horsemen cooled hard-driven steeds at the long oblong trough in the middle of the square: all reality, all beauty.

He studied the varying lights; those grand, nail-studded doors of the great; and especially one great high wall attached to a fine mansion near the Salón de Alcoba the former seat of the Inquisition to which one day he must return. It wore an air of secrecy and intrigue. Tst! what was behind that wall?

The leaning tower was a mystery, and source of great uneasiness to the citizens of Saragossa. On market-days when Chico drove his sheep in from the plain he was wont to stop and stare and tell himself, while he scratched his thick head, what others said: the tower leaned because it was cursed by the murdered and notorious Inquisito buried near-by. Manuel the barber—he with the dark sunken cheeks and cruel eyes of a cut-throat insisted, 'did not the initial M stand for murderer?'—Manuel, who stoned his only son for disobedience and kissed his thumb, making the sign of the cross with that same cruel hand, intending to brain the brat if necessary to bring him to terms, he piously said, 'The tower leans towards God to make up for the wickedness and sins of the wealthy in this holy city.' There were many who leaned to this idea, like the tower. But no one knew.

Curious about Pilar, José, turning down the alley to the right, arrived at the *fonda* of '*La Viuda*', whither he was

bound. This rotting old inn, once a great house, consisted of a series of rambling, crumbling two-storied buildings, leaning against each other for support. Over them hung an air of desolation. Every roof, broken and damp from decay, was whitened with the ordure of pigeons. From behind the pigsty rose a small tower which cut the sky in two and was punctured by one small prison-like window. Pigsties and animal-sheds formed a manured court, black with mud in the rainy season where the pigs wallowed; yellowed with dust the remainder of the year. In one corner grew the olive tree; in another, under a saffron haze of starlight, Pilar's mother sat on a stone broken from an ancient Arab pillar, and bent over polished a copper pot with manure under foot. Hearing steps she stretched out her stringy neck in the manner of a startled turkey-hen, peered about with small glassy eyes, grunted and, because of failing sight, subsided unsatisfied.

José, fishing out chalk from inside his blouse, paused and sketched her on the brim of his hat, a dramatic ruin of a once dignified human power—maternity. He sobered, became thoughtful, less devilish in mood; and the drawing tucked under his blouse, he lingered in the door of the inn, taking in the room. He noted the merchant back from Toledo, again talking to Gaspero, their two noses close together as before. Antonio, the scribe, and Carlos, the saddler, sat at a rickety table talking politics. That is, Antonio talked. Carlos had the name of philosopher, for he was a prudent, crafty man who lived the proverb: 'A closed mouth catches no flies.' He preferred to listen. It was safer. Two muleteers, with beards like cows' tails and with heads bound up in once-clean red handkerchiefs, sat over a belated supper noisily slopping up hunks of bread dripping bacon-fat. At the rear of the room near the black hearth, stood the 'regulars', the same number of inert, corpse-like men as they would stand next winter with feet wrapped in cloth thonged in leather, leaning wizened heads against the wall, looking at nothing out of eyes as dull and hard as iron. 'They are like detached fragments of the clay wall behind them, waiting to crumble back into clay again,' José

thought. His eyes darkened. With Nina lately shepherding the goats, Pilar, now proprietor of the *fonda*, appeared to him another and strange person. Her feet in slippers impressed him, and her dozen or more long petticoats of black worn with a gay green tight bodice beneath which her breasts were enticing. His senses bounded; a white rose gleamed in her crisp black hair. With her back to the door, thinking of him in a tearful state, cutting more bread for the muleteers—she did not see him walk in. Throwing back his long cloak with a dramatic air yet with the authoritative gesture of a man who knows he stands alone and both enjoys and resents it, he exaggerated his stride and crossing the room sat down near Narciso. He looked at Pilar. Intending her to share his humorous mood and the bargain he made with her so long ago (which she forgot), he snapped his fingers and commanded: 'Here, my fat wench! Fetch me a skin of your best black wine. Be quick on those plump feet of yours, I say. I am no saint to stand praying. Quick, I say!' Pilar, who was staring open-mouthed with surprise, had not stirred. He called more arrogantly, 'Am I one to bear watching like some of your other guests?' He looked at her, hiding the smile in his eyes.

'*Cómo?*' At last she answered, her eyes masked, her voice hoarse with rage. Her heavy black eyebrows rose to a peak over an unsmiling stare and then down on eyes narrowing to hide the black flame within. . . . 'Mother of God . . .' she raged inwardly, 'what manner of man is this steel and velvet one who walks with the air of kings and offers me insult? . . . "The accent tells more than the word." Holy Virgin!' Pilar repeated as she made off to fetch the wine, rolling her hips with seductive intent, knowing he had been denied her this long time. She brought the wine in sullen silence. Avoiding his eyes and slapping it down on José's table, she undulated back, behind Gaspero. Fermenting over the insult, she watched José slyly, wanting to kill him, to kiss him. But "the wise keep their eyes in their head", and while she searched her heart, her heart grew colder, her head hotter. 'Mother of God! He has not been to the tryst since the day of the quarrel.' No lover could

offer her love and insult her the same moment! Pilar took a sly look and boiled harder; he had turned away.

A scowl settled on his forehead, making a deep rut. He had had enough; a belly-full, too, in the atelier. She had quarrelled with him on a day when her arms, or a look, would have soothed him. He wanted savagely to hold her throat and strangle her—crush her until the blood gushed between her two red lips. His teeth locked. 'She no longer loves me,' he concluded. 'She lacks feeling, lacks understanding! "Women, wine and fortune soon change." Little difference between women and mules—a bale of hay at the nose or a kick from behind to get them to go a level pace! How long,' he wondered, taking a sly glance at her, 'had he been assuring her that she was pretty? The winds of vanity had torn her from him! Tst! To tell a woman she is pretty turns her head!'

With a shrug he turned away to the *bota* which he seldom indulged in, when he noticed Antonio. Close to Antonio, whose head emerged out of a clumsy collar like a beetle's, sat Carlos, whose own small head bore the colour and quality of a withered walnut. Out from under José's cloak came chalk and paper. Out of mind went Pilar, atelier, Master. Joaquim went to Narciso's table unnoticed. José bent over the paper spread out on his table.

Joaquim and Narciso exchanged glances; near enough, they peeked over José's shoulder. There had already appeared under his quick hand two heads, the beetle and the walnut.

The sound of voices hung in the low, smoky room like flies buzzing about a dead donkey. Neither the drone nor the noisy drinking reached him, busy drawing those sensual lips of Gaspero . . . the long hooked noses of the muleteers . . . the Toledo merchant's small, crafty eyes. His personal world became another world of greater delight. He was experiencing another sensation, that of falling in love with humanity. The world seemed suddenly to settle in his soul. He was inspired to the greatest desire of his life —to perpetuate the truth of all human emotions, not one love but all love. On his grave face shone a look of exalta-

tion, and in that moment José's passion for the glamorous Pilar was definitely divided.

She, seeing her rage had no effect, came out of her corner and walked slowly past him. He was too intent to notice. The lusting merchant mentioned her to Gaspero, who replied with cool gesture.

'Her countenance is too plain to be seen with pleasure.'

The merchant gulped down his wine noisily and thumped his empty cup on the table. A sinister smile formed on his thin tight lips as he replied suavely: 'Too plain, I grant you. In Toledo we boast of more magnificent women. The one who burned the bridges of San Martín one dark night to hide the defective architecture of her husband's poor craft. He, a fool, dared not even remove his scaffolding lest the bridge fall down.'

'A virtuous dame, indeed. One worthy of a stronger man.' The two fell to exchanging experiences with women, while Pilar swayed across the floor, her short, round body moving like a cat's, and back behind Gaspero, stared, angry and frightened by José's new mood.

Antonio, the fearless, to impress Carlos, the fearful, pounded his fist on the table. Said he: 'For centuries, Carlos, for centuries, we have been treated like a pack of naughty children. Say what you will' (Carlos hadn't opened his lips), 'say what you will about patriotism, but can a hurt child be *forced* to love its mother?'

The wily saddler lifted the *bota* high above his mouth and squirted its rich red stream down his throat. It fortified him.

'Silence! Antonio,' he said, 'sorrow lies at the bottom of every cup.' Carlos was a good audience, since there were many who listened to Antonio's talk with suspicion; many who suspected the worst of one who could not only read but write; many who were fearful and superstitious, for on the subject of politics the scribe seemed obsessed. No one knew where he got his learning. No one knew whence he came nor how long he had lived in Saragossa. Antonio was respected, but a person to be regarded twice and heard, maybe, not at all.

'No cup is deep or wide enough to hold the sorrow and unrest of a nation,' he replied sadly.

'*Lower!* Holy Virgin! Yours are the jaws of destruction.'

'You think you drink wine, *amigo?*' Antonio laughed. 'No—my friend, you drink gall. The present King of Spain is like every other King of Spain. History repeats itself. Those, like yourself, who meekly accept life, seldom rise above it—or even to it. Waging war for peace is Spain's great sport, Carlos. The Kings of Spain have been—all save one—busybodies substituting one stupid act for another stupid act in the belief of reforming evil. I have secret information, my friend'—he leaned closer and peered at the saddler, his bright, intelligent eyes glowing like coals—'of more uprisings about to take place in Madrid.' Carlos looked about him furtively, and tugging at the scribe's collar, brought his beetle head close to his lips.

'If so,' he whispered, 'it is well to keep it secret. Of what use here?' He had no wish to be mixed up in what looked unsavoury, and grimly he crossed himself, adding cautiously, 'What with spies looking out of every Inquisition door in the city!'

'Hoh, hoh!' guffawed Antonio, 'the government is likely to any folly when a King discovers that the long black cloak conceals lethal weapons, or that our broad hat-brim hides crime! He is dull enough for any stupidity, my friend.'

'Silence! Holy Mother of God!' Carlos put finger to lips and eyed the room while his feet shuffled uneasily.

'It means, I hope, another insurrection. Let *me* lead the King among his *much-loved people*,' Antonio sneered, 'and I will bring him to thousands of bellies emptied by his extravagance, I will open the royal eyes to crime that festers where poverty has neither hat nor cloak in the bitterest cold of winter!'

Hearing the furious voice, José raised his head tangled in a net of creativeness. He rose and moved near to Antonio and listened. The scribe, looking up, recognized the one and only soul among the crowd there who lived beneath the surface of life. He nodded, kindly, and said: 'It would not surprise me to have the King issue an edict to

apply shears to cloak and hat-brim. Anything to improve our morals.' He took a malicious pleasure in Carlos's face, which had grown waxy. 'Sit down and join us, *amigo*,' he said, looking at José towering above him, and remembering with a twinkle of the eyes the written document recently retrieved from Fuendetodas concerning him. He went on: 'It is my opinion that, as they did once before, the Madrileños soon will rise in a body to another glorious massacre—*sí*, *sí*, and they usually massacre wholesale!'

Carlos, knowing such heretical talk could, would in fact, lead but to one place, looked about. His frightened eyes settled on the open door.

'When the next uprising comes *this* King will not escape.'

'He might flee.'

'True, he is well protected by fat women. But if he should, he would not be allowed to enter Madrid again until he pledged himself to many good things.'

At the solemn expression on José's face Narciso and Joaquim guffawed so loud it brought '*La Viuda*' grunting to the door, teetering, peering suspiciously in.

'The old mare's spavined from kicking over the traces in her youth!' The muleteer nodded in her direction, at which another roar of laughter rose and he added: 'She has the morals of a hen. She takes the *bota* to bed with her since her cock was killed on the roost.'

Antonio, vexed, looked about and raised his own voice. 'Only fools laugh at the pain of life. With people, so with races. Our unrest, my friends, our unrest and poverty is serious business. And what's to be done about it?' He waited, knowing there would be no reply. He answered himself bitterly, '*Nothing! Nothing* is ever done about it. Spain makes love, starves, kills her enemies and makes the sign of the cross. And starts the cycle over again. That, my friends, is our *true* history.'

Such seditious talk was for those with the belly for it! Carlos quietly lifted the wine-skin, squirted one last fortifying draught down his throat, and rose. And using the old woman as an excuse, he plodded heavily across the straw to the door. 'Good evening, *señora*,' said he as airily as he

could, and committing this brief deference he faded out into the night. Antonio was still talking to José, who stood with head bent weighing, quietly, thoughtfully, every word.

The laughter was subsiding like the patter of rain-drops as Joaquim's small, unforgetting eyes, like an elephant's, alighted on José's drawings lying on the table. He nudged Narciso and, drolly cocking his head, nodded. Narciso looked. The two together bent over the papers, a malicious smile forming on Joaquim's colourless face.

'You know, José'—Antonio scrutinized the youth's silent grave face—'messengers from the fleets of Solomon and the King of Tyre sought their most precious ornaments for the Temple of Jerusalem in Spain! Spain has been ravished of her greatest treasures. The English bulls—one perspicacious marshal, with the instinct of an art-dealer, once sent ahead of his marauding army his expert with a dictionary enabling him to identify our best art so he could compel our churches to sell on his own terms!' Antonio spat his contempt. 'Sit down, my fine young fellow. Spain makes history not with natural birth-pains but with abortions. . . .'

'No, *señor*, a thousand thanks. Another time.' José was swamped in his preoccupation. He did not want his present mood destroyed by ribaldry, or even history. His quickened senses needed to be free from disturbing things. 'At another time, *señor*.' He bowed to Antonio and turned to his drawings—and went livid. Narciso was deliberately slicing them into small pieces with his dagger and flicking each piece to the dirty straw, while Joaquim, with evident satisfaction, ground each piece in with his heel. Joaquim looked up into eyes, pin-points of murder, and step by step backed off.

'*Jesucristo!* Bastard! You destroy my property? Your poisoned guts aren't worth half of one scrap there of my best self!' The cold level fury of the voice at his elbow roused Narciso, who, stupid with drink, asked childishly: 'What are these to you?'

'Nothing to me, you scum, but everything to Spain!' At this thundering sincerity a boisterous laughter went up.

Narciso, frightened entirely out of all sense, looked to Joaquim for support, but that cautious lout was already standing well back in the uncertain shadow cast by the sputtering wall-lamp.

'I will replace them,' Narciso licked his dried lips.

'*You?* . . . replace a vision of *mine?*' The veins on José's forehead swelled, turned blue. . . . A cock spurred to fight to the death, he flew at him, hand on sword. The *fonda* was surcharged with electric silence. No one moved. No one wished to interfere, one death more or less mattered little. It was Fate. A brawl was a nightly affair. Nor could a woman prevent it, being man's pleasure! Pilar, her heart bounding wildly, gauged her lover's strength, his lean, long body springy as steel. With eyes masked she watched, proud, furious, longing to make him come and crush her to him . . . pound her body till it ached. . . . Passionately silent, she saw Joaquim behind Narciso slyly draw his knife and make a feint to move forward. José sprang. At that instant a puff of wind scattered the oil-flame, blurring his sight. Two steels struck, clashed, José's clattering to the floor. . . . His hands went at Joaquim's throat and fastened. Narciso grasped the table-edge and lowered himself down to a safer level as Joaquim's knife-hand, weakened in José's grip, crashed down on the table. Narciso dropped to the floor minus two fingers. He lay in a crumpled heap stupefied from shock, holding the bleeding stump gushing blood over his breeches, and groaning like a calf that has lost its mother. Above him raged the struggling pair. José was flinging Joaquim about like a sack of meal, and gloatingly strangling him into a helpless pulp. Back and forth he swayed in the furious grip of those powerful hands, while José's shouts filled the place: 'Scab . . . vermin whelped in slime. Come and fight me as men should fight! You stinking offal, you lack the courage. Fight me with knives, now . . . NOW!' Almost breathless, he shouted and pummelled the dazed Joaquim, whose tongue stuck out between his lips dry and colourless as ashes. 'Pray to the Virgin . . . before I cut out your white liver and fling it on the dung-heap . . . a delicacy for dogs! Outside . . .

prove yourself a man . . . before I finish with you. . . . Before . . . I . . .'

Antonio wedged himself in between, for Joaquim's eyes bulged. As the scribe's hand gripped José's arm, he wheeled, furious at the interference, blindly trying to shake off the hold as tough and tenacious as an old vine about his wrist, when something in Antonio's voice seeped through his rage.

'Big wars, my son, are preferable to little wars. Hold your best strength for Spain, not waste it on a fool!' And like a man coming out of an ugly dream José understood. With a savage kick he flung Joaquim from him. His head struck the table and he went down under it unconscious, near the moaning Narciso, half-conscious and groping about the straw dazedly for something gone from him.

'Do the big take time to stamp out vermin? Leave small things to the small! Spain needs big men, José, my friend!'

José's brow relaxed. He said, not without proud defiance: 'You are wise, *señor*. Who am I to kill when I would reserve my power to create. Thanks! To the crows with hogs!' And without so much as a glance backwards, he strode to the door and out into the night. That night marked off something of his youth. A deeper hatred of shams and pretenders was reborn. He walked through the darkness as through a circle of flames, fired with more fervour to move the world onward, forward; his world of Spain!

As he disappeared from the rear of the *fonda* the dumb men moved forward. They stood looking on passively while Antonio, a kind man, got Narciso to his feet. Joaquim had come to his senses buckled against the wall, feeling alternately of his throat and of his broken head. With Pilar's help, the maimed hand was washed and bound up in strips torn from her petticoat, and sick with pain and loss of blood Narciso was put to bed on the straw in a room off the cellar. Joaquim, following his friend, stood over him cursing and lying a garbled account of how José's sword had done the miserable thing to his hand. Antonio heard the lie, and having seen the whole performance knew it useless to protest, because Joaquim made Narciso be-

lieve it. The scribe went away deciding that José could take care of the lie—if he chose—while José walked under a midnight sky brilliant and soft with saffron stars, rage and fight gone from his consciousness. Spain and Spain only existed for him now. Antonio's talk clutched at his hot veins as his own hard hand had Joaquim's throat. He saw Spain with feeble, inert men serving her; fat-bellied priests spewing out spiritual life to those with bellies flat from hunger; machines offering sacraments from the altar to those dying from starvation; saw the two cowards left behind him, the roots of Spain! How, he wondered, could he free his beloved land from her centuries of birth-agonies? 'Abortions' Antonio called them.

All that night José painted like a mad man given a sane vision: one cartoon after another to avenge Spain's wrongs! Kill evil by creating beauty. By creating eternal beauty, create eternity! His crusading spirit would release disease and poverty and the struggle of a proud, submissive courageous people dying from enforced indolence. The output accumulated: biting ironic truths of the mutilations of war, its ugly rot; slit noses, gangrenous legs, torn, bleeding arms, stacked bayonets tipped with bloody hearts; mouths black, tongues torn out; a pregnant woman stabbed through, naked in body, naked in pain. . . . The stars paled. A rose glow mounted into the eastern sky. A bird called and then more birds called. A cock crowed and far beyond the lighted *vega* the crowing was taken up. Close-by, the pealing bells of El Pilar calling the faithful to Mass roused him. And only then, unburdened of this white heat of vision, did he fling himself down on his mattress to sleep off his rebellion.

The old *quixada* mounted the stairs out of curiosity, 'to shake up his straw', she told him. He yawned, stretched, cursing her soundly; conscious of a great depression; back in mind to Antonio's talk. Antonio said his people were like a chest-of-drawers hiding real agonies in their little dark secret corners. Antonio said Spain was hanging in Time as fixed, as dead as the *Jesú* that hung on the door of La Seo. . . . Waving his hand José got the gabbling old

woman out of the attic, and walked over gravely to see his night's work. Crude, he admitted in his honest way, and faulty. And latching his door against intrusion he dragged his drawing-board to his one window for light and there studied it. But he saw also each drawing was a triumph of energy; the very blood and the very bone of life as he felt it.

Going down the stairs, he met Joaquim coming up with his head plastered with vinegar and brown paper. José laughed so lustily that Joaquim turned and thundered back the way he came. As he passed the Master's apartment he looked in. The Master was nodding beside his brazier, empty except for some dead fish which the cat was fishing for, on its hind-legs, busy. At the bottom of the stairs he passed Narciso. Neither spoke. 'Let the two fools keep out of my way,' José thought, looking at the bloody rag about the fellow's left hand. Narciso averted his face, the colour of macaroni, and terribly drawn.

The mauve twilight shot through the window across his hand. Outside, from somewhere came a woman's singing, a low, husky, passionate song. His restive mind heard, remembering Pilar, and the wild unrest of her fever in his blood. He worked on, humming. . . .

'Thine eyes are cruel spears! . . .'

He looked up. The atelier was empty. He put up his materials and went out and walked in the Aula Dei gardens, where roses were in bloom and pungent herbs grown for chartreuse gripped his senses and stabbed him with secret delight. Lolling against the almond tree in the deep, purple dusk, he felt the pious inertia, the ecclesiastical poverty about the monastery here.

He became alive to the painful beauty of the blue night, the low chanting of fresh winds, the dew sweet on his shoulder. The garden made him dissatisfied. He craved bigger places than Saragossa, greater achievements, people like Antonio, who understood him. *Madrid?* Antonio had awakened in him a greater ambition, and José's mind soared. To Madrid he would go! He would meet there all the beautiful rich *señoras* whose husbands would patronize

him! Tst! . . . He reached the bull-corral, and there leaning on a flimsy rail he brooded far into the morning, watching sleek hides, a greater black than the night against which they were outlined. Hides that hid power, a power, he felt, not unlike his own.

The very next day the Master strangely enough and with much concern broke the seal of a letter from Fuendetodas. The letter was the apotheosis of subtle diplomacy, which, the Master's mind being what it was, he did not fathom. After reading it twice a sudden terror assailed his authority as an instructor of the fine arts, for the letter plainly stated, 'And if you, *señor*' (the script said), 'should by chance feel assured of no future for this rebel of mine apprenticed to you, I beg you, dispatch him at once here to me. You will see, if you please, that he brings with him those realistic sketches of street people of his.' How, puzzled the Master, could *he* know of those vulgar street-scenes which he deplored? 'I will deal with them myself, as well as this rebel's contempt for your academic training. But, *señor*, has the news reached your ears that painters from the *Academia* in Madrid are to be imported to Saragossa to decorate the vaulted ceilings of El Pilar?'

Until high noon a vague idea distracted the teacher. And then he saw a quality and design in that purposeful rapscallion José which, it *might* be possible, existed. But there was another uncomfortable distraction; those still active suspicions of the Holy Office, secretly active concerning that old bloody business after the last festival, and, so he was informed, their continued effort to discover the ringleader. Certainly, the pious man admitted to himself, was not his first duty to the Virgin and to Spain? But if, as the first half of the letter suggested, political and royal pressure should bring imported painters from Madrid, would they do credit to him and his teachings? He broke out in a sweat. . . . That day José received a commission, and Narciso received one also. As if to guarantee—whatever it would guarantee was vague in the instructor's mind—the two were to paint the northern nave of the church of El Pilar.

Side-by-side on a flimsily erected scaffold they began designing angelic forms on the high, half-vaulted ceiling. Narciso's hand had healed. But since the brawl in the *fonda* his fear for José's colossal strength had increased, and his own elation over his commission was crushed by being forced to work beside this bull of a man. Narciso started work very low in the jaw.

José, drunk with enthusiasm for this first public work, went at it with energy that caused Joaquim to sneer and noise about, 'He spews out his very entrails'; said slyly, for Joaquim was more fearful of José's strength than Narciso, although since the brawl he was bitten by a fiercer jealousy, as an apple is eaten inside by a worm. Joaquim watched; then told the Master, 'He's brought enthusiasm, freshness of colour, but his designs? Pff! a sacrilege!'

Outside criticisms began to pour down on the new designs. Early and late, before and after Mass all Saragossa arrived and gaped upwards. Singly or in groups in the nave they watched the two young painters at work like two spiders on the ceiling and commented loudly. The wise saw promise in José's bold strokes, but they were few. The many preferred Narciso's pale efforts. The majority saw nothing in either.

'That one has no originality,' said one, pointing at José.

'He has original sin. He flirts with life.'

'The Devil's curled his tail about him tight.' This from a friar.

'As an infant he suckled poison in place of mother's milk.'

José worked in a frenzy of zeal while these comments mounted about his head like a mephitic halo. He was called all those things people are called who dare what others dare not—to be themselves. Criticisms could not down his vision, and in pure devilry his first achievement was impious. His vestal virgins had the voluptuous frankness of women of the street parading with bands of sacred but profane little cherubs with a pink rotundity of buttocks anything but celestial.

The scandal that ensued delighted him. He became the

most-talked-of person in Saragossa. His realism was a crime, heresy, iconoclasm, perversion. He became a moral issue and a public debate. Some hoped the Inquisition would deal with him. 'Deal with what?' José asked, hearing this last verdict, with a gleam in his happy eyes and an extra touch of crimson-lake on the fat round little bottom of each of his cherubim.

'From the beginning I doubted the wisdom of allowing him to handle sacred subjects. You understand, my friend, that I do not counsel vulgarity. Classicism is my creed, my forte.' The Master, cloaked in fear and doubt, had brought Antonio to the church to bear witness to his own good intentions in this matter. They stood together below the scaffold, craning their necks, looking up, the miserable instructor groaning inwardly at harbouring this rapscallion when that donkey of a priest had sent for him to return home. Had he committed a sin against the Holy Ghost? He groaned: José had profaned his most sacred traditions.

'God forgive him,' he muttered with piety, 'those fat-bottomed cherubs.'

'Would flat bottoms be more sacred?' Antonio's eyes twinkled.

'You know nothing of the principles of art, that is plain.'

'True, but I know life and courage, my friend. I also know,' added the scribe seriously, 'that life divides itself into two classes—those who understand and those who do not!'

'Do you understand iconoclasm and irreverence?' questioned the worried Master, fretfully.

'As much as any man I know. Also reverence for one's ideals when presented even in this unusual form.'

'He will bring down the Inquisition on my head,' moaned the Master.

'One has to die some time! What matter, eh?'

The Master recoiled from his friend as one lacking in delicacy, his patience gone; he pointed out again to himself that he could not be held responsible, and wheeled about, leaving the scribe gazing upward at the youth's luminous inspiration which had burst out into a divine, mad sort of humour.

Antonio and Saragossa saw José ride the harsh comments so like a Titan; presently new commissions began to pour in for him. He was given a public mural to do. The criticism died down. José's prominence, too strong for Joaquim, became an age-old wine of dry, sour vintage. His sullen, heavy face turned the colour of a fish-belly when he thought of José. He got Narciso alone out to the *fonda* one night and with heads together they plotted revenge.

With Narciso again appointed his assistant, José set to work on his new mural, a Santa Teresa on a southern spandrel, re-inspired by his fire of criticism. It spurred him to more understanding command of his medium, new handling of those dependable flashes of insight. His technique leaped ahead; while Narciso, like a minnow swimming in the wake of a leviathan, copied him in secret.

The mural was finished: a haunting background with pallid fleecy clouds for halo, and seven-times-seven refined in colour as so great a saint demands, Santa Teresa turned out to be a perfect likeness of Pilar of the goats, lacking in mystic delicacy, naturally, but José's ideal of womanhood at its saintliest best—at the moment.

Narciso recognized the likeness, but held his tongue. Being talented, he saw much in José's work to profit by and imitate. One day he screwed up courage to break through the chill silences that surrounded them from the start. He moved cautiously as a cat along the flimsy boards of the scaffold for a close inspection of the new work.

'Broad brush-strokes like those for backgrounds are good enough,' he ventured, 'but not for flesh. The Master taught you that. He knows!'

The old argument was reopened, but José, lifted up to rapture over a new-born discovery, answered with kindly humour, 'Must one be literal, Maxo, to make an impression?'

'I know nothing of that, I only know . . .'

'Exactly—that's all you'll ever know! What *has been* but not what *may* be, but I will add to your poor little store. Art and life, *amigo*, are two occupations in which one can do as he pleases without consulting his neighbour.'

'But . . .' Narciso pointed with his brush. 'You paint the face of your nun in unholy likeness to a rose.'

José with mock gravity examined Narciso's face.

'Are nuns more like roses than sheep? Nuns have secret hearts like roses pierced by many a thorn. Why not the rose as a symbol?' José's vehemence swayed the scaffold, and Narciso, frightened, clutched a rope while replying with waxy lips, 'I can conceive of no such saintly symbol.'

'Well enough, then the answer is paint as you feel. And if you can't *feel—plough!*'

Stung by the reply, Narciso righted himself and retorted with some show of courage, 'The Master says you lay on too much bitumen.'

'You lay on paint as if your belly was stuffed with straw, and your brains too.' José laughed. 'What *is* painting?'

Narciso had no reply save to crawl cautiously back to his own stilted share of the work and begin again his mechanical labours.

For many days they worked in oblivion of each other. Then one morning José, roused by Narciso's silent contempt (egged on by Joaquim), shouted from his end of the scaffold: 'If fasting can give you vision, in the name of God, *fast!*'

'You blaspheme!' A slow sullen red stained Narciso's pale face.

'What of it? Answer my questions.' José faced him so swiftly, the scaffold rocked like a boat. 'Once more I shall add to your little store of knowledge,' he said. 'Art, like life, consists of sacrifices and accents.' Whereupon, with diabolic glee, as Narciso slyly watched him, he added a bold, ironic accent to the beard of his tough San Pedro, portrait of his friend the night-watchman.

Narciso's thin pallid lips snapped. José moved as far from him on the scaffold as possible, to be rid of his irksome presence, and was soon absorbed, a look of creative devotion on his grave face.

But, as was to be expected, the novelty of the work wore off, dissatisfaction followed, and lust for a change. . . . He burned to go to Madrid. The strain of standing long

hours in a damp, gloomy church cramped his body as well as spirit, and strained muscles, and a hot mind cried again for release. He took the hour of siesta, bethinking himself of his boyhood desire, and went to the bull-corral, where the keeper of the bulls, an old friend, allowed him the sport of 'calling' young bulls. He practised happily, and more than once escaped the fate of being dragged from the pen a corpse. But this release of physical energy only revived more restlessness. The old craving and curiosity for life surged up in him. Night after night found him again in company of thieves and rogues and whores in the foulest fever-breeding rat-holes in the city, by the Ebro. There lust and knifing were a thing of the moment and there he flirted with Death and unlocked his imagination. But his entire life seemed surrounded by a magic force. He wore on his sleeve the proverb, 'Don't trust, don't wrangle, don't form a brotherhood,' but he found companionship. His note-book, later, was crammed full with sketches of this humanity stripped of pretence, new secrets of the human heart. Steeped in new excitements, he went back to work, eager to translate into paint these tragic and comic humours of the human spirit which seemed to accumulate for him to re-create as the fertile earth accumulates to fruition. And his work took on a new seriousness.

Pilar no longer shared his life. Pilar, since the night of the brawl when she tossed until dawn on her mattress, grieving, biting her shift in her misery, had grown hollow-eyed. She had not seen José before or after Mass, prowl and steal time from the *fonda* as she had. Life was empty. Her soul was seared with the hot iron of loneliness. During feminine fits, Pilar's head-piece stirred and filled with schemes as a nut with meat. The corners of her mouth turned down, for desire was a brutal god beating continuously at her hot blood. In Pilar's veins was none of the water-soup she served in the *fonda*. . . . No more bliss beneath the acacia tree; and moonlight nights killed her with pain.

Night after night, padding about the *fonda* serving guests, she chatted, grieved, counted coppers, spooned the *podrida*

and kept her eye on the door, her wild heart exploding at each approaching step. One day, Pilar, giving a good lie thought up in the night, passed her old mother nodding in the sunlight of the court. Once out of sight of her she picked a rose, pinned it coquettishly over her ear, adjusted her shawl so her breasts showed plainly, and, taking her seductive self past the leaning tower market-square redolent of ripe fish and indecent meat, she arrived with beating heart at the door of her friend the lace-maker. María, under her grape-shadowed door, with lace-pillow on lap, was industriously at work. She looked up and her lips pursed.

'*Buenos días*, María. I have news for you.' Pilar moved under the green arbour and toyed nervously with the rose suddenly plucked from her hair. 'Nina is nursing a sick kid.'

'It's time for her to nurse something. She will marry?'

'*Sí, sí!* The old one grows feeble and lies half the day on her mattress bleating like a sick goat.'

'The old are always hard on the young.' María laughed.

Pilar's hungry eyes searched the *plaza*.

'Last night two strangers came by on horseback,' she began. 'They pounded and shouted to open the door. I didn't as it was late.'

'Who knows what you missed?' María's breasts churned with envy.

'One has enough to care for already at the *fonda*.' Pilar bit at the rose, her eyes again peering over the square. 'I did not see you at Mass this morning. What news . . . of the city?'

'No news,' said María, and forthwith bubbled up a spring of gossip. 'Manuel nearly killed his son yesterday. The brat was stealing honey when Manuel caught him with his hand in the pot. He pounded the stone lid on his wrist and crushed the bone, so the chemist said.'

'The boy will be crippled?'

'It served him right. That or jail. Manuel did well to teach him his lesson in time. You could hear the boy scream, *here!*'

'Scream? Why should he scream?' Pilar's interest in cripples ceased. Her roving eye had come to rest beyond

the horse-trough under an awning where another Pilar was arranging her stock of penny fans. Pointing with the rose, her lips curled scornfully.

'That one of virtue—*there!*' she said. 'How she must pray to the Holy Mother for a lover before old age finds her "dressing the saint".'

María looked, took a pin from her cushion and stabbing the air with it, said: 'She lack? She has a lover any girl would be proud of. One not easily tethered, as the saying is.' Pilar became a pillar of fire. Around the corner of the tower strode José and stopped before a beggar folded up, a mound of oily rags at the foot of the tower. . . . The rags unrolled. The beggar shot two perfectly good healthy legs down from the upper half of his stinking breeches and stood up with a grin, no longer a cripple but José's new model. José put into his dirty hands a *perro chico*, the beggar whined his compensation, 'Jesus and Mary give him who gave,' rolled himself back into his comfortable filth, to sleep, and José strolled leisurely on to the fan-stall.

In the Holy City of Saragossa under the shadow of El Pilar, there were always being born little girls who were dedicated to the Virgin in the hope of future fecundity. Pilar of the fans was one of these. She was of a ferocious virtue, a quality not often under José's eye, and because of it imagination cloaked her with burning interest. In her eyes as black and expressionless as blackberries beneath hair as black and coarse as a mare's tail, he got glimpses of a very pleasant hell. He courted her, and courted her in vain. The surprise of it pitched him into a boiling desire, and his public pursuit was food for this Pilar's vanity, which in turn fed her virtue.

Pilar of the goats, ready to kill José or kiss his feet, drew back in shadow, bitten with a jealous frenzy. She had lived with his love and given love that became her life. The tumult in her increased; the rose twirled in her hand and cut the air like a dagger. Her small slipper tapped the stones with a lively beat. María, noting it, gossiped with increased pleasure.

'Is it true that *he*,' she nodded her head at José, 'is the

coming painter of all Spain? She is lucky to attract one who attracts the King.'

A mangled rose fell to the stones, and out into the reeling light stalked a frenzied goatherd. Timing her steps nicely, hips swaying, hot eyes fixed, she went and stopped beyond the trough, in front of her man.

'José . . . *mío* . . . can you forget so easily?' Heavy eyelids lowered, lifted ravishingly and settled as upon two dark doves at rest.

'Pilar?—little pigeon?' He was surprised into a gloomy tenderness. And, sweeping her his most cavalier of bows, dismissed her for a coarse blouse which pressed more disturbingly upon charms unseen and as yet withheld. About this Pilar's thick brown throat glistened red glass beads which moved convulsively, gleaming under the awning's light like evil magic. Expressionless eyes rested insultingly on the goatherd's face as she bit off her words: 'The handsome *señor* is more interested in fans than in the greasy wool of goats.' She held up a fan. 'The gracious painter likes the scenes of the bull-ring, eh?'

The shaking goatherd knew her story had gone from mouth to mouth. Her eyes shone like a vulture's ready to tear from its bones the ugly olive flesh of this thief whose thick thumb was pointing at her. Even so her heart was beseeching her lover for the return of her very life. Her slippers rapped the cobbles; her face grew bloodless. The other Pilar, assured of victory, had turned to wheedle a hesitant customer to buy. With his back to her, José leaned over the stall, toying with the stock, giving Pilar of the fans full benefit of his amorous glances. And as the customer departed he leaned close and whispered: 'My arms ache to cage you, my tame hawk! You will dance with me in the square to-night. I am free.'

'Free from what?' The goatherd's slippers clicked rapidly away from fish and rosary and herb-stalls and under the fan-stall awning. 'Free for this swollen pig of a wench? What most pleases the fickle painter of Saragossa?' she cried, her voice quivering like her chin. 'I myself want all or nothing at all—as you were wont to.'

José looked around and bowed with exaggerated grace. 'I am one who manages his own life—free from advice.'

The infuriated Pilar smiled bravely, but with a jerk she pointed her slippered heel under the stall and brought it down, hard.

'My foot—the slut has broken all the bones in my foot!' screamed Pilar of the fans, not hurt but writhing for effect.

'You lie! Loose a bull under this awning and you'd run,' shouted Pilar, hoarse with passion. 'My foot is too small to crush the hoof of a cow! Nor would I, a lady born, even touch a boaster of make-believe chastity!'

'You skirted devil . . . you saddle-nosed bitch . . . Holy Virgin, I am a lady, you pot-bellied trollop . . . you loose fish . . .!' screamed the fan Pilar. 'You dare call *yourself* a lady!'

'What don't I dare?' shouted the goatherd, her hands moving wildly, unconsciously, among the stock of fans. 'I dare anything now!'

'You dare steal my fans as well as . . . my lover?'

'*Steal? Me*, steal,' repeated Pilar, dazed at the accusation.

'Yes, steal, I saw you. You put a fan in your pocket.'

With a quick move the infuriated goatherd jerked the toe of her slipper under the stall against the wooden props. There was a loud report of crackling wood and down crashed the stand, props, awning, the neatly piled fans rolling away in every direction. From under the awning, draped about her dishevelled head, sprang the fan Pilar rolling up her sleeves, the fury of her voice reaching every corner of the square. The other Pilar backed off, laughing stridently, unable to resist a last taunt.

'Trickster! You wrinkled old virgin boasting of the beauties of love you know nothing of. . . .'

With one lunge the fan Pilar caught at her nose. Strong teeth fastened in her upraised hand.

'Trickster . . . virgin . . . old,' shrieked she, 'who are you to talk virtue you never had!' Pilar with effort freed her paining hand and backed away, while from behind the stalls came hurrying a chattering group anticipating much pleasure. With one glance at her wreckage the fan Pilar

caught the other about the waist with such force it hurled her against a cart piled high with lemons. It upset. With a squeal of fright the donkey ran away dragging the overturned cart, while among the yellow rolling fruit sprawled the two Pilars, pounding and cuffing and screaming. They bit. They clawed, they tore. The red glass beads broke and rolled off like currants. Locks of black hair floated away in tufts . . . the fan Pilar with both fists punished the other, struggling hard to get free. They bumped and banged and caromed over the cobbles like two wild-cats in clouds of rising yellow dust; a cheek torn and bleeding, two lips cracked and swelling; blouses torn to rags.

'Good for her hot blood. Beat her well,' yelled the tax-collector.

'Let the mud-larks fight, the dust is a cooling nest,' jeered the fishmonger, sourly, himself suddenly covetous of the goatherd's charms, now well exposed.

'Let me go,' wailed she, dizzy and nearly done for. 'Let me go!'

'You dirty trollop. . . . *Never!*'

From between the bowed legs of a muleteer who with an obscene jest stopped in front of him barring his view, the oily cripple was peeking with lascivious satisfaction at the fan Pilar bare to the waist. José, oblivious to everything but rhythmic flashing bodies swaying in an inviting tangle of massed colour, had no thought of helping either. He elbowed his way through the boisterous crowd and leaned against the tower wall, with paper and chalk, rapidly sketching; hips, torsos, legs and waving hands became lines of sensuous feline movement. A fresh scream, a flash of agitated flesh and he looked up in time to see the two fall into the water-trough.

The cripple with one leap extricated them, hauling the half-naked fan Pilar upright, both girls dripping and facing the jests of the delighted market folk. José's interest in the virtuous Pilar vanished. His sense of beauty was offended; her breasts were unpromising, her chest ribby, her shoulder-blades would cut anything in two, and disenchanted he wheeled about, thinking, 'Leave all things to Providence.'

And made off to his attic to translate into pigment his bunch of confused pink flesh. Towards the dripping breathless pair strolled a priest, who stopped and sternly demanded of them both a purging of the sins of the flesh. Pilar of the goats, whose voice was thick in a bruised throat, sobbed: 'It was she who started it, Holy Father.'

'A lie! She pigged it on me. I was listening to an honest man who loves me, Reverend *Señor*.'

'It's a shame to belie the devil.'

'*Liar!* I was making a gift of my best fan to the Count's wife when this slut slapped me.' The fan Pilar, though breathless, spat out her spite and began to scream.

'Enough!' The priest raised his hand commandingly.

'But, *Señor* Father, God knows she's doing all she can to ruin me who would not hurt a flea.'

'Hear my side, Reverend *Señor* . . .'

The curé silenced them with a tale about a woman named Jezebel. He moved on, and seeing no future excitement, the tax-collector moved aside with the fishmonger, to talk it over. The stalls filled again with their respective owners. Sullenly, the fan Pilar, who had pulled up the torn blouse to cover her nakedness before the priest, stroked down her bedraggled hair and limped away to her own stall to gather up what wares the children hadn't stolen, meanwhile venting her spite with shrill maledictions that cut the air like a harsh wind. The goat Pilar stood shaking where the cripple hauled her, until María came forward with relish and pursed lips and loud condemnation. Pilar kneaded her bleeding hand, and longing to ease her bursting heart, turned. But the expression on her friend's face pricked her pride. She shook her head at the proffered help and bent over the trough. In the cooling water she cleansed the open wound, bathed her scratched cheek free from blood, and still dizzy went stumbling across the square in the hot reeling light; around the corner of the tower and on to the *fonda*, silently, her wet slippers making dark prints in the hot dust as she went.

Later, José painted a small canvas with brio and luminous flesh-tones, of nymphs bathing. Nymphs bathing was bla-

tant realism; two nude, sensuous, rhythmic bodies lolling peacefully on the banks of a shallow lake. From the wide flat face of one nymph stares a ferocious virtue, although the eyes shaded by black hair as coarse as a mare's tail look out a very nest of temptation. The other nymph smiles with voluptuous red lips, frankly showing in the depths of insolent eyes a smouldering passion. Perhaps it is to this canvas which José referred when he said, 'I could never paint anything in captivity, cat or other animal. Every movement must be free.'

The following morning, early, before her mother could force another lie out of her, Pilar, by dint of bathing her wounds in cold well-water and much clean meal from the mule-bin spread over her scratches, hid all evidence of the brawl. With humiliation anchored in her heart, she stole out early to Mass; to be alone and pray. In the dark chill nave where the cold odour of poverty, unwashed humans and incense hung on the damp air, she sank to her knees before the image of the Blessed Virgin in her pillar of jasper. In great humility her head bowed to the earth. Solemnly, sincerely, she made a vow to HER who was so young, so beautiful, and who knew suffering of her own. This Divine Lady would hear her; and daring to lift her troubled eyes to the brilliant ones, sad yet shining with warmth and rich with understanding, Pilar poured out her sufferings in a torrent at the holy feet: 'O Beautiful Divine *Señora*,' she prayed with her whole hurt heart, 'hear my prayer. Restore my lover, who loves me. He is devilled by one unnatural who casts a spell upon him. O Lady! Thou knowest my heart cannot beat without love. Holy Mother, read my heart . . . I have never desired another. I am not evil. I have been true. . . . Help me in this hour of pain. . . .'

Pilar raised her head, and because the calm eyes in the sweet holy face above her were bright (in the rays of the ever-burning lamp) Pilar read them as tears of happiness over her delayed piety. Before the Most Pure, she vowed to don a single garment, tie it with a hempen rope and crawl from the Most High Altar through the streets of

Saragossa, kissing each cobble on the way—*if* the Divine Lady of Sorrows would restore her lover. Pilar remained one hour on her knees, praying, trusting; repeating her vow. After thinking it over, she postponed the date of her penance from the Feast of the Most Holy Virgin on the eighth of December, to that of Corpus Christi. She would, Pilar reasoned, being a little clearer of head by now, give the Holy Lady more time, for as one knows, 'there is often little profit in haste'. 'O Most Pure,' Pilar added to her prayer, 'Thou knowest my heart is pure. Evil has never entered it. Give me one sign, Holy Mother, that I will yet please the *Señor Jesucristo!* And if it is your divine will, intercede with *Señor* God, my Father in Heaven, against my only sin—that of over-loving.' From the depths of her soul Pilar made the sign of reverence and rising came out of the dark church into an early pale sunlight, her heart relieved and uplifted. The Virgin, a sweet, suffering *señora*, understood all human pain and there was no doubt that José would soon be restored to her. She had but to wait.

So Pilar waited for an answer from the Most Pure. But none came. Empty monotonous days dragged by, burying her in more prayers and more hope; days of lifting her drawn face in surprise when he did not come. Each night in the *fonda* was the same, listening to Joaquim's envious bitter talk about José, to the same gossip of how the King was about to recognize his genius. Pride kept her smile fixed. Pilar waited a long time for her answer. The little sister Nina was taken in marriage by the saddler's son. The old mother took to her mattress, grunting and complaining the whole day long, her old eyes less and less sharp, although her hearing remained *too* good. She was twisted with a new visitation from God, and hearing was her crown. But gradually even that and her evil tongue ceased to function, and she became a mere animal desiring only food and water.

Time turned hope into torture. There came no sign from the Blessed Lady. Pilar's lips tightened. The round curves of her cheeks sharpened, the velvet in her eyes grew

as hard as iron. Yet her prayers waited upon her wounded pride, her loyal heart going out to the old love, through the magic of prayer. Still no sign. Pilar grew thinner and pale; and the lines about her red lips now offered dry bitterness. And then a consuming desire for revenge bit her like an acid: she turned to Gaspero. Thus would she avenge José's desertion.

Spring: sap ran in men's veins as in the trees the length and breadth of Spain; carpets of anemones in the forests in Fuendetodas, and there José's restless mind went adventuring while the whole desolate *vega* about Saragossa was brought to renewed life. In new heat, here and there a stalk glistened like a bright toy sword-blade. Fleshless, bony rocks were carmine with broom, sharp-cut crags bristled with purple thistles. Birds mated noisily. Donkeys brayed outrageously. Chico's sheep were bleating wistfully under day-skies as hot as young blood. The whole earth was mating and Spain throbbed with secret life at dawn, at twilight, under black skies soft with star-dust.

José's feet itched to be moving. And suddenly he remembered, in an alley, a great nail-studded door, mysterious, one to be investigated; a high wall shadowed by an oak, a *reja*, which once intrigued him. Forthwith, the Eve of St. John (were not all *fiestas* a time for pleasure?) found him in the alley no wider than a cow-path near the Salón de Alcoba, ostensibly sketching. If his eye were on his work his mind went elsewhere. The alley ran out into a *plaza* which formed a frame to a passing panorama; silver-throated little asses gay with jingling bells and red trappings, laden with panniers bulging with lemons and oranges and figs, preceded a congregation of lean dogs and pigs ribby from lack of food. After their droppings strutted pigeons dragging their tails in the hot, bright dust. Then came a young bull tied to a long rope and led by dirty hooting little boys who stopped to tease and stab the brute with sharp wooden forks which enraged him into attacking them. This amused them greatly. And roaring with glee they fell behind and twisted his tail, laughing at his evident pain. As one little urchin became busy about very private

business of his own, José was quick to finish another of those 'vulgar street-scenes' of his. But more eager to be about that other affair, the sketch went into his blouse and he strode off down the alley, which extended far along and beyond that Moorish mansion.

From over the wall beside that shut-in garden came the intoxicating fragrance of jasmine, and his senses reeled. Drinking in the excitement of spring he walked around to the front of the mansion and stopped opposite it, suddenly arrested. For many a day that house, a solid, dignified evidence of luxury, had filled him with a sense of adventure. And looking casually to right and left, up and down, and finding no one in sight, José crossed over the street, looked the house over, and going up ran his hand sensitively over the delicate stone traceries ovalling the front-door. He backed away to measure with his eyes the distance from street to the fine iron balcony high above it. 'A perfect distance for sudden death, say at the hands of a surprised or too prejudiced husband,' he mused, smiling. (At twenty he was the terror of almost every husband in Saragossa.) He saw himself thrown by aristocratic but manly hands from that balcony to the street below, a mass of romantically broken bones. 'Worth it,' thought he, turning a dare-devil gaze upon the iron *reja* which closed the patio in and his dreams out, when his quick ear caught, from behind the *reja*, a woman's voice, singing the saddest of music. A flash of red fire in his brain, downward burned his heart. The lament of a love-bird for its missing mate, he felt, caged, and suffering (rather loudly) the pain of its own death-note! He turned, and nearing the grill cautiously peered in. Within the inner court dappled with hot light, all lush with myrtle and green-growing palms and orange trees, with jasmine in flower, there beside gently agitated waters of a fountain silvering the path with mist, walked a lady. A lady of the rarest proportions, enslaved . . . isolated . . . inhumanly neglected . . . a most beautiful mystery, pining away! And, as he plainly saw, a ravishing beauty, a *señorita* walking in loneliness and because of it—no doubt—in great tribulation of spirit!

He brought from beneath his cloak his guitar and leaning against the grill in languishing and dramatic ease, he twanged a couple of seductive notes for the *señorita's* ear. At this unusual break in the leisurely quiet of her morning thoughts, the lady walking hesitated, peeked out from between her iron bars at the broad, manly chest, at the strong legs—he had elegant legs—and inclined her graceful head. And as quickly turned it towards an upper window of her mansion which her dark doe-like eyes scanned at length. Alas! displaying no annoyance, as she should, at this intrusive impudence of the stranger, she moved with charming grace down the path towards the grill, and nearer her troubadour, knowing full well who serenaded her. His fame of conquest had already reached her sociable young ears. At a safe distance from the *reja* she stooped languidly, plucked a jasmine-bloom, held its jewelled petals so like her delicate cheek, lowered her fluttering eyelids as fragile as her flower, raised her dark eyes smouldering with interest —and passed on.

'Thou forsaken, wounded thrush!' José murmured, but as it was broad daylight and the hot sun streaming in the heavens, and as she passed entirely from sight, he did the only thing left. He twanged a mournful note to indicate his despair and betook his distracted senses off, reminded of the golden coach of his boyhood and the beautiful girl it had framed, with hair like ripe wheat! (This lady's hair was a crisp shining black, however.) 'Could it be she?' he wondered, visioning the coach, the day and the mountains; seeing himself muffled to the neck in his black cloak, with hat-brim pulled down to hide his infatuation (never to be hidden) on the first dark night scaling that high garden wall where the great overspreading oak offered security to one in search of golden fruit. 'To-morrow!' said he, undaunted, the light of conquest in his handsome eyes.

