

DENNIS (Public Thriller Writer No. 1)

WHEATLEY



The

GOLDEN SPANIARD

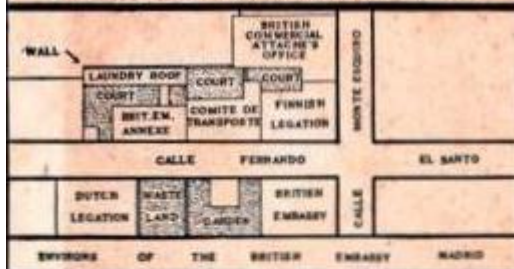
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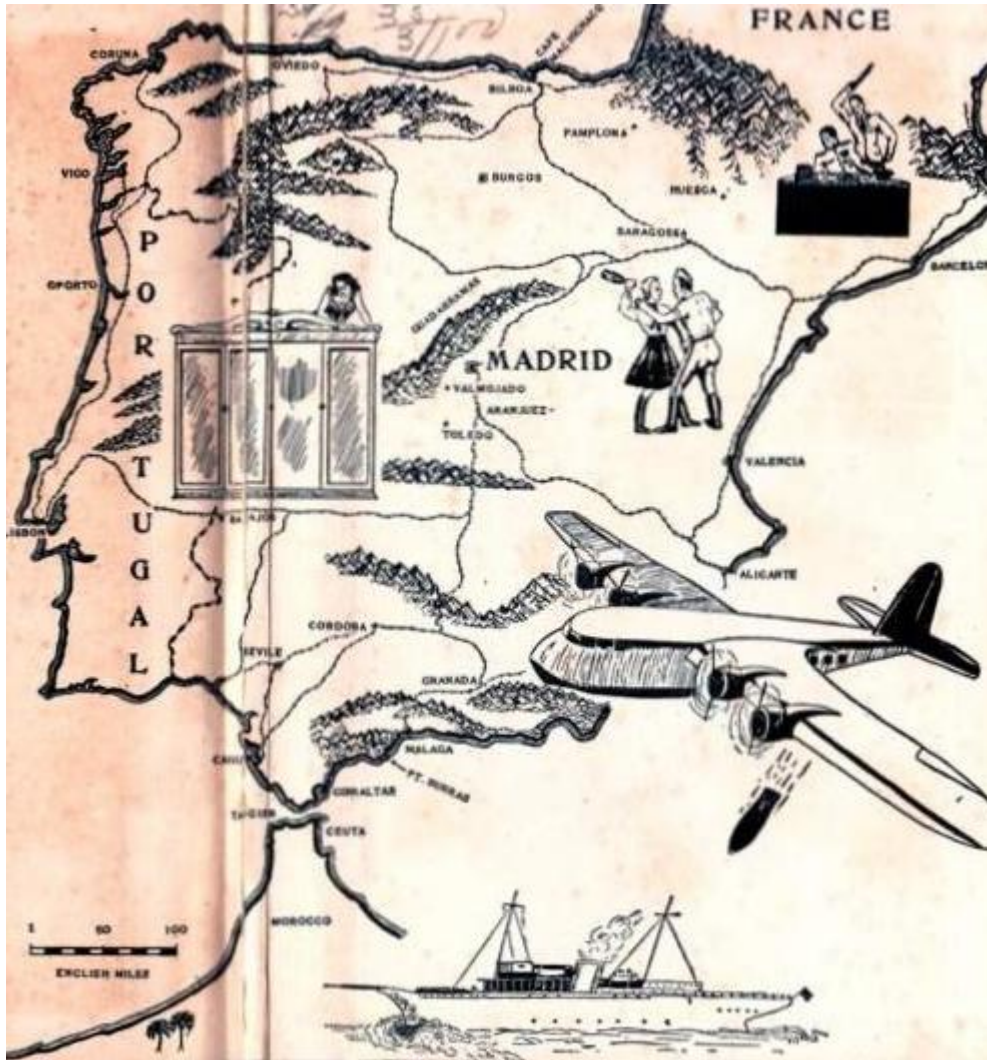
The
GOLDEN SPANIARD

**DENNIS WHEATLEY'S
THE GOLDEN SPANIARD
FIGURES BY DIANA YOUNGER**



CENTRAL MADRID

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. PALACIO CUBALLES | 8. LOURDIA'S SECRET H.Q. | 9. WAR OFFICE |
| 2. BARRIO CUBALLES | 9. BELLA'S ARTS CLUB | 10. PRADO GALLERY |
| 3. CHURCH BURNING | 7. GAS CO.'S OFFICE | 11. AQUARIUM |
| 4. PALACE HOTEL | 5. MOLINERO'S | 12. FRYBURN'S DEL PROYECTOS |



What would you do if you had *ten tons of gold*, enough to pay a Regular Army of 150,000 officers and men for half a year, lying in a private bank where you feared Communists would seize it? That is the problem which faced the brave and beautiful millionairess, Lucretia-José de Cordoba y Coralles, when Revolution threatened Spain.

Those modern Musketeers, the Duke de Richleau, Simon Aron, Richard Eaton and Rex Van Ryn, made famous in the pages of "THE FORBIDDEN TERRITORY" and "THE DEVIL RIDES OUT", became involved in the struggle for the possession of this great fortune.

From early July, when the Military Revolt was still being planned, through the wild excitement and confusion of the early weeks of the

Outbreak, up to December when Madrid was in a state of siege, we follow these remarkable men. Again and again they hazard their lives in desperate plot and counter-plot while the adorable Princess Marie-Lou waits in her yacht off the coast of Spain to aid their "Scarlet Pimpernel" activities.

The tale moves from lesser thrills to breathless suspense and finally a superb climax. The Fiction Editor of one of our greatest national dailies said of Wheatley: "*He is the most successful adventure writer of our time.*" and this great romance of Lucretia-José and her millions is undoubtedly one of the finest stories he has ever done.

Dennis Wheatley's Work is also published in:

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Uncharted Seas

The Forbidden Territory

The Devil Rides Out

The Eunuch of Stamboul

The Secret War

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Such Power is Dangerous
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Who Killed Robert Prentice?

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In Preparation

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DENNIS WHEATLEY

THE GOLDEN SPANIARD

A Novel

18th Thousand

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LONDON

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FOR MY GOLDEN STEPDAUGHTER
DIANA YOUNGER

A dear and joyous companion who brings
the blessing of much laughter to our
house and who is even more beautiful
than the picture of the Golden Spaniard
which she painted with such talent for
the dust cover of this book.

THE GOLDEN SPANIARD

Chapter One – A Debt of Honour

Chapter Two – The Duke has a Very Queer Experience

Chapter Three – A Most Unexpected Encounter

Chapter Four – The Most Dangerous Woman in Europe

Chapter Five – The Other Side of the Picture

Chapter Six – The First Round

Chapter Seven – The Duke Makes Soup, but not for Supper.

Chapter Eight – Don Lluís Turns Burglar

Chapter Nine – The Succession of Culs de Sac

Chapter Ten – Death in Madrid

Chapter Eleven – The Price of Secrecy.

Chapter Twelve – The Storm Breaks

Chapter Thirteen – The Miracle

Chapter