Old Proverb: A Woman's Hair draws more than a Team of Oxen

JOAQUIM HAD CONVINCED ALL BUT ONE PIOUS STUDENT that José had cut off Narciso's fingers through jealousy. Joaquim's craven soul cloaked his deep-rooted fear of José in a cringing deference; inwardly his hatred had increased to murderous obsession. He plotted and dared nothing, lacking the guts to act. His personal accumulating outrage became inflamed, and on impulse he strutted out of his admiring crowd one morning, towards José, like a game-cock. Thrusting his beaky nose into the back of his neck Joaquim let out a noise like vindictive crowing.

'How comes it, my fine fellow,' he rasped, 'that one so strong as you escaped conscription? Is the King your cousin?'

'Hoh, Maxo, so that's the burr irritating your thick hide?' José turned and laughed into the wily, glowering face.

'Laugh!' threatened Joaquim. 'But it looks strange that Narciso and myself are forced to give up our apprenticeship and leave such as you to loaf. Why should we be the *Juan Soldado*, and you the painter to the King?' Joaquim's voice rose.

'Why? Because bullies are better dead than artists!' José's calm was exasperating, and seeing the lout's spleen he added, 'Perhaps I lack the necessary inch.'

'You are a giant! You make jests at my expense! . . . It's a plot, a crime against me!' Joaquim's voice became the cock's scream of battle, and the students tittered.

José, the tallest there, wondered if he escaped conscription by some diplomatic coup of his Padre's, who still sent him his quarterly stipend, gotten from the same mysterious source.

'The crime lies in your ever being born, my friend. I lack the inch, else I would be joining you.' José laughed, and the others laughed with him.

'You are taller than all of us put together on end!'

'It's a trick,' José baited innocently. 'All I did to escape

was to stride up to the officer in charge, and when he measured me I inched my neck down inside my shoulder-blades—so!' With a solemn face he postured like a dwarf. 'And my knees—so! Worth knowing, eh? If you'd asked me . . .' He shrugged.

Narciso's face was blank, his mouth open, and though he still grudged José any tribute, he took from his pocket a bit of tobacco, rolled it in a paper making a cigar, and passed it. With mock gravity José, according to custom, took a couple of puffs and passed it courteously to Joaquim, who was forced to accept.

'It is true, Narciso, that non-commissioned officers look like butchers and cheesemongers? Had you been wise you'd have volunteered for the Guards and got a living for life. A trick worth knowing too.'

Joaquim, stewing in malice, stared. Narciso, always literal, said: 'You should have told us this before.'

'All real knowledge comes late,' bantered José, 'but tell me why you are unhappy. A *carabinero* shouldn't cry at Fate with nine shillings allowed him and four ounces of bread a day.'

'It is Fate!' Narciso leaned against the wall, gloomy and dejected.

'One role is as important as another,' José persisted. 'Each has its pleasing dangers. If Spain's business is *War*, mine is the fruits of *War!*' José's hand indicated what, adding, 'And to be done in my own way at that.'

Narciso sat limply down, hands clasped, hanging between his knees, head bowed over.

'You'll get one dirty shirt a week. Do you forget your government's kindness?' José's eyes shone with amusement.

'You would reform the world?'

'The effort would amuse me. Trolling in a mule-track all one's life is to follow the path of ignorance. You are too content with bread and bulls.'

'Not being a soldier, you can't speak with authority.' Narciso lifted a sickly face, the colour of damp leather.

'Make soldiering an adventure, Maxo. You'll have gay

little loves and grand parades, leave of absence for four months at harvest-time. Think of the new wenches along the road with two months' pay in advance.'

'I know that the *quinta* demands unmarried men between seventeen and thirty-six. I shall make it my business to know why you escape.'

'You will never know!' José was irritated by the dream of a far-away garden wall and a lovely face returning.

'In the end it is the same whether I paint or shoot, when the King's warriors are put over the heads of men who are far braver. It is Fate!' Narciso looked green.

'I will change clothing with you, Narciso, and go in your place,' joked an apprentice too young for conscription. 'What does *he* give to Spain?' A head nodded towards José's spine.

'My heart and my hand,' José said, his clowning over, wondering when those two weaklings would be feeding cannons. His mind seethed with war horrors. Human sacrifice was an expensive comedy; he saw military life like the *opéra bouffe* he heard about: soldiers strutting in childish parades, starving children playing war; jaunty little colonels with fierce moustaches, swaggering under giant swords; naked babies dragging carbines up jagged ravines; nuns strapped to hamstrung stallions; a procession of bones staring with pig-eyes; dead men marching, under a torturing sun, as Spain's troops were marching this moment, and dying in distant provinces as they had marched and sacrificed and died since Goth and Vandal slaughtered wholesale in efforts to remove Spain from the earth. He latched his door. With voluptuous ferocity he crammed all the merciless terror of battle into carmines, yellows and blacks that bit like iron rust into blinding whites accenting every horror. Spain's drama beat on every nerve-centre of his being as the canvas came to life: hacked heads, mutilated faces; putrid flesh; dying mules with gaping stiffening lips. . . .

When dawn came the light in the opal sky looked, to him, like brittle fleshless bones in a bowl, the bumble of a bee outside the window like a shot cannon-ball. Then

he came out of his mood, his fire out. Stale and exhausted, he piled the canvas against the wall already deep with cartoons and sketches, half-finished, entirely finished, and went out to Rita's; got a cup of spiced chocolate; then around to the church to work. Savage and downcast, he donned his smock and climbed the frail ladder to the scaffold to find Narciso at work in no mind for holy posturings, and the other occupied with unpleasant thoughts. His time for joining his brigade of *carabineros* was growing short.

'It's being said that your Santa Anna there is a portrait of that loose woman, Rita, who keeps the *posada!*' Narciso blurted out suddenly.

'And why not? Is she not part of Spain and of the world I know?' José, after a pause, asked irritably, 'Have you ever seen a saint?'

'You have an unholy tongue!' Narciso countered.

'You have no instinct, or you would know what expressions saints wear.' Knowing where the other's eyes were, José deliberately piled more high-light of white lead in the eyes of his earthy San Pedro, adding sanctity to the smile of a joyous sinner.

'There's a perfect saint for you, Maxo!' he bantered. 'He has cheeks like a sausage. You always distort your holy ones.'

'You always foreshorten your angels and give your cherubs eyes as flat as orange-pips.'

'The Master says . . .'

'That comical old numbskull!' José turned so savagely, the scaffold swayed. Narciso grabbed the hand-rail, the wood snapped in his fist, the loosened nails parted from the flooring-boards, one end swung out—and down—Narciso with it. He landed on the stone floor below with the plop of a barrel thrown into the river. The scaffold swaying under him, José peered down and saw a mass of broken bones. Seizing a loose rope, he tied one end into the open Gothic arch and the other about his waist. He lowered himself. The rope was too short and he too fell; landed on his feet, winded, and made his way quickly to

the broken body to study the crumpled bones, passionately alive to the design of Death. 'Is man a temporal thing made immortal by accident or design?' he wondered. 'Is art like life, only a series of sacrifices and discipline? So in every impression is expression grounded.' He hurried away to find the sacristan. He came praying.

Together they lifted the dead fellow freed from serving his country and carried him slowly to the atelier followed by a crowd.

That evening in his dark attic, with elbows on the window-ledge, José gazed out. The moon poured down an icy flood and in its piercing whiteness, José attempted to drag out of the moon the purity of its secret. Perhaps he found it, for the next day, working alone in peace, the sky he finished took on a light which comes into skies of an Easter dawn.

A holy and bland brother was ordered to take Narciso's place; a sociable soul, pleased with his promotion. Hoping to gain something of José's now admittedly good brush-work, he squinted in secret and talked: 'I am a humble painter. I shall paint only what belongs to the holy look of innocence.'

'One can overdo innocence,' José answered, peering at the sterile beginning. 'But in God's name remember that your San Pedro was no idiot with a watery eye or with a slit for a mouth. Saints are human beings. Never paint saintly eyebrows like the last hairs in a goat's tail plucked out and thrown on!'

'We are taught the truth by the facts of sacred history.'

'Into the river with facts. *Live!* Learn from life and living. Facts are dead thoughts. Dead things belong to the dead. Are dead thoughts living values?' José grew belligerent, feeling some prick in the other's manner. His mind sharpened. Was that criticism basic? or did it spring from the other's outraged religious scruples? He leaned back and studied his work until he had a crick in his neck; seizing a sponge dripping with turpentine, he wiped out the whole of the work. 'Vanity shall never be an indictment, whatever else is said of me,' he told himself. (Years

afterwards when he returned to Saragossa he went to look at his first fresco, gave one glance up and said, 'Don't tell me I painted *that!*')

After Narciso's death, Joaquim's sluggish blood seemed to course from his black heart to his clogged brain. He acted like an ox hit on the head with an iron mace. His old blustering became sullen silences; an oily suavity towards José. His small, glittering, revengeful eyes followed him about everywhere as he heeled him like a dog, about the city, slobbering and jawing to himself, with no interest in anything but his fermenting purpose! He would slip into the dark nave of El Pilar and huddle against one of its vast high pillars, watching José at work, a sinister leer on his sly, irresolute face. Deep in his dull, fermenting soul burned one purpose—revenge. To fight José with knives to the death! His friend must be avenged! But he lacked courage. So he postponed the killing; brooding and postponing again until his small brain was a network of vengefulness, timidity, wiliness, jealousy, caution, futility and self-protection, all whirling without ceasing about one idea—to kill. That José killed Narciso rooted itself in Joaquim's brain. '*Revenge!*' The word now sprang at him out of night-shadows, poured from the heavens; it rang in his ears like the bells for Mass, like bells for Vespers. 'But how?' How could he with safety to himself avenge Narciso? Should he leave all to Providence? No! God would not be satisfied with him then. But how? When? One day he went to the Master, who was taking siesta in his private apartment. Cravenly, Joaquim stood twirling his cap around in his hand until his question came out.

'Master, you call me a good draughtsman? I beg you to allow me to finish Narciso's part of the spandrel on the scaffold beside José.'

The Master, annoyed at being disturbed, saw no sense in this and refused. Joaquim went away relieved, thankful, knowing he could never do what had jumped into his mind to do, even had the Master agreed. There must be other ways. And at twilight, a few days later coming across the *plaza* another idea came to him.

He plodded up the steps of the church, stopped, peered furtively about and, alone, pushed open the great doors and went in, closing the door behind him cautiously. 'God will show me a way,' he mumbled, as if answering unseen people. In the dark, empty church he leaned against a pillar from where he could see the altar holding a carved wooden image of the Holy Virgin. The burning altar-lamp lit up her face to calm beauty as it had for Pilar. This holy interest gave him courage. He fixed his eyes, heavy and dulled by the constant conflict within, on those of the radiant Mother. He prostrated himself with a prayer forming in his mind. She spoke to him, thus: 'You, *señor*, are a loyal friend, and God will show you how to avenge this foul death. He alone knoweth he was murdered by one sinfully jealous of your fine talent. I will intercede with *Señor* God to show you the way. HIS voice will direct you. . . . Wait and pray and listen.'

Joaquim mopped the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. He, Joaquim, had had a message direct from God! Wait, said God, and he felt a great relief. But immediately his heart began to beat violently with a new fear. Suppose God, who saw deep into all hearts, chose him to knife one whose physical strength was greater than three men together? One who had the power of a bull and bear rolled into one? The sweat rolled down his face while he looked beseechingly at the Holy Image. If she would perhaps retract? But the sweet face was calm. What sign was there that the Holy *Señora* would protect him? With God, if he made it, a vow was a vow and never to be taken back. What then? Clearly his cunning vindictive muddled mind saw how impossible it was to fight José with knives. *He* would be killed, not José. Joaquim shuddered.

'I love God too much not to keep a vow once I make it,' he excused himself. 'I shall carry out my resolve before I serve my country, but it *is* better to wait and listen.' Relieved, he looked cautiously about the pillar, mumbling, 'Yes it is better far to wait and listen,' cautiously, softly walking out of the church, feeling very pious, with eyes cast down. He found comfort; his responsibility was shifted

to God's shoulders. As God rewards virtue HE would reward him with *Light!* He looked up at the starry heavens from which was to come to him the sign.

Nevertheless he spent the next afternoon drinking at Rita's *posada*, filling himself with strong wine. By dusk his faith that God would reward virtue was fortified. At midnight cunning guided his unsteady feet stealthily around the tower square past the market-stall, to the *fonda*. 'Wine!' He reeled into the room to Pilar, alone, bowed over the table in lonely despair. Her face was worn and thin. She rose, lit the oil-lamp back of him, and brought a full wine-skin. Holding out her hand for his coppers she went away without a word.

He escaped his fear, drinking, thrusting the weight on his mind on to the Queen of Heaven—or was it God? Both then! The wine stilling his brain comfortingly, Joaquim felt safe. To-morrow! 'My poor lost friend! My murdered friend. I will avenge you yet!' was the last thing he whimpered to the wine-skin collapsed on the table like himself.

But 'to-morrow' turned out to be 'bull-day'. Joaquim made ready with cold water from a tub, as José wiped his brushes and descended from a new and safe scaffolding, to make ready for the *corrida*. 'Bull day' put a stop to all business negotiations in Saragossa, and its citizens in a riotous mood for pleasure. All morning could be heard the sound of hammers tapping, reinforcing wooden barriers and uprights of the arena, with seams bulging from the heat since the last fight. All morning José could hear the city buzzing with excitement. And now, siesta over, the townspeople were already straggling across the *plaza* towards the north gate and out on to the dusty road. The crowd wavered along the earth ahead like a gay-coloured ribbon. Joaquim with addled head but cautious feet was plodding along in the throng when Carlos spied him.

'*Dios!* you of the spindle shanks,' Carlos bantered, 'where is your cap of maintenance, you night-bird?'

'One copper is as good as another on this day of days,'

Joaquim answered sullenly. Carlos, his tongue loosened by excitement, caught sight of Manuel.

'Ah, Manuel, my friend, let us hope for fiercer bulls than the last time,' he cried to him.

Manuel, the slop-mouthed barber, marched along clutching the crippled, twisted wrist of his always-frightened little son trotting beside him, trying to keep pace with the huge feet, and whimpering softly to himself. 'I will throw you to the bulls at another sound out of you. You are doomed to end badly,' threatened Manuel. So the boy, afraid of his father but more afraid of missing the fight, wiped away a tear and trudged along swallowing his sobs. Nina, with radiant face, swung along beside her young husband with new violet breeches tied at the knees with braided scarlet wool, crooned to the baby in her arms: 'My pomegranate-blossom, my frail flower, sleep, sleep in strong arms that carry you in love. . . . Sleep, my dove. See, Juan, see!' Nina pointed. 'See the *Alcalde* trims his fat paunch with a new silver chain.' Nina's eyes were all for the Mayor in velvet and plumes astride his best steed riding in the throng, stiff with dignity. The Mayor's Lady, on his second-best steed and so tightly bodiced her bosom spilled over like fruit in a basket, rode behind him, sitting sideways. 'A new white mantilla, Juan, and her best ruffled skirt!' Nina admired the elegant lady's long ear-rings of brilliants set in the finest of Spanish silver. 'Sleep, little dove,' she crooned, with eyes on them.

Children jigged along pelting each other with fists full of dust. Tall, bronzed, lean-jawed men, with their brown deep-bosomed wenches, with black crisp hair greased to a bright shine, ajingle with silver ornaments, like the mules, jogged along, laughing and jesting. The sun beat down from a sky as hard and blue as a Moorish tile. José hummed with gusto and swung along on the edge of the crowd, detached, happy.

'*Por Baco!*' he thought, buoyed up by another new commission, to decorate the ruined part of the Carthusian Monastery. 'And who knows,' he thought, 'but that today sees me also a success in the *corrida!*' The dream cher-

ished from boyhood never deserted him, and while he wished no ill-luck to the matador imported from Madrid, still 'what is one man's finish is another's chance'. Tst! 'If he is to be killed, he is to be killed!' Although the matador had come highly praised, José strode along seeing himself in the ring substituting, surprising Saragossa with his virtuosity—when his dream burst. He saw Pilar. She, keeping up a shrill chatter and with hips undulating, walked beside Antonio, the scribe, while her quick eyes, like darts of jet, went this way and that. José's face lit up as he remembered the fevers of her wild blood. '*Qué gracias tienes!*' Yet the old fires were out. But she had seen the smile and her heart became a bolt of fire. 'Holy San Cupid!' He had smiled his recognition and her joyful laughter rippled into his ears. One look was enough!

'You are a wise man, Señor Antonio,' Pilar turned boisterously to Antonio, 'but can you tell me whether love brings happiness, or are love and pain one—and I already know!' She laughed. 'I see Joaquim ahead and I wish to speak with him.' She swished her full gay skirts, conscious of José's eyes upon her, and undulated ahead to Joaquim, full of a scheme that burned up her breast. They walked along talking, to the arena gate. There, the fan Pilar, having her booth set up and engaged in a thriving business, had her happiness destroyed for the day as she caught sight of the goatherd.

'Hell-cat!' Her thin lips snapped.

'Moth-eaten virgin, with a heart of straw and water,' thought Pilar of the goats. But she averted her flashing eyes brilliant with happiness and squeezed in through the narrow gate. That recognition! 'His blessed lips! O Holy Mother, Thou hast heard my prayer—return them to my own,' prayed Pilar. 'Blessed *Señora*, Thou knowest I see with the eyes of the heart and, if only once before I die, send those strong arms that I may rest my head within them and hear his tender, "My pigeon!"' Galvanized, Pilar sat down and awaited the killing. But each bead of Gaspero's coral necklace circling her throat burned and choked her; an evil band keeping back the seething, death-

less love welling up out of that mysterious organism that was woman. Looking cautiously about, she snatched the beads from her throat and thrust them deep in her bosom. If her new green and purple shawl moved restlessly, and the new red slippers tapped, they masked her purpose. And if Gaspero's silver comb high in her black hair caught the sun and glinted like a polished mirror it was because the hot head beneath it shook in agitation, and likewise the scheme within.

Pilar had borne with malicious tongues aplenty, but now the Divine Mother had heard her prayer! Even so, Pilar did not cease praying. 'Now I am absolved of sin, since YOU the Most Blessed and Pure have heard me. A thousand gratitudes are not enough!' Pilar's wits raced on, reaching out with tenacity for what was her primitive right —love.

The throng from Saragossa was swelled by more throngs trudging in from small hamlets to the north and west. Those who could afford it crowded into *galeras* which creaked and groaned under their load unmindful of thirsty-tongued dogs tied underneath. They elbowed their way to seats on the green grass embankment high above the ring, seating-places high enough to ensure safety from escaping bulls. That expectation added pleasure to the excited crowd, waiting sweating and exchanging pleasant obscenities under the fierce sun. This day of days was looked forward to with violent excitement, and the fine brutal spectacle would beget in turn a ferocious satisfaction; suspense was relieved by the passing of the wine-skin. On 'bull day' every citizen was brother to every other citizen, and the skin passed about democratically. Enmities were laid aside and the crowd awaited the slaughter in high carnival spirit, hooting impatiently. They smelled blood as the smell of life. With the killing and the smell of blood they were assured that they were alive, that they were indeed living.

At last from his high safe platform of wood under its bright gay banners, the *Alcalde* threw down into the arena his key to the *toril* gate. And with hot, glistening eyes the hushed crowd sat forward.

From the moment the first bull, a man-killer (a *matatorero*), pounded out through the gate into the arena, the new over-heralded matador made a lamentable showing. The ferocious brute made straight for him, caught him on his horns and tossed him. The surprised man went plop! with a terrible thud, unharmed but unnerved. He forced his collapsed legs upright in the centre of the sand. '*Zas!*' The bull charged. The matador jabbed blindly, his sword stabbing at foreleg, throat, chest. The crowd did not pay to be cheated, and they set up a sullen groan.

'*Cáspita!*' José, next to the glistening-eyed 'fans', stood behind the barrier. He saw his hope of substituting grow with such clumsiness. 'With every move of the cape he proves himself a clown,' thought José, cold, contemptuous. 'The fool,' he stormed to the fellow beside him, 'he spent his strength in a brothel last night, else he would not collapse.'

From the bull's great gleaming body bright blood was spurting, when with a bellow he charged so suddenly, the matador went down under him. 'Take the old lady home. . . . No—he's an infant—give him the breast. . . . God gave him no guts!' The insults rained down on the palsied matador. '*Palmas al toro!*' The crowd sensed his terror, and this last insult stimulated him. Under the beast's black belly the matador sidled along cautiously on his spine, and coming upright at the bull's backside, he stood up trembling, managing to grin like a trick monkey. This act regained him his prestige. This was a pleasure!

'*Viva España! Viva matador!*' The shouts rose higher and higher as the matador stood there paralyzed with fear, awaiting another charge. But the tortured bull turned from his butcher, appeasing his own butchering. Two needle-pointed horns fastened in a *chulo's* bowels. The *chulo* went up in the air as high as the tower—and down with a crash. The bull, with sides heaving, nosed the bloody, useless human and the crowd began again to mutter when they were pleasantly distracted. The matador, weak as a jelly-fish, faced the bull, undecided whether to finish him from underneath or vault the barrier and escape with his life, when the crowd jeered: 'We want men—not hens!'

José, taut as steel, clutched the rail cursing the shaking figure in the ring, when someone threw a packet of figs and hit the matador squarely in the jaw. He lay where he fell when a knife hurtled out and pinned his palsied hand in the sand. 'That cuts better than your pitchfork,' sneered a voice. At that moment a man behind the barrier close to the dazed bull leaned over and twisted his tail just as a *picador* on a spiny nag moved forward. They met. There was a crash, a sound of splintered wood, and the nag scraped slowly down along the barrier, spilling his bowels on the reddening sand near the dying *picador*. '*Palmas al toro!*' 'He's a man-killer—no cow!' The poor, quivering brute, looking for cesape, dragged towards his gate when his eye caught the glint of red. The matador, freeing his bloody hand, raised it. The bull's head went down. He charged—upon a short sword that plunged upward into his shining belly. With a roar like a broken Olympian the beast reared backward, dying, and sat down.

José, about to vault into the ring, fell back in disgust. A young gipsy wench, with one spring, cleared the barrier and ran to the dazed matador as the dying bull righted himself for his last charge. He succeeded only in knocking her aside, and up on her feet instantly, eyes like iron bolts, she seized the fallen sword as the bull turned, and aimed. The beast toppled over at her feet with the sound of a hogshead thrown from a mountain-top. The earth shook. The crowd, mad with enthusiasm and desire to avenge the butcher, began to climb down from the embankment—when the matador, who knew what a pack with belted knives meant—took advantage of the gipsy's victory. He crept stealthily over to the gate and out, hearing '*Viva María! Viva Señorita!*' for they had never before enjoyed the spectacle of a woman in the ring.

Little boys ran down into the arena to fight for and cut off the dead bull's ears. Flowers, ribbons, fans, fruit, sausages, coppers and gold coin fell at the feet of the smiling wench, panting in the reddened sand. Every man, woman and child roared and yelled until it was remembered that she was a gipsy, and a pariah. Instantly there

was a hush; she was escorted out with no courtesy. The ring was made ready for the continuing of the day's pleasure; the dead bull dragged out of the ring by a team of mules jingling cheerful silver bells, and the day's sport was resumed.

José took the road back to the city ahead of the throng. Fate had refused him a chance to prove his boyhood skill, and he strode along gloomily watching the yellow dust rise and settle over his stockings. On the first day of the New Year he had met up with a beggar! Bad luck! Joaquim, whose gait was far steadier than his head, manœuvred and caught up with him, insisting on walking beside him. They plodded on, each absorbed in his own thoughts, abruptly forced to one side of the road to make way for a coach rolling up from behind. Glancing up (it was Gaspero's coach), José saw Pilar lean out, smile and kiss her hand to Joaquim.

'Wine, women and fortune soon change,' José muttered. 'To the devil with women!' Nevertheless he watched the coach, stabbed suddenly with his old passion at seeing Pilar in Gaspero's company. His blood fired to rushing torrent of the old flame. Joaquim, caught between Pilar's scheme and his own fermenting, lumbered along. Neither spoke. At last Joaquim, jerked back to his promise to Pilar, began cautiously: 'I'll wager you never saw a sight like to-day's. And a woman did it. A gipsy woman . . . in league with the devil.'

'Mild bulls, all from the Amala farm,' grunted José.

'The *señor duque* does feed his bulls on lead. A woman in the *corrida!* You never saw that in all your life. Shall we go to the *fonda* and drink to the woman in the ring? I'll treat.'

'Given my chance to-day,' José said, 'I'd be a better success than that clown from Madrid. He's a butcher—no matador.'

'What is the secret of success?' Joaquim was uncomfortable.

'There is no secret, any man with a head can be a good matador. Every move the bull means to make shows in

the whites of his eyes—as it does in a man's—if you watch.' José, after trudging a few steps, added, 'Never remove your eye from your enemy if you are wise, Maxo!'

Joaquim planting one cow-hide boot in the dust and then the other, pondering it, decided his moment had come.

'A sage remark, *amigo*. It might be well for you to keep an eye on that gilded fox riding on ahead with your pretty goatherd. You should make him eat sour grapes, not stolen plums.'

José turned the idea over and the sovereignty of vanity won. Far behind, the townspeople were already turning back to the city to crowd into the *fonda* to crown the feast-day with wine. José's eyes glistened. It would amuse him, certainly, to go with Joaquim and show Pilar and prove to Gaspero that he, José, was the one to make golden the fair name of Saragossa, not her gilt vulgarian. His lust for adventure sealed the impulse. With a violent thump on Joaquin's spine, he bent double, choking.

'An idea, Maxo! We'll fill our bellies. Mine is as flat as the earth. A good joke, eh? to knock that brass pig's snout till his head spins. Come, lift those heavy feet of yours before all Saragossa gets there!'

Joaquim, gagging and coughing, felt this intrigue meant revenge. Having egged José on to a coming fight he had pleased both God and Pilar! And, having pleased God, he saw clearly how God would reward him. Then, alarmed at the danger to himself in this scheme, he trudged along in a fog of gloomy silence, listening for God again to speak.

On *fiesta* days, chairs and tables and benches in the inn were moved out into the court, where long boards were also laid down on the stones. Joaquim's throat was dry; he was chewing his now bloodless lips when he and José strode into the court. Pilar, all excited, stood under the bougainvillæa vine, its dark bloom dappling her cheeks with coins of blood. Gaspero stood beside her playing a too flattering role in José's eyes, himself tense and nervous. The eyes of the two men met as if rapiers crossed. José turned away to quench the rising fire in his blood as Gaspero's seedy eyes fastened on Pilar's body. José's bedevilled

hand went to his sword, which he stopped on the way back to fetch. Master of graciousness, he said to Pilar: 'Wine, *señorita*, for my talented fellow-painter and guest, Joaquim.' He bowed gallantly, but the sting in his voice was pitched at Gaspero.

Pilar and Joaquim had schemed for exactly this. But her heart dropped a beat as she swayed out from under the overhanging purple shade feeling Gaspero's fingers tighten on her wrist. Those fingers were bands of iron belonging to a voluptuary who had well paid the old widow 'to let the rose die a natural death', and who was now only waiting to throw that same bruised rose away. Gaspero's code of insult was simple and quick. He addressed Pilar in cold, measured tones while backing to lean languidly against the vine: 'Who is this person to command you thus?'

Pilar met the sneer with narrowed blazing eyes.

'He is my guest, *señor!*'

José's insolent calm kindled Gaspero with sadistic joy to knife him at once, and he stalked towards him. Joaquim, knowing what would happen, was fastened like a nail in a sure place, behind the tree, his head full of strange stirrings; also of safety. From there he watched for God to send him his reward, as José, waiting proudly and arrogantly, glared at Gaspero.

'And who are you to detain my service in a public inn?' He commanded Pilar over his shoulder, 'Wine, *señorita*, for my guest, at once.'

Gaspero's face went livid.

'Hoh! my merry San Ginoco!' he sneered, his eyes on Pilar, 'is it possible I misjudged you, little *salada?* By Allah! You play two games? Felicitations! But you play badly. Come, choose between us! *Now.*' His thin, cruel lips went the colour of fish long out of water. A sword pinked the hand clutching Pilar's wrist as José sprang.

'Bastard!' Gaspero backed, drew sword and leaped at him.

'To hell with you, you rotting cock!' Two swords crossed, struck, crashed! Gaspero's lashed like a whip directed with cold, calculating fury. José's steel whimpered,

bent, cracked. Two men, cold with rage, moved like elastic bands, bending, swaying, boot-heels cracking the cobbles, dust flying. José lost breath. Hot, thick drops of blood spurted down Gaspero's fine white linen shirt. Behind the tree Joaquim shook and prayed God to strike José dead. Pilar, with colour gone, and with her hands clenched, waited trembling to spring to José's defence when two shining blades whipped to one lightning flash. Gaspero lunged. She dipped the heavy bougainvillæa branch down into Gaspero's eyes—too late. His blade had ripped open José's arm. José's sword flew to his other hand and slit through Gaspero's belly. Then he fainted. Gaspero's veins were pouring out like water reddening a pool at his feet as he stood exultantly wiping his blade—when he pitched suddenly forward. His head made a terrible whack on the stones and the man lay in a river of his own blood, dead.

Two friends came and dragged his body away much the way a mule-team drags a dead bull from the ring. Pilar had flung Gaspero's silver comb at his feet, ripped off her petticoat, and on her knees was binding José's arm, and screaming at the terrified Joaquim to bring water. When he saw the dead man carried away Joaquim came bravely out from behind the tree and fetched a cup. Pilar was wondering if José had seen through her scheme when he staggered to his feet, and with a cold '*gracias*' walked weakly away, leaving her staring open-mouthed. She flew at Joaquim for his bungling, who now feared God had failed him.

'I had to stand by that fellow José,' he whined to Carlos. 'Without me—pff! what might have happened? Gaspero is a tough rooster. I myself would have put an end to him sooner—but . . .' After plenty of wine he grew lion-hearted. With more, he drowned the haunting fear about God. But soon in his cups his gloom returned, and he sat staring at the *bota*.

Stars leaped to the dust like gold thrown out of heaven. The wine-skin passed. Laughter rose, shriller, higher. Pilar, very bright of eye, bustled about her guests, who made coarse jests about the fight.

'One lover is dead, but one remains? Lucky one!'

'Who do you take for your next lover—Joaquim the killer of Gaspero?'

'Fool? He daren't kill a flea!' Pilar was preoccupied: José had proved his interest in her! So she met ribald jests with a secret triumph. For, as the wise knew, the odour of love is stronger than the odour of despair! Joaquim was bawling drunkenly, in debt to her for wine, but she brought him another skin without speaking. As he lifted the leather skin up to allow a slow dripping into his throat he looked about in surprise. HIS voice? There was a voice in his ears! As the last drop slid down his throat Joaquim felt God must be pleased to speak with him as HE had—to him so patiently awaiting to avenge Narciso. Inspired, his head fell forward on his chest as he heard through a fog of laughter two Valencia students quarrelling over Pilar.

José lay sick of a fever. The tear in his working arm was a deep, angry lane of congestion, despite the balsam stew faithfully applied each morning by the old *quixada*. She came and went, diligent in her vigil. She brought him strong broths, made from meat stolen from the Master, but the clotted veins swelled and darkened, a longer red. Then they grew black. José tossed on his mattress, his imagination painting his future a darker hell than his arm; aware that his life hung on the colour of that arm, and he watched it with melancholy eating into his soul like rust. Then Joaquim lumbered up the attic stairs. He looked down at the arm hopefully; pried and spied about while giving José bits of gossip. (There were only a few days left before joining the carabineers.) José woke as Joaquim, an unnatural gleam lighting his crafty eyes, held up an inspired cartoon, thinking, 'If the Inquisition sees these...!'

The chemist had applied leeches; the fever abated. José sat up weakly in a passion.

'I stand by every one!' he burst out, 'you chicken-hearted slug! The soul of Spain is not to be for ever bled by the villainies of a licentious court!' And his head spinning from weakness, he fell back, hearing Joaquim mutter: 'These might better disappear than you.'

'Those are my life's blood . . . for Spain,' José managed. He could say no more.

On his way downstairs Joaquim stepped into the Master's private apartment, to tell him that José was a devil in a mask, his heresies would burn them all in hell, and that certain cartoons would ruin the Master's repute. But, with the teacher's eyes boring him, Joaquim changed his mind and making some silly excuse lumbered out. 'Wait and listen' rang in his head again. He could afford to postpone what he wished the Master to know.

Up from his sick-bed, José had the old itch to move on, to discuss art with intelligence; someone like the Padre who was dispassionate in all things (except his love for Spain), when Fate forced him to disappear, and at once! It was the time for another church festival.

It appears that both El Pilar and La Seo were tenacious of their respective popularity. Forced to share their predominance, each church held its own special *fiesta*. These festivals took place about every six months and it was Our Lady of the Pillar's turn to impress upon the populace its sanctity. Her festival fell upon the day when, recovered, José was wandering about, and all Saragossa thronged into the open to view the coming public procession. There were red-blooded partisans for both parishes, one representing El Pilar, one La Seo; good fighters for both causes. Crowds paid their respects to the Madonna; the procession appeared; passed. Devoted women in gay masquerade walked piously, horsemen rode theatrically, naked children trotted solemnly past an awed throng puncturing the heat with shouts of '*Sea matado . . . sea matado!*' as they made the sign of the Cross. The festival continued far into the night, and after dark revelry was carried on behind barricaded shutters. That night down in the lower part of the town a pitched battle took place. Each parish group must have been captained by someone equally bloodthirsty in the cause of Our Lady or the Seo because the very next morning three were found dead, as before, on the field of honour down by the river Ebro.

Whatever the Master thought now remained locked

within himself. Only his brow furrowed. If the Holy Office was again moved to take action over this murderous feud (his last acquaintance he preferred to forget)—someone would have no chance whatever against that august body. He acted with discretion and dispatch: José slipped through the Puerta del Portillo and on to the yellow road leading to the austere north that same day. And Joaquim heard the voice of God that moment, saying not to postpone the thing to be done. He got his knife sharpened. Long before José's shadow fell upon the cautiously opened door of the house in the Plaza San Carlos, Joaquim waited. God said there might be no returning from the march on to Manzanares where his brigade was quartered, which he must join that evening. Even with God's aid there, still Joaquim saw a loophole: he had been in hiding long enough for his courage to ooze. He made suddenly the sign of the cross with thumb and finger. As the strong, lithe figure of his 'rival' flitted across his sight, Joaquim stole out of hiding like a cat, when José, eyeing the street, spied him.

'*Adiós*, Maxo!' he called out in smiling camaraderie, saluting the new soldier. 'May Fate be kind to you and bring you a safe return. *Adiós! Adiós!*' José stole into the lane where the stables were, and Joaquim cursed and called on God for help. Then he got what passed for it; with deadly purpose he turned back to the atelier and stalked with brutal intent through the oval, polychromed door and disappeared up the stairs and into José's attic room.

Making a mysterious circuit of the streets with stealth, and once through the Portillo gate, José found haven in dense woods half a league out. That night he hid listening for pursuing horses to crack the silence. Fuendetodas was but six leagues away, and now too far from that lovely lady caged behind that iron *reja* of the Moorish mansion near the Salón de Alcoba! At dawn he disappeared. At that hour before dawn when the world is a safe grey, by some magic known to his underworld brethren, José found tethered to a tree a little grey ass. Strapped to her were a

bundle of clothing, figs, cheese and bread; under that some sketches wrapped by the shrewd, adoring old *quixada*, in oiled silk, thus preserving them against the mists of night and the dews of morning. The trappings adjusted, and with spirits rising at every tap of the wise beast's tiny feet, he rode out of the woods, his sketches hid beneath his long cloak which hung down about the little beast's rump like an old woman's petticoats. He clattered along, once in a while stopping to listen for pursuing feet, imagining what the Padre would say about his progress, what wise criticism he might make at his surprising sepias: mothers spanking the bare buttocks of unruly infants, little boys engaged in purely private business, flirtatious dogs, animal secrets. The life he knew and loved. When the sun rose the little ass was already picking her way with sure, dainty feet over sparkling myrtle, over meadow-stubble, on to the King's highway. Her silver bells, usually jingling like a tune, were silent. But the red tassels bobbed on her nodding head. Casting caution to the four winds of heaven, José's very soul floated on the quiet of the morning.

'My heart flew to my breast
Thou didst cut its wings so it remained there,
And now it has waxed daring
And will stay there evermore.'

The song lifted over an immense, vast silence. He heard it echo in space and sang with more gusto, his eyes on the sky, an incautious peace in his being.

'*Zas!*' he slapped the donkey. She refused to move, teetering on the edge of a precipice. He dug his heels into her ribs. He spanked her. She bared her teeth and made noises like a frightened infant. At last, by spanking and pulling, he jerked her back so suddenly she sat down and everything fell off, including himself. 'Ah, my angelic little devil, we'll see who is master.' He beat her. She scrambled up and started back at a gallop down the narrow road hewn from a rock. But she stumbled and he had her. He gave her her head and she sank her white nose into the cool grass for an assured meal, for the day was hot

enough to boil fish. Time for siesta on a near-by green bank; the sun radiated white heat. He lay still, peering into the deep gorge at his side. At the dark steep bottom a small dog looked sadly up. José sat up in the shade and sketched savage rocks towering up at either side of a black abyss, at the bottom of which stared up a wistful face; not of the dog but the face of humanity searching for greater heights than this barren earth afforded. The sun sank to hyacinth and spilled over the far snow-capped Pyrenees like wine. Dusk: José tethered the satisfied ass, ate his figs and bread, saved his cheese for the morrow and wrapped in his cloak lay close to her for warmth. Far below could be heard the murmur of water in the ravine. He listened, watching the gusty yellow candles set in black marble above him. Every nerve was alive to this dark ocean of quietude, and in this quivering unfathomable space, its mystery swept over him like a beatitude. The bellow of wild bulls stampeding cracked the stillness. He caught the snarl and heavy breathing of a pack of wild dogs running. Then down upon him sped another night, bringing sleep. In the cool dawn with the morning star to guide him, he was well on his way with an uneasiness running in his veins, since a garden wall dripping with romance haunted him far more than the pursuit of the Inquisition.

Whatever happened during this newest 'gap' must remain a mystery. It is surmisable, when he found no immediate pursuit, he jogged along and up the stony mountain path to Fuendetodas, ripe for the Padre's unprejudiced criticisms, and shrewd enough to get himself hidden for a time by one pulling strong wires at Court, and likewise within the iron walls of the Inquisition. No doubt, as he put a greater distance between him and a sinister hunt, his buoyant imagination painted a picture of an old eagle awaiting him who with a glint in his eyes would first bless him. Then an exchange of tales of those dumb minds in the atelier; and stimulating talk, thus: 'You believe as I? Always crusade for a principle.'

'Need you ask, my son?'

'I wanted to hear you repeat it.' This compliment, im-

pertinent and diplomatic, would fetch a broad smile on that weather-beaten old face.

'*Señor* Padre, keep these sketches. I owe everything to you.'

'All, my son? They are of value.'

'*Sí, sí*. . . . You agree the problem of the artist is not to reproduce exactly but use the element of nature to create new elements?'

'*Sí, sí*. . . . The artist should achieve creative form and warmth with a mind open to life. . . . May He reward you as He has me. . . .' The sign of the Cross; a strong leathery old hand laying on another blessing and probably a purse filled with *duros*.

Words lighten as escape deepens. And so did the veil which covered his tracks. However, in the course of time José emerged, silent and rather solemn, on the highway again and put the little feet of the ass, a jingle of bells, on the road to Saragossa. He, making first towards a hamlet to an inn known for its fair hospitality to spend the night, pulled up at the inn as night fell like a blanket of black velvet. He led the ass through a low bleak arcade over a stinking littered courtyard; felt about; found a rat-eaten post and tied her to it. He found the inn only a hovel cut out of rock on the hillside.

He took seat at a small table on a sagging floor, under a befouled picture of Our Saviour on the Cross. A small square hole cut out of the wall let in light by day, and air, although two bits of old wood nailed tight barred both for ever. Across from him sat four men huddled together, for the night was cold, near a small bricked hole in which only a flicker of fire was left. They were arguing, and stopped, their heads coming suspiciously together, as he entered. With his hand on the black beam overhead he groped his way to a bench closer to them, and calling for food, noted the four heads outlined on the wall.

A tottering old man brought a wine-skin which he put down beside José on the bench, and made haste to water the stew in the pot over the bricked hole, from which his customers had eaten. A long, ugly dog came and licked up what the old man spilled from his spooning on the

floor. The four men, overheated with wine, took up the argument again. From what José made out he was among thieves, inasmuch as one, a muleteer from Madrid, was cursing his friend who had made a recent attack on a caravan coming from Madrid. The attack had miscarried and the passengers, all Madrileños, had been carried off into the mountains, where they were now being held for ransom. José came from a fearless race, but he longed suddenly for the open road. He sat up alert, watching the old man on his knees blowing a feeble breath on the charcoals, to liven them.

'In my opinion' (José caught), 'my friend the *corsario* conducted that attack like one crazed. He should have taken advantage of the *Indulto*.'

'What business is it of yours?'

'Hoh! What business is it of *mine?* That's good—wasn't I the one to assure him of a *full* caravan this time? I know my business! He is not scrupulous with his contracts—he is dishonest—not to be trusted.'

'Assuredly he lacks probity since your head-piece planned it.'

'Bastard! He allowed me only one peseta a head even when I guaranteed him a *full* caravan! Ten *duros* a convoy is not enough for the risk I took!'

'God gave that *corsario* a barrel for a head!'

'I already paid him my share of blackmail. He's—a dishonest dog—if he is wise he will give himself up to the authorities and be honourably discharged of his responsibility in the affair. I intend to! No more business will he get from me.' The rogue's drunken voice lowered; dwelling on the fast-approaching doom of his friend and ally who conducted the attack. The four heads came closer together. 'I am a wise fellow. I give myself up, I take advantage of the *Indulto* and receive my reward and my pardon at the same time.' He looked about murderously at José, aware that he was listening. In the flickering firelight a hand lifted and moved as a knife cuts across a loaf of bread.

From José's mind was removed all thought of future death in the probality of an immediate one.

'*Amigo!*' he called. 'Before I eat,' José gestured diplomatically towards the muleteer, 'such a head as the *señor's* there is invested with authority. I am a poor devil of an artist but I would compliment him. Fetch a light, *señor!*'

The old man was deaf and, out of a corner blacker than her hair, shuffled a dried-up old hag with raw gums. José held up a *céntimo* which she grabbed, bit the edges carefully, sounded it against the damp stone wall and went away into the darkness. Presently she shuffled back holding a small copper lamp which she lighted with a charcoal from the fire just coming to life.

José made sketches of four heads of as rare a company as ever kept out of hell. Rising leisurely he went towards the fire-brick, and shoved each complimentary sketch into a surly, unwilling hand, and as he guessed each man, though drunk, was flattered.

Far into the night he watched the four brigands drink themselves into vinous comfort; into snoring peace. The fire died down and they all fell forward where they sat. Alert, rigid, José waited until the old hag shuffled out of the dark dragging his mattress, which she placed in the middle of the dirty floor. The mattress was filled with sour straw lumps and the scraping noise wakened the muleteer. He staggered to his feet, went to a corner of the room. The corner fouled.

'*Santa Bárbara Benalta!*' Shortly he was snoring again on the floor as dead as the fire.

With imagination filled with a dozen forms of death, José got cautiously to his feet and dragged the mattress out into the dark safer courtyard, where he laid it on the dirt where the ass slept. There he flung himself, listening. Inside the hovel the quartet woke and called for wine. More wine meant more quarrelling, suspicion and a quicker doom for himself. The muleteer lurched once to the doorway and peered out towards where he lay. José sat up on the sour bumps and leaned his head against a mouldy post, waiting and staring into the cold night, hand on knife. So fruitful an adventure as being carried off to join those

Madrileños held in the mountains was not one to follow on the heels of another escape!

An hour before dawn he moved his stiff limbs and peered about into the dark stillness. 'It is wise to remove temptation from the strong—the strong are so easily made weak,' thought he, stiffening as he caught an unmistakable sound behind him—feet stealing softly. The attack was upon him. He gripped his knife . . . a steady breathing on his neck, a touch of moist flesh—and his knife plunged. A groan, a thud, a gurgling—and he was up groping for the ass. He gripped her nose to prevent her braying and was across the court in a flash. . . . Hearing no sound of pursuit José stopped and looked back. Behind him lay the huddled ghost of the dog—dead. 'Thank God,' said he, when the ass's feet at last found stones on the highway, 'I killed the wrong dog.' It was more agreeable to be moving in the sharp cool of the morning than forced before his time into the unknown. The morning cast pale shadows on the road ahead. From time to time he cast a sharp glance behind as he jogged along on his journey homeward. The red tufts on the ass's head swayed before his eyes, picking her way over the stones. Her silver bells hit the quiet of the day like the notes of birds singing, as he watched the sun rise, a red disk scattering yellow flames over the top of the world. A red flower grew in a dead stump of a fir tree projecting from a high jagged rock. Against a tiny watercourse he caught the tinkle of goat-bells and a shepherd's reed whistling. And as if to get every inch of Spain into his heart—and so on to canvas—he rode along meditating on the colour secret in a strata of pink marble high up, when there was a shower of stones, a whirlwind of blinding dust, a blunderbuss shoved in his chest—and a masked man seized the ass's bridle. She sat down on her rump with a squeal of fright. José slid off.

His fist flew out and met a jawbone; from a bloody brigand two teeth fell out attached to a goodly shred of meat. Another blow; the rogue's ear near left his head. Wham! The wretch sprawled in the dust, flat out. José trampled on every part of his carcass. He then suffered a

twinge of magnanimity and removed his foot, except for one boot, clamped down on the bruised belly, while he thundered: '*Plunderer!* Now what are you?'

'Dead!' The broken man was scarce able to speak. But, 'Get gone, get gone, in Heaven's name,' he groaned, before his senses floated off altogether.

José towered over his civtim, noting a voice of breeding. The good black wool jerkin about the lean body bloodily outlined on the ground, while greenish, showed refinement. He tore off the robber's mask and found under the trickling gore a fine nose pinched with hunger above a grey pointed beard, much matted.

'*Señor*, a poor business—banditry!' José said, sternly. 'So you would rob one who has nothing?'

'Leave me to die alone. I beg God only for peace,' moaned the wretch, stirring enough to feel for his jaw. Finding it there, he opened one black eye and, able to see, was encouraged to bitter complaining. 'The country is impoverished. I am impoverished, *señor*. I may starve, sir, but the children of my blood shall never be slaves to bounty. Better to rob than ask for charity.' With another groan he closed the blackened eye—or it closed of itself—and he lay still. Always inclined towards one ennobled by pride, José's lust for punishment vanished, and a tenderness substituted at his mention of the starving little *niños*. Here was no robber, but a victim of the year that lost Gibraltar and dried up Spain's national ambition for commerce! A liar the robber was not; but a generous-hearted, suffering old man. José's heart warmed.

'*Señor!*' he cried, gallantly, 'there has been a mistake! A million pardons!' And he went and caught the ass wandering in search of another decent meal; and fetched his wallet from her pannier. Bending down to the moaning gentleman in all kindness José said, 'Here is food, *señor*, for your children. And coppers, permit me, *señor!*'

The battered man could scarce believe his ears, or the one not cleft in two, and thanking God louder than before, attempted to rise. But his weak limbs buckled, and at the painful sight of one so aged and worthy and so nearly

done to death, José raised up the robber himself. And when, by using the tail of his jerkin, he got off some of the blood from the battered features, he saw a face of great refinement. Propping him against a tree he fetched water from a near-by stream and then his drawing-things. It was then that, also horrified, the proud but impoverished robber-gentleman thrust back the coppers into José's hand.

'From so generous and gallant and courteous a foe I will accept food gladly, but not money, *señor!*' he murmured.

'But, my good *señor*,' cried José feeling the other's unfair position in the world and regretting his haste (generously forgetting how it was he who was first attacked), 'I would give as it was given me.' And he pressed the coppers back into the robber's hands, with the Spaniard's grand manner.

'I can accept food, only,' insisted the weak voice. And the robber again returned the coins.

At once José returned the money to him, with courtesy and firmness.

'No, *señor*, no!' Yet once more José felt the coppers pressed into his hand, and inspired not to wound one so sensitive and proud, cried out,

'Half then, *señor*. We will divide.' So to the robber it went, being so courteously persuaded. José asked, 'We will travel on together, brother.' And he pressed *his* half back to the old man, who promptly returned it, all but a few of the coppers.

José, finding the man still too feeble to move, heaved him up on the ass's back where, bruised but courteous to the last, he collapsed like a sack of meal. The three took up their journey together. Travelling on, the battered robber prayed to God openly for his good fortune in meeting with a stranger of such rare virtue; and presently they came to a stream by a cross-road. José lifted down the gaunt, bruised body to bathe the wounds more thoroughly in the clear cool water. Propped up on a soft green bank the poor man sat refreshed by bathing, by this kind-

ness, and by the warmth of the sun and the cooling of his hot wounds. Extravagant in his thanks but seeing plainly that those few coppers he had retained for pride's sake must be returned, he said, 'I cannot with honour, *señor*, take even these from so generous a countryman.'

José, who visioned all the children of the land starving, said, 'I respect your honour, *señor*; then take these to your market and realize on them, in God's name.'

And into the astonished bandit's hand he thrust all that were left of those street-sketches which José wanted criticized by the Padre.

Now the robber recovered.

'The saints be praised,' he burst out. 'And may God reward you as you reward me!' His grateful voice followed the tall man and the little ass, which even as he spoke became a mere speck on the yellow dust of the road. Huddled in his bloody but warm jerkin he relaxed into a sore, limp heap on the cool sod; and soon was sleeping that sweet peace which comes to all those with a clear conscience.

It was well he did not go first, as perhaps he should have done, to his attic, because what happened might have been prevented by rage. For that day on which José hastily quit the city Joaquim worked with sadistic glee there. José's prodigious output, drawings and sketches, fevers and hard labour, were collected in the middle of the floor and Joaquim's freshly-sharpened knife went to work. He hacked a jagged cross on the Nymphs Bathing, and he was slobbering to *señor* God with knife uplifted when a tub of cold water was hurled over his head.

'You're as sick as a Jew on Saturday,' screamed the old *quixada* from the door, following up her suspicions. She scuffled into the room brandishing her broom and whacking away at the water-soaked figure unable to see with the cold dose blinding him. Wham! Wham! Wham! The furious woman hit with thoroughness and purpose. And at last, where he had intended to please the Queen of Heaven, Joaquim was screaming.

'Holy Mother, intercede with the *señor Jesucristo* to protect me from all future battles. . . .' But the only inter-

cession were the persistent blows from that well-handled broom. And in the place of that reward which Joaquim sought, he lowered his head and fled from the room with the screeching creature after him, her broom whacking what it could, to the bottom of the stairs. She, too, would see duty fulfilled.

The moon purified the world when José, muffled in great cloak, pulled his broad black hat down to hide his eyes—never in the least hid—as he made off in the direction of the Moorish mansion, where was the fragrancy of loveliness which led him to the high stone wall about the lady's garden. Where his light step fell in the startling brightness of the night, touching cobbles and dirt, spread great patches of marble whiteness in which his long body became a lean ghost as black as his hat. How to avoid being drowned in light too dazzling to be pleasant, began to puzzle him, when he found himself standing in a comforting pool of black cast by the great oak at the end of the garden connected with the mansion. The stones of the walk, green with age, shone water-white. With a sigh he languished against the tough bark of the great oak, looking up into its manifold leaves, noting how they patterned the alley with white and ebony chequers. He threw back his cloak and he sniffed and he listened. The odour of jasmine inside the wall made him even more drunken than the drug spilling from the moonbeams. José looked down, then cautiously up and all about him. Like a young Olympian come down for an hour on earth, he no longer hesitated, and inasmuch as a garden wall is made to scale, he scaled it.

Within the protective deep black shadow cast by the oak on the top of the wall sat José so agitated, so eagerly scanning the garden below, shining like a burnished riverbed, he lost his balance, and cascaded off and in. His breath was out of him, for he fell a greater distance than appeared from the top, the moon and the oak doing damage to his calculations. In fact he was stunned. And, by some necromancy, the Lady of the Jasmine, herself dallying in the moon-walk there, most unexpectedly neared the dark-

ness where he lay under the blackness of the tree's shade as he arose up out of it.

The lady's world went spinning. She scarce dared hope for this! The truth was, that in that one long appraising look on a morning too long ago, over her petalled jewels she recognized instantly a spiritual kinship with this romantic one, so gossiped about, so favoured, and so engagingly calumniated. His fierce spirit called to the yet untamed spirit within herself, caged and smothering to death for want of freedom. Life had denied her youth a natural flight, but its celestial wings still fitted her cherubic shoulders with uneasy snugness. Meaning to halt and bid her cavalier begone, as duty and stern etiquette demanded, she advanced upon fashionable feet indiscreetly close, clutching with trembling fingers at her lace mantilla. And in tones meant to be haughty but which were in truth of melting sweetness, she inquired,

'And to what, *señor*, am I indebted for so surprising and so dangerous a visit?' Her voice held a birdlike lilt. 'Did you come to rob my garden of its jewels and silver? Nay, *señor*, go at once! I command it.' Saying which she advanced still further into the shadow where José, greatly perturbed, stood rubbing the bump on his head, swelling from so unexpectedly connecting with the coarse tree-roots where he fell. 'Get you gone, I repeat,' persisted the lady, allowing the glow of sultry eyes to ravish his, for even here the moon poured out a radiant essence. Emotions take little stock of words, and imprisoned in devilish, divine madness, José bowed with stately grace, and letting go of the bump implored her with outstretched hand, badly bruised, not to deport him from this Elysian glade. He had not the least intention of going, and was at the moment as immovable as the Pyramids on their firm base. Never before had beauty so shattered his senses, nor his wits.

'I bow to your wishes since you wish it, but I beg you grant me one moment of sweet converse, *señorita.*'

'*Señora*,' corrected she, and her silvery laughter would mock a nightingale. The raillery alone in that voice en-

slaved him as she said, 'But before you leave me, *señor*, pray tell me what you do here?'

'*Señora!* You whose eyes rival the night in loveliness ask me what I would do here? When more than the moon they kill me with pain? But since you are most gracious I would now lay my aching heart in your two hands of alabaster.'

At this those two alabaster hands trembled and fluttered, and the moon shone less white than did her face. She stirred and, with a proud, languid grace, laughed softly.

'But what if my hands were already full,' she teased archly.

'Then my heart would fall from them, broken.'

'Compliments are for those to whom we are indifferent, *señor*. But for those we love . . .' She broke off. 'Perhaps you are right . . . and yet,' she murmured pensively, 'it is myself who labours at a greater disadvantage. Who knows? Ah, *señor*, I repeat—what *do you* do here?'

'The same as yourself,' José made bold to answer, intoxicated by her indiscretion, realizing that she lingered.

'I wonder! are you quiet sure of what we both seek?' And she seemed to hesitate while the white lace above her throbbing heart fluttered like a dove at nesting-time.

'I seek only the desire of my heart.'

'And do you always find the fulfilment of your desires, Most Fortunate One?'

'Even more! Here I find the heart of life, *señora*. And the very heart of life is love. And of love I make an art!'

'Ah!' There was a gentle sigh, as if the night-zephyr passed them by. 'You are indeed favoured of God,' she said at last, 'but who are you to risk a life, perhaps, for me so indifferent to living?' Another sigh. (She knew well enough who her hero was, and trembled at the thought). Her tiny scarlet slipper stirred a pebble beneath it as he, more and more impassioned, cried out: 'Your devoted slave, and anguished painter, *señora*, José de Goya y Lucientes! For whom the earth and the moon and your gracious presence all join in making life a pure ecstasy.'

She pondered this, her slipper very alive among those

white pebbles. And then, with a little laugh blown to him like the notes of a flute, she challenged, 'And so not content with the earth which already seems yours, *señor* José, you seek, shall we say, a constellation? Tell me, sir, what of all your many experiences has added the greater spur to your living?'

'Love and love only,' he came back at her, too hot-hearted for caution now.

There was not one sound in the garden save the long breath of her sighing, before she asked tremulously: 'Think you that . . . that love is sufficient? Cannot love make life more of a hell than paradise? A hell of bondage and servility and lies? Can one have both love and happiness, or, if love, no happiness?' And now his lady's voice was wine in his veins, for it rang with passion as fierce as his own. 'But perhaps,' it went on, 'perhaps you demand of love only enough—enough for its health's sake? But for me when I love . . . for myself . . . Ah, *señor*, perhaps it is well the good God denies me love—I would demand far too much. Nay—too much is not enough for lonely hearts to feast on at twilight when one kiss would soften the sharp edge of day . . . or one touch at dawn when the body needs warmth, or at midnight when lonely . . . or in the moonlight!' And impatiently, passionately she pushed aside her mantilla exposing her dreamy face while two hands gestured her emptiness, her despair.

How she moved with ease among his thoughts as among her own flowers! How he in his frenzied rapture would seize her and make off—if he could.

'This diamond-clear night would wind about your gentle throat, a perfect love-night,' he voiced, husky with his own intensity.

The lady crossed herself; she was near to swooning for the delicious languor pouring through her patrician limbs.

'Fie!' she managed to say at last, while José's mind reeled in a new enchanted world. His glistening eyes fastened on her own, star-like. With impatience he threw back his cloak as if breathing were impossible, which was true, and as if he were beside himself, which he was.

'I, a mere painter, at least may pour out my heart's passionate homage to a caged White Dove?' he managed to say.

'Ah, *señor*, there is naught but the cloister for my sepulchre,' she sighed. 'And were I authorized to my own life—I would unfurl my poor tied wings and swifter than the wind . . . I . . .'

'I would descend into hell and drag you from the arms of Satan himself, to serve you, *señora!* If words were diamond-tipped, then the wealth of my bleeding heart would stab your beauteous hands. . . . *Love! Virgen Santísima.*' The fever of his passion stung her hunger. . . . 'I sing of . . .' His lustful eyes stripped her, and aware of his passion, of his desire that flayed his body, she grew taut. Her breasts pained; they were eloquent!

'Sing?' she inquired from behind the storm in her own body. 'Nay! only silent love could outburn such a night.' Her smouldering gaze turned and rested suspiciously upon the upper window of her mansion. All was still. Flaming, starved of love, she suddenly sank against him, down, like a bird gone to its nesting. . . . Engulfed in the black pool of silence in the shadow of the great oak, the darkness became a mystic symbol of their humanity . . . and the night ran madly towards morning. All velvet was the garden now, all black on white blossoms like shimmering ice. And over all, a hush. Dew shone on mute petals like bubbles of frosted honey. The moon paled, the air chilled. A nightingale sobbed her love to the sky and pierced their sighings with an aching sadness. . . .

'Love-bird,' murmured José with throat burning. But as he spoke the exquisite face so near his own became a white mask and the lady springing to her feet stood, transfixed, at a most unwelcome and rude noise.

'*El señor duque—por Dios!*' She nearly swooned in her terror, and clutched her cavalier's sleeve, for there was no mistaking the familiarity of the firm step of her old hidalgo striking the pebbled walk and coming down the garden. 'Fly—fly—Mother of God, fly,' she whispered hoarsely, arranging her disarranged self, 'else you are

doomed to die!' And her dainty hand made the sign of the cross on the air.

'No man dies who begins to live,' José's hand tightened on his sword-hilt, for the too-domestic spouse with the instinct of a gendarme was steadily crunching down the moonlight towards them. Again the sign of the cross and the lady nervously fingered the rose in her hair, turned to face *el señor duque* within the cold embrace of the black shade.

At this unusual and illogical night-wandering of his innocent wife's, the gentleman's suspicious, uncertain temper now fluctuated to a certainty. And she, with the courage of pirates within that full but fragile breast, moved one tiny scarlet slipper out on the pale silver of the path and greeted him teasingly. José was about to spring and run the intruder through, when a white hand like a feather thrown from a tower, waved in the air, and the red rose crushed against his eyelids. And there behind the well within the full sweep of the lady's full beruffled, umbrella-like bustle, he crouched, waiting. But, as she manipulated her lacy petticoats with such nervous fingers, she needs must move. He moved, and moved backwards, and fell into a well. A dry well to be sure, but a well nevertheless, and all overgrown since it had been there from about the ninth century. '*Por Dios!*' There he lay cursing heaven and muttering under his breath what a weakling to wait upon a woman's nervousness and not run the bearded old goat through before such an ignominious mishap would befall him. '*Jesú!*' he fumed, nine feet down.

All the wiles known to woman that lady used upon her uxorious lord who seemed to have taken root like the oak itself. Move he would not, and while José raged below, the twain above stood in the chill moon-stream and argued, the lady shivering and chattering like a caged finch, the stubborn gentleman raving; thrusting his sword-cane viciously into the heart of the flowering border, now into the night, and now into the pebbled walk, as if his unseen foe lurked within each or all. Beneath, less impassioned, sat José imprisoned. At last the lady moved, taking her lord with her by the innocent and ancient device of plant-

ing a bumptious kiss upon him. This she might better have bestowed the instant of his arrival and spared José the added pain of sitting amidst nine feet of damp cold mould, warmed only by rage and jealousy. *El señor duque* jested coarsely, sentimentally; invited and grew ribald as they took a noisy departure, the two backs etching fainter and fainter shadows on the burnished walk. . . . José began to lift himself out of his prison of green oozing fungus, eager to be off in order to return. Before his straining eyes his struggling hands clutched only slime and wetted stone. But at last they found anchorage in an old vine-root, and presently he reached the level earth. Breathless, he halted to run a chilled hand over a bruised area of flesh, when the night was pierced by a stifled scream.

On the cobbled alley, the next morning, lay a limp, crumpled heap in a purpling pool of young healthy blood —José with a knife sticking in his spine. By noon the entire city of Saragossa assembled in the market-square to discuss it, and gossip circled like flies about a dead donkey. That the young dare-devil, the painter, had been stabbed to death was one thing, but how his body could be spirited away, was the mystery! Everyone offered an opinion.

'It is an omen that Saragossa is doomed because of its evil ways,' said Manuel, who stoned his little son for liking honey. 'God ordained that this youth be removed from troubling the earth with more folly.' Manuel looked from face to face trying to ferret out any hidden knowledge of the affair.

'From what *el señor duque's* servant told me,' Pilar of the fans added vindictively, '*el señor duque* is not through with this villain who poaches on a husband's sacred rights!' She shut her thin lips on her raging curiosity and challenged the crowd with blazing eyes.

Discretion kept the Master silent and shuddering when the gossip reached him. He put finger to lip to keep the devil out, intending to say nothing, see nothing and hear the same.

One noon, Pilar of the goats strolled innocently away from the *fonda* to the square to bargain with the meat-

monger for a hare. She planted her plump body before his stall and fingered the bull-meat while her quick eyes allowed no cheating in the purchase, but did allow an oblique view of the other stalls, and all of the still gossiping venders. Rattling her coppers down on the wooden counter she seized her bargain by its two stiff ears and took her departure homeward, by way of María's doorway. Past the horse-trough went Pilar with eyes cast down, but with her ears pricked up.

'Hoh! Pilar, have you heard the news?' shrilled María from her doorway, as Pilar hoped. She passed on, looked over her shoulder, and stepped back.

'News?' Pilar reached the door. 'How is one to get news with Narciso gone and Joaquim gone and coppers to count and stew to spoon—and the care of an old woman who bellows all day long like a cow that lost its calf?' Pilar looked down and María's sheep-eyes looked up.

'The old are too slow to die! But if it's God's will . . .'

'Some living are already dead,' murmured Pilar, hiding her impatience. 'But I must be on my way,' said she without stirring.

'The Mayor's wife offers me a goodly sum for my lace,' said María vainly. 'Then you didn't hear what happened?' Pilar lowered her eyes while María told her the amazing tale polished with piety. 'And such an irreverence is not to be tolerated.'

'Truly . . .! What then?' The dead hare seemed to come alive in Pilar's twitching hand.

'What then? Well, *el señor duque*, who is related at Court, says if José still lives—that he will kill him as a painter. He says that such a scoundrel might possibly benefit Spain as a labourer but not as a gentleman!' María's needle punctured the lace-pillow savagely.

For an instant Pilar hesitated to put a question on her trembling lips. But never lacking in courage the weakness passed.

'Then, with the King's help, *el señor duque* intends to find him . . . dead . . . or alive? But where is he, María, does anyone know?'

'Only God knows. Who else?'

'*Sí, sí*—who else?' Pilar shrugged.

'But if the King aids *el señor duque*, you may rest assured José will be found.'

'Assuredly! . . . *Adiós*, María, I must be on my way, for I have lingered over-long. It is sad—he was a gallant fellow. I shall stroll by to-morrow, for it may be you will hear he has been caught.'

And Pilar, whose heart was near to bursting, crossed over the square, and went back to the *fonda*. She put the hare into her mother's hard fingers, now twisted like an old vine, to assure the crone of her bargain. Then she went to the darkest farthest corner of the *fonda* and there being nothing in sight but a pig in the doorway, Pilar fell on her knees and hid her face. With her whole soul Pilar prayed to the Virgin; prayed in breathless whispers, her heart beating like the muted notes of a flute. . . . When at last she rose her movements were a series of mysterious manœuvres: she peeked in at the old woman and listened to her heavy breathing; she circled the room, looking casually for some time into the court, looked the inn over, every corner, and then tiptoed with utmost caution to the dark end of the room where there was a narrow sharp flight of mouldy stairs, which led up into the small dark tower above the pigsty.

With one foot on the lower step, she stopped to gaze back and then cautiously mounted, reached the top, listened and opening the one small dark door, closed herself in without a sound. The room, no larger than a closet, was musty with the unused years. Over beside a bundle of straw strewn hastily on the rotting timbers of the floor, she gazed down.

'José *mío!*' Her voice was soft and low. 'José—I have news! Now we know how to plan!' There was no answer. Pilar knelt down, put her ear to heart, found it pumping, and cried, 'The good God!' and rose up happy. Placing within reach a bowl of soup and a cup of cold water, Pilar tiptoed to the door, opened it without a sound, and made her way cautiously down the stairs.

The following week of suspense was Paradise to Pilar. She knew all that had happened; she knew by instinct what would happen; *el señor duque*, himself given to amorous indulgences, would not forgive it in others. One who makes domestic life holy with inviolable traditions, and sacred by the age-old etiquette of an iron grill, revenges another's lusts with gusto and pursuit—to the death.

It was Antonio, the scribe, who came upon José that fateful morning, and knowing Pilar would be on her way to early Mass, circuited the wall and waylaid her. Together they clogged the alley-entrance, engaged in dissembling talk, and at the moment the pious were closed within the church, by superhuman strategy and strength they got the limp body back into the *fonda* and hid him in the tower. Pilar nursed, applied healing salves of wine and rosemary, scolded and commanded; lied to quiet him, and stole out every spare moment to spy and comb the city for news.

Slowly the deep, ugly wound mended. His giant physique and young blood served him, what with Pilar humouring and nursing and protecting him.

'*Virgen María!* listen to the fellow,' whispered Pilar at the end of the second week. 'Do you court death again so soon, *valiente?* You are not yet out of Purgatory. Not so much as the tip of your nose shall be seen until Antonio says the way is safe for you. He is on guard every minute, and will warn me.'

'Thanks to your great heart, *Nonio*, my brown pigeon.' Thus was Pilar rewarded—he called her brown pigeon! Gratitude shone on his face, in his beloved voice. 'But I soon shall be up lusting for revenge,' he added, irked.

'Revenge? *Dios mío!* There is your future to consider,' she argued. 'We must use caution, José, a stranger came through the gates this morning. He has a mean eye, the eye of a man-killing bull. He bears watching. Caution, José!' And Pilar laughed softly, since he once more called her 'brown pigeon'.

José groaned, a groan of restlessness and impatience, for his fever was gone. Pilar gazed down, knowing she had

gauged aright the pig-headed stranger who this very day stopped to compliment María (who deserved none!). Tomorrow she would have more to tell José.

'Immediately I saw him talking with María, José, I sauntered by, by chance,' Pilar grinned. 'I had to watch María, for I do not know him well enough—yet—to share all the secrets behind those two long mule-ears of his.' Pilar's eyes held alarm but she smiled wistfully. '*Qué hombre!* . . . could not perhaps a little of your old passion be made to live again, José? No? . . . Never? What is a day in one's life when the year is naught but days?' Pilar sighed as she tiptoed about preparing to cleanse the still open wound. She came closer to him. 'Well, José, "the friend who won't aid and the knife that won't cut are of small consequence when lost," as the saying goes, and once Pilar loves—*always*. Though your hot, wild heart drives you on . . . José, Pilar will remember!'

'*Sí, sí!*' He remembered, but the fires were ashes now. And more to consider was the wound drawing to a healthy but terrible itching. So Pilar smothered the cry in her heart and applied salve.

Each day she shrewdly managed an interview with Antonio, who kept her warned as a man in a lighthouse seeing a storm on its way; and José was not safe. But José watched her, irked and restless, coming each day with her strong arms hung with cloths, and laden with salves, and food and wine. Those golden days under the acacia were again hers, and she encouraged her memories while discouraging his freedom. Antonio had told her *el señor duque* had engaged workmen to build his wall.

'To the moon—lest upon another white flood of it, José, you are washed again into the garden. Yes, you may sit up—in my arms . . .! Hoh! My valiant, you are better off flat on your straw, eh? For another while! Ducks must paddle before they waddle.'

'But I must be up. Up and out. . . .'

'Words are brave things, but oft empty.' She shook her finger at him. 'I am not satisfied with Antonio's report. . . . This black pig of a stranger may be a long-

fingered agent of the Inquisition. That *señor duque* is a wicked old goat with long horns and a purse filled with ducats. Wait—those horns cannot butt you out of my life *altogether!* . . . Your future holds more profit than your murder.' So Pilar's wise, salty tongue ran on admonishing, advising!

'Pilar, my faithful, you are right—but . . .'

'Certainly I am right. Antonio says the stranger is not frank about his destination. That in itself is a thing of suspicion. I shall have to engage him in talk myself and see!'

'But this inertia . . .'

'One cannot become as clean as the blade that stabbed you all in one moment. But men are weak, impatient creatures!' To comfort him Pilar managed, through Antonio, to secrete his colours to him while he drew pictures on the wall with a spoon. So cautious had she been, so careful, that now the gossip had the painter both dead and buried and travelling in a foreign country.

The Inquisition was by no means an unpopular institution. It provided an easy way—by annihilation—of chastening those endowed with extreme and offensive virtues, such as those with too great an imagination, like José.

Before Antonio's booth, Pilar ostentatiously held up a copper as if about to dispatch an important message while her eyes darted hither and yon for lurking enemies as she listened to the scribe, trying not to betray her terror.

'"Between the King and the Inquisition we dare not speak." He cannot escape the Holy System.' Over the counter Antonio ran a dry quill while letting his honest eyes rove over the street before lifting them again to Pilar's. 'The eyes of the Holy System long ago fastened on his ceiling and spandrels in El Pilar, didn't they?' he asked with mournful gravity, recalling the last festival and admitting the necessity of speedily spiriting this handsome devil out of the city once and for all. 'Do they not testify to his lawless, blasphemous mind, eh?'

'He does not blaspheme in paint,' whispered the loyal Pilar fiercely. 'And those Holy Officials saw nothing of it until an old goat with money-bags chose to . . .'

'The Inquisition recoils in horror when it pleases them. Their cup of sanctimoniousness spills over to suit.'

'*Señor* scribe—help me to save him—you must—you shall!'

'Help one who so upsets tradition?' Antonio's shrewd old eyes twinkled into hers. 'Help a fellow who profanes the holy female saints by too rosy a sphericality? and his lady martyrs with devilish womanliness? Tst!'

'But, surely he paints his cherubs . . .'

'Too much like healthy babies! No, my pretty, there is no hope. As in the case of all heretics, José's spirit will be returned to God by way of boiling oil, and *el señor duque's* influence.'

A groan of horror escaped Pilar, on a rack of her own.

'Is that justice?' she cried fiercely.

'The Tribunal may even prefer a simpler method—tearing him apart. Thus will God be avenged—and Spain lose agenius.'

'Antonio, my friend! Our wits must save him or I shall kill him first and then myself.'

'You might do worse! Against the power of money we are helpless, my pretty. Let me weigh this sad business in solitude.'

Pilar's lips were chalk-white, her throat tight with terror and her wits racing with the wild, forlorn hope that Antonio might be wrong. Pilar did not undulate now, she walked sluggishly, like one haunted by an unseen but certain ghost, and though her head was up, proudly, she swayed around the Tower wall, as the wildest of schemes took possession of her. Meanwhile, irked and restive, José suddenly become like a straw house on fire. He had ripped from the wall two oaken panels, dowelled them together, and with oil from the lamp and dust from the window-pane and his spoon, drew on it a picture of the Inquisition Tribunal trial. He was reborn. Flinging on mounds of paint, he flamed over his vision, an audacity to the point of madness. He spooned on colour as if from his heart rather than out of a pot. Pilar laughed the laughter of courage, for with that premonition of disaster her new in-

genious scheme of escape for José made her more fearful, more uncertain. Her wits churned like a windmill.

The next morning she sat—with purpose—on the Arab pillar in the court, a red rose in the freshly oiled hair that shone in the hot sunlight, and plucked a fowl while her wits turned over her secret: that terrible new truth of José's, up in the tower. A footstep caught in her terrified thoughts and she sensed who it was coming. She looked up into the bright, uneasy eyes of the suspected stranger. Her throat dried, but she gave him a warm arch smile.

'*Buenos días, señor!*'

'*Buenos días, señorita.* But you are salt, *tan sal.*' He could find no greater compliment while eyeing her sharply, amorously.

'But there is beauty everywhere, *señor.*' Pilar flung down her raw bird, troubled, taken by surprise. She had not expected this so soon. She rose nervously and with seductive enchanting languor swayed towards him, smiling.

'True! but God gives beauty like yours seldom, my red bird.'

'Then God is wise,' she answered glibly, angered and confused and giddy at his flattery. Allowing him one promising glance, she lowered her eyes before his greedy stare.

'A pretty face such as yours is not one to be borrowed, eh? You win many lovers?'

'One never lacks for lovers . . . a girl has her likes, *señor!*' Pilar looked coyly down, shoved back an escaping lock of hair and looked up into his keen, dark face, invitingly; knowing he baited her, yet fearful, excited, and muddled before his homage. 'But why would the traveller compliment Rita's *posada?* Here, *señor*, we give generously of food . . . and bed,' she parried. 'Perhaps the new traveller who journeys shortly elsewhere will promise to try our fare? *Adiós*, I go. My ailing much-loved old mother calls me, *señor*. . . . She needs my kindliest care. You will come?' Pilar grasped the plucked fowl and started towards the door, resentful and more excited by her small victory.

'To-morrow—*señorita*—not to-night then!'

'To-morrow—good! I myself will then have time to prepare for you a special dish, one to your liking, *señor*.' She stood in the doorway swaying voluptuously. 'To-morrow then will be a delight,' she called with special meaning.

'He needs watching, that one,' she told José up in the tower; with arms akimbo and a scowl distorting her pretty face as she watched his deft hand create out of an unliving mass of blacks and reds and whites. Instinct told her of something hidden there, of a not-understood delight in his strange world. It puzzled her. But he allowed her to grind his colours, and proud as a peacock she shuddered at where a slip of hers might lead him. 'Swine!' she said gazing at the 'Inquisition trial', her thoughts on the attractive stranger. 'Swine! such a one needs close attention.'

The finished picture glowed and lit up the dim dirty room like a jewel in brilliant facets. Gruesome realism, it portrayed a prisoner—a self-portrait of José on trial before the *auto-da-fé*. José backed off and regarded it with satisfaction.

'Antonio tells me that the great are born but once in a century.' Pilar laid her hand proudly on his shoulder; but recalling the special evening meal she hurried away to mix oil and spices and herbs for the dish to tempt the stranger, with José's daring picture in mind. She kept repeating '*Por Dios!* What might befall him. *Por Dios!*' And an excited red mounted under the brown of her cheeks too attractively.

Her wits wandered while serving the stranger that evening. 'He is a wolf in sheep's clothing,' she told herself, bustling about to fetch this and that. 'He needs watching —yet who knows but I may be wrong?' she said, her wits tangled by his flattery; and frightened before his hot gaze. And then because, paradoxically, the primitive woman desires male approval, while despising him, determined to make herself alluring, intending to spy and play safe, Pilar sat down at the table and faced him. She filled up a wine-cup and pushed it towards him, smiling into his dark, sharp face, yellow as old tallow in the evening light. With José in mind both fear and pride would not be dismissed.

'We have a wise one here who says the great come but once in a century,' said she, lowering her eyes before the man's bawdy stare.

'A great and holy city like this must produce much talent.' His eyes narrowed as she looked up.

'There are some who promise . . .' She broke off, confused. 'Is your province rich like this, *señor?*'

'The Basque has his own pride.'

'And wit,' she flashed. '*Sí, sí,* we have some who paint the ceiling in El Pilar and the Cathedral. But one could weep for those painters who should be saddlers.'

'A rare intelligence, *señorita.* I drink to it—and to you! Fortunate your lover!' He raised his cup and over it his eyes sought hers lasciviously, desire flaying him like a lash.

Pilar gazed back more agitated than she knew; a new confusion added to her troubled spirit. And haunted by memories of her one love, a new fear rose to protect that love, when the Basque startled her into saying: 'There is one here . . .' But her head-piece cooled suddenly. 'Tst!' Were *his* wits sharper than her own? She smiled to hide perturbation, for not yet had she probed this black pig who was an offence to her pride in José. 'If my cooking delights you, *señor*, then you will honour me another evening. Tomorrow? I may cook you *un pichón con guisantes?*'

'Ah, *señorita*, a delicacy indeed, *pichón con guisantes*, but what else do you promise, eh? What might you give the hungry—*for dessert?*'

'Another promise, *señor.* A promise is a light but a *sweet* dessert.' She rose hurriedly from the table, excited by his sudden appetite for a 'dessert', farthest from her intentions. She went and stood at the foot of the tower steps praying silently to the Virgin for wisdom to guide her from this stranger's evil influence.

But the Basque himself had not yet probed the deeps he was after. He rose and sauntered over to her. He stood beside her, the flattering wolf close to his lamb. He measured her vanity, her stubbornness, her courage, and now her clearly disturbed face. Then with a fawning, plausible compliment, indelicately he led her back to the delicate subject,

while Pilar, with one foot still on the step, felt her wits desert her as she chattered shrilly, foolishly, trying to parry.

'Besides beautiful women Saragossa has much to be proud of, you say, *señorita?* To-morrow, then, you will tell me more of it?'

'To-morrow . . . yes, to-morrow, maybe.' Her eyes opened round and bright. Pilar did not suspect her evil old mother. But she was not aware of the *duros* put into her old claw that very morning.

'Your fire and your intelligence intrigue me. Maybe to-morrow you will lead me to see those frescoes you mention.'

He mocked her, she knew. She shrugged.

'Maybe . . . I do not boast in vain!' Persisting with pride, 'I know of an art that makes the donkey-eyes of others pop with envy. You mock?' Then her face reddened with fright and confusion.

'Mock?' In feigned surprise his eyes wandered over her face and found, high above her head, a small hidden door which '*La Viuda*' had sold him. 'Mock so blooded and fiery a filly? For whom my heart aches in emptiness?'

Then, as the mind is a tricky thing, and fear does one or two things—clarifies or distorts—fear unhinged her.

'Mock if you like, but there is a great one here,' shrilled she, her red slipper tapping up one step to her Paradise above the pigsty. 'You shall see!' And with a swirl of petticoats the slipper moved another step up, and no sooner did that than her heart was paste, her legs shaking like reeds in a high wind. She stood frozen at her own craziness. Scarcely breathing in her agony . . . ('*O Santa María Purísima, Misericorda!* Holy Mother, I have betrayed him! Hear me—hear me—O God, and save him I love. It is not too late—not too late!') Pilar prayed. Gazing down on the face below her, she knew it was too late! Knew that there was naught to do but pay the price of her madness, for both she and the Basque now heard gay singing inside the door. . . . And Pilar, almost crazed, saw the Basque fling open the door.

'José! A visitor!' Her voice had the harsh cracking of metal struck a sharp blow. 'A visitor to see your great art.' (Holy Mother of God, there was the Inquisition picture in

full view!) 'Come, show one who hungers not that—his intelligence calls for your own work, not that gloom borrowed from Joaquim.'

Irritated at the interruption, and with no thought of its portent, José turned and looked into a masked face and knew intuitively what it meant. Pilar's eyes told nothing. She, leaning against the door, taut as a cat, her hard knuckles drumming on her wide hips, was praying, her lips a scarlet thread which she chewed as if to unravel the horror tightening within her soul. ('O Queen of Heaven, tear out my evil tongue before it destroys my love. Most Pure Lady hear me, hear me! Guide him to safety before it is too late.') Her heart cried out the agony her eyes hid. 'Why do I bring misfortune to love? They will destroy him, through me. . . .What can I do? O Virgin of the Immaculate Conception—hear your despairing child!') Limply, and with eyes closed, as if to shut out the terror before her, she heard the unctuous Basque discoursing on things he knew nothing of. And José, so long suppressed, unable to restrain his pent-up temper, was retaliating.

'One has to comprehend the individual and his *own* values before one is fit to judge the artist,' José said, cold with contempt for one who posed with such windy talk; and wounding the Basque's vanity which was not hid from Pilar. Her eyes were wide open now. ('O Lady, O Holy *Señora*, perform your divine Miracle before I die of my own torture. My vow before God shall be kept in exchange for your divine mercy.') . . . José's irritated voice . . . and then: '*Holá!* How the bear growls in his den!' With feverish spots on each cheek, Pilar swayed with lazy grace into the room, close to the Basque, who suddenly got in his thin ribs an enticing poke from a well-rounded elbow. Accompanying it was a side-glance from knowing eyes which settled warmly on his vanity. '*Capricho!* It is true he has genius enough to paint the *sound* of the Miserere if he were not . . .' Pilar tapped her forehead. 'Cork, my friend, all cork, else he would appreciate a Basque's great intelligence—as I do!' And shoulder to shoulder with this despicable trickster, Pilar laughed into the malign eyes enga-

gingly. Arch and warm she pressed closer and closer, breathing slyly, 'But the good God sees to it we have but one of his kind!'

The Basque, uncertain of her, searched her face, but she pressed closer, suggesting sharing an intimate secret with him, her face the colour of swan's down.

'*Dios mío!* Give me virile men like you, *señor*, who have the strength to fight Saracen dogs—not one of paste! But, come—have you not had enough of this? Daylight flies. Far better a feast for the stomach, eh? An omelette with herbs and—*queso*—and dessert? A *sweet* dessert? Let us leave this grim *loco* to his white lead!' And near crazed by now, Pilar, laughing hard, wove her plump arm into an unpleasantly bony one and marshalled the Basque out of the room. Outside, she drew the wooden bolt across the door and upon a man lost in thoughts of his own.

'Now that my black bear is caged one may eat in comfort. . . . He has run through *ten* men! I would not have my honoured guest done to death!'

The baited Basque was certain now she was neither vain nor silly. But not once did Pilar's heart stop crying out to José while her wits raced with scheming to get him out of the trap. While her eyes rested on the Basque's, the eyes of her heart prayed for forgiveness ('O Lady of Sorrow, I am dying of defeat. Help me to guide him to safety. Hear me once more.')

That night the Basque feasted. Set before him were *pan blanco*, milk-soup, eggs with truffles, butter-paste, pork-chops, *fricandó* with gravy and fowl in salad. Pilar, with hips swaying, hovered about his table, coquettish glances riveted on his eyes.

When the Basque's covetous eyes came away from an emptied plate they would fasten in the same greedy way on her. She kept carefully within his sight, watching to see how long before he would become properly inflated with wine, how long to heat comfortably. She brought him *tortadas* and almonds, and seeing he was not even inclined to drowsiness, fetched him a heavy black wine. When he drooped, Pilar faded into the purple dark, leaving her

overheated Basque awaiting his 'dessert' with an expectant gleam in his dark, sunken eyes. . . .

Out of the night came the sound of a *chirrilón* as if Chico sounded a homing note to his flock lost on the *vega* . . . and José, descending carefully from the tower window to pigsty, from pigsty to earth, vanished into a night that folded about him a velvet security.

There were no stockings on the sturdy legs under the table, and they moved incessantly, nudging lean shins until near dawn. Her best linen blouse opened deep in front, Pilar bore a red geranium crushed between full breasts. She smelt spicy and sweet, and in her crisp, black hair, gleamed an agitated silver comb; Pilar leaned far over the table, busily cheating her inflammable foe. As she gestured and fluted and flirted, Pilar's silver bracelets jingled a solemn music of atonement. When the Basque was finally bloated enough, Pilar's promise of a 'sweet dessert' faded. Anyway, his wits and limbs were dissolved in a limp and muscular disuse. But over and over Pilar kept suggesting to him his great mistake.

'I assure you, *señor*, it is known that *el señor duque* was in his cups that night. Who in their cups knows what is what?'

'True,' he mumbled hotly. 'But you are salt, my fiery little mare.'

'The *duque* should go to the rack for slandering a poor cork-headed painter. *El señor duque was in his cups!*' Pilar's blazing eyes could scarce hide their contempt.

'In his cups, you say?'

'Assuredly! and a great man like yourself knows that in one's cups one might mistake his own father for a goat! *When one is in their cups*, one might take a boar for a bear and *el señor duque could not be sure!* Bears and boars look alike when in . . . More wine, *señor?*' Pilar rose and brought another skin of black fire, and laughed into his eyes slowly glazing. 'You are one to see justice done? And I repeat, my friend, it was *all a mistake!*' She lifted cup to mouth pretending to drink. 'Did you consult with the scribe Antonio, as I suggested? He is a wise man. Did he not agree with me?'

'He agrees that *el señor duque* was in his cups. You are a

wise wench. Pass me the wine. Can you swear to the fact about the *duque?*'

'Is it necessary—with *you, señor?*'—Pilar threw back her head and laughed outrageously—'as long as *you* know the *duque's* weak head?'

The Basque's head nodding drowsily, jerked up brightly suspicious, and then he roared with admiration. Desire lessened and all muscular power was postponed. Again Pilar suggested clearly how in their cups all men look like bears or boars, or all alike, until he slumped sweating down into his chair.

He looked at her, his face a blank, life showing only in fishy eyes. She came and stood beside him, letting her hand rest on his shoulders. Bending over him her lips touched his ear as she whispered.

'But come, *señor*, the night begins and leaves me sadly alone?' Pilar waited the effect, and said, 'You see in me a poor girl, but one of virtue, eh? You hear?' Each word dinged against his ear-drum. 'If I hide this poor painter wretch—up in the tower—it was because his talent is *pledged* to Spain. To *Spain, señor! You* will see those mistaken long-fingers of power at Court, or the Inquisition . . . *withdrawn! Withdrawn* at once upon your return to Madrid. Your promise—for my promise of a dessert?'

How speedy was this young mare, how fatiguing, how impossible it was—at the moment—to keep her pace, and the Basque wished only to sleep. His fumbling wits gathered, but words would not come. And for his own future, he nodded, her wily suggestion planted in his drunken head like seed in moist sand.

It was near dawn when Pilar dragged him, with legs folding, outside, where she plopped him on straw hastily strewn near the pigs. Being disturbed, they made eccentric noises and lumbered about as if enjoying a clumsy joke. Dead enough, she left him there, and stole up to the tower room. Her strong arms lifted that tell-tale picture up on to rotting timbers in the darkest, sloping part of the roof. Covering it with rags, satisfied, she left it to the rats and bats and ants and dust.

The Basque, back in Madrid, once more trod to the 'Walk of Liars' on his way to his superiors, fully, furiously awake. He reported shrewdly that his mission in Saragossa exposed the fact that *el señor duque*, given too often to his cups, had driven his knife into the wrong spine: *el señor duque* had dishonoured a poor but worthy painter with talent, which it would be well to preserve for the future of the Church, the State, and therefore God. He, the Basque, had seen the *duque's* victim, a wretched, simple, aggressive fellow living in a foul inn with a lazy, incapable, deceiving bitch. If it pleased the Court he himself, in due time, would be pleased to return to discover what else this painter might have accomplished to benefit Spain! Indeed, never being more awake, the Basque was quite ready to return to pay off a score not pleasant for him to contemplate. His was not a nature to deny itself any 'sweet dessert', much less allow a rich promise to go unfulfilled. Of a certainty he would return.

By the aid of her lantern which flickered like fireflies in the dark, Pilar ventured out across the *vega* to him hid in Chico's cave, bringing food and wine and gossip, late each night. Her terrible moment was a thing to forget and forgive, and José laughed at her continued fears.

'The Basque is gone, José, but the city is not yet safe for you.'

'Tst! It will not be long now before I return to work.'

Pilar's eyes became two black fires.

'Not yet! *El señor duque* mistrusts the Basque, and is not satisfied that justice was done him. That's the talk. A rich old goat can butt farther than Madrid.'

'I can die but once.'

'True—a man goes to heaven in tow breeches but not by way of gilded horns—if he is sane,' snapped Pilar.

José accepted her judgement only for the moment. His satisfied eyes travelled down long aisles of light to the sky's brim, into dream vapours. He watched Chico tend the young of his flock. He noted violet, twilight skies, as if heated by some remote conflagration, die in flames of orange. He saw the white radiance of dawn unfold into

crystal, into silver, into a red-gold crown for earth. And he knew that these eternal sublime truths withheld great creative secrets which could never be wrenched entirely out of space. He must experience more life.

'There is a prize offered at Court, José,' Pilar brought him news. 'One hundred pesetas for one who designs the most beautiful costume for a fancy-dress *fiesta*. If we were only certain of our gilded old goat . . .' Pilar deposited her basket of figs and fresh-cooked bull-meat. 'Your cold-water virgin—she of the fan-stall—had to send for the apothecary to fetch leeches and ease the pain in her jaw. María told me.'

'Leeches suck out poison, as I know.'

'Bah! Leeches suck out everything but an evil tongue like hers.' Pilar, on the ground at José's feet, jabbered of the perfidy of women; how Antonio longed to journey East in search of wisdom. There came the old longing, and she slyly reached out for his hand. Fingers met; his withdrew. Pilar's heart grew heavy. They sat without speaking, José withdrawn into silent marvelling of the night, she fingering the stiletto hidden in her black hair, worn for protection on these nightly excursions.

'Leeches cannot suck the pain from the heart,' she said after a while, and she pulled herself upright and went away into the night.

José lay on the earth, a sleepy receptacle for Chico's talk, and there darted into his mind this: how translate into beauty life as he beheld it? Leads and canvas were too cool a medium! Here, in this rare clarified atmosphere, his work lacked vital force, non-essentials were emphasized, essentials unaccented. He said to Chico, who was asleep, 'I need to reach out. . . . I need greater stimulus, Chico! lifting out of academic limitations. I need the salt of new tongues and old Masters! To create one must be among creators.' And he jumped to his feet and strode up and down in the dark, crying, 'I am buried alive.' He nudged Chico with his foot.

'Chico . . . *Amigo!* I go at once to live in a world of the living. I go to Madrid to win a prize and study the great

of the earth, the great master Velázquez! His inspired painted pieces are there, and who knows, *amigo*, I may even learn of a foreigner. In Madrid is a painter called Rembrandt, and one Van Dyck, of Flanders. His pictures hang in Madrid.' José laughed outright. 'Wish me happiness —I was buried in a barren tomb and I am resurrected!'

His intentions to go crashed about Pilar like thunder. She burst out in blind fury, her eyes iron-hard: 'The idea of one as mad as a dog that chases his own tail . . .' And galvanized with suspicion, she searched his face under the light of a million stars and shrilled with malice, '*Dios poderoso!* You need not linger for the sake of your old goat's lady-wife. Yesterday the whole city near died with laughter at your expense seeing how she rode out cooing to her gilt Satan!—like two doves in one nest!' Over the girl's face flowed a great sadness. Then, giving vent to an exclamation (not to be put here), she walked away into the night stiff in hurt dignity, and swallowing a thickness painful in her throat. Her only world was uprooted. She prayed at Mass the following morning, hoping that sanity be restored to him, and he to her. And yet, as she trudged through the sweet still night looking warily this way and that into the dark, Pilar's dry lips were offering every inducement to the Queen of Heaven, 'a million penances, to help hide this mule of a man, for ever'. The next night, she reached the cave lifting the lantern high. Waving the light into his determined face, alight with the passion of adventure, her own became drawn and anguished.

'The Basque is back in the city. It is unwise to go now,' she said.

'Back for you or for me,' José laughed with good-nature.

'Antonio talked with him. It's madness to cross the city until I dispose of him. He grows a beard to hide his evil intentions, but beards never hide the evil eye.'

'One who listens to old women would sit by the fire for life,' José teased.

'*Zas!*' Pilar slapped him, and simply and loudly said things to and about him. He laughed. She stamped her

foot. 'Antonio saw *el señor duque* coming out of his patio gate with him. This time if he finds you . . .' Pilar shuddered. 'Disguise yourself if you would play the fool!'

'You will help me?' José asked with cool effrontery. 'Your love has been a torch, it may be again!'

'God knows the truth of that.' She melted. And in despair flung at him, 'Ya! after all, if you leave all the love I gave there are other smart fish besides painters. Men are a poor ungrateful lot.' She made an angry clicking with her teeth and flung herself into his arms, sobbing, 'It was a true love, José.'

'You gave me pleasure, my brown pigeon.'

The sobbing stopped, and furious she backed away: 'Men are God's worst works—ya! Tinder-boxes of self-seeking pleasure. *Dios*, what a world it would be with only good girls in it like me and no evil men at all!' Shooting her last black bolt of jealousy she went off, evolving what disguise would be safest for the long, hazardous journey, and what the quickest way to trick the Holy Office and the Basque. She lay on her mattress wide-eyed throughout the night, angered and troubled by a tragic sense of impending doom.

Whether to travel north towards the Pyrenees and over into France, where French art offered inspiration, but from where a continuous war boomed its ominous noise into the valley—and which might involve him in immediate immortality—or travel south to win the prize in Madrid, where life was more abundant but where it might yet please the Holy Inquisition to hasten him on to eternity more quickly than he desired—was the debatable issue. José decided on Madrid, the more hazardous and therefore more delightful adventure, also his purse again being lean, to win that prize, as 'coppers would bring in the bacon'. His senses throbbed while Pilar's senses stood still.

As if the last night of her life had come, Pilar jabbed her stiletto into her thick hair, donned José's great cloak and large-brimmed hat and, lantern in hand, went out stealthily across the court of the inn. In a basket on her arm lay José's disguise and needs for his journey. The long empty

years ahead swept over her like an icy wind. José would never return. Behind the tower she stopped and lit her lantern, for the night was starless and black; and swamped in terror of the years ahead, went on forgetful of all else. When she arrived at the cave, at the sight of how the devil in him was pleased at going, she fell into a nervous fury.

'So—you *will* go, eh?' she shrilled, flinging the basket to the ground and in her heat nervously disgorging it. José caught her roughly to him, in excitement, and with a sob in her throat she capitulated and, for one moment of bliss, felt his strong arms hold her. She spoke bravely to hide her wound. 'It is past midnight and you—you' (a fresh sob halted her tongue), 'you must be away before dawn betrays you. Who knows where that black pig of a Basque is lurking, José? But before you leave, tell me, José, does love always bring happiness—in the end? For men, yes, but not for women. . . . But if the good God gives us happiness of one love—once—one can afford pain!' Her heart contracted, knowing that no lover's arm would hold her ever again, but she braced herself for the farewell. She reached up and the lips that brushed his cheek were cold and dry like straw. 'Come, my blind beggar! Now the patch over one eye, your staff, now the hat!' Pilar finishing off his disguise with a pot-shaped hat, and seeing her handsome lover become a professional loafer courageously laughed. It strangled her. Then, 'Before you go along the road of life, I am to have one last kiss? José? One only!'

He had no desire to, not so much as a moth's wing of the old feeling touched him, but bending down to her he kissed her graciously, lightly. And then he seized the lantern, waved it at her and with a buoyant laugh started off with the fumbling step of the disabled they had practised together.

'*Adiós*—my faithful! *Adiós*—wish me well! God protect so loyal a heart!' Through a chill heartache she saw his tall, fine figure stride away beside the squat, clumsy Chico. He was to guide 'the blind' as far as the northern gate. The lantern wavered like a wayward but captured star; grew dimmer; dimmer. When the loved, retreating body flowed

into black immensity and became part of it, she managed, 'God go with you, José . . . José.' Then, frightened for him, she went stumbling over the rocky earth towards the *fonda;* unheedful of everything but her pain, until she reached the old trysting acacia. It called to her, now that her night was bright with starlight, yet dull. With a sob Pilar flung herself on the earth beneath the tree, alone with sorrow.

'*Ser-eno! Ser-eno!*' The watchman's cry rang out over the sleeping city as the tap-tap-tap of a blind man's staff cut the silence at the northern gate. There, with a silent grip of hands, two friends parted, smothered in darkness that covered them like a coat. The blind beggar went safely now, warmed by a ragged blouse and thick wool jerkin beneath, and with ragged breeches buttoned at the knee over rusty gaiters. But the pot-hat and the patch were unable to hide the glitter of excitement in the brilliant black eyes beneath them. The staff guided him out of dark hard road-ruts and mud-hollows and deep sloughs underfoot, which bore convincing evidence that the *Alcalde* of Saragossa resisted both royal will and public convenience to the good of his purse.

With her first trysting-place her only solace, Pilar lay as upon her lover's breast, her heart crying out in silent, racking grief. Her two fists beat the earth. She bit at the grass, strangled by unheard sobbing . . . moaning . . . praying . . . 'O Santa María, I am cold, the philtre of despair poisons my life . . . *Misericordia María Purísima!* The light is gone out for ever . . . deserted, thou who knowest sorrow . . . O Heavenly *Señora*, kill me, I am better dead. . . . Strike me now, if it please you, Sorrowing Lady, I have no will to live. Better to die than to wither. . . . There is naught now but to enter the Kingdom of Heaven . . . Dead. . . . I am already *dead—dead!*'

Burned out with sobbing, she lay inert, moaning softly, and it may be that the flash of a falling star found its course past her hot, dry, aching throat. Something roused her. She raised her head slowly; opened her eyes with terror on a figure coming stealthily from behind the acacia. Muffled in a great cloak, hat pulled well down to hide dark

sly features; evil eyes cold with purpose were caught by the starlight. She knew him. She got to her feet without a sound and faced him, now beyond fear, her one idea being to save José from pursuit. No word was spoken as they faced each other. Cunningly her hand went to the stiletto in her hair—and then straight at his heart. The Basque's hand shot out, gripped the upraised fist, forced it from his body—and with a sudden jerk downward, the stiletto meant for his plunged into Pilar's heart.

One breathless cry of pain, a tragic note piercing high like a dirge from a flute, and Pilar's little love-world, the cloaked figure, the starlit night sank into one dark glazed blot of eternity. Softly, one by one little crimson beads from Pilar's heart, red as the corals of Gaspero's necklace, seeped into the earth and joined those other courageous dead whose loyal heart-stream enriched the *vega* for many centuries; her heart given in all honesty, in selfless sacrifice, as great love is given. And while dawn was yet a phantom of the dark, and José groping amid sweet heather-banks on which to sleep, Pilar lay at rest.

'*Ser-eno! Ser-eno!*' Truly all was serene.

BOOK FOUR

Old Proverb: He that Marries a Widow with Three Children Marries Four Thieves

HELL ON HORSEBACK MIGHT BE AFTER HIM, BUT HE WAS up with the birds at crack of dawn and on his way to Madrid, singing, the steady crunching of boots dinging in his ears like bells for Mass. As birds fly, so went his wits, and his boots, like creatures possessed of the devil determined to get into heaven. Pebbles flew out, dust blew up and by the noon sun poured down. His patch was tied up over one eye like a shutter ready to pull down at the slightest alarm. The beggar's staff, ready for the professional tap, pointed forward like the prow of a ship making a lane in the sea of yellow dust along the road.

Gauging distances by the sun, by twilight to-morrow he

would reach Madrid. *Holá!* To morrow! A New World, many worlds, high and low, in one; intellectuals, Court, the *Academia*—and Velázquez! He was free from a shallow pond of small fish. Never again a woman in his world! Men, men of lean flesh and bone. The sooner he reached his new glamorous world the sooner to live it! Presently the main road would be travelled by packed *galeras*, Royal Mail caravan, mule-packs aplenty and thin-ribbed robbers who would intrude on his time, and, assuredly, his carcass. Forthwith he marched, flinging his song on the soundless air with the same passion he flung lead on to canvas.

'A star is lost and appears not in the sky,
On thy tiny face it sets itself;
In thy brow it shines!'

Zum, zum, zum! His deep bronzed chest hummed like a harp in the breeze of his own making. The earth poured up an oven heat, the sun blazed down, a burning copper disk. There was not one sign or beat of life in this impenetrable earth-stillness, save the drone of insects and the creak of plodding boots. The way began to go up. Rocks lifted into hills; into mountains; and soon José reached the mouth of a mule-path. He mounted steadily to a patch of myrtle shaded by a giant cork tree; he flung down the pot-hat and the patch (worn inside his blouse because it itched!), the staff, the wallet and jerkin; bathed his sweating body, drank from the stream and, refreshed, sank into a gold-green peace. After munching bread and sausage from the wallet, he relaxed on the cool moss and lay to sleep, gazing up at the dark massed leaves quivering overhead. They challenged sleep. They held a waking, breath-taking delicacy, a mysterious conjunction of subtle trembling accented shapes as elusive as tones in music. Each separate leaf was a dark elfin form as sharp as a cat's tooth, made with an effortless perfection he yearned passionately to re-create.

Seeing the sun riding to the west, he made off eagerly, peering into dank, cavernous groves, at the stream running beyond, searching for his boyhood *xanas* and *muestras*.

On the other side of the ridge the mule-path went down into an isolated valley dotted with white huts, red roofs and black sheep, nibbling; deserted save for a woman kneeling where the stream emerged. She bent over, washing. His foot fumbled. Out circled the staff. Tap, tap, tap! Little *Nonio!* What mighty breasts! What rounded hips! A wench worthy to breed a race of giants! He went towards her (faster than ever blind men go), peeking at her ravishing bulk from under the pot-hat in an excitement that nearly raised the hair under it. . . . Tap, tap, tap!

'*Buenos días, señora!* I am world-weary and seek rest.' He carefully lowered his body to the green bank and sank down with a meaning sigh.

'Good day, *señor*.' None too graciously the wash-lady spoke, thinking, 'What a terrible sight is a blind man.' And making the sign of the cross she went about her business of whacking three linen shirts of good homespun on the wet stones in the stream.

'Night is soon here, *señora*, and I have nowhere to lay my head.' He sighed again. But upon inspection through one slitted lid he concluded, 'The ugliest women make the best housewives.' But she kept on whacking. He said, 'But first I would sing for you and my supper.'

But she only pounded the stones harder. He got his guitar from his bundle and plucked away. Zum . . . zum . . . zum!

'Be on your way,' she said, not attuned to music and already surfeited, and seeing from the tail of an eye a wretched man who was no concern of hers. . . . He lacked the moustache. Even a whisker would sit better around such a jaw! 'A naked face is a tame face,' thought she, 'and the blind are useless except in heaven.' There would be little comfort in such company, less than she already had with her own man. 'Bah! even a bad man *whole* is better than half a man like this!' And she slapped the stones with a dab of wet linen.

'A robust angel with a fine figure such as yours, *Nonio*, how it must set off the landscape.'

'*Sí, sí!* A strong woman sets off more than scenery,' she

answered tartly. And suddenly she sat back from the stream and regarded with interest this stranger who gave compliments for nothing. She adjusted the strands of wet hair streaming about her red, perspiring face, and a hand went to her bosom as if on a tour of discovery.

'A star is lost
And appeared not in the sky,
In thy face it set itself,'

sang José.

She began to hum, too. Enamoured always, he sang passionately to a creature with powerful limbs and full breasts, while she began to appreciate one so gifted, so afflicted. . . . He stopped.

'Your husband must be a good man, from the careful treatment you render his garments.' And he took a sly peek at her, thinking, 'If you would know a husband's character observe the woman's face.' And hers, he admitted, was not much.

'Do the blind see through their lids?' She turned sharply to him.

'With their ears, when necessary. Nature sharpens one faculty to replace another.' He wondered at her lack of sense.

'God has his own way!' She fell silent once more over her rubbing. His misjudged topic was rooting in her mind. Presently she wrung out a shirt as she wrung a fowl's neck for the soup-pot, and cried, 'A good man you say, *señor*—my husband *good? Santa María!* Save for the clean shirt on his ugly carcass, no one would know he has a good wife like myself. Son of a horse he is! Never at home, for ever at cards, for ever betting on the bulls and always losing. For ever poor. *Poor, señor!*' Her voice mounted to carry her wrongs with more emphasis. 'This last winter we have no charcoal and the *señor cura* he says, "God loves the poor best," but for me I wish God loved us less. . . .' She grew louder, as if to enlist sympathy by volume, while a gleam of her Arab ancestry lighted her yellowish dull eyes, 'Always the woman pays half with her heart and half with her

back.' And she sat back and regarded him, her dumb face brightening with hope.

'Contentment is better than wealth.'

'*Cómo?* I have neither. I am a cruelly tried woman.' Her torment gathered to a loud shriek since here was an audience a long time lacking. 'A man' (the shriek gathered) 'might go a long way and not find a woman like myself, one up early and late to bed. I am afflicted with a man possessed of evil. A man with a devil in his soul.' She shrieked as if noise alone brought comprehension. 'He has no guts!' She folded her arms over her bosom and began to sway back and forth, laughing. And her laughter becoming like the noise of geese, slowly, cautiously the blind beggar lifted himself up, inclined to be on his way, 'Like a tree bearing sour fruit and wiser to leave before it falls on one!' He removed his pot-hat, wiped the sweat from his head and patted down his hair which reacted to her distemper. He reached for wallet and *makhila* while the woman was see-sawing back and forth, engrossed. 'She may pay half with her back, but the other three halves with her tongue! How disenchanting are women,' he concluded, forcing the staff outward to a small arc.

'My lovely *señora!*' said he moving one foot faster than the other. 'It grows late. I would find where to rest my lonely, miserable body. *Buenas noches!*' And he took a quick step forward, his staff tapping as if angry.

The surprised lady stopped rocking and wiped her moist face with a thick brown hand. She looked up, and now that he was leaving her she regretted that she had not made more of this unusual opportunity. One does not get in *one* package a man of sympathy and handsomeness and understanding with a kind voice to boot! She had one good feature, a pretty mouth, and she opened it.

'Wait, *señor*,' she said in a new suave feminine manner, 'a blind man is of little use, but I can find a bed for you. Wait! my man is away with the mules.'

José's feet took on a strange nimbleness.

'One is entitled to happiness since I know more of misery,' she wheedled. But when he kept going she was

aware she had lost him. 'Fool!' she screeched, 'what is man but a soft head too dull to see merit and virtue in a good woman like myself.' She rose up as if to propel her meaning and invitation into him before it was too late, yelling, 'Stay! I am a lonely woman . . . a lonely woman afflicted by God with a man with . . . no guts. . . . Stay . . . *señor*. . . . I suffer!'

'My good *señora*,' he answered without turning, 'I too suffer!' and he walked faster than any blind man ever walks, the sweat on his head that of one who runs a race. With her screeching a discomfort in his ear, he fell into a rage at the unfruitfulness of his journey. Off came the hat and he mopped. Off came the patch. He cursed. He sat down to rest with the cries of the tart woman echoing against his spine. By and by he started. The stern heights behind him fell away into long dim distances, the road ran ahead in quietude. Fine snuff-coloured dust settled about his gaiters. The country flattened and spread out into vast, lonely fields of grain quivering on the still air like golden pollen. Men were threshing wheat. He slapped on his patch. When he came abreast of them, one called:

'How are you, blind *señor?*'

'Alive, *amigo!* Can a man ask for more?' José shouted.

'Maybe not, with a tragedy in the heart like your own,' the man shouted.

'Tragedy in the head, comedy in the heart, *amigo*.' José longed to sketch each passive animal face, like that of their starving, ribby white horse. Round and round ambled the horse about a centre-post from which stuck out a long pole with a wooden wheel on the end. A boy sat on the wheel dragging after the horse, around the post, and the wheat under the wheel flew out like amber snow. So, José concluded, all three would go round to eternity. The northern pines began to loom ahead, comforting sentinels of the coming night between a gloomy painter and a fat scold.

He ripped off the patch and hung it about his neck and plodded on, dwelling on the disenchantment of his journey, and on his frescoes of El Pilar. Had he painted them with any false realism? He did not suckle on sugary senti-

mentalism nor did he indulge in loud apostrophizing of the good *señor Jesú*. In Saragossa, Tst! they painted in devotion to ritual and form rather than with artistic righteousness! Assuredly he believed less in the divinity of dead saints than in the divinity of humanity. . . . Pausing to watch a flock of birds streak like copper threads across the western sky, flying into the sun's fire, he forgot himself.

Olive trees grey-green with age, gnarled like old men, began to appear. Ahead men crossed over the field with hoes flashing cold silver against the hot sky. A cow lowed. It meant his journey was coming to an end. His patch sprang into place; one eye strained ahead as he stepped back into his role. Tap, tap, tap! His step fumbled but his blood raced. In the hollow dug-out of a stony hillock was a cave under a group of tall alder trees growing out of its top. In the opening leaned a bundle of gay rags—and he tapped so fast the pebbles flew up and hit his shin in haste to reach that greatest of mysteries—woman—in green and yellow stuff. . . . Then he nearly choked on his own rage. The bundle ballooned into an old gipsy; her wrinkled face puckered like a melon burnt by wind and sun and frost these hundred years, in its dried upper end two seeds of eyes; fleshless bones within a yellow brittle shell. . . . *Holá!* Here was a face already designed for his next fallen angel in Purgatory! His eyes screwed up, yet he could see, in those two small, glittering black seeds glued on him, the appraising cunning of an abused old mule possessed of the ageless wisdom of Buddha.

'*Buenos días*, my good mother,' said he with courtesy. 'I travel a long journey and beg rest and a cup of cold water for my parched throat.'

Out of that throat like dry citron, came a grunt; then gibberish, which meant she was at his service since she saw he was good to look on and young. She trusted and liked youth as the aged do who understand life.

'The impatient are slaves of themselves,' she mumbled. And while she studied him, he was aware of being in the presence of one whose roots extend down into the earth and reach beyond it.

'A cup of cold water before I take my way,' he repeated, trying to see without being seen to see.

'Does any but a tame man rest after a restful journey when he has met with neither man nor pig nor wild dog?' She pointed to his staff innocent of soil or mould or blood; Pilar's gift, this *makhila*, the shepherd's staff which carried inside a knife for protection. He laughed outright, laughter that is life to old ears. No one angers an old *gitana*, and off came the patch which he flung to earth with wallet, his too-clean weapon, then his bundle.

'Iron is but straw. A wise man is his own disguise. *El señor* is in need of advice as to his way in life!' grunted the old witch.

He swore his frown was never meant to deceive her. He mopped the towsled hair on his powerful head and eased his body into shadows pooling at the roots of a single olive tree beside the cave-opening. She sensed everything; his varied hungers, his passion for life, his lust in eyes like burning charcoal; the inquisitive nose where curiosity lurked, the sensual mouth, restlessness, adventure, variety; all the fierce fundamental power of a man apart, and the geniality that often goes with those smouldering fires within. Her two bright, probing eyes left his face, turned heavenward as if to draw down to her, from quintillions of miles, union with another self of keener sight.

Impatient at her long silence, José got out his guitar, when there came the neighing of an Arab stallion. As white as whey, it rested a black muzzle against corral-bars of green fir-boughs on the high ground back of the cave. He studied its suave lines (which, strangely enough, were to play later a tragic role in his life along with this old devil of a gipsy he had come up with) when it trotted off. José's hand dipped into his blouse and brought forth a *céntimo*. Reaching up he pressed it into the old dame's fist. She gazed at him as from another plane, rejecting it.

'The strong follow the advice of the wise,' he insisted impatiently. 'I long to hear my fortune, good mother.' Gazing at the coin still in her hand, she spoke bitterly. 'It is our lot to wear dead men's shoes, *señor*. Lent and

prison were meant only for the poor. . . . *Muchas gracias, señor!*' Her thanks held more of pain than gratitude.

'Come, mother, my fate!'

Her eyes became deep unearthly tunnels leading away into a far world. She squatted down on her haunches, making a nest of her bones, reached up and caught his hand in fingers as tough as tow! A man's hand with soft knuckles tapering down to long fingers that knew neither poverty nor the plough. She peered at the open palm. . . . A shudder ran over her. At last her discernment seemed to him greater than that of the renowed Lady Abbess of Las Huelgas who, endowed with the grace of God, held supreme authority over life and death.

'*El señor* dies many deaths. He will draw life into him as the sun draws water. Through the father of heat and the mother of love will come honours, but the *señor* pays a price for love. The price of love is sacrifice, pain. *Misery*...' Her lips folded over her words like leaves of a yellowed book. Then suddenly she fell back into her mysterious silence. . . .

'More, good mother—I beg!' Excitement, flattery, pleasure, credulity crossed his face like quicksilver.

'I see churches.' She peered eerily into space. . . . 'Always churches . . . *el señor* moves. The devil lurks behind the Cross. The winds of caution blow over his head. He is beyond caution—beyond wisdom—he dares over-much. He must learn—SILENCE. . . . Talk is a death-trap. Woman —Dangers—Honours—always women. Then—ONE . . .'

Before his eyes raced a vision of gardenia flesh, blue eyes, a garden wall, his boyhood Princess whom he would yet find. 'Never caution for self,' mumbled the gipsy. '*El señor is* Spain!' She lopped back against the cave, silent, her old bones sunk in billowing, dirty, gay rags.

Holá! The old *gitana* promised him everything he wished, all he came journeying for. He was in haste to be gone, yet with little desire, since she might have more to tell. So this strange pair sat together, preoccupied, each watching the other, because of some wireless, warning each that they would again cross each other's path? as, alas—they did. The

air chills. A soft wind stirs. Overhead the little leaves of the olive tree flutter like mating birds. Over the whole earth hangs a great peace. Out of stillness greater than sound, comes the faint elfin tinkle of sheep-bells. Then a *chirrilón* like a silver flute. The leaves turn to silver-green, to copper, to puce, into lead. One by one stars, yellow-sharp, pierce the darkened peaks of the distant Guadarramas. Near-by, the highway grown black runs up to the Milky Way, 'the road to St. James'. And upon the hillock behind the cave a suave silvery ghost flashes into a dark abyss of space—then stillness.

José lay gazing up, pondering the *gitana's* prophecy. All that complimented him. And with habitual independence throwing away her advice on caution as having no part in his life. Ya! Intimacies of the flesh helped him to create! Talking led to the reforming of fools! . . . Flaming pictures began to form in his mind; when a bowl of water-soup and a hunk of black bread were placed by his side. Noiselessly the old crone brought it, and noiselessly she went back into that primæval mystery and silence in which she lived. He thanked her with a million thanks and sipped of his soup. A starved dog came out of nowhere, sniffed and padded back into the darkness. Then her voice cackled across the night: 'Spain bleeds. There comes one who baits the King as one baits bulls. The King will be blinded, and lavish on him high appointments because of a fat woman's influence. The King is a tool in her hands . . .' and on and on. The *gitana* spat a thin brown stream, the only juice left in her. '*Señor* will live to see these bloody truths, but will take no part in them.'

'What part will I take for Spain's good, my good mother?'

'Wait upon caution. One needing wisdom. Caution is wealth, *señor*.'

Her bright seeds of eyes were on him, and flattered, he laughed buoyantly, yawned, stretched and was about to gather up his belongings when she offered hospitality for the night. He accepted. Presently he felt her tough stiff old fingers on his, guiding him, for it was pitch-black

save for the stars. At the mouth of the cave, bending low, they crept into a black space tunnelling the earth which seemed to reach to the ends of the world. Hordes of disturbed bats fluttered like damp velvet against his face. The cave was a stink-pot of animal matter, decay, mould and that cold smell that the poor have. The gipsy pushed towards him a sleeping-mat of sour rush and disappeared; to reappear with a bleating goat on the end of a hempen rope which she looped about her bone of an ankle, and lay down on the stinking floor of damp earth and dry cow-dung. Opposite her, fastening blouse and jerkin against this death-cold, José lay with eyes staring up at the dripping earth ceiling. Sleep refused to come for the scuttling of small animals, the drip of damp, the continued bleat of the goat deprived of its kid and the stamping of the stallion overhead. When the crinkled old throat relaxed in a series of trumpetings, quietly, on all-fours, he crept out into the open. Under the olive tree he lay down, not to sleep but to listen to the still voices of the night like whispering gods of his mountains—mountains where in childhood he ran wild, developing his passionate independence and utter disregard for consequences.

Day was a vague shell of ivory when José climbed the hillock above the cave to observe the beautiful white stallion. But the stallion pounded away from him with plumed tail straight on the morning air, and he saw only a sleek silver horse winging into the dawn. Those flying hoofs brought the goat and the gipsy out of the cave into the open, into the flaming light of morning. José stripped and bathed in a near-by cold, blue, crystal stream; preparing himself for the coming glories in Madrid!

With imperious grace he bade the old crone good-bye, and always with a generous palate for the poor, pressed into her hand another coin.

'*Hasta la vista.*' The toothless mouth opened. 'Remember, *señor*, all things are possible with God. Without caution man is a ship on beam-ends. You, *señor*, have *ears?* USE them. *Eyes?* BE FIRST TO SEE. Caution—caution, *señor.*'

So he left her, aware of her ancient wisdom, but unaware of her coming treachery. Her eyes watched—would watch until he became a shadow, as a vine, then a speck of dust, as he went singing an Arab ballad fruitful of anguished love.

At a cross-road, out of her sight, he pulled a knife from the end of the *makhila* and cut from an ash tree a square of bark. The curling edges he flattened out on the back of his guitar and with his thumb-nail etched on it her puckered old face, the face of his next fallen angel in Purgatory. Then he carefully placed it in the crown of his pot-hat and strode on, fancy painting her, the Fallen Angel and several other etceteras. There would have been more, but he had to go down a steep path zigzagging between two high black walls of rock. That changed the nature of her portrait to none at all. Once more on solid earth he swung along humming, over a tawny plain devoid of life except for a miserable pair of huts leaning towards each other as if for help, like starved faces without eyes. Out of one rambled a black goat, a naked infant Eve, a dumb woman and a rat-tail of a man. Including the goat, they watched him pass with animal indifference, although he said pleasantly, 'Good day, my friends.' Commending them all to the devil, he strode on, sweat oiling his chest, for the heat was enough to melt his bones. Elation mounted with the sun as he pondered the *gitana's* prophecy, that which flattered him. Hoh! To bed with the most beautiful and noble of *señoras*, consort with royal ladies, a free man! To win respect from beggar and aristocrat alike! To paint all Spain! Juggle the heaven and earth and art and wealth in one hand while—what would he be doing with the other? *Holá!* He winked. Like Hermes, with watch-springs in his heels, he now winged his way to win life's prizes, not even alive to robbers, for at any moment he might go sprawling in the stony road, toes turned heavenward insteard of towads Madrid. . . .

Under an olive tree, warm with steady going, he sank comfortably down, stretched out, and gazed at the silver-green frieze overhead until his eyes closed. . . . When they opened the sun was a lake of crimson sloping westward,

and he sprang to his feet nearer destiny than he knew. A turn in the road and there revealed lay the wide flat plain of Madrid and the river Manzanares. On the farthest river-bank silhouetted against the burning sky were three heavy-handed louts pouring water from large brown earthen jars, into the dried-up river-bed, to allay the dust. From over the river floated sensuous, sweet, faint music: the sound of a *fiesta* caught in his fiery head. A pulsing, stirring jangle of rhythm beating against the whine of *dulzaina* and mandolin, the rattle of castanets—human laughter, revelry, shrill piercing of playful children, dogs barking, horses neighing. High rose that exciting squealing that young, pursued girls make; and he obeyed impulse, all future glory and honour tossed high as a steeple and crashing to earth a mangled mass of broken intentions. The carnival spirit, the blood-lust for life, ran up in his blood and thudded against his ribs. The *makhila*, the patch and the pot-hat (with the Fallen Angel clinging to the crown of it) went hurtling into a ditch. He made off the high road, riverward, every pulse in him beating; dragging forth from his blouse a red square of flowered cloth which he tied about his handsome head. With head high, eyes burning, he strained forward, a smiling, regal, devil-may-care figure, not unlike royal Cæsar, but who might himself have had even less eagerness for such promiscuous devilry ahead.

Over the river in a grove of ash trees, wavered invitingly the trappings of the *fiesta*, a sea of colour, yellows, reds, orange and rose; streamers of crimson and lemon and green fluttering from bough to bough; toy-stalls, wooden eating-booths, booths for games; horses kicking up clouds of dust, black flies; pigeons strutting under their bellies; mule-ears tufted with red worsted, tinkling silver bells; a black mare flirting a long ebony plume braided in scarlet. On the baked red earth lay slow-chewing, cream-coloured oxen decked with necklaces of green myrtle. On sped José towards that restless, gay river of herdsmen, goatherds, charcoal-men, wagoners, friars, smugglers, ploughmen, wenches, naked children and brigands, jostling and singing and weaving in and out in intoxicating chaos—and

passed over the river more drugged than any saint permitted to taste the fruits of the earth.

It was the last day of the Romería (beloved of the Madrileños), of the pilgrimage to San Isidro's Hermitage erected by Isabella the Catholic in gratitude for the magical opening of a spring hereabouts, the holy waters of which cured her ailing son, Philip. And not alone that, but Isabella herself one day must needs go hunting near these outstanding hills—so runs the legend, though the Madrid plain is as flat as your hand—and she 'was attacked by a boar both fierce and large'. Did not this same ploughboy saint, San Isidro, whose work the holy angels did for him, appear and protect her? He did. What then more natural than to be natural? and love and drink and gamble once a year by way of holy obligation and gratitude? Being the last day, the revellers were fevered to a paradise of frank sensuality as simple as the jungle and throbbing with its own heat. The people of Spain might be starving poor, but they were no slaves, except to pleasure. José's legs—he had handsome legs—wove in and out, for he saw already fifty canvases to be started to-morrow. His nostrils stung with the smell of wine, the smell of women, the smell of animals befouling the earth, fresh, steaming cow-dung, bull-meat boiling over hot charcoals, and the cool smell of coming night. Men hairy as satyrs fingering women, stripped to the waist, danced in lustful intimacy. Cotton petticoats swayed past him meaningly. A mad fiery joy worked in him like yeast. Here passed a prankish lout with soup-tureen for hat, and pinching every wench in his path, a tall, bony shepherd piping on a reed to a naked youth prancing like a bear; a wagoner obscenely wiggling cock-feathers streaming off the end of his spine. A barber followed with a wolfish face wearing a long grizzled beard made from an ox-tail on which during business hours he hung his comb.

Boards for a billiard-table: José paused. A woman with bared breasts sidled up to him. At her exposed bosom an infant hung like a leech. He chucked the infant under the chin and the woman cursed him and went away. Two men on the ground played at dominoes. Neither dared make a

move for fear of the other winning. Long jaws were thrust suspiciously at each other; eyes met; the game suspended. A hound snapped at his fleas. Over the gaming-table a ballad-singer and a clown watched an egg-faced rogue in hempen sandals and olive blouse giving shrill vent to his purpose. Each time he put down one copper he won two, and his pockets bulged. Now they emptied. Now they bulged.

'Ah, *señor*, you lose much?' laughed José, leaning against a tree.

'Lose? How can that be? Have I not my original copper?' The cheat held up a copper and winked. But the clown, already suspicious, caught the down-droop of his evil eye—an expensive wink—and went cold with fury. He drew knife, and sprang.

'*That*—for your bloody heart and your thieving tongue!' he screamed.

The cheat, with a loud oath, drew knife, blood already trickling down his hairy chest. They glared. They backed.

'To the death!' Rolling up sleeves, they crouched, furtive, furious. A crowd came running, shoving, to get to the front to see which died first. José turned away and went and watched some men playing pelota. In a little green space of stubble, men and their wenches twined and twisted and fingered in the dance, the devil butting their greed for more. José burned.

Beyond the trees a sea of amber paled in the west. Silver darts stabbed the night, one by one. The moon slowly mounted, icing the tops of the trees to dark silence. But no moon could chill the heat beneath it. José paused before a booth piled with crucifixes and laces from Valencia, fans, gaudy-stoned rings, silver chains, charms, bracelets, the *bucaros*—porous pots that perspire an evaporating coolness in the hot rooms of wealth; earthen pig-bells to hang on one's button in San Isidro's honour; and more crucifixes of ivory, of silver and carved cypress. But attracted to an eating-stall since there was nothing in his belly since noon, he moved towards one where Spanish preserves, bull-meat fried in garlic and oil, hams, sausages, goat's cheese, 'angel's

hair', and *espumas*, tempted him. What actually drew him were eyes dark as water-plants concealing depths beneath. Eyes that with quick, solid sense appraised his prodigious strength, the excitement of his body, its vitality, a man's purpose in nose and chin—and the devil in his eyes. Avidly Ana's eyes took him in as she challenged: '*Señor*—to be a good fellow at the *fiesta* one has to kiss the glass whistle, to honour the saint!' José laughed and touched his lips to a little shining vial hanging over Ana's head, and looked into a face devoid of tenderness, but softened by the moon toning its olive skin. 'Why would the handsome stranger waste so precious tribute on a dead saint with the living near?' The robust lady, pretending a coquettish scorn of his wasted tribute, allowed her eyes to fall before the sudden heat of his own. His blood scarce ran hotter than her own.

'A man may be gay and a man may be old,
But a pretty maid knows what to behold!'

Sang a wench behind him, whilst his head-cloth received a brisk tug. He wheeled about towards black eyes travelling into his, when Ana, seeing how things were, his attention wandering from herself—bustled out from behind her stall like St. Teresa craving heaven, with eyes no longer dark like water but light with the greed of a tiger stalking.

'What does the handsome one like best at the *fiesta?*' she wheedled.

'All of it—and angels like yourself, *señora*. I love to live—and live to love. . . . And you, *señora?*' Ana's full bosom, exposed to the moon, quivered, and his senses were reduced to one strangling blood-heat in ears and throat.

'Hah! Does not a man fashioned by God know?' Ana craftily hid that heaving bosom; and the moon dipped away from the stall, leaving two figures to throb in darkness.

'The moon makes me to ache with pain. Does not the beautiful *señora* know it?'

Ana, baring her bosom, said, 'Ah!' A heady word! But instantly how practical did Ana prove! The loveliest of *señoras* advised the handsome stranger in selecting his inn

for the night—Ana's as it turned out. Ana proved willing, even graciously waiting to conduct him hither.

'Come, *señor*, I shall conduct you, but observe if you please how for your sake I leave my stalls to these wolves to eat everything up before I return.' With acumen exceeding her sweet tone, Ana beckoned a dumb-headed man near-by, and paying him with the smallest pot of all her preserves, left him in charge. Looking over her stock so there would be no doubt if she were robbed, they set out, her bosom pressed against José's arm, the same arm handy to her waist. . . .

'My house of hospitality, *señor*, clean as hard work and thrift will make it,' said she, at last arriving at the inn.

Ana's inn bore evidence of respectability except for certain strong smells that should be elsewhere, as they made their way into the back lower court, handy to the King's Highway. It smelt of goat-dung, mice-tracks, garlic and wet leather and vegetables decaying and foul straw. The mules slept there with the servants when the inn was over-full. The inn sat on a side-hill, a low, square, whitewashed building with a court on the high side in front; and this lower court at the back below the hill, had a damp, cavernous arcade as black as your hat, with stone stairs within, dripping with damp and leading up into the main room above.

'*Señora*, I am indeed enchanted,' said José, as indeed he was—too much so. As they mounted the gloomy staircase he was aware of her fleshy heat adding to his own, as she cunningly pressed closer.

'All *my property!*' said Ana. Reaching the main room, a large barn-like cavity divided by four rotting uprights of oak, one side being the eating-place, with a kitchen off that, and a number of flock beds with no regard to separate decencies. It smelt of rats under the floor-boards, but Ana, pointing to a bed made of four long boards laid over uneven trestles, gave vent to a sly laugh. 'I promise everything!' She emanated a magic that hypnotized him into grasping her about the waist. And though her blood quickened, she, O wise one, backed away from him, re-

marking: 'What a man it is to want a bed of loneliness. He shall have his wish.' And all aglow with hospitality and business acumen and natural urge, Ana placed her estate at José's disposal, and shouted, with very strong lungs indeed, down the stone stairs to her loafing servants scuttling about there, 'Prepare for a guest—you!' They did with a fearful clatter, slinging down a mattress of husks in the loft lately used for cock-fighting. Ana, wanting to kill him with love, while another side of her rejected desire, feasted on glances that burned between them, and said she must return to the *fiesta* before those bloodless gluttons of dogs ate her up. And her hands folded like secrets upon her bosom.

To the *fiesta* they returned, Ana trotting on tiny slippered feet, flouncing full green petticoats and silver bracelet on a capable wrist, thinking, 'Where one least expects it, the hare starts,' while her enamoured, preoccupied guest strode beside her emitting gargantuan sighs, his will dissolving before this forceful creature.

Out into the bright moon-stream sprang a youth rattling castanets. Out sprang a girl, hips swaying. They danced, heart to heart, retreating, pursuing, teasing. '*Olé, Olé!*' cried the crowd, intoxicated, as the swaying pair swirled, panting. The music stopped. The flute stopped. They fell apart, alive only to each other—and bounded into the grove where secrets were hid under a dark amber flood. José waited at the stall, where his new delight, with great common sense, was disposing of the remainder of her viands by yelling their reduction in price. Before her, caught by the music, jigged a naked child under pale trees that ran a silver lane from the moon, when along trotted a young bull escaped from a near-by farm. It stopped and gazed mildly about, when a saddle-nosed herdsman leaned forward and playfully spanked the gleaming rump with his mandolin. To this simple humour a red-necked ploughman added his by jabbing the black nozzle with a sharp stick. A roar of pain, a second jab, and the bull, with a humour of its own, charged its tormentor, who with marked agility sprang behind his fat wife. The crowd roared—a great joke!

The bull halted, rolling an eye, and saw the jigging child. Down went a head and up went a shriek. José sprang. Snatching the cloth from his head he teased the bull aside, caught the child, and like a cat was astride the broad back, blinding it with the same cloth. So surprised was the brute it did not stir for an instant, and in that instant there came running two men cursing and brandishing their picks.

'A-ah! San Isidro proves his glory! The Blessed Virgin protects those who love. . . . A miracle. . . . A thousand paternosters, a million aves. . . . A man this, with hair on his chest!' The revellers crowded about, embracing him. He stood forth a hero, so absorbed in Ana he failed to note it was Ana herself, who clasped the naked child to her bosom and cried, 'My heart's *novillo*—child of my soul! Plump little pig—one kiss'—until she remembered José and stopped, wiped an eye dry of tears, cast a suspicious glance at him, and felt safe.

A wandering friar blessed him. A crone put on his brow a mournful wreath of braided *arbor vitæ* which prickled and was too big and fell over one eye, giving him the look of a debauched saint. He got kissed. God was thanked for a number of things He had little to do with. José had only paused on his way to greatness. To-morrow! Aha! what would not to-morrow see? But behind her stall, with bosom a little more bared, Ana fixed him with hypnotic gaze; her fathomless eyes now like ripe olives in the sun drawing him to her.

Towards dawn, a Bacchic madness seized the festival. Night, as if pausing with finger to lip, hid delicately behind the pale-faced moon while the *fiesta* rushed like a river in flood. Secrets pulsed in dark groves in obscene silences. A throbbing stillness that only the jungle secretes seethed to a dark heaven on earth. Fearing the night might snatch the easy handsome one from her, Ana closed up her stall and announced her departure, and the strong-willed giant and the stronger-willed *señora* strolled back to her house of hospitality. They stood together in the front court under a white sea pouring waves of light on the earth, on them, upon the thrush's cage on the freshly whitewashed wall;

she calculating, José running burning glances over her plump and pleasing person, she weighing his possibilities as she weighed hogs, and concluding '*Alabado sea dios!* but I entertain a bulldog of a man and a child in one in the proper hands' (which were of course her own).

'A night for love—little monkey, eh?' José leaned over, breathing hard.

'True,' said she, flouncing suddenly away with soft tread towards the door, wishing him a thousand gracious wishes for his repose. From there she whispered, 'Holy dreams attend thee, but do not at midnight dream of God!' He sprang at the door—*closed!* and there was naught to do but betake his agitated person up to his loft, where half-buried in his mountain of husks he tossed about and finally dreamed of nothing more divine than the bull-ring.

On the next day, as the sun blazed high over the outlying *vega*, José climbed over the lumpy mountain that was his bed, wakened by a throb of life in the inn below. Children were quarrelling, goats bleating, pigs squealing and servants clattering in the lower court. Pigs had litters there, hens laid eggs and picked up free meals from under the horses of guests continually arriving and departing. Lovers hid there, and robbers occasionally, for the chill court was as dark as the cloak of Spain, although exposed at the arched front to the sky. Vegetables were prepared there, harnesses rubbed, jennets curried and guests welcomed—and frequently relieved of valuables—although Ana was innocent of that. In a fever for her, José jumped to his feet, hearing her shrilly commanding her lazy servant with that masculine authority with which generals command armies. 'Hey—you—Pepita—stir your stumps—the saddler from León wants his chocolate.' Ana was marching about setting a feast for José's *comida*, reasoning that rich food to man—under certain circumstances—was as a hot sun upon fertile soil. With a brown earthen dish filled with a mound of yellow butter on fresh watercress, Ana covered a stain where a swarm of flies buzzed on the table, put down a comb of glistening honey, spiced chocolate, fried pork, figs and cheese and an omelette made of the fresh eggs of

the morning. Ana, with long practice, could beat up one egg for two omelettes, add garlic and herbs—and water—and serve three. 'What a woman!' people said of Ana, who also on saints' days trimmed the lintel with crosses of flowers, who laid by herbs against fevers, who placed fennel over the sill that witches might not enter and ruin business.

José gazed upon this bustling mound of flesh, and saw inviting lips of carnal red, not, however, on the upper lip of the solid jaw, the sprouting of fine dark down betokening more than a woman's strength—a moustache in fact. He saw two enticing feet, feet that betrayed her dual nature; feet that carried her about with the sure tread of a jungle animal, and now with the commanding march of the happy warrior. She gazed back, yearning to press him to her palpitating bosom, to kiss his handsome face—to yield—all the while she willed herself to harder purpose.

'Come—with me?' He nodded towards a grove of alders.

'*Na, na*, time is precious.' Ana could economize in love as she economized in omelettes; and peering from her window looking for the oldest hen for the soup-pot, she thought, '"Love means spectacles through which copper looks like gold, rags like rich apparel and specks like pearls."' '*Na, na*, José, I have little time as it is for my affairs.' And she moved away, knife in hand, to snare a hare for the day's stew.

'*Holá!* I am also deft!' José seized the hare and slit its throat, eyeing hotly the sordid woman; perceiving only beauty. And with senses on fire, yet like a man drugged, he followed her about that week, dumbly dominated by a woman for the first time in his life.

'Am I a man of straw? he thundered a few days later at the shrewd, hard-headed *señora* standing by the wooden table separating strips of parchment, one piece for credits, one for debits. 'Come with me *now*, little monkey?' He seized her with both hands and kissed her until her neck cracked.

'*Caramba*—what a man!' She came upright, pleased. But in sudden panic hearing a familiar boy screaming in the lower court she sidled away, mysteriously.

'When I desire strong meat I do not want snow,' he

yelled after her. But her marching feet were nearing that boy screeching, '*Madre . . . Madre!*' and Ana cursed him. 'You black goat—stop—you—I'll have the heart out of you for upsetting my plans—betray me, will you, son of a Jew! You're my blood—I'll spill it for upsetting my scheme . . . I'll make your brown behind a wale's tail red as bull-meat—*wait!*' She reached the lower level breathless and the screeching of the son of her soul turned into a pitiful moan.

Days came and went as the stars came and went. José tarried half-way to heaven and chained to earth. Never before had he knelt before so perverse and dominating a Venus. To-morrow, he would be on his way to those glories and honours awaiting him. 'To-morrow!' But each to-morrow melted into another land of promise and battlefield of expectancy, until all those things he was to become plunged like a diver on a high cliff into a boiling sea and drowned him.

'Monkey Vine—you are too chaste,' he raged, blood up. 'You eat up my will-power.'

'Fate then gives me enough for two.'

The irony of her hard sense stung his rhapsodic moods to tartness.

'Tst! Will is persisting! I have enough to betake myself elsewhere at any moment—and to far greater advantage.'

'I will send to Saragossa to-day for your possessions,' said Ana, suddenly alarmed. And straightway she loaned him fresh clothing.

So he stayed in borrowed magnificence. One day, Ana, fired momentarily out of control, and looking out the window, under her very nose there he was flirting with her seductive, lazy wench, Pepita!

'Hey—you,' she screamed, slashing an onion as she longed to slash Pepita. 'Milk the goat—you. Go—*escoria!* Jo-séee! Here is a sweet for you, eh?'

Now Ana's secret was a complexity of which she herself knew nothing. Since the death of her man, a spry gentlemanly little bandit so in sympathy with her greed for gold he fell from a horse in a raid with musket poked at his spine, since then Ana's firm jaw had grown firmer,

her head harder—if possible—and while she clutched at love, she clutched at her increasing coppers more. Thus the masculine part of her dominated, and her more feminine virtues receded. She cherished her reputation, but the laurels of chastity on her widowed brow were worn more with purpose than with fortitude. The woman side of her craved marriage because marriage was denied her. A superstition hung over her head like a ring of storm-warning about the moon, 'He that marries a widow with three children marries *four thieves!*' a warning that clung to all the neighbouring male skulls. Until José arrived, Ana's decision, like her jaw, clinched on her fierce purpose. Yet every day her mania for marriage increased. 'Marriage,' Ana told herself, 'holds little enough of salt—God knows—but something of iron to lean upon in the evening of life. For as the wise have observed decrepitude creeps upon one unawares, and blights and wars and frosts can suck away the nest-egg faster than any robber.' Thus Ana tossed between marriage—or nothing at all, in what was called in centuries to come an 'inhibition', and a torturing suppression bartered with Nature. Ana, smart but like most smart women not smart enough, withheld her exciting presence from him neither too much nor too little, so she supposed; and left much to himself, José made friends with farm-animals, with farm-men—and Pepita. . . . He decoyed Pepita to the lower level. He grew melancholy; reticent; restless; wandered the fields as docile as a cow, while Ana, like a bull, squinted from behind her kitchen window with a glittering eye as alive to his every move as to her own exchequer.

'Pff!' She removed an onion-skin as she removed obstacles, strategically yelling at him, 'Hey—you—those wolves, stags all on the same scent—my other admirers! I cannot remain alone one moment but five or ten mustachios are being curled at my elbow.' Seemingly Ana's horde of tramp stags and admirers grew, and José, springing jealously to his feet, went inside to find the room empty of those lovesick savages. His arm went around her thick waist—and no farther. She shrugged. 'I have no time to idle now, my fine fellow!'

'Angel—a man like myself dies without love.' His eyes caressed her two mounds of joy and she cast him so complicated a glance he felt her nearer. She felt marriage nearer and relented. That is, she cooked him a special polenta. Always on Mondays she made a stew good for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. This was Saturday.

That evening he sat spooning into his belly the hottest yet of all her stews and smiling his bold, lazy meaning smile. 'Suppose, *Dulce*, I settle down near you and win honours in the *corrida*, eh? You would then relish me, little monkey?'

'Ya—would I?' Ana swishing irritably by, passed to the door with a trussed fowl in her hand. *Zas!* He spanked the swaying flesh—and up from the table he rushed at her, a river dammed. Bang! The fowl struck his nose.

'*Holá!* my little Tremolina—you burn up my heart—already seared by your chaste fires.' He was ready to disembowel her, slay her, use any violence to quench the delirium in him. But in order to release her own state, she flew at Pepita like a cat, claws unsheathed, tearing and scratching and hissing out her own bottled-up mania and rage; rib-roasting the wench, and screaming, 'Hoh! Cesspool of slime, that will teach your dumb head not to send shafts of evil from your shameless eyes at my honoured guest. He has eyes only for one of virtue like myself.'

Pepita, with a broom of dried reeds, swept up the litter of the day. Pepita had enjoyed this violent man, and she paused, placed her brown finger along her nose, and winked craftily. On defiant, square feet she was thumbing her nose at her mistress behind her back when two horsemen galloped into the court calling for a night's lodgings. Instantly within the inn Ana and Pepita were as one. They bustled about alert to business, Pepita all eyes, Ana all commerce. José strode out under the stars.

'Good evening, *señora*, food for empty bellies?'

'And beds with perquisites, eh?' The second one gazed over at a pretty face on which the scowl had changed to a cunning look.

'Certainly, gentlemen, everything to your liking,' Ana

clapped her hands. 'Hasten, my good worthy Pepita, fetch cold eels, garlic, the pork and sardines and olives. Hasten, little one, and serve the *señors*.'

'Wine—*señora*—you serve the Manzanilla?'

'Certainly, gentlemen—wine, Pepita, my dove. Our Málaga is best.'

One looked at the row of flock beds and laughed uproariously. He looked at Pepita's promising flesh and laughed harder.

'The cost of a bed for two for the night, *señora?*' He winked at Pepita, who from the darkest corner made a coarse gesture and winked back. What are Spain's girls for, his eyes asked.

'Two *reals* for a bed for two, *señor*.'

'Two too many with an alder-thicket near-by.'

'Does one buy a stable with brood-mare for two *reals?*' asked Ana, who had a nice wit at times.

'Hoh!' Ana marched to the shelf behind the fire-hole and brought out bread and cheese and wine. Pepita, dusting off the guest's chair with her green apron, strained to hear every word being poured into her nearest ear. Ana moved about with immense energy and purpose, and knowing José was wandering alone out in the black night sweet with thyme and rosemary; she concluded on the morrow she would serve him a hotter meat with yellow chick-peas—with more red peppers sprinkled in.

As smart as was this *señora*, she failed to recognize that a lonely man seldom remains lonely for long. Madrid was close on its several little hills with several little gates through which a restless man might go and find surcease.

On the morrow, in another volcanic impulse José swung over the *vega* on the wings of the morning in a furious spree of rage and curiosity, fortified by bread and sausage secreted to him by the adoring Pepita. Already in the Puerta del Sol, he gazed about as all provincials stare at novelties.

Now if you work for heaven you make it, and if you make for hell you get there with no trouble. All that day Ana banged pans and jars; marched about whacking

Pepita; cuffed her three brats in turn and beat a prankish mule that nipped her. Meanwhile capitulation teetered to and fro, and settled, afflictingly faithful to her hardening purpose. For in the dark of night had come galloping a man astride a suave, silvery stallion, both well known to her, and the news this man imparted made her eyes goggle with pleasure, and then with greed. This man told her who and what—if God spared him—José was likely to become. Ana could scarce wait till morning to send to Madrid for perfumes and scented ointments with which to rub her body and rice-powder for her dark cheeks. Next day, she wore a red rose over one ear. She irritated her bosoms with the fuzzy geranium-leaf. She made kohl shadows under her eyes and even went so far as to pluck her bushy black eyebrows; determined to allow herself less reserve of manner while being more decorous in act, and add bacon to the evening stew. As a merchant lowers the price of goods to create a demand, Ana waited José's return determined to become his church wife—*now!* 'Ya! constant rain wears away a stone, and such gifts as a good woman in love is unwise enough to make, should be made by way of the *señor cura's* blessing!'

The King of Spain, by the Grace of God, had tried to tidy up Europe, but omitted Madrid. This was an age of adulterers and bastards, and everyone enjoyed evil and got killed, or what they went after. Nights were seared with crime, lust and intrigue. Men knifed and left to rot in slimy oozing shadows were ordinary affairs of bloody dawns. Narrow alleys were black with congealed blood and offal and garbage where wild pigs rooted, pigs with huge ears and small red eyes. Madrid groaned under history reeking with the stench of scorched human flesh; stank with the smoked blood of martyrs of the holy fires of the Inquisition. José went back to the Puerta de Atocha bewitched and rebelling against that dark drama that oozed up from the cobbles beneath his feet. There were strange, ugly high houses in the Plaza Mayor, churches, barracks, armoury, bull-pastures, markets. He gazed thoughtfully at the winking windows of the King's Palace. There was the

Academia! He strolled across the Prado with his postponed glories in mind, his face grave and serious. Back to the Puerta de Atocha he stood on that square's blood-soaked earth which burned his feet as did those fires of the auto-da-fé its victims.

As he re-lived the whole stinking drama boiling up in his blood into a new vision, he was viciously attacked by a wild dog loping in from the plain for flesh to eat; it chanced to be José's leg. His knife flashed. A groan, a gurgle. '*Esta loco?*' he thundered, and kicked the starved carcass into an open cesspool beside the mansion of Amala's mistress.

In the Alameda he watched Madrid's throng cloaked against the terrible winds that swept down from the Sierras over the city even in summer, pass and repass until long after midnight. Under the trees swayed priests, picadors, lousy beggars, prostitutes, politicians, the *manolos*. Water-men in snuff-coloured smocks swung along carrying white clay jars reeded in red. The King's soldiers strutted by weighted down with gold lace and dull minds, twiddling the moustache as long and fierce as a bull's horns. The *majo* every night waited here for élite ladies to drive past; and scandalized them later. Starved old women, bent old men hawk-nosed with hunger, whined for bread. . . .

'There is no conqueror but God,' announced a bitter voice at José's elbow. 'And He takes our bread from us. It won't take long to kindle war in Aragon when men of courage like myself are forced to eat acorns and snow.' Propped against the tree next was a crippled *picador*, eyeing him who indicated prosperity. José noted the ferocity of those eyes for his next 'St. Jerome'.

'The business of *picador* is poor, Chico?'

'Worse than robbing. Yet the petted manolo scorns the government and eats a belly-full at its expense. We need a cure, *amigo*, a cure. . . .'

'No one cure cures everything. What is your misfortune?'

'Tossed by a man-killer!' The cripple, with the curiosity of his race, inquired in turn, 'In what lies your interest?'

'Life, and living. I came to Madrid to win a prize offered by the Court—I am an artist.'

'So?' sneered the *picador*. 'You are late for your good fortune. It was heralded about that Bayeu, of the *Academia*, carried off the coppers—and I starve.' The *picador*, who despised one who worked for gain rather than honour, like himself, shuffled off to beg of one worthier of notice.

'To the wolves with such swine,' scoffed a refined voice at José's other elbow. 'Run him through the guts. No quarter for hogs, though what he said is true.' José wheeled and faced an impoverished grandee standing in shadow which could not hide soiled white ruffs nor a greasy black cape about emaciated shoulders. Like the cripple he sized up José as one indecently prosperous. And forthwith poured out a tale of political downfall and loss of caste and position, indiscreetly frank. José studied the proud, narrow face with pointed white beard, and saw shrunken cheeks and burnt-out eyes betraying years of morbid excess. The tattered gentleman had lost everything but his tongue. That kept up a sneering clack. (José saw—Don Jaime was his name—that having done everything to warrant his downfall he could find no justice in the world.)

'At other courts of Europe, maybe. But not at our own where the *señor cura* rules the country. The *cura* rules the King and gets as profound a reverence from our women as the Archbishop. And my friend—I may call you friend, eh? *gracias!* My friend, not content with that the *señor cura* himself becomes our national little *señor Jesú* and then, *cura-Jesú* becomes Spain's tyrant *de facto* as well as tyrant *de jure!* Ha! I surprise you?' Don Jaime punctured the night with a fragile hand. José laughed, but the seed of something lost and passionately prized was again rooting in his hot head.

'Then,' babbled the stranger who purposed to fill an empty belly and pay for it with polite indecencies, 'then if one does not please the *señor cura-Jesú* one does not fare so well, as I know to my cost. And we, the people of pride, can do naught but starve while wicked luxuries flourish at court! This very year, *señor*, thousands of pesetas were wasted to hang the royal boudoir with tapestries woven with pure gold threads, to please a Queen no better than a sow!'

José felt a skinny, shrunken arm weave into his and heard, as Don Jaime clacked on: 'You were about to dine, *señor? Gracias*, a *langosta* with Málaga, or a plain omelette with fine herbs and small wine, or a succulent chop would be a feast.' From his aching centre rose a cavernous sigh; already directed towards the nearest wine-shop. The thin frame shivered in the chill night air as Don Jaime talked; his tongue never ceasing its bitter gossip. 'I perceive you a man of sympathy, *señor*, and I know men—have you seen these voluptuous mockeries of our *señor cura?*'

José, with a confused vision in his head, admitted he had seen a few, and fell back into his creative dreaming.

'Then,' sneered the other, 'you should know that the *cura's* influence on Spain is its greatest evil. Do you know of their latest reform, by way of the King? Words fail me! He forbids the playing of the guitar at the annual *fiesta!*'

'*Jesucristo!*' José blazed up, 'deprive the poor of such harmless pleasure? Kindle distrust—more unrest over the whole of Spain?' But a great commotion interrupted. The royal troops, having changed guard, were a galloping militia rattling past in great swirls of silvered dust; into the night faded the noble babbler. The Cathedral bells intoned a dirge. A procession of holy men with dark cowled heads, each carrying a taper to light the dead into life, passed against the milk-white sky.

In the wine-shop José sat alone in a dark corner watching different faces bending over different games, too preoccupied with fifty new canvases in his mind to mourn his new lost friend.

At midnight he walked across the dark, silent city to the Puerta de Atocha and stood against a house-wall brooding, melancholy, yearning, not knowing whether it was Ana or the other prize he longed for most. Then he excluded the señora's cheating promises; for boiling up in him was the drama of the *auto-da-fé* forming a picture of that tragedy. Filled with the nebulous thing, he strolled back to the wine-shop near the Prado, where he lay down on a mattress to sleep; to awake and dwell gloomily on the prize and his too-long postponed glories he had lost.

It flashed into his mind he had come to Madrid empty-handed. How then impress the King, the *Academia*, or show the Court what it missed without a new and worthy canvas to prove it? Suddenly out of his amorous inactivity burst the long-arrested desire to paint.

He spent that next day dreaming in the Alcalá, fired with new inspiration. Towards evening he strode over the *vega* determined to woo his old-new mistress, projecting, on the horizon, his coming canvas, '*Auto-da-fé*': the Inquisition stand draped in black crape; a blood-red throne for the Grand Inquisitor, robed in violent purple. The King on a private balcony ablaze with gold-threaded crimson damasks; at his right Spain's grandees; he doomed in safely locked cages, human fuel for holy fires; executioners holding green wood; a little altar overshadowed by a great cross flapping a veil of black; the sanctified procession from Santa María's, Dominicans carrying high white crosses, dukes with the Inquisition standards of red damask, the arms of Spain blazing; pike-bearers preventing escape of caged victims, penitents with slow, chained feet, bared heads. Officials; the glory of God; death-sentences. And by the simple blend of bowing the knee and sitting high in safety under a crimson velvet canopy, the elect of God avoiding the unpleasant stench of those toasting to death under their holy noses. Culprits chained to stakes, eyes glazing with terror at a pious-faced executioner awaiting the signal given in the name of Christ; a man with bellows waits to drive away the rising sea smoke for a clearer, brighter picture of flesh burning black, twisted, sloughing off into a furnace of flames below; the holy hand upright, a bubble, a crackling, a belch of smoke—the flash of fire, higher, higher. He heard screams of pain drowned in the roar of flames, crisp and searing. This was his '*Auto-da-fé!*'

He was re-born, and as drunk on the future orgy of creating as the throng at that show was drunk on suffering. He could feel those avid boughs exude their red-hot boiling, resinous sap that tortured human flesh to a living Purgatory. He could hear the tolling of church bells over the city in the name of Christ. He strode on furiously gloating over

new colour-values, patches of human agony. He forgot that his present predicament was at least partly due to that other impious inspiration in Saragossa, his Tribunal picture.

As he neared the inn, he became aware of a stranger galloping away from the court into the night, on a sleek, suave, silvery horse, both strange and yet familiar. Ana heard him coming, and suddenly the woman in her straddled her complexity as she regarded him jealously under the light of a sputtering candle Assuredly this was not the same man who departed in need of her.

'*Caramba!*' she snapped out. 'What feather-bed were you kicked out of? What husband kicked you back to my house of hospitality? "A hopping flea is one to be cracked."'

'Whose was the voice bidding you farewell like the sound of iron being filed? Did you cheat that one too? Speak—*you!*' Whelmed in his new fever, José was no longer to be bamboozled by a cheat of a woman, so he devilled her coolly, seeing her suddenly as a model rather than Eve. 'That voice! It's not the first time I heard it—*speak*, I said.'

'Who are you,' she screamed, 'to command me? Deserter of my lavish gifts. Why would I occupy all my days cooking delicacies for one unworthly of me? How should I know the squeal of every pig out of your past?' Yet as she gazed at that arrogant body that gave out more than unusual excitement, her own languor maddened her and she saw the fruits of her scheme still hanging on a tough bough. 'No doubt so poor a painter's imagination plays him tricks,' she scoffed.

'No doubt the lack of it is the cause of woman's stupidities. Whose was that voice? Only rogues fly after dark.'

'Old hounds grow mangy—Pff!' She began stringing dried fish. With a shrug he swaggered across the room to make for his loft, hugging to him his new dream. 'The wise find out for themselves.' Her metallic scream dropped to a note of curiosity as she saw brushes and painting-materials under his retreating arm.

'An untilled field runs to seed,' he thundered back, making a gesture of contempt.

The traveller from Ávila, asleep on his flock bed with

musket tied to his wrist handy against robbers, rose up, glared, and lay down with a grunt.

'*Buenas noches, señor* traveller,' shrilled Ana. She retired to sleep with a crucifix and gritted teeth. All night, impulse warred with reason beneath that crucifix, and when she rose up from her virtuous straw in a dark closet off the kitchen, she arose to another hell, seeing José already astride the water-trough sketching that pig Pepita, squealing with delight. As coquettish as a moustached *señora* can be, Ana marched herself down to the trough with alacrity and a stick. Pepita got whacked on her bulging buttocks.

'*Zas!* Loafing slut—you. There's sweeping and the goat to milk. Bestir your dirty sluggish feet—snail of scum—fetch charcoals for the fire-bed. And watch the stew in the pot! Who are you to pose—when I am here for that for a great painter, a Capricious One who goes pounding over the *vega* with the strength of cannon-balls!' (And who might roll away and stay put as cannon-balls do, she omitted.)

It suited José to remain. Soon there emerged drawings of Ana's legs, Ana's everything; Ana on a bench without clothes and with guile, flowing line, obscenely beautiful. Tubs of white lead arrived from Madrid, and the fires of creation increased to such heat there next appeared a large portrait of Santa Ana on a sofa, nude save for a shawl modestly covering one forearm and resplendent with apricot, purple, red and magenta flowers. . . . The summer nights were aflame with stirrings. Lovers walked abroad. Earth pulsed as one heart-beat. Night pressed upon the widow like a hot blanket until she felt it a sin not to seize love where she found it; she was ready now to explode with kisses and fall upon his chest. Ana saw in his penetrating gaze a new amorousness. True, but it was the love-light of the creator who, bereft of earthly blessings, holds communion with the stars. And so from dawn until noon, into dusks like rivers running backward, turned to wine, José painted Ana to impress the King and dazzle Madrid. He brushed in and thumbed out, dabbed more vermilion on the carnation-buds of those breasts, more white to the eye, more glamour to the flesh.

'To-morrow is bull-day with the Amala bulls,' he told her, spooning a spicy *vol-au-vent*. 'And I attend.'

Ana placed the wine-skin to hand and almost split her torso with laughing, but her hard eyes gleamed and her lips twisted cruelly.

'I would pawn my mattress—if need be—to attend with you, Chicosito,' said she with cold fury, 'but always on bull-day I must catch returning business.' (Dare she allow him to go?) He finished the meal and went and stretched out on the earth under the grape-vine, when Ana caught the mingled screamings of a teased mule and teasing boys. She marched outside.

'Come, my *señor* painter,' commanded she, 'let us stroll together towards the Hermitage where first we met.'

Declining, José watched the sun carpet the heavens with red gold, going down in a languorous scented fog. With bouncing breasts and a swish of skirts Ana dropped upon the bench near-by. Her tongue began to squander a perfect love-night with the value of weighing hogs in the moon-period, the rot in figs, the disease in pigs, and, had not José promised her to win honours in the *corrida* and for ever remain by her side? She leaned over him exuding oil of musk-ox, a smell used in Madrid brothels. José, wrapped in his dreams, was enticed only by stars like tiny canaries in heaven, by frogs rumbling fervently, reeds rustling, and the tone of the cicada softening. Wood-doves smote the dark with tender whisperings. . . . Ana began to sing, badly but loudly.

> 'Lo, I sing,
> But I sing and weep like a turtle-dove
> Whose mate, stricken with jealousy,
> Flees from the mountain!'

José remained silent. Ana leaned over him, a sturdy vine ready to wind about a tower, and reached her point: 'There is a pretty legend, José *mío*, about a spring in the Puerta del Sol! On San Juan's day the waters of the spring sprinkled upon the head guarantee marriage before a year is out! Those who seek it at the witching hour of midnight

are assured of marriage! It is midnight. The Prado is not far off, my friend.'

José was visioning his first audience with the King when Ana—the manager—laid her capable hand on his cheek and proved flint to his warning senses. He saw her old and fat and ugly, with ankles the size of tree-trunks, breasts like withered fruit on a thick stem. Ana the cheat, the miser hoarding . . . with black snags of teeth. . . . How beauty flies!

'A legend for wise virgins,' he mocked. 'It grows late and I would be up early.' He leapt to his feet and strolled off into the night, his indifference precipitating disaster, his once boiling passion impaled—and dead—on the legend, 'He that marries a widow,' and so forth.

The scorned woman's eyes grew black with revenge. 'Pay—pay double,' they said, like a merchant who bargains over-long and knows the cost, as she jerked violently from the bench and went in search of her bellowing son.

The sun dusted a lane of gold across the loft floor, when José woke eager to be off to Madrid. Fame now was but a short way off; as the to-be-famous portrait would be dried, he would shortly be granted honours and rewards for this new and greatest effort. Before him surged a vision of the entire Court paying him homage; and off the humps of his bed he turned to the nude Ana in the portrait . . . and leaped up scourged, staring, inarticulate. Over the half-dry pigment ran tracks and cracks and smears and gouges—ruin beyond redemption. His mind rocked. He stamped about half sobbing; inspected it; tearing his blouse, neck swelling, eyes flecked with red. Was the devil with a forked tail horning him? When his rage subsided into thought, back across the room he stamped to the door, when a loose board creaked out on the landing. He stopped, suspicious. A foot as cautious as a rabbit's pushed the door in and opened it far enough to admit a fox of a face peeking in. The room being apparently empty, the fox tiptoed in and over to the canvas, where he turned into a boy resentful of this black magic that was—or had been—his mother. He dipped down to the tub, came up with a fistful of white lead and with the joy of destruction flung it as two powerful hands

lifted him by the hair of his head and near banged the life out of him. He was turned over and proceedings begun on his little backside when his sceeching reached Ana hovering suspiciously near-by. Ana panted into the doorway, and seeing her the boy yelled louder.

'*Madre—mía*—save me—it's the devil.'

'Tricked! *Jesucristo!*' José dropped the brat, who trudged red-nosed from weeping to the more gentle embrace at the door. Terrified, he hid his face in his mother's petticoats, quailing at the sirocco that tore cursing about the loft with such fury the windows rattled; kicking the door to splinters, railing about bitches, widows, shams, cheats, maggots. 'Ruined!—all that was to bring me fame to-morrow—you . . .' He let out one word at Ana, who forthwith loosed her own tongue.

What she screamed is best omitted—it was good of that period. She was ready to kill her brat for being found out, and José for finding him out. She marshalled the boy before her, pinching his ear with malicious satisfaction, out of the room. Glaring at his ruin, José seized the jar of turpentine, cracked it on a beam and hurled it at Ana— in the picture—and all that remained of her dripped murdered whites and red on to the dusty floor. Done! Like a crazed man leaping into the sea, he jumped down the stairs.

He landed in Madrid regretting he hadn't hurled the two of them through the window to their death, still cursing Ana for a damned abortion of Nature, a feathered serpent, a female pirate! He then fell into a profound melancholy, striding up and down the Prado until shrill, high voices woke him out of himself recalling the day was bull-day! His clothes were in sorry plight, all paint-spots plastered with yellow dust, and although the ruined canvas steamed before him like the hypos, he wheeled, re-crossed the Prado and made south to the rogue's market.

In a rented green coat with silver buttons, black breeches and white linen blouse, he took his stand behind the paling of the *corrida*, set off by his raiment as a good frame sets off a fine picture; a tall, handsome, resplendent person, proud with purpose, rage still burning in his piercing eyes,

and so flashing was he, an observant Madrileño asked: 'Who is that interesting stranger there, a person of note?'

'Ya—of note is good. He lackeys for the Ana of the inn near the Hermitage.'

'He looks too clever a clown for that. Could he be the one who paints frescoes in Saragossa? One is due here, they say. But if so the *Duque* of Amala would nose him out.'

'No painter that one. He has the sure, fixed eye for the *torero*.'

José's eyes shone with admiration for those fine taciturn men in the arena, courting death—or worse—in brilliant cool play and equipoise, with faultless, exquisite courage, with muscles steeled to perfect control. The *corrida* added a furious inspiring new beat to his blood, when an unbarbered face thrust itself between him and the ring, and a familiar voice challenged: '*Vaya—señor* painter—I am ready to bet with you providing you supply me with coppers.' It was Don Jaime. He admitted squeezing in behind a friar, and began with undiminished fervour where he left off, the story of his life. 'Thus I chose disgrace rather than lend an ancient unsullied name to a questionable entanglement,' he lied. José laughed, while his roving eyes sought the royal box high under a velvet canopy aflame with red and yellow banners, gold tassels and fluttering fans.

'*Cáspita!* . . . *Cáspita!*' A *chulo* pinned on a pair of needle-sharp horns whirled like a pin-wheel into the air and down, never to whirl again. 'A man's bull, that!' He shouted with pleasure that thundered to the Pyrenees when, with a vindictive nudge in the ribs and a malicious whisper, Don Jaime slid behind him and hid.

'*Caramba!* There in the King's box, see? My one-time friend, the *Duque* of Amala!' Don Jaime whispered a foul word . . 'and in last winter's bitter cold my noble *duque* sent his kept girl a *brasero* filled with gold crowns to ease the discomforts of her chilled and dirty body—while I *starve!*' Don Jaime, José perceived, was peeking out from under his arm. 'I could forgive him that sooner than bad taste! Bah! a frog of a wench caparisoned like the King's

horse with a face as long as a coffin and the smell of the rag-market.'

José turned from the almost hidden Amala to others in the royal entourage—and became riveted. His senses reeled, the blood rushed like a river to his heart. There sat a girl of delicate charm—was she his boyhood's dream-*xana* driven hither from his cool mountain gorge? She had leaned from a gold coach with red wheels and blown him a *kiss!* He stood a bronzed statue. As other men worship before the Virgin on her altar, so he worshipped, all that was truly proud, noble in him reaching out to all that was exquisite and inerrable in this aloof girl. Suddenly his eyes closed, as if a human being encased in fragile porcelain threw out too pure a brilliancy which laved him in blinding light. 'Beautiful boy—he is hurt!' He heard it again filling his heart like the notes of a wood-dove.

Elbowing his way through the throng like one starved, he stood beneath it gazing up at the diamond-sharp brightness of her youth. And she, gazing down at his fine, sinuous body, felt something out of its surcharged vortex that was the man, reach her; felt his silent tribute pour up from him in great electric waves, surging in hot confusion; he saw her lovely mouth form, 'Who is that handsome one there?' while a tiny white hand outstretched a fan indicating him. Did she know him? as she turned and acknowledged the King's command to depart—not until a red rose torn quickly from her crown of gold dropped on his heart. And a small hand lay artlessly on the velvet edge of the royal balcony.

To the nearest tavern he dragged the willing Don Jaime.

'But who is she?' he demanded passionately. 'I must know—another *ponche* then—waiter—her name?—*dos ponches* then!' Forty *ponches* were not enough to drag out of this infernal leech what a man on fire would know. 'Her station?' He beckoned the waiter again. 'Come, Don Jaime—who is she?'

'She is a tame savage with a devilish mind of her own, my friend. *Fin de siècle!* He who marries her will have full hands.' Don Jaime leered in secret meaning over the table.

'Her name, her position? Is she related at Court?'

'A dependent damnably independent—a relation of His Highness—Carlota! and no dowry. The King will marry her to Amala since her house lacks even the means to pay its taxes—a virgin of stone. She declares already, at sixteen, she will marry only one she loves. The minx! She'll soon enough be purged of that notion.'

'Mother of God!'

Don Jaime put a soiled but aristocratic hand before his mouth to prevent evil spirits from entering as he yawned, and as *ponche* after *ponche* slid down the noble throat his blooded wits trailed feebly into comforting irrelevancies.

'Carlota!' José repeated her name as one said a prayer.

'Never bang a door or kick a stone out of the way, for either may contain a soul not yet released from Purgatory,' offered Don Jaime, relaxed. 'Who knows but my own soul may lie in the very rock of Gibraltar? Would that I had lived a century ago to join the Franciscans in Florida! That was living! Restoring one's fortune, feasting like a King.'

'What are her interests—you do not say?'

'*Por los clavos de Cristo!*' cried the irritated gentleman, and trailed away. 'If it pleases me I will acquaint you with the *duque*, my friend. He may allow you to paint a ceiling in the Casa Benavente. The King—if I say so—will allow you to replace the ceiling by Tiepolo in the throne-room. You are *then* a success.' Over the boards Don Jaime drunkenly insinuated what this would mean to his own flat purse. 'Another? *Gracias, señor.*' He wagged his own finger at the waiter and sank down into the waters of Lethe to drag up a shadowy legend of his lost powers, his lost, vast wealth. 'Mine, *señor*, was the wealth of the Abencerrajes concealed in a cave with subterranean passages that led to outer great halls. *Halls*,' he mumbled thickly, 'as vast as heaven! . . . *To-day, amigo*, I am *penniless!*' His grey, pointed beard fell forward on his chest, and gentle sleep drowned the fanciful gentleman from whose noble throat issued very common noises.

Across the silent, bolted, barred city, went José storing

up ambitious plans—to win his Princess. His sword-tip he held straight out in the dark, so bandits might conveniently fall, first. He would return to Ana's inn, gather together his belongings—and get gone for good. From the western gate stretched the *vega*, a lake of polished steel under the still wash of the moon. With senses reaching out like antennæ to a world behind the moon, a world peopled by Carlota, José strained to the tree-top to net the wind and snare the nightingale—and Carlota! But the mud-walls around Madrid had held him for too long. For on this night touched with divinity destiny malevolently put thumb to nose.

Wrapped in a fog that enfolded both Carlota and his picture not yet begun, and burning to create, José reached the dark lower court of the inn. Without noticing the absence of life he fumbled through the darkness to the stone steps and with one hand guiding him along the crumbling wall was half-way up when his foot struck a soft mound. The mound yielded and sprang to life with a human hiss.

'Tst!' José's hands clutched about a small windpipe attached to a boy tongue-tied with fright whom he lugged up the stairs and deposited with a disembowelling thump. A sputtering candle lighted a small monkey-face grey with terror, while out of chattering lips issued accusations so ludicrous he laughed. But enough is enough! José shook the boy violently, a sudden rage supplanting his broken vision. 'Come—no lies—what are you up to? The thumb-screws then, or I'll cut out your tongue.' He seized his knife. 'Who put you up to this pleasant task of cracking my spine, eh?'

Seeing above him large jaws like a steel trap, the small jaws loosened.

'My uncle—and my *madre*—but she will kill me if I tell!'

'*Hoh, hoh! Buenos!* So your mother knows of this murderous task! That indeed interests me. Out with all of it, the Inquisition has no patience with silent tongues.'

With teeth rattling, it poured out of the brat how the

uncle—uncle by courtesy—he was a man who proposed the love-business with his *madre*, and was jealous of her distinguished guest (*'You, señor!'*)—his uncle was after the painter for harming his mother, and his mother and the uncle had had no success since the painter arrived at the inn, and the uncle hated José and hid in wait with evil intentions towards him. . . . The boy stopped to swallow his saliva; and finding his head still on his shoulders sputtered the rest in one gulp: 'Since you came my *madre* she is changed, she beats Pepita all day long and then us, and my uncle he trails you, but first my *madre* she shakes her head "No"—so—but then she finds you do not make marriage with her, they whisper together and it was my brother he dirtied that affair you painted of her. Then they quarrel and my *madre* bids me lie on these stone steps till you come back from the *corrida* and she tells me, "You rise up like a goat and butt into his middle and he will go backward down steps to his death without seeming to."' Here the boy, shaking like a reed, began to whimper. 'But I fell asleep and now she will split me in two and roast me alive like a hare. She said so.'

Then José recalled the three brats—supposing them Pepita's brood. Crunching the small bony wrist he flung the boy from him at the moment when from the upper stair behind him filtered a shadow making very human footfalls. 'My uncle!' whimpered the boy as a heavy boot from behind tripped him. José wheeled and the sway of his fury became his destruction. His own boot planted in a man's belly so savagely, the stranger crashed backward down the stone steps to the bottom into neither a fragrant nor august setting for death. José gripped the terrified boy and with a flickering candle-light held high, they bumped down the stairs to face facts.

'Jesú! Holy Mother!' The boy's uncle was the Basque —*el señor duque's* pursuing agent from Saragossa, forgotten, and lying before him a bundle of broken flesh. The murderer murdered! 'Is he dead?' José asked the boy, near breaking his wrist; forcing him close to that sly, malevolent face he held up the sputtering light. For with the discovery of

the agent's death came a memory of his escape from the tortures of the Inquisition; his bowels sagged; his split thighs were being torn slowly apart, his joints cracking, white-hot irons seared his eyeballs. It would indeed be a disadvantage to die so young—life was sweet! He must hide! Up the stairs he dragged the frightened brat, threatening him at each step with death did he open his lips about this night's doings; he would tear out his festering heart, castrate him, throw his bloody liver to the crows. And the terrified rogue was glad to escape with the easy promise of holding his tongue. In the loft José thumped him into a corner, and with one sweep of the hand gathered up his possessions and draped them on the small quaking figure. He then dragged the laden boy downstairs to the corral where by more whisperings the boy saddled Ana's best mare, bagged her feet with straw and José was gone.

Crouched forward on the beast they fled through the night like a wind passing. Every few minutes a fist banged the animal's skull with a terrible whack—as if on Ana's thick head. At intervals José dismounted to feel ahead on the road for leg-breaking hollows, for the night was as black as sin. The clop-clop of the mare's feet and flying stones racked in sardonic mockery. Ana? José rained blows on the animal's rump. They pounded down the darkness running towards him, a presence rippling like a windflower in his path; an anodyne; in flesh of white of wild asses' milk—Carlota?

The moon perched in the sky like an arch white bird pecking at the dark world below. Ahead, the road stretched a patchwork of black and white flowing into a river of mercury. His melancholy was flowing in the same manner, when the mare halted so abruptly he nearly pitched over her head. He dismounted, held her quivering nostrils, and with tightened rein hid in a thicket of cork trees. Peering out he saw four monks filing past him like dead men in search of life. Bare feet, cowled, in brown habits, they plodded on, a mournful procession, the first holding a torch that smoked and trailed tiny streamers of black. Heads were bowed, all eyes fixed on crucifixes held up before them

doing penance; a melancholy crew of saints who looked like murderers.

Dawn laid her ghostly fingers on the shoulders of the Guadarramas when José reined the mare up on her haunches before the gipsy's cave, and as once did a Moorish King, dismounted from a 'good horse and fresh'. Released of his roped-on stuff he headed her about, struck her wet flanks sharply, and she was off back to Madrid, her flying form fading into the white morning. The gipsy ballooned in the same dirty rags at the same dank opening as he saw her months back.

'*Ay de dios!*' She scented change as goats scent droughts, reading his fevers as before with her inscrutable black seeds of eyes, and willing him to move on. Why should she hide one so blind, who spurned her wisdom and expected aid? '*Ay de dios.*'

With a grunt she pointed to the cave, and giving thanks he crept into that sour black hole, smelling the stench spiralling up from the same stinking sleeping-mat. All that day he hid, cramped in body, on fire with uncertainty, every nerve in him a separate centre of hearing, his intelligent hands as restless as his mind. He did not sense himself a Prometheus chained to his own flesh. The fatalism of his race was the certificate of his predicament.

Towards evening, trying to console himself with an old woman's adage how 'a good heart breaks bad luck', his straining nerves caught the vibration of hoofs beating along the highway. He tensed. They stopped at the cave. From where he lay he could see a chink of light which let into the cave a thread of sunset, and turning over he peered out. The sun spread over the land like the wing of a flamingo, grey and pink, and suddenly he cursed, catching voices, muffled, yet creating a commotion. He sat up. Crouched forward as taut as a trapped animal, he steeled his body to spring and his quick hands clutched the slimy earth beneath. A man of flesh and bones would never surrender life to any man—other than himself! Suspense passing into curiosity, he groped through the slimy dark to the opening. Silhouetted against the sky was a grotesque figure,

with jaws tied up in black cloth ending in rabbit's ears on the top of his head. Crippled, he leaned against his horse for support, jabbering to the gipsy who, talkative enough now, was gesturing excitedly. The man turned—José's murdered Basque very much alive and in the flesh. . . .

He sprang to kill! The gipsy, quicker than he, moved between them. Livid with hate, they glared, José iced over with a sense of defeat, the gloating Basque with murderous intent, kindled to a sense of life begun—thanks to Ana. Here was the one he had long trailed, and his coarse face was sodden with triumph. Neither moved, José a mask of cold passivity with eyes blazing, facing eternity, these two, like Cain and Abel, calculating death. Partners as enemies are through mutual fear, distrust and necessity. Taut as catgut each was appraising the other's strength, when the old Buddha-mule dug out of her dirty rags a pack of greasy playing-cards and held them out, mumbling: 'Gamble for your lives.'

'Life is but a game of chance, *señor*, do we play?' José shrugged and bowed.

The Basque, green of face, with one eye shut and swollen to a yellow-blue lump, opened two split lips with courtesy not entirely under control.

'Chance makes pleasure out of doubt, *señor*.' Slowly he lowered his broken carcass to the ground, suppressing a groan, suffering the chagrin of his busted jaw and battered body in malicious silence. The young giant, whom secretly he feared, heaved to earth opposite. 'A leap from a hedge is better than the prayers of a dead man,' the Basque schemed, cursing Ana's advice. José cursed the Inquisitional power endowed in this unscrupulous swine so handy to his knife. His hatred swelled.

The game began—to end in death. If the Basque did not die first, José's life was for ever in jeopardy. If José did not die first, the Basque would lose all the promised *duros* and his Inquisition office as well. They played, like two spiders, weaving, waiting. No reference was made to recent infelicities, none was possible without more, and evening closed down on them like a black hand. The

gipsy silently brought out a candle-end and stuck it into the ground near-by. Each feared to stop. The moon, a mystic cowl, filled the sky. The Basque won, his teeth flashing white and cruel as a musk-rat's. José's face masked his desire to knife him and escape at once. He was cracking.

'This play comes to your hand, not mine,' the Basque broke in slyly.

'A thousand pardons, *señor*. *My* play then?'

Squatting on her bony haunches waited the gipsy. José was never to know the Basque was her son. He did know now with consuming rage whose was the voice that puzzled him at Ana's inn. Also the suave fleet hoofs pacing this moment back in its corral, and the knowledge galvanized him to fiercer purpose. The Basque's increasing fear rattled against his ribs, like drum-sticks. He lost, and was forced to put up his stallion. José won. The Basque became frenzied. He dared not move and he swallowed a groan. José played on, winning.

'Alas, *señor*,' José said at dawn, laying down a trump card, hoarse from suspense, 'the time soon comes to part with your excellent company.' Since his pockets bulged with the other's coppers and he kept the stallion he could not refrain from a sneer. 'Before the sun overrides us I will be on my way.' The Basque, from under his bandage, shot him a malicious leer, and croaked: 'Are you bound, *señor*, upon another journey of interest?'

Now that it was light he could ease his discomfort, and he moved and let the ache out of his battered spine.

'Many interests,' José's voice cracked, instantly changing his plans. 'I go to Burgos to study a great Cathedral renowned for its crocketed spires.' The Basque too changed his plans.

'Fate gives me the pleasure of accompanying you. I travel your way.' The Basque's croak was oily, obsequious.

'Your pleasure is mine, *señor*.' José grew tenser.

They played the second day through with nerves cracking, while those heavenly twins, Comedy and Tragedy, danced between them like evil motes. The Basque bent, aching, over his cards. José quivered like wires plucked.

He kept the stallion. The sun sank. Dusk, night, José still kept the horse. The gipsy left her cooking to fetch the candle-butt she hid at dawn, sticking it into the ground; eyes on José like a cat's. Once she came bringing a bowl of water-soup which she placed between them. Poisoned? He let the Basque slop up the whole of it with a gluttonous noise, and shivering at the whining, steaming sound of bats circling overhead. José's impulse to knife the swine and end it boiled to delirium . . . then the Basque's nerves snapped. He jerked back so abruptly José sprang up and flung the cards in his face. They caught fire and flared up. 'An omen,' the gipsy mumbled. The Basque cowered before the giant towering over him.

'Enough is too much. We stop.' José dropped exhausted to the ground. He could hear the swine grunting with relief as he too lay down and scraped his knife over the earth, sharpening it. On one arm José braced himself, wound up like a steel coil awaiting dawn. Then he would strike, leap on the stallion and be off! The gipsy huddled against the olive tree. Then all was still. The stars paled on the murderous group. Night dragged on. José stretched out, a tense quivering mass of energy, aware of being watched.

During the hour of the *madrugada*, that hour of white eerie mists of spirit half-lights, when earth is aquiver with strange secrets and silent living presences, he slept the troubled sleep of the exhausted. He dreamed of a vicious black stallion stamping him with maddened frenzy into shredded bloody flesh, when the phantom hoofs . . .

Hardly phantom! Starting up he saw the white stallion pounding away on the road to Madrid. Perched on its back was the Basque leering at him from a congested face bagged in black cloth, ears pointing up like the devil's. Roped to the fleet beast went all José had in the world, hat, guitar, sketches, cloak, sword, every copper, peseta and every *real* of his easily won stakes.

That was the twenty-third of June, St. Cupid's day, when in each province in Spain every young girl, rich or poor, who hopes for a lover—and who does not?—burns

rosemary and verbena as love-charms, behind curtains that shield house-doors from the heat of the street. And it was on that day that José went out of the cave, penniless, into the savage wilds of Spain, his promising career done for. About this tragic event little is known, another disappearance, in the majestic land he loved; wandering probably in those mysterious mountains that give back the cruellest, most savage, secretive and barren refuge, as if Nature, bent on testing man's puny strength, knows she can consume him in his unimportance. Spain's mountain-passes are death-tombs of freezing cold.

That was a terrible year. The earth heat was killing. Birds died in mid-air, found by the thousands about Seville, fallen like stones on the baked ground. That year starvation stalked in the midst of the most fertile valleys, for men were too poverty-stricken to till or cultivate the land. Where José might have safely hid (if he found himself in a valley), midst tall yellow grain since great seas of it undulate over vast flat areas as far as the eye can see, there were only beds of hot ashes; scorched breeding-places for scurrying poisonous tarantulas. Cattle and farm-fowls drowsed under wilted wheat with beaks open, tongues out. Everywhere the once fertile fields were dead seas or blood-soaked from the ravages of merciless guerrilla warfare waging from mountain-heights above. Any wanderer faced worse than death—the possible decay of limbs freezing in the bitter winds that bit and howled like voice of triumphant savages down from every snow-topped range; faced being trampled to death by herds of wild bulls that roamed the dense cork-forests, and attacks from wild starving dogs roaming the country in packs. Probably he spent many days hiding with an empty belly. Mountainous black nights meant coming unexpectedly upon one deep gorge after another, cruel spaces like a thick black fluid where by one slip of the foot one would be pitched a thousand feet into a torrent raging below, to hang half-dead on some jutting rock, bloody, broken, slowly decaying until the vultures got him. And not the least of these dangers, was meeting up with bands of hunger-

mad bandits, hordes of them sulking over the land, showing mercy to no man. But what actual suffering José went through from the moment he left the cave was never really known.

One day at the beginning of Lent, when all Spain was masquerading—the wealthy in flower-decked carriages, the poor on foot—the small town of Jaén was roused from its lethargy by a stranger appearing. Across cobbles cracking with heat he teetered on and fell under the shade of a Judas tree in the middle of the square. His thin face was gaunt and his lips swollen and hid by a thick, unkempt beard. His flesh between his rags, burnt from exposure, shone like dusty bronze. His eyes closed, when a coach rambling its way from the bull-ring roused him. He eyed the Mayor's resplendent wife, pompous and stiff in her carriage, a mottled blur of sunlight, yellowed skin, pomaded black hair, mantilla, flowered shawl, and her passing masked an idea. Life was suddenly more to him than an earth full of stones to a geologist, or the whole Escorial full of sacred scripts to a scholar. Despite his condition, José's mind lifted to new hope. Wavering out from under the Judas tree into the glaring light, he plodded on, through clouds of swirling dust, and on, his jaws thrust grimly forward.

Fate might slap him, laugh him to scorn, humiliate him, discipline him, but crush him, never! Fate was a fool juggling him as clowns juggle lighted torches!

Now it was a long time since José had played the calves in the Saragossa corral, although many a dark night, with horn-lantern hung on the bull-pen gate, he had stolen out there and crouched to meet the fiercest bull in his keeper-friend's pen. But a protecting magic seemed always to attend him: Jaén was too small. Jauras, the nearest town, offered a bigger field—for what? Where had gone his love for creating, and what did his hot mind hold? That night, huddled down for warmth, suddenly José saw Seville a bigger place for adventure than Jauras. He took to the road again under the brilliant tile-blue sky in a silence so

vast nothing disturbed it, noting every new sprout pushing up through the earth; frightened hares peeking out from a bush, realizing, 'Nature never paints a single eyelash, she is concerned with the whole hare. Nature from now on will be my only mistress.' He cared nothing for the world! and while pushing the world deeper into his heart—he clutched his knife. Two men shot out from behind a huge boulder at the right and halted in his path. Wheeling about he waited, suspicious, appraising. The two men also appraising withdrew together and whispered. Then the first, an awkward, fat-ankled lout, advanced, saying: 'We offer friendship and food, *señor*.' He waved a fleshy brown hand towards a puff of smoke rising above the boulder from which came the smell of meat roasting. The second one said: '*Señor*, we arrived too late for the Jaén *corrida*. Mario Muñoz, *señor*, at your service.' Then the first bowed and said: 'Pero Rodrigo, *señor*—and you?'

'I, *amigo?*' José put up his knife. 'A fallen saint—who knows?' This amused his new friends, and thus he fell in with a wandering band of *toreros*—or what was left of it. Behind the boulder sputtered a mean fire over which, propped by a heavy stone, leaned a long forked stick roasting lamb's fries. José feasted. His flat belly filled to comforting dis-ease. Beside the fire lay a motionless mangled lump of flesh, none other than a gored *torero* from the Jaén ring. That he had got this far was amazing, for he was already half-dead. The raw wound in armpit and chest was gangrenous and filled with pus. He seemed beyond pain as he opened his eyes, and he conveyed to José *he* was still master of the art . . . proud of his profession . . . to be gored was an honour . . . his companions were rotten at the slow-pass, the *verónica*, at the *media-verónica*. His voice grew reedy. . . . When he again stored up sufficient energy to speak he began to dictate to all three how to dominate the bull . . . to fix him in a certain spot before the entry of the horse . . . to show art with the cape . . .

'Tst!' exclaimed the jealous Muñoz, who had unhealthy flesh and the long eyelash of a languishing *señora*. 'Joselito had the feeble leg.'

Joselito, the dying man, had now no breath left with which to reply. The two *toreros* maintained, in aside whispers, a dying man is a dead man, and they would be getting on to the necessary remuneration. They tied up their bundles. Muñoz said to the half-conscious Joselito, '*Amigo*, we go to win in the Seville ring. We shall return with a purse and fetch aid at Easter dawn.' He made the sign of the cross.

'It is Fate!' said Pero Rodrigo. And as the Padre would say, 'God did the rest.' What God did was to donate the dying man's clothing and his ass to José, who bade him farewell. The three set out, leaving the stinking shredded lump of flesh to his doom. As the three backs receded, the dying Joselito, proud to the last, cried feebly, 'The sport decays . . . the bull was an old-maid. . . .' José turned. Three crows sat on the boulder, waiting.

'He should first damage the bull's spine as I do,' Mario Muñoz plodded along. 'Always deprive your bull of his natural force, weary him, and all goes well.'

'He failed to watch the left horn and favoured the right. The bull did not run straight. The *último* requires poise.'

After a stretch Muñoz began again.

'He lacks the art of *recorting* ferociously enough.' And Pero Rodrigo shrugged and ploughed through the dust. Bull plays and the dying Joselito's bad plays occupied them throughout the journey.

Ahead of them lay a plain like a sea of calm green water. Something glinted; an enchanting tower of gold above the red roofs of Seville. José stared with rapt gaze and as if plainly calling him came the Cathedral vesper bells. His two companions began to tell of an inn in the city where bull-fighters and whores went. José jerked the ass along, determined to find an inn for himself. And so, as they approached the city, they parted, to meet again, with a thousand *adiós*, a thousand more *gracias*, and on legs far more elastic than those on which he had sagged into Jaén, José strode into Seville in a curious mood, making his way through a narrow, serpentine street where striped

awnings overhead, stretching from house to house, were being rolled back for whatever air the night might bring. Dusk like powdered amethyst hung over the narrow street, where he was thrown into sudden dismay. From a dark arched doorway a sly face peered at him, reminding him of one he preferred to forget—the Basque. Hoh! Reason flashed, what with this long period of time between them, the swine would be powerless! Reassured, he walked leisurely until he and the tired beast came to a whitewashed inn in the Gran Capitán. The innkeeper, one named Gómez, bustled out according him welcome. Gómez, a small, quick man, with the soft, bright eyes of a squirrel, brought his hard-worked hands out from under a green leather apron and gesticulated his desire to make comfortable his guest. He chatted volubly; asked questions without waiting for answers; released the ass of her burden, watered and bedded her for the night out back, brought José's possessions up to a bare, clean room, fetching also cold pork and snow-water for his belly. And then Gómez, leaning out from his inn-door watching this tall, lean, handsome one stride eagerly away again, into the night, bore a peculiarly pleased expression. Gómez had an eye for quality. His guest was of an important carriage, he walked with distinction, he appeared prosperous, therefore would not such a presence mean trade? Gómez's eyes shone brighter than the pale lamp on his wall as he rubbed his hands together as if washing in the invisible soap of success assured by this distinguished presence.

The Seville nights seduced his reason with oleander, fruit-blossoms and exotic perfume, lush, earthy heavens of voluptuous inertia. Night swung out of the palm-shaded Alameda to the river and back, a stream of ravishing deep-bosomed languorous women saying more with fan than with dark eyes or inviting red mouths. Love quivered in the air. Foreign merchants violated the soft dark with strange secret eyes, for Seville was a rich, throbbing seaport. In fact all Seville with his servant, his wife, his ass and everything that was his, joined the night throng. Seville's days were no less golden. Above the city white

with heat shone the fairy belfry of the Torre del Oro, and José, chained to a new passion, wandered before it, gaping. The true Spaniard knows the sordid business of work comes only when he has time enough left over from pleasure. José ambled and gazed at the Alcázar's treasures, the same sensuous, adventuring man again lusting to conquest, seduced by beauty, as of old. He walked through nights dripping with scented tranquillity, spoken to by hungry women—detached; with the gloomy pain of isolation from Carlota.

He entered the Gran Capitán for siesta as a great coach high on wheels of gold paint rolled into the street and pulled up sharp at the shrill command of a bedizened dame asprawl on purple cushions within. The sun shone full on his dark, grave face, and so did the hard, greedy eyes of a lecherous old woman. His interest centred on the two magnificent black horses drawing the coach, until the stare, like that of a bird of prey, so compelled him, he lifted his eyes to those of the *Condesa* Grimaldi. As he coolly returned the look the funereal black mantilla askew on her hennaed head wagged at him, and a repulsive, bony arm thrust from the coach-window beckoned him to her. He smiled. The notorious and influential *señora* patted the air with her lace fan, and that smile she took for modesty. As the coach rolled on she peeked out with added lustre brightening her hard old eyes. Late that evening Gómez, with a grin, thrust into José's hand a scented, crested note reeking with chypre from the *Condesa*, boldly asking an assignation with him at his pleasure.

'The old bitch! To hell with her. I have other fish in my sea.' José tore the note to shreds in rage.

'*Cómo?*' Gómez gasped, 'are you not grateful for the attentions of the rich?' Did he harbour one crazed in the head, one who flew in the face of God by ignoring such an honour? '*Señor*—the name of Grimaldi is one *to make* you!'

'I make myself,' José retorted with insulting sincerity. 'Do the clean enjoy foul, stagnant water?' Gómez, staring, shrugged as at one wholly lacking in intelligence, and strolled off muttering.

As the daily attentions of the *Condesa* increased, the manner of Gómez became more obsequious. Tattered, dirty urchins in groups began to stand about the street of the Gran Capitán and fight to peek in the inn-window. Gómez, trembling with delight at this patronage and righteousness of his foresight, said: 'The talk is, *señor*, that those two *toreros* who arrived in Seville with yourself have already been waited upon by the committee. *Sí, sí*, one must first communicate with these dogs of politicians who control the interests of the wealthy in the *corrida*—but, *señor* . . .' Gómez winked . . . 'this Muñoz and Rodrigo, do you know their ability? Who knows but that you may—if God wills—be the "alternative" on Sunday next, eh, *señor?*' Gómez winked knowingly.

'On Sunday, Gómez?' José asked it coolly, but the word '*corrida*' electrified him. Fate! He shrugged. If it was to be, it was to be and . . . 'On Sunday?' he repeated.

Gómez saw God at work. If *señor*, whom he foresaw had the measurements for bulls, made the 'alternative', then assuredly he might perform before Royalty, which arrived the coming week. Seville was preparing! . . . The plump Gómez's cheeks puffed.

'In that case, my friend, you will advise me where to purchase a short sword for the occasion.' José bent over the deal table caricaturing in sepia the *Condesa* with the head of a monkey on the bowed shoulders of a dwarf.

'I know one of skill who tempers swords in the alley of Sword-Makers, *señor*.'

'The best of Toledo blades? Chico!'

'Ah, *señor*, have I not your welfare at heart?' asked Gómez, disconsolate that his distinguished guest could doubt his sincerity.

'Here—for your pains.' José flung him the finished sketch—a monkey hiding its love-sins behind the misshapen shoulders of a brazen but aristocratic lady. 'She ought to hang. Hang *her* on your walls. With my compliments.'

Gómez looked at the sketch and bent double with laughter. Looked again and straightened up in sudden fright at this one's treason.

'But, *señor*, excuse me, the name of Grimaldi is one of power.' He tore it into pieces and went away, bent over, roaring.

Sunday came. All honours of that day Destiny put into the hand of Muñoz, he of the unhealthy flesh and eyelash of a coy female. As the fiercest bulls only were entered in the Seville ring, and as he managed to get four in neat succession with clean sword-strokes, the fickle mercurial Sevillanos took him to their bosoms; excitable, easily infatuated bosoms crushed him for one week. Rodrigo soured. He accompanied Muñoz, who swaggered about the city boasting, drinking, an amorously drugged hero of the taurine world, which the jealous Rodrigo resented. Meanwhile the cool magnetic person of José, a now familiar figure everywhere, graced the *corrida* and attracted more attention than Muñoz himself. Well-guarded *señoras* of the highest circles saw and sighed at his handsomeness and flung him heart-throbbing glances from behind duennas. He was secretly intrigued at the inn. Dull ladies, rich, amorous, high and low pursued him, as did the still infuriated Grimaldi. The inn where Muñoz put up grew popular. But the street of the Gran Capitán became the busiest in Seville. Gómez's pockets bulged with gold.

Gómez, placing the morning *comida* of hot chocolate, specially spiced for his hero, on the bare table, discussing the fine points of ring-plays, paused, exclaimed, and ran to the door where he again paused to bow, politely humble. The Grimaldi coach had stopped before the inn. From where José sat he could see a caricature of a woman, the *Condesa*, in a virgin-white shawl, her prying eyes peering in from under her redded hair. He leaned back where the probing light could not find him, and, safe, watched amused. The *Condesa* beckoned Gómez, and, as open in her pursuits as any street-wench, placed in his outstretched hand a package, gave orders, and waved an impatient hand to her driver high up in front. Back bustled Gómez, eyes popping, overwhelmed at the prestige the crested coach afforded his inn. With extra courtesy he handed José the gift and hung about eyeing, without appearing

to eye anything. To the object of her present desire the *Condesa* had sent a ring of Roman gold holding the blood-symbol of her licentious old heart, a priceless ruby. From its Florentine box José held it up and burst into laughter.

'*Jesucristo!*' gasped Gómez, terrified. '*Santa María!* What sane one spurns attention from those so high in influence and power as her Excellency?'

'Tst!' José threw the jewel at him, strode over to the ass's halter hanging on the wall and extracted from it a metal ring. Knowing Gómez watched with horror, he placed it in the box where the ruby had been and kissing his finger-tips to the window, mocked, 'To the Casa Grimaldi, Gómez, and a thousand gracious thanks. Return my ring to the old mule—the only ring that fits her!'

'*Por amor de Dios y Jesucristo!*' Gómez's hands fidgeted his horror and only found ease tightly clasped under his apron. Outside waited the coach, and his belly turned cold. All too well did he know these crazy moods of the mighty which could tumble his life's work down about his ears. 'But, *señor*, I beg . . .' He stopped. José waved an authoritative hand, and looking the innkeeper straight in the eye, said,

'Gómez—understand—life cannot *buy* me!'

Before the astonished Gómez could find words to cope further with this lunacy, he disappeared out of the back-door. He left the innkeeper turning bewildered eyes on the waiting coach, the box clutched tight in his shaking hand and trying in vain to think up a lie pleasant enough to cover the situation with safety to himself. And a royal *señora*, enraged at this surprising insult, the first of its kind, rolled back to her mansion brim-full of revenge, determining to bring this insolent one to his knees. (Ah! but what handsome legs!) With every turn of the high gold wheels she muttered, 'Insulting my honourable name indeed! In reverence to the mother of God revenge he shall see. A revenge that will warm my blood!'

The next day—Sunday—the great day of days, the city was decked out for the *fiesta* to honour royalty. From the red roofs of the great, square Moorish mansions hung

crimson and gold-fringed brocades and banners with heraldic and ancient glories wrought in gold threads. Balconies were laced with garlands of bright paper flowers. The crumbling huts of the poor held red geraniums bracketed on discoloured walls. Every cobble in the city streets was freshly scrubbed. The little grey asses padded along, patient under red head-wreaths and tinkling silver bells on red-tufted harness, and panniers stuffed with bright fruit. Even Gómez, still stinging from the royal rage of the Casa Grimaldi, still worried over possible loss of trade because of it, and this very moment rubbing brighter his copper pots with manure left under the royal equipage, was sending to the mountains for snow for a special pudding. An excited Seville was a generous Seville, as Gómez knew.

Excitement gripped the city the night before the great event. Over the river the gipsy-encampment hummed, wooing life with song and gaiety; their camp-fires ripped up the dark. On the night air rang the quickening cry '*La lotteria—a número seis. . . . Consecuente y cinco-o-o.*' Above it the Cathedral bells boomed a nervous quarter-hour and the sound clung in José's veins as the murmur of the river in his ears. He was in a strange mood. Over the red roofs of Seville the Torre del Oro shone a liquid gold against a black night, and he took it for an omen of good luck . . . then the unexpected happened.

With a spread of wine and rich food the worshipping but worried Gómez was bustling about the inn among the throng of ringside 'fans', admirers and officials whom Muñoz had brought. Throughout the week Muñoz had drunk plenty and caroused over-much and to-night he came to boast of his skill before José. Rodrigo, in ugly mood, who trailed his companion in private devilry, fixed an eye on Muñoz. Muñoz, befuddled, nodded, agreed, laughed, got up and the two went off together, Muñoz never to return. In the small room below the street and joining the main room above by wooden steps, the roistering throng talked and argued and drank their fill. Long after midnight, the room was packed to suffocation; men

betting, telling tales of honoured matadors, matadors who got impaled, and stories of amours. The room buzzed. It was thick with smoke. Tense voices bet on this bull and that; most of the men were torpid with drink. The excitement kept up. José, entering silently, leaned against the wall, watching, detached, and abruptly challenged a lout who was airing his ignorance on art. With hand on his sword José strode towards him aggressively.

'If you understood the first principles of art you would keep such lies inside your mouth. Or you will know less than you do!' The sword-hand fell limp at his side and he sat down suddenly plunged in a whirlpool of gloom at what had gone from him. He sat grim and melancholy, when out of the stillness in the narrow street above his head thundered a diverting, welcome sound. His face changed. The blood went tingling in him, like an elixir. The bulls were rushing by to the pens for to-morrow's entry. He listened, whelmed in his old power. Bull after bull pounded through the unlit street guarded by yelling horsemen, their spiked staffs crashing against hard horns tossing in the dark; the hot, heavy breathing of running, bewildered beasts; the snorting of a frightened horse as the thundering hoofs circled the corner at the Cathedral, faded, were gone. He looked up into the bulging eyes of Gómez tumbling down the stairs in haste.

'*Señor, señor,*' cried the excited little man out of breath. 'God speaks. . . . To-morrow, *señor*, is your opportunity, already the Committee begs you, *señor*, to become "alternative" . . . *Sí, sí.* . . . The talk is, the news is . . .' Gómez told what happened.

The two *toreros*, each jealous of the other, had got into a kettle of fish by making love to the same gipsy girl. Gipsy girls are free to choose their own lovers. Her gipsy lover, with a code of his own, who 'acts first and then repents', had lived up to the first half of it. Muñoz and Rodrigo, not too drunk to swim the river, having stripped proceeded across the black, strong tide for amusement in the gipsy-encampment. Into the river they plunged and arrived dripping on the opposite bank—that is, Muñoz did.

Rodrigo never arrived. Muñoz was too broken to tell what happened, if he knew, but it was supposed that Rodrigo got caught in some river-roots, or went down the swift tide and out to sea. Within the hour the blood-soaked carved-up Muñoz, with a dozen deep gashes and knife-wounds in torso and belly, was found outside his inn-door. Brokenly he told how he suspected Rodrigo of plotting to get him to fight the gipsy lover . . . There had been a fight to the death; the mutilated man proved that much. The astute innkeeper communicated with another astute keeper of an inn—Gómez—after a hurried call upon the ringside committee. As Gómez finished the excited room rose to a man shouting for José.

'*Holá!* May Fate bring green laurels to the brow of one here. We toast to coming victory.'

José rose and, exhilarated, toasted the shouting men.

'To my well-wishers! To to-morrow! Friends! I go to my rest.' He raised the *bota* to his lips, and putting it down sprang up the step. '*Buenas noches*, my friends!' And the confidence of his bearing brought a new burst of enthusiasm.

Sunday! Then came the tragic adventure.

It was a dazzling glazed blue-and-white afternoon. Over Seville, the blinding sun beat a shimmering heat that danced in invisible white waves, and stimulated the *aficionados*, a ragged, joyful rabble outside the inadequate barrier between life and death. The noise they made was like a miller's wheel rumbling over the Seville *corrida*. The bulls were kept in a rude dark pen at one side behind the *toril* gate and opposite the specially high, specially safe Court gallery. The King had been detained by some royal malaise. The Queen had private reasons for remaining away, but her entourage sat under the magnificent canopy shimmering with crimson and gold brocades, rich tapestries and the red-and-yellow banners of Spain. The box was festooned with garlands of greens already wilted. Inside, the royal box hummed like a colony of bees swarming in an orchard. It reeked with animated bodies perfumed with musk and sandalwood and amber. Court ladies leaned

eagerly forward, peering down with black eyes snapping, probing, questioning, above a sea of fluttering laces and taffetas and pearly shawls splotched with dahlia, sulphur and the green of wild grape. Noble heads canopied with the finest white lace mantillas, royal bejewelled ears, and very regal bosoms gleamed with the fire of diamonds and rubies and precious stones. Small white hands moved and waved their incessant fans, which cast little ribbons of colour on the breathless air and criss-cross patterns on eager oval faces thick with rice-powder.

A blare of trumpets. Every fan stopped, lips silenced, tensed. The gate opened. All eyes turned on the incoming procession, in hush of expectancy. In rode first, the *alguacils* in solemn dignity and rich raiment, the traditional black-satin plumed hat, black-satin breeches and coats of black velvet with short capes. Each man astride the finest of Arab mounts, barbered and richly housed in Moorish style with handsomely etched steel bits, carried a wand of office. Suave and grave, the *alguacils* rode to the royal gallery, ceremoniously reined up each steed on gleaming haunches, saluted their superiors, and suavely and gravely proceeded to opposite gates to introduce the incoming *picadors*. Equally sedate, in rode the *picadors* on wretched nags useful only as buffers for outraged bulls to gore. The matadors came next, on foot—José leading. At the sight of his handsome lithe figure there was a tense silence, and then a rustle of voices. '*Holá—Holá! Qué hombre! Oy, Oy!* —a day of days this! Hah!' A sigh of indiscretion floated down from the royal box. The black lace fan of the *Condesa*, of the house of Grimaldi, suddenly broke as she made a vulgar comment on that splendid body in the arena, to the *señora* at her side. But the noble one had no reply, for her face, whiter than rice-powder itself, was turned away most unroyally, tense with surprise and unheeding anything but the brilliant figure below. The sun played with the spangled, gold-embroidered black-velvet jacket, the rose tight stockings, the glittering black pants that betrayed every muscle of thigh and leg, the broad red sash wound tight about the torso for protection (provided by Gómez),

all shimmering in the hot light, gave José the air of a conqueror.

With his languorous, distinguishing stride, and excitement running in his veins, he entered the *corrida*, head up, eyes shining and with more authority of bearing than his King. Behind him came the *banderilleros* and *chulos*, the latter carrying over an arm a *muleta* violent enough in colour to enrage any bull. As each *chulo* entered the ring he crossed himself, since he might be dragged out to St. Peter. Before the royal box José stopped. He looked up. The box was too high to see in, and as the sun tricked the crimson shadows of the canopy there was only a mist of gold and red running to a distracting blur pierced by dark eyes here and there staring down at him. He saluted and went to his allotted place, cool, assured, the artist in him alive to the brilliant scene and drama in which he seemed the main actor. *Picadors*, *banderilleros*, *chulos* took their places. A *chulo* advanced to the *Alcalde*, safe in his own high quarters, and fans were suspended as he waited for the signal. The *Alcalde*, with devilish glee, flung the key on to the sand before the last, an *alguacil*, could flee to safety. And as the *chulo* unlocked the *toril* gate the *alguacil* whipped up his nag and the liberated bull, pounding out into the light, saw a fleeing form—that of the *chulo*—who was suddenly tossed higher than a well-sweep. He landed on a mule-driver just over the barrier, and rolling off struck the boards and fell into the arena, dead.

'Plop! that was a good one! A man's game, eh! A wise monkey that bull. Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!' An amusing day had started.

Royal fans fluttered, mantillaed heads jerked in animation. Eyes brightened and one pair of eyes green as a bird of prey's blinked furiously, while two blue eyes defied etiquette and strained anxiously over the royal hangings which protected her person from unseemly glances of men below. . . . Now they focused in terror. José's first bull lay dead at his feet and for an instant he had been near where she—Carlota—would least have him—in the arms of death. She gazed and gazed on that strong body and neither

would nor could take her eyes away. The first bull was mild, the second less mild and the third delightfully fierce. The laughing Sevillanos roared their mirth. This bull, a magnificent beast, rushed into the arena like an avalanche of thunder, and had every man running for his life. The brute had a sense of drama. He pawed and snorted as if on parade, and finally caught a *picador's* horse and ripped up his belly. The *picador* fell off over the barrier, safe, which caused so much hilarity that to save himself he got up and waited at the gate for his nag, which was dragging his reddened bowels after him over the ground. The bowels were packed back with straw, the *picador*, green with fright, mounted and rode into the ring on the sagging horse. But that bull fell and the jingling mules dragged him out like the others.

Tension increased. The applause seemed to galvanize him to cooler daring as José waited for his next bull. Steeled, he stood like a bronze statue melted by the heat to a flexible mobility, proud, wary, restrained—but now not as cool nor in as good a condition as when he entered the ring. Perfect as his play was, his far-away and intermittent work with the bulls overtaxed him; now wearied him by the ferocity of his last bull. In his blood ran hot the *pundonor* of the true Spaniard and pride and self-respect therefore were at stake. Facing the blinding sun now high over the royal box his eyes filled with its distracting haze as the next bull rushed from the pen—and halted. A hush—the bull waited opposite him, as if hypnotized, while José admired the heaving satin sides. Fans held. Bejewelled heads ceased wagging as the bull charged. José sprang to one side. The bull halted and planted all four feet and looked about as if begging to be let alone. 'Oy! oy! oy! A cow that one! Give it to him—you! Give the infant the breast. . . . Walk him out, he's made of gutta-percha.' José caught the rumbling protest when suddenly a red cape was dragged under the great damp muzzle. The infuriated beast lowered his head and charged something not there. Then like a human being uselessly insulted he trotted back towards his pen as if going home. Up went

a roar of protest. At this a *banderillero* tiptoed up like a ballet-dancer, seized the brute's tail with a vicious twist and swung himself along the gleaming sweating sides. A fire-dart plunged into the satin rump. The blood spurted. 'Hoh, well done!' The brute wheeled. Like a leech the *banderillero* held on, planting one dart after another, and was about to leap off to the barrier when he fell. The wheeling bull got him and he went over the barrier with a torn rump of his own. A pretty play and the *aficionados* rocked with laughter. The bleeding bull, feeling exploding pains, with a roar shot at José. Fans hung in the air. José pirouetted aside—too late—the sharp horns caught his sword-arm. The sword and the bleeding arm dropped.

'Bah! He is no game-cock that one!' Another disapproving roar. A red cape dragged under a black nose—to give time. José grasped his sword and looked up for the death-signal. He lifted his hat for the dedication before the death-stroke—and saw Carlota. A curtain of mist before his eyes —and something went from him although he was creeping up on the bull with sword half-hidden in the bloody cape over his torn arm—when the crazed beast thundered. The trembling sword-arm shot out. The sword plunged, missed and stabbed deep into the black temple. The bull crashed forward on its knees as if praying for the cruelty of man, and toppled into a sea of blood. . . . Silence—then an avalanche of sound. From a welter of blood José looked up, surprised. There was a cruel, insulting, menacing din. Then he knew. Seville thought him a coward. The mercurial Sevillanos thought he had killed fearing to *be* killed! They thought he lacked the guts to wait and do again what he had done—show the courage of conquerors! He thought right. The din was swelling as in the Roman Colosseum. Rather a thousand dead matadors than one coward! A vast, deafening noise. His brain seemed cauterized. He, in one misunderstood moment, stood a fool, staining the honour of the ring, by accident!

Pride alone controlled the blood rushing to his heart and making every part of him a separate existence—a body unable to stir. His brain seemed iced. He felt a roaring in

his head as if swarms of insects filled it. For one instant his eyes closed—and opened, knowing no way to meet tormentors save in dumb silence. His face went the shade of smoke. Then, with lips curling in old defiance, he straightened up and, unflinching, his eyes raked the *corrida*, resisting a last compromising glance at a woman frozen with horror. She leaned out, flexing and bending a tiny white hand raised over him in pity. While beside her the *Condesa* Grimaldi wagged a hennaed head and sucked in a malicious breath more determined on a more comforting, more personal revenge as her shallow, evil eyes followed him to the gate.

José strode out of the arena with outward calm behind which ran a cold fury. Had his life collapsed? Ambition gone from him? Were his two worlds ruined? Had he, who intended to conquer, been conquered by destiny? There was but one thing to do—and he did it.

The chill of night lay on the waters of the Guadalquivir as the usual wharf throng watched a vessel warp slowly out of her dock into mid-stream on her way to Italy. The golden bell of the Torre del Oro like a farewell boomed out over Seville, as José stood on the deck, silent, watching his receding land. The fading, irregular peaks of the enchanted Sierra Morena were now barely visible against the last dull gold of day. But he could still see faintly the lofty belfry where a moment ago could be plainly seen the bodies of the bell-ringers swinging to and fro on the ends of the long hempen ropes. The mountains had become suddenly dark as the waters running under the vessel. Now they were sable against the sky and now as dull and sullen as the bloody arena but a short time ago. His face masked a stern inscrutability, turned towards the land. Yet the very droop of his shoulders was the posture of a man thoughtful and melancholy at leaving a mutable, mercurial world of unstable humans who stabbed to save their own egotism. A world in which a flower of a woman—Tst! He stared into the darkness, knowing Fate was separating him from one whom he would give his soul to be with this moment. He saw now only two eyes that for one time

in his life had shaken him to defeat. . . . He had not seen her since that day in Madrid when from the royal rail her white hand flung him the red rose. Suddenly there surged up in him a blinding rage, a rage stronger than the river tides making a headlong race to the sea, sensing across the silent dark roof of receding water those eyes upon him.

His powerful hands gripped the wooden rail as if to crack it, for the vessel was gliding farther and farther from her—Carlota—and his own land. He strained forward trying to see Gómez, his true, loyal friend, Gómez. Was it an hour or a century since Gómez had stood there weeping, bidding him, in a choking voice, depart in peace. 'Peace? Gómez, Tst!' And Gómez said, 'Go with God', and then he, like the land, became the shore, a tree, a leaf, a shadow, then nothing. 'Go with God, *amigo!*' Something final, like the dying note of a flute, echoed over the water. '*Adiós*, my fine friend,' José rang out, surprised at his own voice.

As in all life one stands alone, he who walked up to life with the courage of gods, stood alone. A man who drew life into his blood-stream as naturally as water and wind and fire. A man with face drawn, gazing silently down at the dark roof of water. . . . The river opened into the sea, the sea into limitless black space, space into pulsing dark magic; stars like pallid crystals pointed through the sky; dimmed and were gone. He could hear the sail flapping gently, the whining of timid fresh winds in the rigging; the scrape and coiling of ropes, the voices of sailors chanting—and he heard nothing. But out of the black velvet void in which hung a woman's beauty there flashed a blue-white light like a meteor—gone, and the Spain he loved. Silently he stood merging into nothingness and another 'gap'. And to-morrow? The vessel was pointing towards a world new to him—and with supreme audacity he shrugged.

Old Proverb: Give up Your Secret and You Give up Your Freedom

ONE LUSH SPRING MORNING, AFTER A LONG, HOT CLIMB, a man flung himself down in a cool dark pocket of green on a certain slope in Fiesole, near a cloistered convent, every stone and lichen of which he knew well. He lay with the soft air on his upturned face under a silken panache of smoky white sky, with senses feasting on Florence and the grey-green hills of San Miniato beyond. Often, during the length of his disappearance in Italy he made this pilgrimage to study the fresco of St. Jerome, for behind this wall also were buried alive young flower-like beings who from ankle to chin filled him with mad longing. Today this same José, corrupted by beauty, searched these greens, the violet-carpeted ground, the mournful black cypress, a love-screen for the whispering earth. He fingered a letter in his blouse. During his wanderings from the head to the heel of Italy he had soaked up its wealth of art, the beauty of the Italian schools, and its brooding magnitude seduced him again to painting. Drugged with this scented peace of oleanders near-by, he pulled the letter forth and re-read it, months old, and ragged from attention. Now he weighed the idea of home. A bird piped. The sweet note lulled him to dreaming and down the aisles of light towards him came a sparkling being—Carlota? In this sanctuary together, they seemed to drop among the tunnelling roots of earth to the eternal spring, breast to breast. The old love was singing in his blood. He sat up and read the advice: 'Return. God who sends the wounds sends the cure' (he read). 'God compelled him' (the writer) 'to commend him' (José) 'to God to guide him back to his own land.' God had a lot to do with that letter. 'The *Duque* of Amala had become his patron—the most influential personage in all Spain—was not this a propitious moment to arrive in Madrid?' José re-read spicy news: 'The neighbours over the border were developing a strange appetite for thrones; the French Gunner must want a

front-seat in Spain; what scandals at Court; the dole for hungry and stranded authors had been stopped (by Spain's economical sovereigns); the Angelus no longer tolled for the giving out of bread and soup: "Liars' Walk" was filled with empty bellies and bitter tongues; an embargo might be put on locusts—"which eat well toasted over charcoals!" . . . Amala has put a halo over your head and your picture on his walls.'

Amala could be counted on, eh? With bright, excited eyes José looked out over the hills towards Spain, beyond a flowering plum, beyond a blue-plumaged hill in a square of parrot-green shading. Was the old Padre in Fuendetodas beckoning, saying . . . 'My son now is your hour!' Why not? With Amala his patron! Was it not Amala who had secretly filled his purse during his apprenticeship in Saragossa, the blooded Amala who was kin to the Padre? Spain's Ambassador to Italy was his friend. Assuredly, after the 'episode' of the little nun, he, José, owed much to the ambassador, likewise a connoisseur of art. José read, 'Bayeu is jealous; the vulgar egotist leans too amorously on the breast of French art; and how easy for you to override such petty talent, his tepid outputs in Madrid's *Academia*, although a weighty person in art circles.' With the influential Amala's patronage what could he not accomplish? When was the first homeward-bound vessel sailing? José leaped to his feet and with tempestuous energy stamped down the slope, avid of the old power to paint Spain, become Spain's foremost painter.

Jesú! that episode of the little nun. Tst! Had he not desired that little novitiate for a model? With her dove-like eyes facing an eternity of unnatural, unfruitful years ahead! Was it not destiny to have the Mother Superior come hurrying down the cloister garden that night—of all nights—and stop him—and one bound to wither and sag in a barren body-denied life in a cloister! (Could not he, the artist he had suggested to Spain's ambassador, be measuring that oval upturned face for a sketch?') *Jesucristo!* It had been no prayer for the salvation of his soul that belched from the Mother Superior's horrified lips, he

had confided to the diplomat, but the voiced flagellation of an outraged virgin whose virtue, too long suppressed, saw only evil in the world—and so startled him he nearly fell into the garden. And the amused ambassador saw the point; returning to Spain carrying one of José's Italian canvases, his friendship and obscene remarks about that 'episode' to the *Duque* de Amala. But that ticklish affair created a nasty scandal in Rome. Now with the instinct of the grain-merchant underlying the Padre's love of God, and Amala's strategy and influence at Court, Madrid would prove fertile ground. . . . Hoh! had the jealous Bayeu been thus honoured?

He hustled on board the first outgoing vessel—and amidst bundles of household goods, bird-cages, children and bedding, piled a caravan full of canvases, Florentine colours, tubs of lead, bundles of clothing. And passionately aware of the illumination and drama Italy had afforded him he sailed away, watching the land aslant the morning haze where lizards paled from sea-grey into nothingness.

He sailed up the Guadalquivir river to Seville on Corpus Christi day, proceeding at once to the old inn in the Gran Capitán. Exactly as he left it buzzed with preparations for the festival, with raucous choir-boys fighting to get into line; Gómez leaning against the striped curtains at the door, a leathery wrinkled old man with eyes not too dim to recognize the handsome one who made his inn popular.

'*Vaya!* Holy Virgin, it is yourself, *señor!*' Two hard-working hands came out from under a green leather apron brown with age, and clasped José's. Each cheek received a smack. 'My friend, my patron. The house is yours, *señor!* Everything, bed, food, all that I have. "He whom God loves has a house in Seville," and God gives you my house! And you, *señor?* You prosper? Assuredly. A blind horse could see that. Ah, no beautiful *señora?* No wife of your bosom? Hoh! No little *niños*—the fruit of your loins! Holy Mother, what fruit would be yours! But enter, there is fresh straw on the floor above where a weary fox may burrow—*señor.*'

Seville excited was in gala attire. Bells were ringing, petards exploding, balconies floating gay draperies limp under the hot air. The same Spain! the same gay drama. A trumpet sounded. Every soul went prostrate on the blazing cobbles as the Corpus Christi procession, forming at the end of the narrow awninged street, moved out under the bright burning sky. Bare-headed men in robes wrought in gold ablaze in the sun; under an embroidered velvet canopy on four gilded poles four sombre young priests carried the Bishop in magnificent jewelled robes and mitre, holding the Host; the Chapter in capes embroidered with pearls and gold thread; Knights of Military Orders armed, cap-à-pie, plumes nodding under Spain's dipping flags of red and yellow, pages in velvet, then men in long solemn black dominoes with high pointed cowls with slits for eyes, the red cross of the Crusaders marking their breasts, carrying huge unlighted tapers; cowled, hooded, bare-footed penitents staggering under great wooden crosses; then choristers. A flutter of banners, the sheen of a steel cap flashing white in the sun, and upheld with devout dignity came the Virgin—a life-sized doll with dazzling crown of diamonds on her painted head and arrayed in the wealth of Spain, silk and gold-threaded brocades and rubies and diamonds and priceless pearls: Nothing too precious for the Queen of Heaven! Her right hand ablaze with jewelled rings upheld in benediction over the awed, silent throngs kneeling in the street. Another new canvas, that! and José walked back to the inn as if hearing the beat of Time reveal the instrument that had enslaved the souls of his people for centuries! His dramatic exit from Seville was not mentioned and his hot blood went racing towards Madrid.

Friends of Gómez were journeying north, and the sorrowful Gómez arranged for José to accompany them. On the morrow amid a terrible din, that of the mules, that of the driver and eight little *niños* all excitedly screeching, José with the family got packed under the cover of the springless *galera*, with Gómez waving a vociferous but melancholy farewell. With a blunderbuss to the rear of him,

the tandem mules making music with silver bells and hoofs, the entire caravan creaked out of the city on the road to a new life.

José arrived in Madrid in a mood not untouched with gloating, since that '*picio*' of a Bayeu, a mean figure in *Academia* circles but vastly important to himself, was related to him by marriage. José's marriage to Bayeu's sister took place doubtless during one of those many 'gaps' in his life, and as there were times when he disappeared for years at a stretch, the affair was perhaps another mysterious impulse, and caused a great deal of gossip. Some of José's critics saw in it a shrewd political move. Some winked at it. Others, more alive to biological laws, said he loved his wife. Undoubtedly he did. She bore him twenty children, and his impulses being always natural he had no regrets. Josefa might be, as he knew, neither salt nor beautiful nor wise, but she promised stability as she promised fecundity. And what more, pray, was expected of a wife? Learning in women was a ridiculous emolument; she did not even have to tell time to perform the offices of life, and there were already one or more beady-eyed *niños*, little nut-brown heirs of the house of Goya, out in the small house on the road to Toledo. His wife was a silent woman, a demon of thrift and a good cook, with a bovine predilection for maternity; a gentle woman with startled eyes and tight lips, her hair twisted on the top of her head like her emotions under it. But she was the right woman for him. In fact throughout his entire career she took the part of a mere 'voice', like those invaluable figures in the Greek chorus who mask the sentiments of the plot but swell it at interludes. A dependable, useful feminine prop behind the scenes, she loved him—another Eve. The *niños* were gay, sparkling little figures like the cherubs José painted in Saragossa, and occupied the middle distance of his life. He loved them, but he studied their anatomies more than their souls; and they arrived regularly along with the wheat-crop.

He had scarcely settled when the waiting forces in his life were released. And with the wire-pulling of the old

priest in Fuendetodas by way of the influential Amala in Madrid events began to happen. A flashing-eyed dynamo of an artist was immediately seen everywhere. Bayeu, his brother-in-law, already sour over this firebrand's reputation and crazy flair for being himself, kept watch of every move. And there was much to watch in a daring red-corpuscled male who again took mad delight in associating with every low rogue he could find in Madrid; who spent night after night in the slimy dark Plaza del Rastro in a wine-shop where there was the spiciest *cocido*, and a special Amontillado to be had: a place where bull-fighters came with their riff-raff women. Moreover, Bayeu found he had a full enough purse not only for rummaging in the Rastro to purchase bits of bric-à-brac from that filmy-eyed old rascal who sold rusty iron. But that José was on friendly terms with a penniless priest who bargained for a coffee-pot! Then, overnight so to speak, this obscure person was taken up and seen with Amala. As for women—Tst! Everywhere, they watched his vital, handsome person with the strength of bulls preferable to their own decadent lords and masters. Yes, one moment José was obscure and the next moment destiny had handed him a white document bearing the royal red seal of the King of Spain. Bayeu repeated the gossip how the *Condesa* Osuna, partial to bull-fighters, had suddenly become interested in a new and dashing painter lately arrived in Madrid. Bayeu ground his teeth. But the morning José broke the King's seal on a royal document commanding him to appear in his Sovereign's box at the Teatro Bien Real, that night found him beside His Majesty recognized by royalty: he, of peasant stock, he who was once smuggled out of Madrid, whose youth bristled with difficulties, who left Saragossa under a cloud; but one who felt himself great, not through egotistic stupidity but through a secure inner wisdom.

The *gitana's* prophecy looked about to be fulfilled; ahead lay commissions from royal patronage; an introduction by the Count de Floridablanca to the King's brother Infante Don Luis (husband of the beautiful María Teresa of Vallabrigo, she of shameless history); a commission for seven

pictures for seven altars in the Church of San Francisco el Grande being built by the architect of the age—Ventura Rodríguez. About this time José wrote to the old Padre, 'the Prince's family was simply angelic'. But the friendship with that artistic, easy-moralled, noble Don Luis was mysteriously severed, after José journeyed down to the palace of Arenas de San Pedro at Ávila and painted the family. There he hunted game, doubtless of more than one variety. Whatever happened, José was given a handsome present, his wife sent a rich brocade and he departed, and that was the end of that experience.

'Your Majesty! A thousand humble thanks for your gracious reception of me!' As near being formal as he could be, José bowed, and at the King's command took his seat beside him in the stuffy royal box hung with yellow and red damask in the Teatro Bien Real. The national theatre was dimly lighted, without ventilation. José inclined his ear to his Sovereign, always silent in the Queen's presence; and in her absence prattling away to this man of understanding. His Majesty spent much time in his private gardens in San Ildefonso potting sparrows from behind a special high-clipped hedge, and his voice was high with his recital. Above the shrill chatter of the audience in the boxes circling the theatre, the popular *Tonadilla*—a short comic opera—was being sung by two untalented people, while above their shrieking (necessary to be heard) José could hear out in the street the familiar '*Ser-eno-Ser-eno!*' of the night-watchman. The plot had already been ruined by the high-pitched interruptions of the *Gracioso*—the buffoon—who broke in at discordant intervals with coarse jests; a delightful performance followed by a lascivious dance, the Fandango—very popular indeed, judged by the coarse loud laughter. José was in buoyant mood when the damask curtain of the box parted, a liveried page entered, went down on his knees before the King and announced: '*Sire, el señor duque y duquesa de Amala.*'

Into the royal box like a water-lily floating, sheathed in satin, with stars for eyes and a halo of gold that lighted the semi-darkness came—*Carlota!* José rose perfunctorily,

making obeisance. All of him poured out like water, all of him became wax melting in the midst of his belly. Then from head to foot he was full of her, his heart rushing like a river, knowing he must leave at once—and sitting down—the master mastered: a proud arrogant monarch crumbled to mere man bereft of sense, caught on the high wind of a new fever that tore him in two. 'Do you know me?' the pulse in his throat projected. Then the dark split up into brilliant fragments and his senses floated into inexhaustible, timeless space dragging him into a hell where love lay impaled on something vague, unseen. The small, poised head of the *duquesa* inclined in conventional recognition—but her eyes—how her eyes acknowledged him! 'Ah, *señor*, we meet at last!' While near him, near fainting in the pain of discovering him, she turned away smothered by a sudden brutal gust of reality in her marriage, and a ravishing disquietude she never before knew could exist in the human frame. 'Does he know me?' Her beating heart surged up with the silent cry. . . .

The King was rising, the audience rising, the *duque* rising, his cool eyes looking José up and down. The *duque* was commanding him to wait upon him on the morrow, the hour set; the ducal coach would fetch him to the Casa Amala. A silken fragrance swept by, leaving him in a cul-de-sac of darkness; himself was striding through the night, his blood singing, in a chill thick mist, vaguely sensing 'loyalty' hanging over a dark abyss in his heart.

Long before the appointed hour within the Casa Amala, in an upper balcony behind a dark shutter which with water-jars standing about kept the high, wide, white room cool, were a pair of eyes a deep violet from excitement. From between slats held at a discreet angle by a trembling finger, those eyes peered down on two men talking in the patio below. In the outer patio the afternoon sun struck such fire upon the gold-tiled walk that bars of light shattered the dark inner court into fresh bright ribbons. A tinkling fountain cooled each patio and robbed the ears behind the shutters. But now the head attached to the ears and eyes held to a stiff uncomfortable angle too long, and

the lady attached to both moved a small hand to the right and pulled the long scarlet tassel of the bell-rope. Out among the exotic sweetness of flowering orange below, the morbid melting sweetness of tuberoses and age and the musty moisture of growing palms, a bell tinkled, rumbling through the great silent house. One of the two men talking looked about, relaxed and resumed his position on the crimson cushions. And the talk went on.

The one who listened, unaware that the man opposite had been listening with every nerve ever since his arrival, was *el señor duque* of Amala, a personage, a grandee of the bluest, oldest blood in Spain, a delightfully subtle aristocrat. He was known as 'a man of parts' and whatever or however these parts were, some were public and some not so much so. This distinguished being was a lover of more than one variety of beauty, and enjoyed to the utmost his position, behind the scenes, and more especially his perquisites at Court. He bred the finest bulls, which meant the fiercest. His generous purse opened to the poor, by which he paid for his aristocratic lusts of the flesh and bought his way into Heaven. His finest attribute bore directly on the painter sitting opposite him a lively, sincere enthusiasm with practical encouragement of any genuine promise of genius, revealed in the Padre's Italian letters, with his secret interest in José's apprenticeship in Saragossa. The *duque's* spiritual ear was always on the ground, his earthy eye on the amenities. He was an exquisite; a proud, dignified man with a concupiscent darting eye, fleshy lips, long, jutting jaw and the white, shapely and utterly useless hands immortalized in paint by El Greco. You see him looking out of his canvas, sleek of head, pointed grey beard, white neck-ruff and wrist-laces, in black velvet. But to distinguish him from other portraits our particular *duque* wears about his neck a fine gold chain on which swings, or lies flat, according to the aristocratic mood, a single great emerald on which is carved with impeccable religiosity—the Crucifixion. This priceless bauble the *duque* is wont to lift to his soft lips in difficult moments. It gives sanctity to the smallest or loftiest doing, and one

devout kiss on that cool green stone makes pious the most godless act. At this moment the emerald lay complacent, for the *señor duque* was amused and delighted with this frank, witty, fiery, independent—a welcome contrast to that polished veneer he was accustomed to bear with at Court.

'We are then mutually agreed on beauty, and your Padre —my worthy cousin—did me a good turn to whet my curiosity and appetite concerning your genius, Lucientes.' The voice was cool, suave.

'And to whose support you have given liberally of understanding and impetus,' José acknowledged with gratitude.

'You lifted me to the heights of discoverer. And your impudent realism gives me great pleasure. My good cousin truly wrote, "This youth José promises a unique development, with your accord—if you will trust to my judgement. He is hampered by . . ."'

'Do not spare me, Excellency.'

'"By too great an independence and too frank a tongue. But these are balanced by a courageous pride and inner flame by which in the end both you and Spain must profit."'

'My ambition has not deserted me.' José laughed.

Above them behind the balcony giving on the patio, and before a gold-carved mirror stood the *Duquesa* of Amala peering into the glass which flung back her own intense, fearless eyes, gold hair coiled rakishly about small ears, a small ivory-white face with red lips parted, a white throat pulsing above two whiter breasts kissed by a red rose between, and only half concealed by a *bolero* jacket of black velvet aloof from a full wide-flounced white taffeta skirt: Carlota herself teetering perilously on one slipper while her servant Concepción, smothering in a great walnut wardrobe, hunted the other slipper and threw into the room a muffled rumbling of words. . . .

'The crows carried it off. . . . Not here, Excellency. . . . Holy Mother, I *am* hunting. . . . Juan says if the King allows privileges . . . They will march on the Palace. . . .'

'Talking again with that ruffian, fie! A dull donkey

tells his own story and his neighbour's, Concepción! *Hasten* —I am late as it is!'

'Gone, your Highness! Evil spirits . . . I saw that sacristan at Mass. . . . He sells the drippings off the altar candles.'

'Stupid! My scarlet slipper—that is *black*. Can I go before a distinguished guest with harlequin feet? You try my patience. . . . Elephants move faster. . . . You have wool for brains. Virgin Mother, aid me! . . .' Carlota waved the little servant back to the wardrobe where she at last emerged triumphant. On went the slipper while Carlota braced herself on Concepción's thick skull.

'I knew it was there, Excellency. I always find what is lost.'

'You are a wasp that stings me with poison. Come, come, I meant no unkindness, but to-day I am . . .' 'Yes, I am,' she told herself, 'and God alone knows it.' Concepción was blubbering. 'There, there!' The high, clear voice held a new sweetness, and the little servant dried her eyes on her petticoat.

'Some day,' she began again, 'that sacristan will steal the Virgin off the altar and wash off her gold and then say, "See how the new white virgin is relieved of her impurities—God performs miracles!" That sacristan is a low scoundrel, Juan says.'

Carlota was peering, preening, making perfect what was already perfect with scented powder, little humming steps, calling for a dozen different fans, a dozen different combs, trying them—ready to descend, and postponing her happiness because her legs were dissolved into jelly.

'Enough bleating, little sheep! You are well-meaning. These scarlet slippers are yours—too small, I know, but you may enjoy the pain of them—my new ones soon arrive from Paris.'

'*Gracias*, *gracias*, *gracias*, Excellency!'

'Enough!' A parting glance in the mirror, a swaying of skirts, a lilting walk and the *duquesa* swept from her room.

'It is doubtful, Your Highness, if Spain appreciates your

sincere interest in its future culture,' José said, straining every nerve towards a new, faint sound.

'This is a period of growing-pains, Lucientes. Spain has to-morrow, and yet to-morrow is its weakness. Living in the future makes a disaster of the present, for when all is said the future *is* the present when you reach it.'

'*Señor duque*, my debt to you lies in my future.'

'That debt may be paid now.' A slender hand caught the green cool stone up to full lips. 'In friendship is the finest payment of all! In yours I would be well paid.' Cool, darting eyes rested on José.

'Excellency! My friendship for your own!'

'Cannot the *duque* share so precious a thing as friendship with his wife? You forgot to announce the arrival of your distinguished guest, my lord!' Carlota swayed in and unfurled her fan, laughing. And that sound was a death-song, for with dynamic understanding José knew the vague unseen thing that hung over his own heart, in the theatre, was that chill virtue called loyalty: a two-edged sword. Loyalty, friendship which he had given to Carlota's husband—the *duque*, his patron, his friend! The hot blood singing in him became a violent clotted stream of gloomy, tragic significance—the *duque's* price. His manner iced suddenly. He acknowledged her, scarcely hearing the *duque* say: 'Spain will live for ever. . . . Spain is a miracle.'

'No, my lord—*life* is the miracle.' Carlota was still laughing.

'I am to be honoured by your sitting to me for a portrait? Thus may I honour Spain more.' José bowed to the *duque*.

'Some day, when I have more leisure.' The *duque* rose and strolled beyond the fountain, as if distrait.

'You leave me, my lord, to entertain our guest alone?'

'Are you not capable of doing most things—alone?'

Carlota noted the irony. Her fan fluttered. To the *duque* she seemed in a strangely gay mood, naïve even, a mood not often seen of late, and one not to his fancy. He demanded of life two things, beauty and not being bored. The precious green toy in his hand shot forward as if flung at something that annoyed him.

'I shall call upon you, Ramón, on my return from Seville. *A la bonne heure*,' he said in his gracious, suave way, and passed through the arch into the main hall beyond, and went leisurely up the long wide stairs, to the vine-covered balcony that extended around three sides of the patio.

Carlota's manner changed. Her laughing eyes challenged the man whose triumphant day was shattered; so unexpectedly chained to a pledge which impaled him on a cold, iron revulsion, as if the very thing you become too fond of must in the end break you. The *duquesa* sank down into the impress of the *duque's* body among the crimson cushions on the Oriental divan. Leaning forward, hands clasped, her slippers resting in a pool of sultry light, the rose at her breast moved as if alive, her eyes steady, and saying, as if there would never be another chance: 'Curious, is it not, that long waiting years become a mere moment when one is happy. Then you knew me—in Seville? In Madrid! Yes? A-ah! Since my marriage I have travelled, travelled! Florence, Rome. But since that day in Seville'—her eyes closed for an instant and blood pounded in his temples—'since that terrible day your life has been what? Mine? Uncertainties! Come, *señor*, tell me of *your* life, my years are barren years, all travel or study in Salamanca.' She waved her fan and chatted nervously on. 'A studious woman belongs to the devil or to the angels, my friend. A brainy lady is a dead lady in Spain. I know. Yet I am a woman every inch of me. I keep a diary. I make lace. My diary is full of twaddle, my lace full of mistakes —yet I need . . .?' She paused, and drew in a breath charged with excitement.

'I have little to tell.' José sat cold and stiff, his control fading before that steady gaze. 'You have benefited by study far more than I.'

'Books are no substitute for living, I can assure you. Nothing living comes out of books. . . . What is the head without love? A mere skull empty of life, of wisdom. But I am grateful. My lord is gracious enough to permit me to travel.' She laughed. 'Gracious—because I would take

it otherwise. Study has filled many, many lonely moments. But you—what of your living? Is your life all a pagan epic?'

He sat, whelmed in cold rage. Had Fate lured him back to a triumphant crucifixion? Before him sat his ideal of womanhood, his boyhood dream *Xana*, all gold and white and palpitating, tremulously alive to a love begging his response with her whole ripe being. His eyes threw back a blank wall. She straightened abruptly, proud, as if aware of being broken against something hard. Her proud chin assumed a different angle, her violet eyes grew black.

'I suddenly understand life is a schoolroom. Even you, *señor*, educate me. Like my lord the *duque*, in all sincerity I offered you friendship—but it seems too small a gift for one crowned with greater honours, given so many finer friendships. . . . I see, I see.' She was up, on her swaying lilting feet beyond the spray of silver, plucking a dry leaf from a palm tree, crumpling it in her hand, to hurl it into the fountain. He saw her bend and rescue it and go walking about, her full silken skirt swishing against the old Roman mosaics of the patio floor, and her scorn was as a lash on raw flesh. She came back and stood before him.

'You do not speak, *señor*, it must be that friendship—which alas I find too rare—holds little value in your life? Though I *had thought* . . .' She clapped her hands suddenly. A house-servant clattered out of the silent house. 'The *señor* departs,' she told the servant. 'His hat, his cloak.' And a bitter ironic voice mocked him, '*À la bonne heure, señor!*'

Inarticulate, he strode out of the Casa Amala unaware that the eyes upon him were filled with tears as she went to the bougainvillæa vine that climbed to her chamber above. She shook it violently. 'Concepción . . . *Concepción!*' With a terrible banging the shutter above flew open and Concepción with round, thick eyes like a seal's, looked down. 'Make ready for a journey to-morrow, *el señor duque* departs to Seville early and we go—where shall we go, my child? To—to Salamanca—what matter? Yes, keep the blinds open, the air freshens. Order the coach—would that we could leave to-night instead.' The sun went down,

and still the *duquesa* walked; around and around on the pebbled patterned path, in the pain of hurt, humiliated pride. Certainly that day in Madrid his eyes gave her what she offered him to-day! What caused his poisonous austerity? What had come between them, ruining this one happiness of her life? Hearing footsteps, up went her head with imperious dignity, her eyes flashed behind the tears. . . . 'Some day . . . *sí*, *sí* . . . some day I shall know,' she told herself.

José surrendered to tyrannous gloomy solitude, daring to postpone painting—at the King's command—the Royal Chapel.

The Court was in residence in Aranjuez until summer: the *duque* in Seville. The *duquesa* was travelling, but where it was not wise to inquire. He made an extra effort to paint at home in a perpetual din of domestic infelicities. His strong will might ignore Time, but Time refused co-operation midst the wailing of infants, clashing of pots, screaming children, housewifely complaints, pregnancy and prayers, and a flopping about of heelless slippers on their way to the stew-pot or to place cloths to bleach outside. He took to stalking the streets of Madrid at night. In a kind of beaten fury, with hat pulled down, sword-tip gleaming beneath his great cloak, he ploughed under starry heavens hour after hour as if looking for something gone from him; finding the same Madrid, save for new street-lamps which cast a wholly inadequate beam into a useless circumference where pigs and wenches and gangrenous beggars rubbed filthy rags against the scented silks of dandies. The Alameda swarmed with the same gossiping intriguing, Madrileños who rose late, drank spiced chocolate, quizzed girls, heard Mass, slandered, flirted, went home to sup, prayed and went to bed to avoid serious thought of war and politics. Once he thought he recognized the tattered, noble and malicious Don Jaime. But 'an old dog does not course for whistling'.

And so days piled up into months; months into quickening years with enriching experiences.

Spring; the sun hurled its energy on the earth and all

green things obeyed and came forth. The hills purpled with heather, the days shone blue and gold. The nights—ah! the nights killed him with pain. Restless, he plunged into more orgies of walking. Meantime, in need of money to maintain that continuously increasing and yet sadly decreasing family of his, he finished decorating the Royal Chapel. Criticism rained down on him. What cared he? He was making future history for Spain. Already he had received commissions for portraits, and pupils—one, Vicente Calderón who promised good landscapes. Had he not already seen enough of Mengs's influence with his saccharine saints and sinners? Tst! feeble work! There was plenty of that among the other artists prominent in Madrid art circles. Did he not argue with Dussent, del Barranco, Maella and Zocaru and Ezquerra—whose pictures of interiors and trees were mere spirited dots. Barnuevo had painted frescoes for the Alcázar, but his stuff did not hang long in the royal gallery. Francesco Díaz, Andrea Calleja, and Bertucat had little fancy for art, and Cano, to José's fury, copied Murillo's lovely Virgins. All enslaved, these Academicians, including Bayeu who had a thin, stilted correctness. Bayeu, a toad! puffed up because Mengs had predicted for him a great future! Beratín, José's friend Beratín, the industrious, up from Saragossa to study in Madrid—what was he doing? Bah! *Emulating* Bayeu! These correct, sentimental saccharine painters with their coy Christs and languishing Virgins filled him with contempt, and testified to what degrading depths Spain's art had slumped.

Bayeu turned green at the success of this upstart with his daring ideas and his passion for yellows and reds. Bayeu was shrewd. He played politics, and won—before he died—a second prize from the *Academia*. José said openly his work was artistic prostitution. José knew little of the English Reynolds who advocated a careful study of the old masters. But such narrow academic painters would never accept what Reynolds added, 'even Masters may be studied with suspicion as even great men sometimes are exempt from great thoughts.' His criticism, if

contemptuous, was sound; inspired and fed by a careful study of Titian in the Royal Palace, by the Tiepolos in the Throne Room, and the Veroneses covering the walls of the Palace, and Rembrandt, Velázquez and Tintoretto, examples of which were housed in Madrid and to which he now had entrée.

'Yes,' he told Beratín, 'I owe everything to Nature, Velázquez and Rembrandt.'

To all this Bayeu was a furious witness. Now rumour had it that *Doña* María Palafox, the *Marquesa* de Santa Cruz and San Carlos (an artistic lady), the *Duquesa* Benavente, *Doña* Antonia de Z. (who sang sweetly), the *Condesa* del Montijo (most pious), and Madame Brunetti (a dark *señora* with secret lure), all of these royal personages—were opening their salons to this engaging relative of his. And at the moment that tough old bird of ill omen, old Grimaldi, back in Madrid, Bayeu's speciality, had brought him another spicy but unpalatable bit to chew on: The Marquis de Z., with zeal but little foresight, seeing how it was with this painter growing in favour with the great of the land, must have a portrait of his *señora*—a bizarre lady with wicked eyes. So Grimaldi told the story to Bayeu:

'Ah, marquis' (so José said to the Marquis de Z.), 'how can one refuse to do as you wish.'

'I will give you two hours,' the delighted *señor* replied, and forthwith he rushed from the room and locked the door. Two hours passed. The marquis rushed back and throwing open the doors cried, 'I am delighted.'

'Quite right' (José had replied coolly), 'I am delighted with the results of my violence.' And he was. He remained on intimate terms with the lady for years. So intimate, that within a short time, when the royal *señora* was ordered to join the Court at Aranjuez, she sought José out and begged him to invent any excuse to prevent it. He picked up his brush and painted on her naked foot an appalling bruise. In despair the marquis sent for the surgeon. He examined the wound, declared the case grave; dressed it and ordered a complete rest. But the lively lady proceeded to Aranjuez alone. (Some time later one of José's plates

showed a solemn ass feeling the pulse of an unfortunate invalid.)

Bayeu came promptly to a decision. It was high time to be friends with one in such high favour, for while audacity seldom counts, never had he known audacity pay better.

One day, poisoned with envy, he proceeded to honour his outrageous relation with a visit. He got to the door and got no further. Without waste of ceremony José met him, exchanged a brief *buenos días* and with a briefer *adiós*, turned his back and his feet towards the white scraggy road to the Escorial to study the old paintings there to which the *Duque* Osuna gave him introduction. What Bayeu thought was to be expressed most unpleasantly, given time. What José felt was expressed for ever with one turn of his spine.

July, then August came. The moon moved in the sky and Spain's nights tore him to pieces. A message came from the *Duque* de Amala commanding him to wait upon him at the Casa Amala . . . Carlota? He went and returned: The *duque* had unexpectedly departed back to his private resort near San Sebastián. And so, for a period, life was suspended in empty space.

The September fields became long dark grey furrows like stilled waves in the sea, with mice burrowing under the grain. The martins and swallows were gone and the silver-grey cactus brown, and dried. The fall air was heavy with dampness and under a chill moon the stacked hay squatted on earth like gnomes whispering to the night. Walking gloomily about, José passed and re-passed the Casa Amala, but that mansion, like an indignant person, turned a silent back and told nothing. The Holy Christmas season would soon be upon him. And little did he know —or care—that the new year was to bring him the strangest ceremony the rigid court of Spain had ever seen, and would probably never see again.

Winter gripped the city with cold bitter enough to crack your bones, and he saw a stoic acceptance of biting hardships. Wrapped in his own warm great cloak he burned

with pity. Every tight-lipped grey pinched face he saw he ticketed in his memory as one secretes documents in a private drawer to be one day needed. The artist in him rejoiced in their bizarre agonies, but his soul revolted that such things could be. The contrasts in Madrid appalled him, criminal poverty abiding next to exotic luxury created for an idle effete nobility by over-taxing the people of the land which took their all and gave in return—hunger; denuded them of the little they had, and what was more important, their importance to self. 'It is the will of God,' he heard everywhere, taught to believe that, while the rich were given more comforts, more ease. The large braziers of the rich were piled high with red coals. The poor froze —they had no braziers to heat. What could be done? He knew nothing could be done. The nobility went swathed in suits and capes lined with furs. The poor could die.

Thus the glad Christmas time bringing gratitude to the privileged was upon the city. The royal family came out of the chill gloom of the Escorial hills and back to the Palacio Real to find warmth in the drier valley of the Manzanares. Immediately the King's messenger arrived at the stone house on the Toledo road with a summons; José was commanded to appear before their Majesties at the Christmas festivities at Court. He dismissed the messenger and stared insolently at the red-sealed document, the old rage near the surface, in no mood for even royal patronage. He strode up and down the small, littered room contemptuously . . . and the crumpled royal invitation was flung on the floor. Go he would not. He disobeyed the command. Christmas Eve found him wandering about the bitter-cold streets, watchful and intolerant of intolerance.

In the Plaza Santa Cruz awnings were rolled back from upper balconies to permit the rich, comfortable and warm, sitting behind closed windows, to view the gay poor in the cold—thanking God—for what? Everything was coated with ice, a freezing mist hung over the city threatening rain. In the square where tragedy stalked, a special Christmas market was set up and there rose a cackling of geese blue with the cold; protesting turkeys with purpling

wattles, and frosted feet. José drew his great cloak together, but revolt heated him, not the cloak. Ducks and pigeons, stiff and stuffed into donkey-panniers, blew out a white vapour; even animals shuffled restlessly to keep from freezing.

'*Señor!* Castilian mutton, or sausage, *señor?* Sweet ham. cheese for the little *niños* for the Christmas?' José bought the ham, a pig-skin of wine, cheese and a basket of Barbary figs to be gathered with a goose later, and went away to talk with a wet-nosed rag-bag of a beggar crouched in a heap beneath on oil-lamp on the corner of a house, a stinking, sluggish tail of smoke from which the shivering wretch seemed to derive comfort. José threw him a copper, and watched the Christmas throng pouring into the square, singing to forget the pain of the cold. Tragedy, this grasping at forgetfulness! Boys without even a coat jigged up and down blowing on nipped fingers. Thinly clad men twanged on tambourines and mandolins with frosted fingers, to forget misery. Half-clothed children were too stiff to jump about or even blow bladders because of their still white lips. José saw a young mother's breasts flat from starvation. In Christmas gladness?—moving about with her ragged baby, the little drawn, puckered lips wailing pitifully while hugging it tight, she lulled it with chattering teeth:

> 'The Virgin is in travail,
> At twelve the baby will squeak!'

He put a *real* into her frozen hand, as the church bells boomed the midnight gladness.

The mist turned to a drizzling sleet. A group of youths, warmed with wine, swayed chanting across the frozen cobbles and, to honour the Nativity, danced the *Jota*, usually danced at cross-roads.

> '*Mi corazón volando*
> *Se fué á tu pecho . . .*'

A shivering girl showed garters that would make you blush. 'Anything, *señor?*' she asked, too cold to be arch.

'Anything—little one? Tst!' She dragged off. He threw her a copper murmuring, *'Qué bonitos ojos,'* while watching a nobleman disguised in brown plush as a dog, making kennel noises, chasing a male canary twittering and chirping and hopping on anything but birdlike feet after drunken students, with hat-brims pinned up in front with forks. They rocked up and down the freezing street arm-in-arm, crazily singing:

'Let's drink and be merry
And love our very fill.'

José realized the wisdom of such medicine! Under this rowdy exuberance and flapping cloaks defiance stalked: ghosts of liberty suppressed, ready for strife, ready to blaze into revolt. He studied each passing face like wet lead etched against the night, in rain, a black, cruel, freezing deluge. Clothing froze stiff as boards. Noses dripped, and chilled through José collected his goose, tagged to leave at the baker's for an oven cooking. Weighing the despairing, disproportionate division of his land endowed with wealth for all, he took the road home. Dawn finished the sad revelry.

His daring was on every tongue. On St. Anthony's Day gossip let loose with extra fervour over the news of an unprecedented and unbelievable event about to take place. Up and down the Alameda, the Alcázar, Plaza Mayor, the news ran like quicksilver: the King and Queen of Spain were according this painter a formal reception at Court! And while four-footed beasts were on their way to Church to be blessed and insured from harm for the year, and get their barley wafers, every head in Madrid wagged. It was incredible. But the reception took place. And a King who knew nothing of art and a Queen who knew less not only plunged this human novelty headlong into the highest society in the land, but likewise into a world of treachery, intrigue, and greed, and his transition from vagabond to intimate of the King was astounding. Nothing like it had ever been known. Charles IV soon gave him a seat in the royal coach—the highest honour a Bourbon could confer

on a subject. And the Queen, never delicate in her attentions, later bestowed on him a little picture by Velázquez, the only painting he was ever to own by another painter, 'A Man Eating Soup'.

With his pledge of loyalty weighing on him like an iron cross, yet hoping against hope to meet Carlota there—gossip had it she was not in Madrid—José entered the royal presence, conscious of marionettes posing in white ruffs and black velvet, against French-gilt furnishings, satin gowns, jewels, brilliant uniforms, and suave, sly glances; aware of every aristocratic eye focused upon his entrance. Those innocent knowing eyes of the *Marquesa* de Z., who had been allowed to return to Court; those of the *Duquesa* Benavente and Madame Brunetti, even the cold eyes of the *Condesa* Grimaldi turned on him with hatred, stared and even ogled as she talked to his toady of a brother-in-law Bayeu now holding office of Arbiter of the *Academia*, and he, shooting at him glances like lead bullets.

Silently he made obeisance to Their Majesties, and straightening up—looked into the flashing eyes of the *Duquesa* of Amala, beside her Queen, looking at him from under thick black lashes as she held out her hand. He stiffened, bent, and touched it with his lips, with blood pounding.

'Ah, *señor*,' she began in a high, laughing voice, 'this is a far more auspicious occasion than when we last met.'

'Your Excellency is pleased to remember me?' He bowed.

'Too well,' came the reply tinged with irony, 'or rather, *so* well that in one moment I learned that a bouquet under a donkey's nose does not always move him forward!'

'The donkey is a wise beast. He knows his own power.'

'If not his friends?' She waved a fan languidly, wondering how to break through the ice that encrusted him. 'But even a donkey at times may need a friend—even a painter.'

'Possibly, but the donkey trusts neither friend nor man.'

'Nor himself, possibly.' His obstinacy enraged her. Yet he stood listening to the voice of loyalty screaming within. 'They' said of him that his gallantries were steeped through

with a technique as brilliant as his work—a man so drowned in passion it reduced arrogance to humility and loyalty to silence. Her eyes settled, darkening with determination. 'But perhaps in the future *some* friendship will be more necessary to you than others. Allow me. Congratulations! Yet if I may criticize so august a personage as you have become, *señor*, you went at the royal chapel as if church interiors should remind one of the Queen's boudoir.'

'As they do.' He mirrored her irony.

She laughed, gave him one probing glance and shut him out with her fan as Bayeu, with a sheep's nose for browsing in rich pastures, minced forward. Carlota turned away.

'You are doing well, José, for an inexperienced man.' Bayeu was offensively servile, green with jealousy.

'You overwhelm me!' José despised the small-souled. Bayeu, feeling he had made an impression, strolled back to the *Condesa* Grimaldi whose hennaed head still turned towards the new painter.

'That fool! from Seville?' she said to Bayeu. 'Fools pay for their folly in time, my friend.' She winked at Bayeu, understandingly.

José was presented to Godoy, the Queen's lover; to Pignatelli, and to the Count Grimaldi, as weak a man as ever needed keeping from certain influences. Liveried lackeys resplendent in gold and red passed ices and sweets. Great personages prowled about looking for favours. The Queen, engrossed with Godoy, departed with him, and to entertain José left with him her favourite lady-in-waiting, an unmarried spinster of fifteen whose religious scruples were so virginal she considered bathing a sin, so she informed him.

'For a woman, even in privacy, to remove her clothing is a shocking indelicacy!' For five wasted minutes, while his eyes secretly sought Carlota, he listened to this virgin talk about Holy Water with an amorous air.

'And you, *señorita*, talk about priests and lovers,' at last he burst out. 'Why have you nothing more natural and substantial to show?'

Mistaking his glance for admiration the lady-in-waiting

lowered vacant eyes and tittered, and José, seeking Carlota, found her gone. Without ceremony, he left the reception given in his honour and strode down the crimson-carpeted stairs and out of the Palace; across the Prado into the Alameda. There in the shade of late day he stood like a man carved from rock, unheeding people who recognized him, his eyes throwing back a blank wall.

The unexpected social equality accorded him by Their Majesties was scandalous and bit every politician in Madrid. The flattery of the Queen alone was enough to addle his wits, for she found the new painter handsome, diverting, and the boldness straddling his tongue delighted her. Never before at the Court of Spain had a plain man, a peasant of violent blood, occupied so unique a position; nor one with truthfuller tongue, nor a greater flair for painting. The most trivial word he uttered became a crowning distinction and was quoted everywhere. His arrogance was envied, gossiped about, and entertained a jaded circle circumscribed by the sternest etiquette. The élite, oppressed by the eternal traditional round of ceremonies and formalities, were both piqued and furious. And he became the rage.

José had reached dizzy heights. But she whom he most wished to consult, whose intelligence would stimulate creativeness—the woman he madly desired kept aloof. At the Casa Amala he spent hours discussing with the *duque* ('my friend', he would think bitterly) all manner of topics. Yet never once since his royal reception had he seen her. He became irritable, irritated by the shams and hypocrisies, dishonesties of intrigue, the artificialities about him. The glamour of Court honours began to grow dim, as clear glass is smudged by oily smoke. And he found himself caged in a noble, dull, flagrantly exotic and decadent circle!

Jesú! Money ruled. Here where there was inertia of mind and soul among a debased, degraded aristocracy with nothing but wastage and lascivious idleness and gold amours, there was not one natural passion! Every dame had her *cortejo*. That yellow old sow Grimaldi had a new amour a week. Women were worn out at thirty. The ceremonies in the Throne Room were comedies with every

Court *señora* a scented doll looking for new lovers. As for the men—Tst! so debauched in unnatural ways they were an offence. Thus José was circled about by a morale enfeebled by low, debauched intellects, and the elegant outsides of life began to mean nothing to him, except more arrogance, more contempt. Money was perfumed. Beneath the royal circle devoted to etiquette and traditions, swelled an undertow of slander and licentiousness! Beneath the proud colours of Spain surged turgid worlds of servile nobility dedicated, outwardly, to perpetuate aristocratic authority—and inwardly to their own personal ignoble lusts. . . .

How he enjoyed shocking the Court! although he only shocked it into a higher esteem of his own audacious genius. A lesser man would have talked himself into the bonfires of the Inquisition. He indulged his tongue; and his popularity increased. One day, before a group of sycophants at the Palace clustered about the King, who now always expected something amusing from him, José dared: 'Your Majesty, I know no hero-worship. I would not paint a halo about my own head—much less about yours!' And it so delighted everyone, including the King himself, that all Madrid mulled over it. Orders began to come to him. His 'Crucifixion' was causing talk. The *Duque* of Amala now hung two of his Italian canvases on the walls of the *Academia* despite the wily Bayeu's challenge that they were 'not representative of Spain'. Amala gave an order for two more. José saw with grim realization the price he must pay for the ducal patronage. He thought of himself, bitterly, as a bird of plumage decaying in his own hands, for he must live, and to live must he not please? The little army of *niños* on the road to Toledo had been increasing and he knew by experience that hunger and want are no stimulus to creativeness. Coppers alone bring in the bacon! So he settled down, again, the artist in the man struggling to please himself and please his patrons and the Court. He fell into the old rages, volcanic, unreasonable, and spent them on royal and unroyal heads alike; he was considered more picturesque, more amusing.

'To-day' (he wrote the Padre) 'I delivered to the King a new picture which he commanded me to paint for his brother, Don Luis, who still refuses to patronize me. I have the felicity (?) of pleasing the King. His Majesty not only spoke of his praise but put his hand on my shoulder, enraging me.'

More orders poured in. José wrote a little later:

'I had established myself an enviable mode of life. I no longer danced attendance on an ante-chamber; if anybody wanted anything of mine he had to come to me. I was much sought after, but if it was not anybody in a high position, or to oblige a friend, I work for none.'

By now he was a privileged guest at the palace of the *Marquesa* of Santa Cruz, and yet encased in gloom; a man driving nails with his head, a welcome guest at the Casa Amala, with the mistress of that great mansion keeping aloof. But if she avoided him for her own reasons she kept abreast with his progress, even at times seeing her lord's artistic flair was kept at boiling-point. Meanwhile José raged and worked in a perpetual domestic din, aware of a brilliant emerald etched with the Crucifixion held in cool, smooth but powerful hand, warning him. . . .

It can never be said the Bourbons possessed engaging personalities, and upon the throne of Spain sat a mean-souled, shifty monarch beside a fat, notorious consort with whom he remained in love throughout her disreputable life—or in spite of it. The King, serenely stupid except in one of his rages, could not understand why Godoy, the Queen's lover, could afford finer horses than his own. That was how dumb the King was. But between this royal pair and Godoy, who became attached to José from the first, attentions and favours continued to be showered upon him. One day it would be an order for a portrait, and the next cartoons for designs for tapestries for the Queen's apartment. While Mengs was engaged to execute designs also for the King in an effort to revive the Royal Tapestry works

at Santa Bárbara, where friend Castillo also worked. So José, with a flash of devilry, knowing Mengs's bloodless purity of style, decided to shock him. He designed sweetly pretty travesties on country life of that impossible and ridiculous age of Boucher, in France. As a result for twenty-five years he continued to design tapestries!

His fame spread from the taverns of Toledo to the Grottoes of Málaga. The royal patronage increased. So did his income. He was given by the Crown fifty pesetas a year. He was given a house—an ugly grey cube of a place built in the reign of Charles the Third. The house and the assured income allowed him a definite freedom, and he now worked in a sadly needed atelier of his own, bored by a continuous monotony of empty ceremonies at Court and plunging into a fresh orgy of painting. He painted a portrait of himself, a portrait of Mengs and a portrait of Bayeu. His own portrait in bold brilliant realism was that of a keen, high-hatted English squire looking out of laughing eyes in a rather cocky head, with the sensual lower lip of one who got what he went after. The industrious Mengs he painted like a soured saint, while the portrait of Bayeu looked much like a vain, irascible horse-dealer. Yet his growth as a genius was slower than his notoriety in the boudoir.

One day he was summoned before His Majesty to consult with him about the set of tapestries for the Queen. Whether he remembered or not the Court was in mourning—it would not have mattered—having passed the outer sentry in his box, he was halted by another guard at the foot of the grand staircase inside.

'I demand to pass, the King summons me,' he cried imperiously.

'You cannot pass. You defy the traditions of the Court.'

'You shall pay for this.'

'And you for *that!*' The guard pointed down at José's white cotton stockings, where traditional mourning-black should have been.

José stared at the crimson walls, at the crystal chandelier —and was inspired.

'All Spain cannot prevent my appearing before the King. Fetch me ink and quills!' The bewildered guard dared not refuse the King's favourite, and at once José retired into a small ante-room, to emerge, upon his well-turned legs the same white stockings painted over with bold, black, impudent sketches of all the prominent grandees at Court, those he most despised.

The King, greeting him with a slow mounting purple on the royal countenance, relaxed into an explosion of less royal laughter. In fact His Majesty rocked in childlike glee, and when he got his royal breath and could muster speech he held his sides and roared: 'You deserve to be flayed alive, torn on the rack—but your devilish cleverness compels me to spare Spain so great a wit and painter.' And the royal personage chuckled very much like an ordinary person.

When José found his impertinences cost him nothing, he furnished more. But on the whole, bereft of Carlota, his work absorbed him. That year he painted prodigiously and burned himself out. His depression was genuine and affected his health. He wrote to the Padre in Fuendetodas: 'I have lost all strength and work very little. Pray to the Madonna that she may give me pleasure in my work!' Which letter was a betrayal of his complex soul, since all his life he had hurled anathema at anything to do with churchly office.

Bayeu, hearing the latest audacity, turned liver-colour with horror and envy, and went as fast as his legs would carry him to his friend the *Condesa* Grimaldi. 'Is it to be supposed,' he raved, 'that this upstart, this dog of a gipsy, this' (word unmentionable) 'shall pick all the plums?' And his bullet-eyes shot back a venom lurking in her own. The vulgar red-head nodded. Bayeu put his brown lean finger down his nose and winked, slightly comforted, since those wicked eyes said, 'We will yet hook this devil.'

Bayeu grew impatient. His dog of a brother-in-law was the outstanding figure in Madrid. Wherever he went the fuming man heard quoted this *'lumbino's* latest audacity either in paint or love. Or he saw him in company with the *Duque* of Amala, or with the King at the theatre, or at

the bull-ring with those popular and dissolute bull-fighters, Costillares and Romero, both of whom were openly disputing for the favours of the *Duquesa* Osuna. Bayeu raved and schemed and pulled wires against that commanding figure daring to appear in the peasant's blouse when it suited his mood; also, if it pleased him, in a great coat of olive with sheer white-lined blouse with lace jabot and white canvas breeches, his black crisp hair brushed back and slicked with pomade. Bayeu chewed on his hatred while José continued to break every law in the land, ridicule society, Court etiquette, furnish pleasant gossip for all—while he grew in favour.

One day, bidden to appear at the Palace, he walked to the dining-apartment of Their Majesties, when he should have first visited the separate rooms where the royal entourage dined. He paused in the doorway. Pages were presenting the royal dishes to the lord-in-waiting, who in turn placed them on the table before the august palate. Noble favourites stood beside the King tasting food and water and wine, kneeling to present what was above suspicion. José made note of the fawning and grimacing at each royal nod; the over-attentive Inquisitor-General, the obsequious Captain of the Guard, the Ambassador, and the Court Physician whose bulbous nose José was measuring with careful eye, which aslant fell, to his amazement, upon that malicious noble, Don Jaime. That one-time tattered gentleman shone in rich raiment. Restored to royal favour he turned towards the King the same cruel, calculating eyes and a once-ragged grey beard immaculately barbered. As it was no unusual matter for a noble to escape the clutches of the loan-monger by winning some lottery, José's instinct told him what had happened, and he smiled on Don Jaime, who, seeing him, chose not to see him. José strolled deliberately across the room.

'*Señor!* You are pleased to be too familiar!'

'I am pleased rather to be curious, Don Jaime!'

Don Jaime, mellow with wine, decided on the policy of recognition now that the King's favourite painter stood before him. He rose and weaving his arm into José's strolled

with him to the window, where behind the folds of yellow damask hangings, a sweet drowsiness plunged him immediately into his life-long habit of gossip, and with a delicate finger laid along his inquisitive nose, he whispered, 'I am glad of this opportunity to warn you, my friend. The Queen is—ah! yes, she is! And more in love with men than men with her. The King is wax in her hands.'

'You impress me—since you are restored to power.'

Don Jaime missed the irony and tittered: 'His Majesty knows nothing! Right beneath his nose the Queen is raising her lover—Godoy—you know Godoy? the Guardsman? Raising him to dangerous power. The Queen! Ha! ha! ha! entertains herself with back-stairs intrigues. I know of escapades like those of her own kitchen wenches!'

'You surprise me, *señor*.'

'You are still an innocent? Hoh! The Queen has already granted Godoy a large income. Would that I were younger —but no matter—I envy him. Ssh! I think our royal schemer means to put him on the throne.' Don Jaime sighed.

'You cannot mean . . .'

'Not that—no, I mean if she can! And if so the Crown will need the protection of the *Guardia de Corps*, my friend, for the troops will line the road from the Palace as far as the eye can see. Godoy—a clever scoundrel—he handles her and the King like pawns.'

'That is a bold statement, Don Jaime.'

'I am informed you are about to paint the portrait of the *Duquesa* of Amala, eh? She returns soon to the arms of her—shall I say loving lord?'

'Why should she not return?'

'Hoh! You do not know the pride of our friend Amala—I see!'

There was no time to demand Don Jaime's hidden meaning, for the King was passing out to his private apartments, and obeisances must be made, and Don Jaime tottered back towards another goblet of the King's wine. Returning! Gossip had Carlota an eccentric, a traveller (a thing of suspicion) given to modern ideas on freedom, dangerous indulgences in learning, over-study of the clas-

sics, neglecting her lord the *duque*, and, in fact, having all those things a woman of intellect would be to people of no intellect.

The following afternoon in his new atelier, in brutal rapture he was perfecting the Court Physician's portrait before him, when without waiting to be announced in walked Don Jaime. Irritated at being interrupted, José with dripping brush indicated a chair and went back to the more interesting matter of doing that nose. Don Jaime, exuding a vulgar perfume—musk was the vogue for gentlemen—took his own time before seating himself on a yellow damask sofa from where he watched José at work. Presently, since his malicious tongue would no longer be still, he began, 'Since this atelier presented to you by the Crown is becoming a Mecca for all Spain's important personages, I decided to observe for myself the secret of your magnetism and power!' Don Jaime leered pleasantly.

'Tst!' José inclined his head and painted on resentfully.

'As you saw, I myself once more enjoy royal favours, but, Holy Virgin—you far more than I.'

'Royal favour—but hospitality is still my own!' José recalled his sinister meaning in referring to Carlota yesterday. Over the face of the meddler came a malicious smile.

'Ah, well, to obtain gifts from the gods one must always kneel.'

'One or two dare to stand upright.'

'Few, my friend, few. Where are they?'

José swung around with his paint-brush to his own chest. Don Jaime's eyes wavered, and his tongue settled on a tastier subject, for the moment.

'The King's new French chef makes a saffron sauce much to my taste.' He blew a kiss to the room. 'And not all men are endowed with so sensitive a palate as my own. The average tongue is vulgar—our poor Carlists, for example, now being sold over the border, carted over the frontier in the dark like bundles of hay—hungry this very moment, I warrant you—but what could they taste like myself?'

José's temper rose as he flung another mound on the medical nose.

'How do you get on with that political rascal Bayeu, your brother-in-law?' broke in the tattler, wickedly smiling.

'By leaving him alone! We have nothing in common. I am a pagan—he an Academician.'

'Hoh! But look to your laurels nevertheless,' tittered this unwelcome guest. 'Bayeu, I happen to know, is eaten with jealousy since your recent honour. He will do everything in his power to dislodge you, mark my words. He—and his friend the *Condesa* Grimaldi. What, my friend, did you do to the powerful lady—ignore her?'

'Does a sane man enjoy fruit that rots on the tree?'

'Well, my friend, the talk is that in her you have an enemy. I warn you as a fond friend. The talk is, too, that the King is no longer blind to what goes on between Her Majesty and that rogue of hers, Godoy. Over the wine last night it was said that she is about to make him Prime Minister.'

'In a pack there must always be a leader.'

Don Jaime suddenly relinquished the luxury of his silken cushions and mincing across the floor stood behind José, examining the portrait over his shoulder.

'I perceive that you paint in the egg medium, eh? quite original. Bayeu uses too much bitumen.'

The keenness of this unexpected insight mollified José. And now the scented effeminate, regarding a nose of blatant realism and the whole of an obscene life in eyes that struck you cold, observed: 'How you mock, my friend! You are more satirist than you know.' Saying which he crossed the atelier and again sank down delightfully inert among the brocade cushions, and from there called out, 'You have a gift for seeing the weaker side of nature. There!' The white hand gestured towards the portrait of a famous general well known to Court, lying against the wall. 'In that face one sees ferocity engendered by the trade of killing. I presume that is your meaning?'

'You presume right. The honest mind doesn't deliberate over an ugly truth.' To rid himself of this intrusion José

pulled the bell-rope for the servant to bring refreshments. His mood was spoiled, and more than annoyed he went striding up and down the room, while Don Jaime clacked on: 'The *Duquesa* of Amala arrives to-morrow, to sit to you? You seem not to be in her graces, eh? She has a mind of her own, this tame savage of the *duque's*. We agree woman needs charm, yes? But the *duque's* wife has so much of it that the Queen saw fit to banish her to Andalusia. Hah! I surprise you? All her learning avails her nothing now where Her Majesty is concerned.'

'What does it please you to imply, *señor?* Speak!' Rigid in front of the man, stood José.

'Only, *amigo*, that the Queen is jealous of her Godoy.' He leaned forward, leering. 'She is irritatingly beautiful, this Carlota. She has brilliance and erudition, we admit, but . . .' José saw through a hot haze a white ruffled wrist flung out, reach for a scented handkerchief, wave the fine rag under the pinched nose before airily announcing, 'You ask why? my innocent. Because Carlota's beauty so intrigues Godoy he would have her for his mistress.'

'Bastard. . . . Liar. . . . God strike you dead!' From a near-by table flashed a dagger and a man lunged, but rage curtained the liar and gave him time to jerk to one side and fall to the floor, escaping the dagger which pinned the wall where his head had just been. He rolled under the sofa, pushing it in front of him like a barricade, and from there, with a face the colour of a fish long out of water, peered out and sneered: 'One easily imagines that you may have already found favour with the *duquesa*—in secret—even more than the handsome Guardsman.'

'First—out your foul lying tongue—and then . . .' José was on him—or would have been if the sofa had not been violently jammed against his shin. He lunged again, and this time caught the baggy folds of the effete throat, hauled the liar up by it over the back of the sofa on to the seat and was shaking him as a terrier a rat, when a scream and a crash stayed him.

'*Señor* Painter—Master!' The little serving-maid in the doorway had dropped her tray in terror and stood wringing

her hands, screaming, which timely noise gave Don Jaime chance to rise and shove a table between him and the painter, and say mockingly: '*Gracias! Señorita*, I owe my life to—to . . .'

'To the humble who reminded me in time that my hands are worthy only to cut out clean tongues. But I assure you any future hospitality here means a cup with something in it more effective than chocolate. . . . Bah!' From the pinked shoulder trickled down a bright red stain on to an already stained being.

'Show this man first to a bandage and then to the door,' commanded José, turning from the trembling servant to his canvas in sardonic silence, and leaving the inwardly foaming, noble *señor* making his way after the servant, pledging revenge silently. . . . '*His* Carlota—Godoy!' The thought guillotined him; trailed over the canvas frenzying him, yet with only remembrance grounded in his soul as a flower grows in the fissure of a rock; remembrance like a valley in Paradise where his burning-eyed love could never be doubted. Nevertheless the thought of Godoy lodged in him poisonously.

June: Their Majesties were to go into residence at Aranjuez, where they remained throughout the month. José, summoned to pay his informal adieux, was ensconced in the royal box off the Buen Retiro where a special entertainment was being given. A new variety of acts; a Tonadilla; a poet reciting doubtful couplets; a blind man and a dwarf doing monkey-tricks. José was aware only of a ravishing disquietude—Carlota—sitting beside the King: Carlota! conscious only of a rapturous fruition; he transported to a world of brocaded flesh and stars glowing like the heart of an opal. Yet his face was cold and steeled, passive, as his eyes pierced the dark where a fan waved against the heavy air, hiding, waving, revealing that seducing bosom.

'*Ser-eno!* . . . *Ser-eno!*' It floated over the city and into the theatre. 'Serene, eh?' He was penetrating the darkness beyond that waving fan where his deity sat, when the play ended, to be abruptly galvanized by hearing Carlota, with

the courage of pirates in her breast, defy etiquette by saying to the King: 'Your Majesty!' (How graciously she bowed!) 'To complete a perfect evening I desire, with your permission, sire, to go to the atelier of this famous man by your side. I have long had a great curiosity about his work—to see for myself, since men of prominence sit for their portraits.' Carlota's eyes held the King's eyes playfully.

'Will your Majesty honour me by accompanying her Excellency?' José heard his own voice, yet not his. But it happened His Majesty was in no art-loving mood, and when the liveried page drew aside the gold and red damask hangings and the King was gone, a painter whose passion had not weakened during an eternity of longing found himself outside the theatre door; protecting something exquisite from that pack of humans who for ever wait outside doors for a glimpse of greatness. A far-away, flute-like voice dismissed a coach, ordered a servant—and said to him (with a burning eye on the night): 'Moonlight! Ah, *señor*, too great an ecstasy to stifle within a coach. One prefers to drown in its aching sweetness. . . . Or to float down its silver river, with—shall we say—a friend?'

So this voltaic personage with the fierce pride of Saracens was trolled along like a falcon hooded and chained to a shapely wrist. Tapping on very earthy silver heels beneath swaying petticoats, wrapped in a rare shawl of ivory lace, her beautiful bosom bared to the night—beating as if doves nested there—her lively tongue vied with the tattoo of her fan. At a protective but discreet distance behind, lumbered Concepción with round, intent, seal-like eyes upon her beloved mistress, wondering why Her Excellency's orange-red satin dress weighted down with lace flounces of black, and the low black velvet evening bodice embroidered with gold looked all one colour in the white moonlight. ('They' said of Carlota what 'they' always say of beautiful women with salt in their blood, that woman is the seducer. Yet Carlota was merely loving. 'They' said the women of Spain demand much wooing—but what woman does not? So you are left to believe what you like.) Having an intellect Carlota knew that wisdom consists not

in seeing life but in seeing through life. Being a woman she knew that absence coils the heart-strings to swifter uncoiling. Being a duchess—and what a duchess!—Carlota was no longer interested in her position because of that she was quite sure. *'Ser-eno!'* It echoed the tapping of her footsteps. José moved so quietly that Carlota looked up at him and smiled. *'Ser-eno! Señor?'* Her fan patted her cheek, cold as her tongue was lively. But when José clanged the great steel knocker at his atelier door, even with her abundance of daring, her tongue was dry and hot and cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

In the atelier, one by one in their tall steel sticks candles flickered into flame, the better to light Her Excellency's way in. But before even the third candle sputtered, her silver heels tapped impatiently about the marble floor like wild familiar bells ringing in the room. And at the lighting of the last candle she halted before the easel, curiously alive and near dead from the sudden fit of swooning on her and the hot humming of wires that ran from heart to finger-tips, back to her beating breast, thence to brain and knees—and now all mixed up with something in herself singing a beatitude! Then, with great effort, sommoning her most languorous gesture, she flung aside the tapestry covering the portrait and saw—not the Duke of Wellington's—but her own. . . .

'Ah!' The sigh floated above the room splitting up into bright pulsing prisms, hiding a heart overflowing, and flowing into two hearts, her own, this man's, who was dissolving into her completion. She turned, and a small hand flew out, where she could not see for joy, nor for wondering if there could ever be enough of such bliss on earth as she saw the betrayal of his heart in that portrait of herself. Her eyes opened on his. 'You have robbed me, señor. A portrait was to be my excuse for coming—to give you a commission for my portrait but now—what will the gossips say now?' Carlota laughed sweetly. 'What will gossip say to these and about you?' Gossip was to say plenty, Carlota was to discover. For in the two later portraits of this lively lady his genius immortalized his mistress.

And for that, having bitten into the iron virtue of the Church, the Inquisition put down against him one more black mark. In one portrait her nervous body was outstretched upon a couch designed for love; her tense mobile limbs, her quivering bosom accented in especial places with vivid carmine, expressed exactly what he intended to express, José's whole passionate experience. In the other portrait the *duquesa* was clothed in a *bolero* of mustard-coloured cloth, white lace trim, white gown shading from lavender to dove-grey, silvery sash suffusing the claret and yellow slippers; while she looked out at the world with dark eyes gleaming with hidden fire and breathing expectancy. And it was doubtful which portrait was the more naked of the two. But the clothed one was prepared for a ducal eye whenever that personage desired to inspect the Master's newest picture. And would he not have been surprised to find his *señora's* portrait which challenged the balance of all the Saint Anthonys in Christendom?

'*Excellencia!* Carlota. . . . I am unworthy.'

'*Tiens!* Is it because I have been away? It is unworthy of you to be so stiff with me—still—such words are the stuff of lies and intrigues from which I have been running all my life!' And at last secure again in a bondage that held him to her and ready to meet any issue, this poised but reckless *señora* loved with overwhelming honesty. . . . 'Is not my ruse brilliant?' she asked. 'Why must we go on escaping as we have escaped each other this long dead time when I was in Andalusia?'

But thoughts of Godoy stung him like scorpions as he regarded his ideal of love.

'What, to your intelligence, does my work lack?' he asked abruptly, nodding his head towards the portrait.

'*Nothing!*' She smiled gaily. 'You have already the highest of all attainments—knowing what you want! But what *do* you want?' she teased suddenly. 'Who knows of our secret love but you—something you hid from me? . . . Ah, my friend, virtue is a matter of intent! I assure you the heart knows more than the mind!' Her hand fluttered to her bosom to stay its beating. She looked deeper into his eyes.

'Curious—curious that you painted *that*, and steeled yourself against me! But good heavens! the *duque's* lady allows her tongue to ramble over-long when she came only to view the portrait of a great man from over the sea.' She laughed quietly. 'To-morrow it will circle the city how the *duquesa* Amala defied etiquette and went alone to the atelier of the favourite Court Painter. So you will graciously remove my portrait—which you might paint out in order to paint in again—and replace it with the next. Meanwhile I study the features of this English Duke, so I may tell parrot-like each point, to my lord. To-morrow the *duque* will question why I dared outrage him by this visit—if I chance to tell him. . . .' The rest was lost. She was crushed against her lover's breast and there was no breath in her.

With a sigh of cobweb weight covering a heart already light with rapture she went breezing like a delicious mountain zephyr, about the high dignified chamber, regarding its deep sunk cedar beams, tapping with grace her folded fan on the palm of one hand; humming, touching with naïve concern the crimson and gold-threaded damask walls, the pearl-sewn copes (wrested cunningly from the Thieves' Market). And then, like a sweet determined child who knows what it wants and furthermore gets it, she sat on each black walnut chair, stepped carefully on every marble block on the floor, from one pink square to one black square pinned down with shining hand-wrought pegs of copper. She went touching all the candlesticks. And when she was done with that she breathed, 'Heaven be praised,' and settled herself comfortably on the same yellow sofa on which Don Jaime had vilified her. 'A far more regal room than the Throne Room in the Palace,' she murmured, looking around. 'Peace and repose—a room to dream in, eh?—a room to love in!—and if heaven were half so sweet I would gladly die now—and I'm near dead at that!'

The blood rushing to his heart savagely, suffocated him, and he sat on the cushion at her feet, his eyes ravished by her lips, toying with the cushion's scarlet tassel as if to bind her to him for ever. While she, knowing her own mind, was determined now to have her fill of love too great

to be borne alone. After a marked silence her sweet, light voice announced in her engaging way: '*Señor* painter, you might paint another portrait of me.' Silent, as his hand caressed her, he made no reply. After another pause she asked, 'And how would you have me?' It bore a double meaning, and all control snapped. The restraint of her long absence crouching within surged to his lips.

'Here—always here against my heart—my white Flower.'

'I knew it . . . I knew it!' she scarcely breathed, 'but openly, frankly now, my Crusader.'

And as he released his pent-up longing she no longer denied him. . . .

'Shall we forget that first day, you and I? That first day when I learned what it means to live? To love? What will they say of us now, my love? Does it matter that my lord *duque* is a politician—and a cruel one?'

'Politician?—an ugly word! I am not to be bought. Loyalty? my sweet. . . . I cannot lose you. . . .'

'Nor shall you—providing . . .'

'No provisions in love.'

'Queen of Heaven—what a man! Would you have a dagger in your spine to-morrow? And if the *duque's* friendship can hold tight, why not my own longer?'

'Too great a price for you—but why were you away?' he burst out, burning to give her again and again the transports of his life-blood, his very soul; his hand moving over her warm body.

'My marriage was one of convenience—a barren affair. Amala would have me, as he has had other women—but not on my terms—and he has been, well—a possessive husband! Kind in giving me my way—since he found no other way would do! But he has not the ways of the heart prized by such a woman as I. I owed him the respect of his position—now I owe more to *my* life—my life to you—*far* more! Ah, life, overflowing. What is there to living if life fails to exalt?'

He sat with her, listening to her voice pouring out from her loveless life like a sluice-gate opened and letting through natural waters long dammed. One by one candles went

out. She lingered, recklessly, indiscreetly, amazingly poised, madly in love, maddeningly lovingly close against her handsome lover.

'Love comes! Love is—it stays—or it goes! Is there any answer to that? A-ah, my friend, the heart teaches how to love more than the mind. The more I learn from books the less I live! Why did I stay away?—you have heard gross tales about me. Only to you would I stoop to explain. At Court there is one mind a shade darker than the rest. Godoy's! *Sí, sí*, he is your friend, but he will never forgive me for criticizing his trickeries. You understand?' He understood, raging silently, loving her the more.

'Then all is well.' Suddenly she sprang up and mocked him, in high spirits. 'I cannot tell, *señor*, when I shall sit for that new portrait—let us keep to the sweet excitement of uncertainty. It is stimulating to hold tight to the dream in one's heart secretly. . . .' She paused. 'We are not *canaille* you and I. Let us be guided by something waited for, something longed for until . . . until . . .'

Dawn: she was in the doorway blowing him a kiss and poking Concepción, rolled up in a ball of sleep outside the atelier door.

A bottle of Tokay cloaked in a willow lined with the green leaves of Barbary figs found its way into a famous painter's atelier, a symbol of the wine of life; a ring of pure gold from Rome—fashioned in the heads of two mighty bulls, the horns carved to hold a ruby, the deep red of heart's blood. More than symbol, it was a bond of passion, of crusading and faith, which, in the face of slander, or the unexpected manœuvrings of a misunderstanding *duque*, would for ever remain the emblem of eternal trust.

The day for the sitting of that portrait was postponed. And José, in iron chains of circumstance at last forged by that pest Bayeu, travelled to Saragossa on a pressing matter, two pressing matters, one Picazzo himself, the other Josefa. The year previous José left Madrid for Saragossa to assist under Bayeu, in redecorating the church of El Pilar. And after standing his unbearable, obviously insulting authority

over him, they quarrelled. Bayeu, looking upon his own position as Arbiter of the *Academia* in the light of a saintly endowment, had not grown more complacent over José's accumulating triumphs. Since their quarrel, which publicly disputed his talents as painter and instructor, Bayeu, within a sour ferment, consulted the insulted Grimaldi, too ready to aid him now in his plans for revenge. So between them —as if by accident—Bayeu's bullet-eyes shot straight and deadly hot into the Holy City of Saragossa, recalling to the pious members of El Pilar's Holy Chapter his relative's early work in the Pilar church; likewise reminding them how impious were all José's frescoes and spandrels of fleshly bawds in churchly trimmings. There they were still brightening the gloomy dome, nave and vault over the *Coro* in that dark but sacred edifice.

So Bayeu—the ferret—shot poison into the Holy Brothers, honest, simple folks who did not know planes from pigment. But as José's many commissions still came from the church which saw no reason to offend the Crown, Bayeu's pleasing business took longer to accomplish than he expected. He had journeyed to and from Saragossa several times during the year to keep alive the hot fire he started. Twice the Chapter of El Pilar weighed and dropped the matter; and then the wily man grew desperate. Finally one day he crossed himself devoutly and slyly poured into the Canon's ear how this impious firebrand painted too earthily the bodies of his female saints!

'Should these Holy Brothers of El Pilar,' asked the servile Bayeu piously, 'dedicated to the service of God, continue to be tempted to carnal thoughts by his vulgar paintings which surround them? This—this *Vicio*—bah! a dauber, who paints angelic forms with the plump and venal lure of trollops. Is it meet?' The Canon thought it was not meet. That so sencouraged Bayeu he shot his small eyes and his hand upward to the dome of the church and suggested: 'Can it be that his fleshly infants with large pink buttocks and without the illusion of divine origin —can be cherubs?' And again the Canon thought not. 'Then . . .' Bayeu, knowing that José discredited here

would be discredited everywhere, thrust his long jaw against the Canon's ear-drum and sealed it tight with extra evidence.

'Then the one way of wiping out such a sin against Heaven, Reverend Father, is to replace his unholy fancies with my own, purely classic conceptions. *I* paint for God alone! the Queen of Heaven and her Holy Office!' And thus having got a hot fire started, José was forced to defend himself, and show just cause why he should not be allowed to desecrate the Church further, or retain his enviable position there. Go he must, and with him Josefa. The matter of her health, in the opinion of the Court Physician whose portrait was not yet finished, was imperative. He, flattered to be perpetuated by the King's favourite, to return the courtesy had several times looked in on the ailing woman awaiting her thirteenth child. He found her languid, pallid. She had a lack-lustre look and languished. 'Physic,' advised he. Josefa drooped. 'Cupping,' said he. She developed vapours. 'Leeches then,' and she grew worse. 'Then, *señor*,' said this great wise man, 'hers is a baffling condition. She would benefit by a change of air, a journey, perhaps, into a different clime, and all would be well.'

Before dawn, one morning, the painter's coach so familiar to Madrid rattled over the cobbles of the Plaza Santa Cruz and out upon the King's highway, making for Saragossa. The great coach on four huge red wheels swayed and creaked and banged over the stones in the muddy road while the driver perched high in front shouted his horses to a gallop. Within, on richly tasselled cushions sat the furious José, his handsome face cold as marble, his brilliant eyes looking straight ahead—which was the driver's seat. Beside him, placed as carefully as his other luggage, was Josefa, jouncing about, wrapped in her wifely garment of silence, and tingling not a little with pleasure since this was her first excursion since long ago. Private anxiety lined her patient face. She had seen a bad omen at the city gate—a man carrying a little coffin with glass front; within a beautiful boy with small, waxy hands filled with pink rosebuds and silver-paper flowers. Josefa, feeling the coach swinging with perilous gyrations, knew that

disaster hung over her. Being a religious woman, with a shudder she resigned herself into God's hands while her pallid face at the coach-window looked out over the distant Guadarramas where an ivory light poured down. Sparrows began to twitter. March coming up from Africa had brought another spring to Spain, green patches of grass and anemones and azaleas and red and blue stars to the land, dreams to youth, and hope for the aged. The springless vehicle rattled along under a sky like a sea of milk, and Josefa, poor lady, saw little and felt everything. She had cause to worry when for a moment she forgot God. Bandits lurked everywhere; she had seen one bear, and heard the unmistakable curdling bellow of wild bulls. She sighed and accepted the rattling and creaking under her, silently. 'Hoh—an olive tree in bloom,' said she, which, considering her state, were heroic words. But her man, bemused, sat beside her, every pebble struck, every turn of the wheel, the sound of a bird-voice, circling about Carlota—then circled less hotly about the *duque!* He could feel the swish of Carlota's petticoats on the marble floor of his atelier.

The tawny road crawled away into a narrow serpentine cow-path. Then into hills; up, past a rushing white torrent; and into a cool black mountain pass. On the top of the mountain, the sun like freshly washed gold rested as before the altar of heaven. Boulders of majestic height rose abruptly up, glinting, blue-grey and pink topaz; above this sparkled the sky, now a blinding blue. On rushed the horses, ascending and descending at a furious gallop over ruts and hollows, the coach swaying from one side of the road to the other. High up in front was the driver under his peaked hat, shouting and brandishing his long whip, and making a terrible commotion to keep the already winded, straining beasts at top speed—when with a terrific crack the coach collapsed, its spine broken. The axle snapped. The two lay inside prone upon their backs.

'*O Santa María Misericordia . . .!*' shrilled Elena.

'*Jesú! qué hombre!*' José struggled upright in a violent rage, thundering at the driver.

'*Por amor de Dios y Jesucristo!*' screamed the surprised driver, perched at a perilous angle and still unmercifully beating the horses struggling to the impossible task of going forward, or going at all. José extricated himself at last, and the sudden motion of shifted weight jolted the driver off his seat. He lay on his back in the road, without ceasing to curse, without stopping the horses. His fists groping for a stock of stones, hurled them one by one at the frightened horses' ears. His sash was bloody, his peaked cap missing, silver buttons ripped from his velveteen breeches, but the stones and the screams were intact. From his throat issued noises like a child being strangled, nevertheless each flying stone struck accurately the ear it was meant for. Within the coach the recumbent, uncomfortable Josefa in tears, cried: 'I will go no farther.'

'You *can* go no farther,' shouted José, more furious at such inanity. '*You can go no farther—woman!*'

The *majo* rolled on the ground and swore and continued to throw stones. The din continued while José stood in the March sun, in a world apart. At last he began to curse the *majo*, and the sound seemed to bring him back to his unfortunate wife. He dived head-foremost into the perpendicular coach, and dragging upright her rotund and panting body, brought her forth and settled her like a half-full sack of meal on a tuft of green grass. This movement disturbed the coach and off flew a hind-wheel and rolled away and lodged between two boulders. That liberated the two winded horses. The harness snapped, and shed of their trappings off they raced to find a meal for themselves. By this time the *majo's* heart bled for the ruined cushions inside the coach. He wept. He beat the earth in grief—(mixed with fear of punishment). The Master's cushions would be stolen, ruined, sold to the Thieves' Market, he yelled,. since there were now no horses to divert him.

'Stop!' roared José, and he seized the whip and gave the fool one or two healthy wallops on his black-and-blue buttocks. Josefa cried louder, being both kind-hearted and hysterical.

'Stop!' shouted José, and she stopped. But she began

again, and he turned on her, saw a woman troubled, and he went to her and lifted her up and held her trembling form. At last, with that inspiration that never failed him, he braided together the silken fringe of the coach cushions and made of them a saddle-bag; caught one of the now satisfied horses and fitted the bag on it. He placed Josefa up, put his dagger across her arm and he himself got up behind her holding her, and they set off on the journey at a comfortable walk. The *majo*, seeing that he was being left to the mercy of bandits and other animals such as boars and bulls, floundered to his feet and without so much as a groan went and caught the second horse and set out behind his master, at a discreet distance. José inquired, 'You are comfortable, my Josefa?' and that discommoded lady with her private pains rapidly increasing replied, 'On my way to Heaven,' which, considering everything, contained more than one meaning.

They plodded on, travelling four leagues in four hours in stony surroundings of ineffable silence. Nowhere were to be seen either human beings or human habitation. The jog turned into a walk, the walk into a stumbling pace and Josefa closed her eyes and prayed to God to deliver her in safety. It grew dark. Every few minutes, to propitiate his master and save his own neck, the *majo* would stop, dismount from his horse, feel ahead on the pitch-black road for obstacles such as rocks, robbers, skeletons or murderers, and then remount his horse. In the early morning the wearied beasts stumbled into a courtyard of the first inn in Saragossa—and José set out hurriedly in search of a midwife. But before he could return with one his last child shocked into the world, left it, and the midwife, knowing God was guarding the stricken man, went out in search of straws to be burnt to enable the little departed soul to go to Heaven on a pillar of smoke.

He made his way into the sacristy of El Pilar which smelled familiarly of incense and cold, neglected bodies and old cassocks, late for the conclave. For on his way he went into the nave of the church and stood before the Virgin on her pedestal of jasper, in her white dalmatic,

shining against her bronze and marble temple under the array of candles and silver lamps. Long before his arrival the Chapter had gathered in the sacristy to weigh this matter that so vitally concerned them, wholly ignorant to a man on matters of art but impressed by Bayeu's position in the *Academia* as well as by his political astuteness and forthright piety. Already they had passed a resolution entrusting their holy leader, the Canon, to impress upon this honoured but impious painter how grateful he ought to be to Bayeu—his relative in God—for his influence in obtaining commissions. But this idea, presented to José upon arriving before the Holy Brothers, did not seem to appeal to him. He was not grateful, he seemed even put out by someone's crafty, brainless lying, and rage burned up his gloom.

'By what right,' he thundered at the assembly, 'do your unworthy minds impose such a verdict on one who serves his country and his King with his whole soul? One who searches more honestly for truth than a dog of a trickster here I could mention?'

The Canon, greatly shocked, rose up somewhat like a beef-bone engulfed in black cloth, and displayed the anxiety of a searching heart by scratching the beads of sweat on his tonsure.

'By the laws of God,' he replied, grateful to the Queen of Heaven for inspiring him. And pointing towards José's mural Lady of Charity on the arch near the High Altar, declared, 'It lacks the decorum and Christian virtue required by the laws of the Church for the spiritual need of man.'

'Is there any among you who can *truthfully* define Art?' demanded José, his face mirroring the arrogance he felt. But this question only perplexed all concerned, and added to the sum of his own effrontery. Seated safely close to the Canon, Bayeu admonished his erring relative.

'The Chapter is more impressed by your lack of reverence,' said he, glib and smug. And then, righteously, José made a parade of his sincerity. He backed dramatically into a stone recess, folded his arms, and in what became

an embarrassing silence abandoned himself to their obvious uncertainty of procedure. Meanwhile he studied insolently the long, self-sanctified jaw of his bullet-headed relation, thinking, 'Those who live to fill their own bellies give others skimmed milk!' And into a significant pause he dramatically hurled: 'Would it please these Holy Gentlemen to have me spend my life holding an umbrella over my "Lady of Charity"—there—to protect their pious gaze from her tempting breasts?'

Shocked by the ribald and the unthinkable, a babble of voices arose. Those who knew nothing talked loudest. The King's favourite was proving more than an ecclesiastic problem! After a buzzing of tongues and a wagging of heads, to Bayeu fell the pleasant task of announcing the verdict—not yet entirely agreed upon. The pompous jealous little toady, strutted up from his chair on skinny legs and belched out: '*Señor!* This Holy Chapter resolves that as man and as artist you offend God! Therefore and hereafter you are not permitted again to touch, paint or design for arch, spandrel, ceiling or vault or dome, or any part of this sacred edifice dedicated in love to Our Most Holy Mother and her Divine Son!' Bayeu coughed—and humped down, suddenly realizing, what he had not previously, that inasmuch as all the space in the church to be painted was already painted by this devil, what availed the punishment? A sudden diplomacy on the part of the Canon, showed *him* a light not previously seen, namely, this decision might prove a political boomerang! Was it not, even at this late moment, better policy to keep in the good graces of the King through this painter, than otherwise? Besides, he was suddenly suspicious of being unduly influenced by Bayeu. The Canon rose, coughed and moved to adjourn the meeting, 'to meet again' in three days after further thought and prayer!

They met as proposed, and this time Bayeu, choking down his rage, heard the Chapter resolve 'To present a medal of honour to *Doña* Josefa, wife of the *Pintor* Goya in virtue of her being the sister of that great moralist and scholar and Arbiter of the *Academia* San Fernando, Bayeu.'

Furthermore, with the medal in hand José strode to the door of the sacristy, turned and flung it at his feet. The colour fled from the sour sly face, but being economical by nature, Bayeu bent down and secured it. A medal shown in a half-light and not *too* carefully scrutinized might prove of benefit some time! However, weighing the matter again he sent the medal to his sister, took horse out of Saragossa and rode sweating up to Madrid, nursing a bigger revenge and cursing these good but stupid Brothers he left behind.

Again destiny stepped in in favour of this despised relative. Already José had had the honour of being received kindly by Their Majesties when he presented his plates 'after Velázquez'. Buoyed up, he wrote: 'I could never have wished them to be more pleased than they showed themselves on seeing them.' Bayeu swallowed that, doomed to swallow more, for the next glory to crown this 'dog' was the unveiling of his seven altar-pieces. With José's Crucifixion, portraits and output in general, in spite of strong opposition by the continuously shocked *Academia* —and how he shocked them with his feel for flowing, curving flesh, and his furious drive against their artificialities —his altar-pieces for the Church of San Francisco el Grande were unveiled with great ceremony, in the presence of the King and Court. Madrid went wild. The church was crowded. Even the venomous Bayeu travelled in from Toledo to be present—and seen—among the prominent artists: Gregorio Furro, Calleja, Maella and José's friends, José del Castillo, and Bermúdez, the art critic, accompanying the happy architect of the church, Ventura Rodríguez. That was balm in Gilead, for once more José wrote, 'It has pleased God to comfort me.' But he might well have added, 'also the Count de Floridablanca and the royal family', who had had considerable to do with the affair.

Again Bayeu hoped for the worst, chewed his tongue, and plotted. But poor Bayeu, who saw ahead on his relation's gravestone an epitaph as long as your hand, never finished his famous inharmonious brother-in-law. Bayeu died. Had he lived, he would have died anyway at having to witness Goya's crowning triumph—Goya within two

years was made *Pintor de Cámara del Rey*—the greatest honour in the land. It meant more enemies, more friends, and more doubloons, although Goya was seldom in want, for he had no hesitancy in demanding payments for work brought him through what he considered a gilded if princely pauperism.

There now developed at Court a sort of royal triangle: the Queen, the *Condesa* Benavente, and the *Marquesa* de Z. all engaged in burning themselves up with jealousy over the *Duquesa* Amala. And later there developed for José a serious and perilous position which did nearly cost him his career, when the thin-legged, small-witted *señor* of the old red-headed hen Grimaldi, at her instruction, struck at him. For the Inquisition—with his old enemy the Basque still in office—waited secretly with counts piling up against him back in Saragossa.

Meanwhile Carlota, both exalted and depressed, sat over her tambour in her high wide cool chamber above the patio in the Casa Amala, where hot gold shadows re-patterned the mosaic floor; where the bougainvillæa climbed to her window offering a feast of new tender greens. Her woman's lively emotions stabbed her with every beat of her heart. She was transformed, her very existence renewed, her mind surprised with ecstasy, yet praying like an eager girl the fulfilment her body begged. Hers was no heart burdened with common intrigue. She was not what Don Jaime said of her, but with a woman's courage admitted she could not live without love. Time was commanding her body to wait no further, and then, upon José's return to Madrid—the *Duquesa* Amala rose up and defied every tradition she was born to, although the whole gossiping world of Madrid knew with a smile what she had been up to, and winked.

Sunk on the crimson cushion in the atelier, both heaven and hell in each flying moment, they would sit together in the violet velvet dusks in fullness of accord, awed by the poverty of words. José would recall the wenches of the past. What they evoked in the past was but a fierce exhausting undertow, whereas this passion exhilarated and

uplifted his heart to singing—and alas to a dirge. While his presence comforted her, Carlota's heart was asking, 'How much longer must I wait?' José's passion, having awakened the highest in him, fanned the fires of his sensibilities into a new creativeness. He loved her so, so it was said, 'that just to hear the rustle of her passing he could not eat'. But it was neither eating nor the lack of it that helped him suddenly to amaze Madrid with the new alchemy of his work. The *Duque* of Amala was quoted as saying, 'He justified my intelligence. He has become a crater boiling with all the passion of Spain.' That was after being at the atelier, where he stood before José's newest canvas, with the emerald held against his soft full lips.

'I am proud of you,' said he. 'Your work takes on new depth, finer balance, and greater richness in quality.' His words were soft and suave above the Crucifix in his hand.

'You honour me, Excellency! *Gracias—gracias!* You, too, *feel* the flesh-tones take on more luminosity.'

'They take on an embarrassment of life—they live!' and the ducal patron allowed the green jewel to rest upon his velvet heart.

Madrid was agog. The King was delighted. The Queen was—no—the Queen was delighted only with a new lover or a ruby the size of your fist. But so inspired had José become, he would paint a portrait at one sitting, do twenty, thirty feet of mural in one day. He piled up notes, sketches, incidents in chalk, sepia; drawings, ten deep. He laid on his colours with a spoon, a whisk, a sponge—anything at hand. And it was not long before the tongues of scandalmongers dropped sly titbits concerning Carlota's visits to the painter's atelier. If the *duque* her lord heard, he made no sign. But then that was not his way. Had he heard, the emerald would have been flung out over his ruff and laid against his teeth. What he would have done—or what he did later—is another matter. But Amala had private affairs which took him often to Seville, where he had his bull-farm. Had he heard, in all probability he would have—emerald at lip—coolly said his wife was lacking in taste, over-romantic, eccentric and cold, without human passion

—as he had found her. But the coarse jests and references continued, augmented by the evil Don Jaime who started it. As if obeying the ghost of Bayeu, Don Jaime had gleefully passed on the gossip, which piled up like waves after a ship, aided by the two Grimaldis.

As José experimented with life so he experimented with aquatints and etchings, and about this time he was inspired to do a series on copper plates. *Señor* Grimaldi, egged on by *Señora* Grimaldi, heard and aided and abetted by Don Jaime and the silent, still hopeful Basque, spread the news about the city both about Carlota and these new creations. Their daring surpassed anything yet José had perpetrated; the maddest, most audacious flight of his imaginings: Cork Trees as men marching to War; Bat Men flying; the symbol of Spain's materiality: Death drunkenly crowned with poppies and flirting like a Court Lady; Woman with Two Heads, showing the weakness and strength of womanhood; Forsaken, an old hag with drained, sagging breasts showing the effect when sex fades. All of them he put away and forgot. But what Don Jaime and *Señora* Grimaldi bit on with satisfaction which helped their revenge, was eight of those never-to-be-forgotten etchings satirizing the Church: lecherous naked gloating old monks with hairy legs and loose, drooling jaws, ape-eyed, and every one of them perfect portraits of some high official of the Inquisition.

Suddenly to José's amazement gossip reached him that caused him to fear for Carlota's position.

'Excellency!' he spoke casually before the faithful watchful Concepción, 'you are not to visit me here again. There is talk which can only end in your banishment—or worse.'

'You hear it too?' Her eyes flashed. 'I shall come when and how it pleases me. I shall merely change the hour.'

'You will remain away altogether until the gossip ceases.'

'Which, once started, never ends. . . . You mean it is your wish?'

'I mean you must be protected.'

'*Tiens!*' She waited for just that and laughed happily. 'I shall merely change the hour—or come as a "Bad Angel Flying to her Lover".'

But she did go after dusk, when the sky was so full of star-dust it diverted the eye and enabled a *duque's* lady to become less distinguishable—so she reasoned. It was a little late for caution. Yet in her heart she was quite indifferent, so it amused her to sally forth disguised—as she thought—her lively eyes and lovely head hid under Concepción's black cotton mantilla, her impatient feet in Concepción's flat boots beneath her servant's black swinging petticoat. But go she did! with an ache of flesh and blood that consumed her—which would have greatly surprised her lord the *duque*. And then one evening, near swooning, she laid her small hand upon José's arm and her impatient, impassioned eyes sought his.

'My life is barren without you, my lover!' She waited, tormented, reckless, lonely.

'My dream Princess! Such love is beyond reality, beyond love itself,' and a cold disciplined voice melted to a tenderness as great as desire was savage.

'Let us go away together—and be alone where our fever is our own . . . before youth goes . . . and we are forced to fall in love with death! *Love me!*'

'Where you go, I go.' But this time it was he who was sane, knowing that to flee with her was to ruin them both.

And when their enchantment was broken by another commission from the King to paint a portrait of the royal family, he told her, pointing to a red-sealed envelope, 'Our heaven is not yet, my Carlota.'

'I shall wait—I am yours!'

The next evening she arrived, for his sake, accompanied by the bewigged widowed sister of the *duque's*, an elderly *condesa* deaf, near-blind, and who seldom spoke, being too pious to call her soul her own. A perfect *dueña* whose appearance at the atelier would stop the tongue-wagging, Carlota hoped. Not that Carlota cared, she was beyond that, all thought was for José. But the gossip had gone too far with such capable promoters as Don Jaime, and the *Condesa* Grimaldi and the also jealous *Marquesa de Z.*, although it subsided whilst the royal portrait was being painted.

José was forced to spend every moment with the Queen. Her Majesty must weigh the effect of her portrait upon posterity, and needed to consult him on this engaging position of her chin, or that captivating angle of her little finger, or the slicing down of her figure—a dray-horse for bulk. So José moved into the Palace to be near the royal lady, and was forced to listen to endless feminine vapourings and noble tittle-tattle, while on fire with longing. Because of Her Majesty's changeable mind, the painting of the portrait continued indefinitely. But at last it was finished, a triumph in dignity and sardonic truthfulness—a moral in pigment. What the family lacked in essence José made up. You can see for yourself the Queen standing in the centre of a huge canvas, vulgar, domineering, in gold-and-white satin, with one fat hand on her little son in scarlet, whose likeness to Godoy is satirically faithful. In the coarse red royal face one eye is looking in one direction and one in the opposite direction, ironically indicating what José meant it to, her naturally grasping nature. At the Queen's side stands the King, majestically brainless, banally smiling, and only effective because of the gross amount of him and his regalia of black satin breeches, high, shining military boots, scarlet coat and various medals on his bulging chest supporting a white lace jabot falling on his unkingly bosom. The future King is there in blue, and the blue hides a shell of nothingness. The royal portrait was painted like a grocer's family, José's newest form of revolt.

During the time he worked on it the Queen's inamorato had been advanced from a high important rank to a more important rank—that of Knight of the Golden Fleece, and José now believed all that Don Jaime hinted long ago, that Her Majesty would yet make her lover Prime Minister. Another tragedy for Spain! His pride for and in his long-wounded people boiled up and spilled over in that portrait. His arrogant mind had run amuck. Was this not a disastrous reign? With human hopes drenched in blood? Did he not hear all Madrid cry *'Viva! Viva!'* whenever the over-fed, bejewelled sovereign rode out accompanied by cavalry escort in extravagantly rich regimentals, with her

lover by her side? Gossip told him that '*Viva! Viva!*' was lip-motion only, but he saw the tragedy of his country the tragedy of the human race—the many suffering because of the greed of the few. Even now over the Spanish frontier human beings were being smuggled like cannon-balls, a high tariff for a Colonel, so much for an inferior officer! Carlist plots were again flourishing. Every province seethed with the struggle to free the land from the authority of Church and State. Spain was once more a house divided against itself, deadening the spirit of the brave poor who needed more than the pomp of an Ash Wednesday with which to bury the 'Mystic Sardine' in a coloured coffin under the shadow of the Palace! And he knew that a once great army subdued by Romans, French, Dutch—had grown languid! So all of his resentment poured brutally brilliant into that royal portrait.

The Court was delighted! Once more Madrid was agog, and the royal pair further honoured him by permitting the new portrait to be carried to the painter's atelier for a public viewing.

Carlota, who dared to come immediately, happy for him, breezed into the *sala* and all radiance went out of her. He was looking over his copper-plate etchings and with a gasp of horror she saw them.

'Are you insane—José? Has the devil got you at last? Do you not know where such things lead? Even ecclesiastical hypocrisies can be overdone. . . . Holy Mother!'

'Can Truth ever be overdone?' He was cold with disappointment at her timidity.

'Assuredly if the price paid for it is your life! Uselessly sacrificed!' She was trembling, for with a shudder of horror she saw him tortured—saw scabby, running, gouged-out eyes destroyed by the Inquisition for one audacious moment he called freedom! In stark terror she studied one plate after the other, the face of a prominent Churchman, a hairy, naked, gloating, satiated monk, drooling over an atrociously mutilated woman! She cried out, flinging it from her. 'Another iron gauntlet in the face of the Tribunal. Of all things courage in men, but this is *madness!*'

'*Madness?* It is sincerity!'

'It's stupidity—is there not a time when to keep still is as courageous as to speak?'

'I saw it in War—the same truth is here.' He shrugged.

'Forgive me—*amante mío*—forgive me, but you go too far. Hide them, hide them, you have terrible enemies, as strong men have. Such power as this breeds jealousy in men less successful. I do not stoop to servant's gossip, but I trust Concepción, and she informs me of so much hate for you in that traitorous old hen Grimaldi and Don Jaime. Yes, and in Antonia de Z. too. You are not safe!' She came to him, pleading, 'Come away if you bear me a great love—come *now*—you are not safe!'

'Nor you.' He kissed and kissed the small white hands until the wire of her heart hummed with fresh transports, until fear was wiped away, and only love remained. But no sooner did she depart than she was consumed with fear again as if her heart had eyes that saw what was about to happen to him.

Why he then did what he did, is not easily explained. For years his impertinences had put Madrid in the palm of his hand. He had attained financial freedom, the creative freedom of the artist; the world was his. He loved a recklessly romantic woman who loved him. Perhaps he wore his crown of success at too rakish and too unholy a tilt! Perhaps it was his excess of energy, that electric mass in him, perhaps his sublime indifference to public opinion, or his frenzied desire to discipline life, or the intense pitch of feverish elation for Carlota, or all things combined. Anyway, José made the mistake of his life. In one of those false moves that even the sanest sometimes make, he issued those etchings privately. Those pitiless, biting, violent scourgings of political Spain, his trumpet-blast to rouse hope in her; monstrous horrors born of his passionate despair. They were out a bare twenty-four hours when he received a summons to appear before the King.

With his usual air of fearlessness, José arrived at the Palace and strode into the royal presence and made obeisance, a far more regal figure than that of His Majesty

slumped in the depths of his great gold chair and as nervous as a cat.

'Assuredly, sire, portraits—all of them,' José continued to protest coolly. 'All because you have not one honest man about you! Think you, sire, you have a staff of reliable officers or Churchmen? Gold lace and surplices wrap about lay-figures of wood without vision, without morale, without loyalty to Spain—or to you! Every word they utter in your royal ear is weighed and studied and guarded and stuffed to their own future benefit.'

The face of His Majesty became a royal purple.

'You surprise me, Ramón.'

'You surprised *me*, Sire.'

'Your daring is offensive.'

'Their falsity is offensive! More offensive to my eyes than your Majesties' servants' bad table-manners—or even your royal displeasure.' José bowed, folded his arms and waited. The King rolled his eyes about as if trying to recall each exact word his political prompters had prepared him to say, and fixed them on the resolute, proud face before him. He had been well coached, but the royal jaws dropped when José said: 'If these toadies serve you in *their* way, sire, a despicable way, surely *I* may continue in *my* way, sincerely expressed?'

From the first His Majesty had sincerely admired this independent, lightning-nerved, lion-willed man of genius, and he heaved forward in his chair, staring, perplexed. All animation seemed suspended, then he paled, then his face hardened.

'You think to restore peace by ridiculing and destroying the best that has been?'

'Nay, sire, do not misunderstand me. Peace, progress for all—not by destroying the *best*, but the *worst!* and reconstructing therefrom. Has Your Highness seen for himself these etchings?'

'No, no, but I have been informed that . . .'

'So I thought, sire—and you were informed by my enemies.'

'You dare too much.'

'I dare too little. And I warrant you, sire, I shall dare more, since daring has made me all I am—Your Majesty's favourite—as well as his friend!' José's brilliant eyes pierced the royal dull ones.

'Begone, you clever rogue! You are right—the world belongs to those with courage.' The King was forced to smile as he lolled back in his great chair, relieved also as he gazed at the pliant retreating figure of this insolent giant.

And so the matter dropped. But not for long. There was that hennaed old dame at Court and a treacherous, loose-tongued noble, and a hopeful ferret of a Basque and a now not-blinded Marquis Z.—all dark, sinister forces working together for his downfall. Likewise the *Duque* of Amala. Within the great stone mansion, the Casa Amala, Carlota's fears were rapidly increasing. She noted, somewhat breathlessly, a perceptible and subtle change in the manner and speech of her lord, the *duque*. The *duque* appeared cooler but more suave, more communicative yet wrapped in thought, more acid of tongue—and more silent. And with a quickening of her heart Carlota noted something even more—how her lord's useless white hand toyed constantly with the precious green bauble etched with the Crucifixion. Nervously, constantly, Carlota saw it spring to the soft, full ducal lips as if unusually agitated. And particularly did Carlota see above its subtle glow how the *duque* gazed at her, thoughtfully, exquisitely courteous, but with a suggestive, cruelly penetrating gaze.

'Your continued whim to linger in Madrid intrigues me,' he said politely one morning in the patio, and her heart pumped near out of her body. She smiled and replied, tense but quietly: 'You of *all* people should know the whims women have.'

The emerald flew to his lips and over it again Amala weighed secretly the happiness in her face, as he weighed cautiously all serious affairs in his life. Then his soft, suave voice, his hard, possessive eyes still upon her: 'My protégé seems more reckless and independent than need be of late. He offends my sense of dignity towards the Powers in Spain!'

'Ah!' It was all she could manage to say, holding up a finger pricked on a palm-leaf which she suddenly clutched.

'Ah!' It was all the *duque* intended to say, except, 'And this afternoon at his soirée I shall attend in order to see that his daring does not go any further! I am taking with me a man whom I am considering worthy of my future patronage!'

'And who may it please you to patronize, my lord?' Carlota had no breath for more, and could not ask about the etchings. His cold, subtle expression she saw reflected in the patio fountain, and the mood, she knew, presaged evil.

'Does it concern you—especially?' he replied leisurely.

'Only for Spain,' she was quick enough to answer, near swooning from fright, and struggling to keep her poise, scarcely able to with her heart in her throat like any common woman's.

During the morning, up in her cool high darkened chamber, the pink roses on her maroon skirt dipped and fell as she walked terrified, up and down, up and down the hard glassy polished walnut floor, trying to see ahead and afraid to, with all the horrors of the world in her head. A small beam of light from a slitted shutter, each time she passed, fell like an unshed tear on the white hand clutching her bosom. Once her frightened eyes fastened on the silver Christ on a black wood crucifix hanging on the white wall above under her crimson damask canopy. But the drooping Christ gave back only more agony for the canopy's fringe made a shadow on his heart like her own, like drops of blood. And away went Carlota up and down, up and down the pink roses on the full skirts agitated like herself.

Those afternoon soirées of the *Pintor de Cámara's* which the *duque* mentioned, were now as famous as José himself, and a Mecca for poets, students, engineers, lawyers—all those barred from Court circles—who came to discuss the undiscussable—politics. Bayeu used to come to introduce some small-fry dabbler in art who hoped by a favour, or remuneration for himself, and by association with the Court painter, to reach one day the royal eye. Aware of

an electric tension in the room José stood listening to the gracious Floridablanca, the famous littérateur, when in walked little Grimaldi in company with Don Jaime—and the *Duque* of Amala in company with the Basque. A sudden blasting rage engulfed José. He strode across the marble floor without greeting his patron and addressed his old enemy with contempt.

'And to what am I indebted for this long-delayed pleasure?'

The Basque's rat-like eyes shot to the *duque's* for answer.

'To me, José, and to my purely private interests,' answered Amala suavely. 'Do you question me?'

'Excellency!' José bowed and smiled frostily. 'I never questioned the sincerity or proof of friendship—or my own loyalty to Spain.'

The duque of Amala acknowledged this with a gracious nod.

'Then we may enjoy the royal portrait which we came to study.' And a white ruff moved, allowing a slim white hand to grasp a cool green stone.

'It is yours to view. Whether you enjoy it, is also yours to decide, Excellency.' José shrugged, gave Don Jaime and the tight-lipped Grimaldi another look of contempt and strode away pondering the situation—indifferent to it now that his rage had spent itself. The *duque* took the Basque's arm familiarly, and with Don Jaime bringing up in the rear with Grimaldi the four strolled about the *sala* poking and plucking slyly at hundreds of sketches which lined the wall. José had ignored Don Jaime, who, animated by curiosity, came—protected by Amala—in an all-forgiving mood (never once forgetting that day of rapiered insult), because curiosity would not let him stay away. José moved away to receive the *Duque* de Arcos. In spite of José's biting ridicule of certain high officials, Father Antonio Llorente came to every soirée with his smiling inhumanity, to watch everybody and everything, and his sharp glance had already crossed swords with that of Pignatelli. He, the dark, domineering hypocrite stood talking with Uriquijo who was peering about irresolutely, a sly sycophant who

came to see and be seen. It was said of Uriquijo that he received with a wink the gift of a Bible from Napoleon. José, having greeted Father Llorente, beckoned the smiling amiable Floridablanca. Caén Bermúdez, the art critic, and Carnicero the illustrator, were discussing the pros and cons of José's realism with Castillo, when Father Llorente said to José: 'My son, has not God disciplined you enough?'

'God—or the devil,' José laughed.

'The devil can't because God has,' said the quick-tongued priest.

'Still, realism need not be bald,' Castillo persisted. 'If you paint the moon and sheen it with soft, burnished clouds the moon still remains.'

'True,' José defended, 'but realism is more the expansion of Truth—a living organism seen with the eye of the heart.'

'Not always with heart either. Too often the hand-maiden of head-facts like Bayeu's and Mengs's,' said Bermúdez.

'Art should be the voice of God,' said Llorente piously, and went over to talk with a more important man, the Count de Arcos. And the two stood before the newest canvas, 'Two Shepherds', discussing it with that æsthetic libertine Arnanda, who turned his wagging head to Godoy, who at that moment was talking with the Count Grimaldi the weakest of all easily-influenced mortals. With nervous, insolent grace José chatted and walked about his thronged room, watching Don Jaime, who watched Amala. His head was lowered and thrust forward like a stuck boar's before a copy of José's 'Betrayal of Christ', soon to hang in Toledo. In the faces of the lewd crowd animating the brilliant background of that canvas, suddenly he recognized his own, and scarcely able to articulate, turned to Amala with a cold, meaning look, and the two went off to a far corner of the *sala*. They stood deep in talk near Godoy and a small laughing group discussing José's newest ceiling in a church cupola outside of Madrid, 'The Legend of St. Anthony of Padua'.

'I am bored by tradition,' José said.

'He is a fearless devil,' Godoy laughed admiringly.

'Behold! He paints St. Anthony lifted up on a saintly elbow with a ghost's hand writing "Nothing" on a piece of parchment.'

'Nothing is all he ever sees,' mumbled Don Jaime with a leer, more infuriated by the bravura in the picture than his likeness. 'Could *he* see a Miracle—much less paint it?' He looked to Godoy for sympathy, but Godoy strolled off; making his way back to José, and while he lowered his voice he kept his shrewd, unprincipled eye on the dandy as he said, warningly (he had just read an inscription on a plate. Beneath three plates José had written three burning sentences, a last protest against injustice; one was, 'The safeguarding of a prisoner does not necessitate torture,' the other, 'If he is guilty why not kill him at once,' and the third, 'So much barbarity in treatment equals the crime committed'), and Godoy's eyes bulged, 'Having courage, my friend, I admire it in others. But—ssh! It is being said of a certain painter that he might do very well to tune down his independent song to a lower, more welcome pitch. At this particular moment a more dulcet note might soothe the Inquisition heart, my friend!' Godoy shrugged, looked squarely into José's eyes and strolled away to join Pignatelli, with whom he had much in common.

The *sala* became tense with the intrigue. The atmosphere was much like that at a water-hole in the desert where animals come to drink and stand cautious, alert, suspicious of sudden sharp fangs from behind, or fearful their share will be gone before they turn.

José stood apart, wrapped in a strange nostalgia for his mountains. He could hear the old Padre say, 'Thou hast been given a great gift, José, guard it well,' and he had done a couple of frisks, stood on his head because he had to, and with the speed of an eagle taken the path to his home, no larger than a cow-path, past pigs and naked children, and burst in before his *madre* with his happiness! That was living!—he thought, staring coldly at Don Jaime —pouring into the ducal ear of Amala something that had darkened that exquisite's face.

'This painter's romantic and impulsive adventurers in

yellow and reds augment a certain firmness of fibre, Excellency, but he disappoints me,' Don Jaime murmured.

'In what particular way?' asked Amala, the emerald hidden in his hand.

'He is too emotional to convince me of his emotions? Have you seen his new dome in San Antonio?' Don Jaime winked at Grimaldi, who first located José across the room and cautiously advanced with a sketch hidden under his arm. 'But our friend here brings us the design for it—the pretty head of some noble lady whom your Excellency might recognize!'

Don Jaime, with vicious wink, held up one of José's newest and most intimate sketches of Carlota, one he did in secret tenderness and had hidden away.

'Have you seen his etchings on copper-plate, Excellency?' he asked, shooting a satisfied look at Grimaldi.

'I have seen enough!' And without the courtesy of an adieu to his host, His Excellency walked out of the *sala*, a certain cool green stone hot with the impress of an aristocratic but murderous hand. Behind him followed the Marquis de Z. with Grimaldi smiling at the smirking Don Jaime, all three well pleased with themselves and their accomplishment.

On the following day before the hour of siesta a certain piece of news ran like a devastating fire over Madrid. The Inquisition had seized all of Goya's infamous etchings! The gossip burned its way into the *Academia*, the Palacio Real, the Casa Grimaldi, and into José's atelier. And in the Casa Amala, with her eyes rolling in terror, Concepción burst into Carlota's chamber and unloosed it breathlessly.

'Excellency! Your Excellency! Juan says the Inquisition has netted its bird. It's had its eyes on him ever since he became Court Painter. . . . Ever since Saragossa. . . .'

'Hold your tongue! . . . Ever since what? Tell me every word!' With her heart stopped, her hand clenched, Carlota sprang from her canopied bed and stood staring—knowing without another word José was *doomed*—a great artist. A man annihilated, betrayed. Betrayed by his own courage! 'I warned him, I warned him!' her heart cried. We must

act—flee! go together while there is time! And she swayed and held to the great high bedpost, for she knew it was too late, her face drawn beyond recognition. She was all woman now, all emotion, and she stamped her bare foot, crying passionately, 'Broken—destroyed—sacrificed.' Her straining eyes shut out the rack. Her throat contracted. When her eyes opened the beam of light from the shutter fell on the silver Christ under the canopy. She heard the divine heart crying—'Light!' She was transformed, her fear transmuted to energy, to daring. God and the Queen of Heaven had given her back her wits—to *use!* And she did, though gossip had many varying tales afterwards as to what really happened: what happened being more gossip.

'Make haste, Concepción—my wardrobe—fetch me, no, not my black heels, but my scarlet heels, the colour of my heart—my gayest costume, the ruffled ivory with Chantilly, the carved comb, my best white mantilla—hasten—the new imported ear-rings—and my umbrella to hide my tell-tale face which I intend all Madrid to see—I am mad! Quick—go to Juan and learn what it pleases my lord the *duque* to do during the next hour! No—I am quite calm —Holy Mother—calm enough.' Carlota beat her breasts with trembling hands while waiting Concepción's return. . . . 'Hoh! So Juan says the *señor duque* visits the King? Juan swears it? You and I walk out together on an errand of mercy. *Alors!*'

The two set out for the Plaza Santa Cruz chatting crazily, shrilly, as if over the selection of a fish to fry, or a fan to buy for the next *corrida*, Carlota's patrician body swaying, dipping in excitement, her eyes the colour of the bright, hot sky. But when they approached the great polychromed door of the *Pintor de Cámara* and her hand rose to touch the high steel knocker, she trembled and for an instant faltered. 'Wait—Concepción—wait, for between my reasoning and fear . . . I . . . can scarce stick a pin. *Tiens!* Wait here—wait!' (Concepción had not budged.) 'Now do precisely as I tell you. When my hand touches the knocker turn and face the square. Do you attend? *Sí, sí,* face the square and count your heart-beats to twenty—nay thirty—

nay—not enough—count forty, and if no one approaches such as, well, no matter, go quickly then across the *plaza* to the vendor of fruits and busy yourself in selection of fruit for his lordship's table. But—remember! one's eyes need not rest on oranges, or dates, or figs, but on *faces* that may come by! Look wise—study every face—we may be followed. You attend? *Now*—see—my hand is rising—count quickly—and return as fast as seems safe. Wait inside as always. . . .' Carlota's hand hung on the knocker like a limp white flower while she glanced about her, and then the steel thing boomed out a sound similar to that of her own heart-beat, and she was swallowed up in the mansion of her lover. Tense, plunged in profound melancholy, his face set, he was wearing a rut on the marble floor of the atelier, when, with patrician grace, and ease (put on), Carlota swept imperiously in, and he paused and stared at her, in amazement. While she, so sure of herself and with so much calm, said: 'So—you are betrayed—lost—you know what it means?'

'They were the loftiest heights of intention—of my art.'

'A height lofty enough for gallows to hang you on. There is no time now to discuss the merits of intentions—you must act, and act while there is time.'

'Act? How? Would you have me flee as if I were ashamed?' With his knuckles white from straining, he began his march again. '*Useless*—I stay and fight. I shall always fight for what is righteous in art, if it costs me my life!'

And her pride in his great courage almost cost her her calmness.

'If you have courage to stay—I have courage to stay beside you and save you.'

'Save *me?*' He stopped, his admiration greater than his despair. 'Save me, Lovely One—how?'

'*There is a way!* Have you the original plates of the etchings?' She swayed as she crossed the floor, suddenly palsied with fear lest he had destroyed them. '*There?*' She pointed to a pile of sketches and went down on her knees on the floor, rummaging, breathless, her trembling hands scuffling among the mêlée. Suddenly her drawn face

lighted. 'O Queen of Heaven!' She held up the copper plates. 'There is hope! Dedicate the plates to the King —and leave the rest. . . .' The clang of the knocker arrested her and she stood up listening, her heart tense with new terror, her throat contracted. Then she smiled. 'It is Concepción, come to warn me to come away—a-ah—my foolish fears! *Sí, sí*, I will go now—the quicker to get to the King and save you. Do not delay one instant, José—*dedicate them to His Majesty* and leave the rest to . . . and . . .' Again the clang of the knocker, and her silken petticoats dipped across the floor to the tapestried door—and the wires about her taut heart snapped. The tapestries parted and her lord the *Duque* of Amala, vainly barred by the shaking Concepción, entered. Only by sheer force of character, barely able to make obeisance, Carlota managed to say archly, if a little shrilly: 'Ah—my lord! How considerate! How you compliment me, following me hither rather than go to your Sovereign—as you were supposed. You come to remind me that the King holds levee to-day and it were *lèse-majesté* not to attend? *Gracias*, my lord, a thousand thanks. . . . These intriguing etchings of your protégé' (a slight flurry of a trembling hand towards the wall). 'You have seen them? They attract so much comment, Concepción and I were mindful to see for ourselves—as you—Concepción—attend!' With head high the *duquesa* passed her silent *duque*, and the tapestries fell together hiding the determined set of her jaws, and the knees of Concepción near knocking together as she followed hard upon the scarlet tapping heels of her adored mistress. And, committed to the pride of an ancient Castilian name and all that it meant, the *duque* could do nothing but turn and escort his lady from the mansion of his protégé and thus convey that he and the *duquesa* were thoroughly *en rapport*. Past 'Liars' Walk' went His Excellency, beside his lady near to swooning, almost pulseless, her body a burning lake in which her heart had sunk. But presently she was able to unfurl her fan (Concepción behind her clutching the forgotten umbrella), as she said lightly: 'I am considering, with your gracious consent, another trip abroad.'

'Another? It would seem as if you already wander too far afield.' She tripped. There was no mistaking his meaning—and he caught her. She laughed. But she laughed briefly, for he was saying with suave exquisite dryness: 'You have then grown *more* restless?'

'More studious,' she corrected in a voice pitched a full half-tone too high.

'And since you are already too learned—for a woman—what would you study—abroad?' The emerald reached the ducal mouth.

'Life, my lord. I have the adventuring blood of the Moors in my veins.' (A mistake, she knew, too late.)

'That is more than noticeable.' The *duque's* tone conveyed to her it was time to talk of other things, and yet gallantly, courageously, foolishly Carlota flung out her last banner.

'If it were not that war threatens, I would journey to France. Who knows, if the Queen abandons her country, as she is capable of doing, she may have a new lady-in-waiting in her train.' Foolish, she instantly realized, in the face of such tragedy, for the *duque* laughed, a most obnoxious sound. Here they rounded a corner where, to her surprise, since it might mean a number of things, the ducal coach awaited them. But, except for a loud drumming in no way connected with the rumble of wheels, and an irrational fluttering of a fan, they bumped over the cobbles in silence to the Amala mansion, Carlota wildly asking herself what were the *duque's* intentions now, while knowing that a great, precious life hung on the subtle and immediate use of her own wits. And the *duque*, exquisitely, cruelly silent, intending her to remain in ignorance of his intentions, dwelt on an aspect of the situation it was well she did not know. The coach was dismissed. They entered the mansion, and at the staircase parted in silence, which became for Carlota her own crucifixion!

That evening the Throne Room in the Palace was ablaze with light and tense with suspense. From the Tiepolo ceiling which Don Jaime had extolled, hung great crystal chandeliers shining with candle-light that gleamed down

on a brilliant scene, in which assembled the wealth and nobility of all Spain. The entire Court was present, the three most jealous ladies, smilingly awaiting the outcome of the latest mad news. At midnight the élite, waiting for the dénouement of the impending scandal they were discussing, were disappointed at the absence of the *Pintor de Cámara* and the *Duque* of Amala, and Carlota his duchess, and gossip swelled. The candles, like human eyes, twinkled and winked and shed their brightness on the bejewelled bosoms of royal ladies, Court costumes of rich brocades, silken hose, black velvets and shoe-buckles of French brilliants; on gold lace and bemedalled breasts of high officials. The Aubusson carpet could scarce be seen for the restless waiting feet that covered it. The French gold-tapestried chairs could scarce be seen for the aristocratic pulchritude that filled them. The great Sèvres vases could scarce be seen for the luxurious, colourful costumes that passed and repassed them, eyes on the door, waiting, tense. Still neither the *duque* nor the *duquesa* arrived, nor José. Their Majesties, descended from their great gold throne chairs, were democratically standing, the Queen engaged with a young, handsome petty-officer in the Royal Guards, when the chatter in the room ceased abruptly—and in the sudden hush every eye turned to the door. And in their midst Carlota, *Duquesa* Amala, made a leisurely, dramatic and carefully timed entrance. Bowing graciously to right and left as she came, a dazzling vision of gold hair, ivory satin, apple-green slippers and a great apple-green feather fan to match. Eyes suspiciously sought other eyes. Mouths snapped, lips curled, but Carlota, avoiding all eyes but her King's, continued smiling, until she reached Their Majesties. Before them she made deep obeisance. As she moved, every head in the Throne Room moved, also, and she stood proudly waiting for His Majesty to acknowledge her presence, which he was now doing. His eyes rested on her ravishing bosom, whiter than the ivory satin that barely covered it; and with every eye fastened on him, his eyes again fastened on hers, flashing and brilliant and dark; gold hair aglint with pomade and aromatic scent and piled

daringly high in the newest most startling French mode. The atmosphere in the room was heavy with musk, suspicion and tuberoses. On every side lurked treacherous tongues. Taging her time to bow with languorous recognition of her arch enemies, *Condesa* Grimaldi and the *Duquesa* Benavente (first seeing that the Queen was still engaged in talk), Carlota manœuvred discreetly to the King's side, where she stood, after making him more aware of her presence. Lifting soft drooping eyelids, and with an animated jingling of ear-rings, she groped for the royal mood, preparing each word to give the needed effect. At last she decided to inquire first, his pleasures in the bull-ring . . .

'Not all I desire. The Amala bulls are going off in fierceness.'

'If they were bred less soft, would Your Majesty's pleasure increase?' Carlota's shining eyes petitioned his, innocently, pensively. 'Amala lives to do his King's bidding. Suggest, Your Majesty, that new blood is needed in breeding his bulls. But, sire, is not new blood needed—*elsewhere?* in our glorious Spain?'

'Such as where?' The King ogled her.

'Ah! But your kingly mind is too quick for me—I am dazzled, sire.' And while her eyes flattered the man in the sovereign, there came a slow, sensuous rhythm of the green ostrich fan—newly imported from France—which undulated up and down creating a sensuous little breeze of intoxicating perfume on which each of Carlota's carefully chosen words carried seductively to the royal nose and ear. 'Ah, my mind works! For example, sire, the Inquisition. Once it maintained a mediæval restraint on men's consciences and conduct, but now . . .'

'Now?—you imply that it wanes? Does Amala appreciate you, Carlota?' suddenly asked, not the King, but the man.

Carlota managed a laugh, her eyes a compliment and in her hands the fan, undulating, while his dull, slow royal wits tore out her heart and threw it back at her, bleeding.

'Perhaps his lordship confides in you, sire; his wife is *only a woman!* But, sire, the Inquisition . . . I would whisper

to you in confidence.' An up-wave of the trembling feathers hid her and her sovereign from the watching room. Breaths were indrawn meaningly. She did not waver. 'Your favourite painter, Goya' (how cunningly, how cautiously she stressed the 'your'), 'only to-day I took my little maid-servant to his *sala*, although the *duque's* sister usually accompanies me, to instruct the child in Spain's new art. Your Majesty had acumen in choosing this giant. He is a genius, sire, worthy to represent Spain for all time.' The green feathers slid sensuously down for discretion's sake—and up, in another intoxicating barrier. 'He makes fire out of ice and snow in his *passion for Spain.* Sire! have you seen his new etchings?' The willowy green feathers flattened against a full, trembling bosom. The uneasy room seemed to break up, vibrate with electric waves of suspense. Groups of nobles paraded past her. Pignatelli with Godoy, the squinting little Count Grimaldi talking with the Prime Minister and watching her like a cat. Past her, swayed a confusion of brocades, dark, treacherous eyes, tricky eyes! Floridablanca, chatting with someone who scanned her face frankly, with hate—*Duquesa* de Z.; Don Jaime approaching softly within hearing distance.

'Pay no attention to his distracting ugliness, sire,' she laughed, 'I would hear *your* opinion—and only *yours*—on your great painter's latest work.' With one eye on her enemy, Carlota sighed ravishingly, as if not to gain her sovereign's confidence were to woo dissolution. And as the royal wits seemed to grow even duller, she hurried, 'You yourself know he pours out his frenzies only because of what threatens *his*—and *your*—and *my* beloved country.'

'What is there to threaten Spain?' The King was more alive to her than to Spain. And in an agony of suspense the green feathers stayed up and shut out crystals, light, Don Jaime and the whole stalking nobility. Now that Carlota had played her sovereign to a pleasant mood she must play faster. She grew vivacious, gay. Her eyes sparkled into dull yellow ones as if there were but one man in the world for her, and that man was her King. And all the while

she poured into his kingly ears the things that threatened Spain; unrest, disturbances in secret orders, new societies of doubters, the greed of charlatans of all classes, those who dealt in cheap occult mysteries at the expense of the simple and poor, the unrest of poverty and how empty bellies breed pessimism, and pessimism breeds disaster.

'Are not these dangers to Spain, sire, what *your* painter desires to expose?' The royal head nodded agreement, and she leaned closer. 'It was *you* who had the foresight to make this man painter to the Crown—it shows your great wisdom and knowledge and yours alone. I congratulate Your Highness—but . . . only this very day I am informed that the Inquisition intends to make you powerless! You, sire, *powerless*, and through this man. The Tribunal has seized his marvellous etchings and *demands his trial!* If' (her words tumbled out), '*if you allow it*, sire, it will prove the King of Spain *a pawn in their hands!*' She was near swooning, her lips trembling, but her eyes blazed into his. 'Behind your august back they have *dared* to *usurp your authority* and seize etchings that are of value because of *your* foresight for Spain!' The green feathers, bunched in cold, trembling fingers waved away a liveried flunkey passing ices and sweets. And now an almost breathless voice murmured, 'It was you, sire, who had the great sense to command those etchings for Spain' (he had not, but by now was sure he had). 'Then for Spain's sake, for Spain's future history—command the original plates. Those *copper plates are your own by divine right!* They are *dedicated to Your Majesty!* Send for them—sire—let the Inquisition keep the first printings, they are valueless without the plates! It is for Your Majesty to prove to the Tribunal that the King dictates to *them*, not the Tribunal to *you*. Spain's commander by the grace of God! *Do not delay!*' Her pulses pounded. With ear-rings swinging scandalously close to the royal cheek, her fan waved back and forth, but still she did not leave the King's side. She did not dare, his promise was known to be nil for as much as a year at a time. Patiently, persistently—she assured and reassured him that to command these special copper plates (and at last he began to see it) would prove

to the Church that the State was inviolable! And towards dawn, as she again reassured the King, the King reassured her that he alone was all-powerful.

'A thousand thanks, Your Majesty, for your gracious promise. You will send for the plates, sire?' She was by now nearly voiceless, nearly pulseless, yet the fan whirling in office and her over-bright eyes rested fully on a man's, with a woman's arch admiration, as she finished, 'Then I shall not rest until you summon me to your side to discuss their merits with you—my King!' Only then, and then none too assured, considering what she left behind her, did her diamond-crusted heels tap away from him, and across the floor of the Throne Room before a mass of suspicious, staring, amazed eyes, colder-probing than before. What is here reported may be only gossip on which many a life-history has hung and been guillotined. But one thing may be safely supposed that gossip had right, Carlota's feminine appeal to the King, for she was as subtle as he was soft, and someone saved him: the King sent for them, whoever acted first.

Back in the Amala patio, the ivory satin skirts swished and dragged over the paling star-lit walk, round and round until they abruptly tilted up the wide stairs as she heard the *duque's* footstep. Just as he, waiting earlier for the rumble of coach-wheels to carry her away to the levee, stepped cautiously down those same stairs and set out upon a particularly personal commission. Disguised in long black cloak, with hat-brim hiding his exquisitely cold chiselled face, with his full lips pressed together, the preoccupied *Duque* of Amala, on a borrowed nag, cantered over the Madrid cobbles, downhill, out over the *vega*, thence towards the Hermitage San Isidro and into the court of a *posada* kept by a woman named Ana. (You may remember Ana, the thrifty widow who tried to make up her mind and had no mind to make up, having only instincts that failed her.) Her ankles were now the size of tree-trunks, her breasts pendant fruit upon a thick middle stem, and she walked with a limp, weighed down by sin and fat, for, having little else to sell, Ana had sold her last son to the devil. Ana's

posada had fallen on evil days. It was crumbling to decay. The grape-vine on the wall was fuller, but the thrush's cage empty. The larder was empty and the flock beds broken down. No one any more ate or slept at the inn, and no one came, save, of late, the *Duque* of Amala. He sat his horse rigidly, for within his mind lay a definite purpose—like a bird that fouls another bird's nest. And in the cold fury of wounded pride the *duque* intended to carry out a fixed idea, less that of an aristocratic husband than of a proud, humiliated head of an ancient Castilian stock, and as far as his own honour went still an ornament to Spain. Once honour is stained in Spain, and this is a peculiar stain! it must be cleansed, the hour and method of which he was on his way to complete. This was not the *duque's* first visit to the *posada*, but it was his last, for inside the stinking rat-eaten walls he was drilling a dull mind for the last time in the way it was to go within a few short nights to come. Each mention of José's name brought from Ana a vile expletive.

'*Za!* That one! I kept dogs to keep him from me in those days—now *Pintor de Cámara? Za!*' She spat as at any dirt. 'That one? He wanted to make me his church wife, but he had no wits, and I told him I would not marry with one so dull! Then, *señor*, his strong hands went around my throat and he flung me down my cellar stairs of stone and my spine is since injured. You see me crippled, *señor*, because of that . . .!' Ana's lack-lustre eyes shone as a *duro* was laid on the table. The *duque*, having heard the same tale too often and differently at each visit, grew impatient. Within the dirty and deserted room sat Ana beside her dumb son, on one side of a split wooden table, the *duque* opposite. Between them a candle-butt shed a small beam on her face and hid the ducal eyes regarding her over the greasy fly-stained boards. The son's rat-like eyes had fastened on the *duro*.

'Twice,' complained the irritated *duque*, 'your son assured me he knew this painter by sight! Come—either you do, or you do not. If not, someone else in the neighbourhood will.' And another shining piece of silver moved suavely

in long aristocratic fingers. The youth, frightened, whined (with his eyes on the silver) that he *did* know the painter, but if His Excellency would have patience all would be well. The boy was a perfect tool for all his dullness, yet the *duque*, to be sure, repeated his plan, while Ana shrilly convinced her son of the honour of being in so grand a personage's pay. So the impatient *duque* patiently repeated instructions how upon the *third* night from this night, the *Pintor de Cámara* was to sit in the royal box in the Teatro Real, and he, the boy, *was to be there*, when the *duque* himself arrived. The *duque* would then engage the painter in talk, and walk with him arm-in-arm in front of the theatre, and then leisurely walk into the narrow lane at the back where the shadows of a full bright moon made so many things possible, and . . .

'You *understand*—at last? It is well for you that you do not fail. Three nights from this night you will be there? I shall be there! When you see me turn into the alley, where you will be in hiding—then!' The *duque* gestured the rest of the coming drama. 'Point it down—*so*—well in from behind. Deep!' commanded his Excellency no longer glacial and noble, but venomous and bloody-minded, as savage as any common man gloating over his revenge.

'Will he use your Excellency's dagger?' inquired Ana, her filmy lustreless eyes glittering with satisfaction.

'Fool—would I destroy myself? There shall be a special one sent the boy.'

With the matter finally settled, the *duque* rode into the black night, his face lined with an exquisitely cruel coldness, while Ana clutched at the silver and blew out the candle that it might not be seen from outside.

The following afternoon, within José's atelier, the *duque's* deaf and half-blind and tactful sister sat within a deep recess at the far end of the *sala*, her wig awry and her head toppled forward in sleep. At the other end of the great room Carlota faced José. Even though the dedicated plates of those famous etchings had been early that morning safely delivered, Carlota was pale from strain, and tense as her high-pitched voice indicated.

'*Amante mío*, you are not safe even now! It is lunacy to linger where their lust for power and their policy of blood and iron may repeat itself and yet break you. Amala is capable of the utmost cruelty. He suspects us . . . I beg you again, fly before it is *too* late. Come away while there is time. I beg, I implore you—to Fiesole—there you will find a market for your art. . . . Come away!' The pitch of Carlota's voice woke the *Condesa*. She sat up and looked about, and the pious head fell comfortingly forward in prayer.

'The *duque* will poison us both, and poisoning would become neither of us. We would grow red and swell up and our eyes pop like toads'—and think of his lordship's amusement.'

'Tst! I shall bind your tongue as I bound your wrists. Your fears make me fanciful!'

'Imagine me—in death with the wings of a butterfly spitting poison!' She was trembling, trying to smile. 'Oh, let us fly from all this inhumanity about us, have the courage to fly now!'

'*Sí, sí*, my Lovely One—*now!*' The passion of it again stirred the *Condesa*, who sat up and fingered her beads, and her poor eyes saw Carlota's lips frame (for her special benefit): '*Señor*, I would say that this latest canvas of yours takes on a great architectural power.' Whereas the two were immediately engrossed with plans to fly as soon as each could make their several arrangements. Suddenly Carlota clapped her hands and went and tapped the *Condesa's* shoulder. 'Concepción awaits us.'

At the hour appointed on the night planned, Ana saw that her dull-witted son set out from the *posada* to keep rendezvous in the city. At the same hour José strode towards the theatre, and likewise a great red coach, on high wheels with crested doors, swayed off from the Amala mansion and rumbled over the cobbles towards the Buen Retiro. The coach had not proceeded far on its way, however, when its only occupant, a white-bearded grandee with a cruel exquisite handsomeness, was suddenly disturbed by a small sound—the tinkle of a silver bell. He

listened. The nearer it came the more it carried an irritating and violent discord to a tense enkindled brain, for his Excellency was in haste to see fulfilled a deeply cherished plan, one he had no wish to postpone. The silver tinkle came nearer . . . nearer. . . . A symbol which a really religious soul—like the *duque*—could not ignore. The little bell of the priest making his way to the home of the dying! The *Duque* of Amala heeded it as a devout churchman—and as a husband, he hesitated. The precious green stone flew up to soft full lips as the silver tinkle smote once more the ducal ear. He dared not hesitate. No one dared deny assistance to the priest on his errand of mercy. None too graciously the *duque* called out to the driver and the coach pulled up, and allowed a whitely-ruffled and disgruntled nobleman to gather in a Holy Man on his sacred mission. The door banged.

The coach started. And off it went in the opposite direction from its original destination. On and on, farther and farther away from the theatre—on into a filthy squalid quarter at the extreme end of Madrid, and only then drew up before a wretched hut with a broken door and with one window sealed with dirty cracked paper. Cold and furious at the abortion of his plan, the *duque* got out in the priest's wake, and lowered his noble head, to get into the door. And beside the *duque* in a filthy hole stinking with the fetid suffocating smell of disease, the priest lighted a taper which he carried, and among the slops and sour rags on the damp earth saw a man lying, muttering in delirium. His face was swollen and greying with the plague. He was far gone, and the priest knelt beside him to pray, making a sign to the *duque* that he was just in time to administer the last office for the dying. He recited the Indulgence, and at the sound of a strange voice the dying man opened his eyes in which for an instant flickered consciousness. The good priest prepared for extreme unction, and opening the pyx, produced holy water and oil. Dipping his finger he anointed first the closed swollen eyelids, the nostrils, the mouth, the incessantly moving hands, and last the soles of the poor feet, while his own lips moved in silent prayer. And that

done he whispered to his Excellency he would remain until the end.

The ministering priest and a furious *duque*, side-by-side in the crested coach, rolled back into Madrid; and the *duque* left alone got out and walked hastily towards the back of the Buen Retiro, uselessly, as he knew. There was no boy, no moon, and no play; it had long ended. So the great coach rumbled homeward under a million stars, twinkling as if mocking a vindictive gentleman inside, who, although thwarted, had no intention of remaining thwarted for long. And those stars in reality did mock him, for in no time at all, within a short time, beneath his coverlet of purple damask the *Duque* of Amala lay ailing, shivering; taken in fever. A fever so violent, so virulent, he seemed burning in hell! The fire stabbed and blinded his aristocratic eyeballs with fiendish pain; it racked his belly to black vomit and his fine, slim limbs to unbearable agony; a fire that would not be quenched and a fire that grew worse. After a few more days in this hell, and when he was free for a moment of a wild delirium that destroyed the cold, clear brain, and when God kept him from sinking, *el señor duque* made a sign to his servant Juan, that he would say something of importance to his duchess Carlota. But before she could be found—no one seemed to know her whereabouts—although she came tapping into his private chamber and bent her lovely head down to his unforgiving eyes—the exquisite subtle *Duque* of Amala was again tossing in another hell of delirium; thence into unconsciousness, and into the decay of common clay. At sundown he died.

The Court Physician, whose bulbous nose gave José such particular labour, after a first glance at the *duque's* face, got himself called safely away on matters of private business. He feared all malignant diseases, having no knowledge how to cope with them. And so it happened there was no help for the *Duquesa* of Amala, when she, too, fell ill of fever, and the whole household was distracted, it also having no intelligence on matters of illness. There was no one left to attend her save her faithful Concepción, for all the house-servants, now helpless with terror, fled in panic

to the remotest quarters of the great mansion. There was a curse on the house! So the servants hid and prayed. The *duque's* widowed sister, the *Condesa*, poor lady, naturally incapacitated, barred herself behind her chamber door, and there, on her knees on her *prie-dieu*, prayed with trembling lips; mumbling over and over her anguished novenas to God. She petitioned devoutly for the release of this great house from further disaster. She petitioned with her soul the blessed San Pedro for the repose of the *duque's* soul and for Carlota, whom she loved, a speedy recovery—or the grace of a happy death. . . .

Carlota was dying. The round, intent, seal-like eyes of the faithful Concepción fastened on her in terror. She could do nothing, standing there over her beloved mistress, except make the sign of the cross with thumb and forefinger. But at last, roused by her own weeping, the frightened child scurried to the corner to the pewter basin and ewer and brought impossibly small wrung-out wet cloths which she laid on those staring eyes, ugly from congestion. Within her great wide carved bed, canopied with crimson damask, Carlota lay very still under the silver Christ on the wall. Red blotches darkened the small oval face, making the gardenia flesh a sickeningly paled mask. The languorous eyes that so recently flashed courageously in the face of scandal, into the King's eyes for her lover's life, were mere slits hiding the coming darkness. . . . Poor Concepción! She could make nothing of that delirium that cried wildly to the King in a terrible fear, and which kept fading back into the fevered swollen throat. Listen as she did Concepción could only pray to God to relieve them both of this terror . . . and choked with sobs, she would lay cool freshened cloths like a blessing on those burning breasts. She poured cognac between the distorted purpling lips. It trickled down over the fevered flesh below. She rubbed the restless limbs, patted the small ill hands moving over the coverlet, as if to find anchorage for life. . . . Concepción prayed and wept and prayed again. . . . One lucid moment, and, scarcely breathing, Concepción bent down. She seized the silver Christ from the wall. The dying hands could not

hold it. Concepción laid it on the poisoned breasts with tears exploding down her tired face, and flung herself across the bed, sobbing outright. . . . Between her sobs she said over and over the Miserere. . . .

A faint murmur—the loved voice—and she sprang up. Mother of God—the *duquesa* wanted her mirror to behold her own ruin! and at the sudden misery in those fevered eyes, Concepción shrieked. The mirror crashed to the floor and Carlota sank back into unconsciousness. Concepción ran for the priest . . . for another . . . for another. Every priest was away tending the sick poor, for the plague was spreading. And so with a sinking heart all that long night the faithful little servant stood by that great carved bed, helpless, wringing her hands, praying; walking the floor. And, at dawn when the night-watchman cried out over the city, 'All is well,' she herself nearly dying at the sudden strange silence in the room, seized the broken mirror and held it to Carlota's lips—and fell fainting across the bed. When she came to, blubbering with terror Concepción, with legs buckling, fled from the room out of the house and over the city to José; clattered breathless into his atelier and fell on her knees at his feet, her streaked, blotched face and streaming eyes telling him everything!

Beside Carlota's bed he stared down, the sensitive, sensual mouth drooping and tightening cruelly as he beheld the sickened body before him. Torn with anguish and a voluptuous curiosity, mingled with a ferocious hatred of beauty harmed, in one flash he saw his life passing. He whose instincts had never been denied, he who lived wantonly on beauty, had lain with love like a drunkard, known creativeness to spring out of its dark secrecy; he whose brutal, violent, phallic ego knew life's worst decay—War—and its black hell—he suddenly knew the grandeur of sorrow. He dropped on his knees and gathered her to him.

All the vital force of his breath he poured into her, on to her, on her chilling breasts, her swollen mouth, her dying hands; into her wasted body, as if his flame would hold that precious life and return it to him. For an instant Carlota sighed, stirred, and her lovely head sank against his

heart. His black eyes probed her cold, heavy lids. He kissed them passionately. They fluttered. . . . Her eyes opened—and beholding her own misery in his they closed on what she saw. The poor parched lips formed one word—*Love!* He clung to her, insolently defying death, willing back life to his one ideal love, his boyhood dream—*Xana*, his glorious desire. He held her, kissing the sick hands, the slowing heart, the precious gold of her hair. And so holding her, Carlota, with a sigh, slept in his arms, her re-birth begun.

. . . . . .

The most famous man in all Spain, José the peasant, rose higher and higher in royal favour, a great and envied power at Court. Never broken by life, he was never to be broken. His smouldering passions fanned him into ever-growing heights and depths of his art. As he aged with all of that bull-strength abused, he was vital, alert, alive with a still insatiable, devouring curiosity for life. His recklèssness, daring, his insolent audacious self-confidence, held. As he grew older his eyes remained undimmed, scornful, piercing; his nervous hand painted. His passion lived . . . stimulating, inspiring a Dionysian whose blood never cooled. Charles IV the King went out. Another King came. . . .

José lived in a house outside the city gates behind the Puente de Segovia called the 'Deaf Man's House', bitterly resenting the only disease that ever touched him. The walls of his room he decorated with 'Satan Devouring One of His Children', a long-haired frenzied giant slobbering over the bitten-off head of a naked woman; no other painter in the Spanish Church ever had dared represent the nude. Gossip had it, even now, the King was incensed at his introducing royal ladies at Court into the faces of his archangels. If so, the King had an amiable way of showing it. He presented Goya with more money and caused the edition of two hundred and forty copies of his eighty plates. His wife had long since died, loved and loving, and he lived—he had lived during the reign of four Kings—

discussing art with a few old faithful friends; Carnicero, the illustrator of *Don Quixote*, Caén Bermúdez, the art critic, and Selma, the engraver, all loyal to his ideals and to their own still fired by fête or funeral. These were still dark days for Spain, dark and violent, and in the bitterness of his burning spirit he still found expression in 'Desastres de la Guerra'—the outcry of his soul. Still he painted, hating the atrocities committed in War. The peninsula was a shambles . . . Wellington arrived in Madrid with an English and part-Spanish army. José was commissioned to paint that celebrity. He did so, in red chalk. And so irritated was he by that august person's remarks, he flourished his sword in his face and the fortunate general barely escaped with his life. To the very end, first and last and always, Goya was Goya: always himself, never compromising; a great lover, a great man whom no foreign idea ever led astray. The last of the old masters, he was the first of the moderns, and being both he was universal, for until the end of his life he fought for the *principle* of Truth, than which no man can be greater.

He made occasional trips abroad, once with his pupil, a youth named Gil, to gaze mournfully upon a smoking heap of ruins, once Saragossa. Once he journeyed down to Seville to paint his 'Santas Justa and Rufina' in the Cathedral there. Finally he went down to Bordeaux, victoriously alive though deaf and now half-blind, and there he took up his painting in the old way, flinging on paint with a rag, a broom, a spoon, too impatient propably to wait for new brushes. Even as a very old man, back in Spain in his great Bolivar hat and the cape, a bizarre figure, guided about by his friend de Brugada, for ever a butt for the ribald jeers of street-gamins, he roamed into dark alleys and hidden places, his dimming eyes prying into life; wrapped in his great creativeness, spurred on by the very iron in his soul—to the end.

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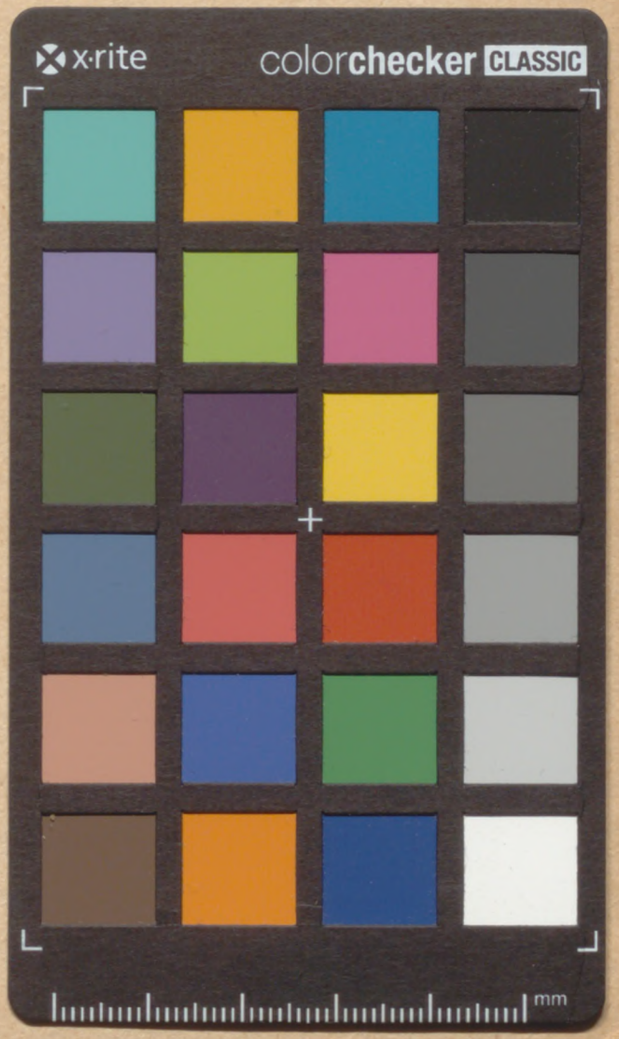

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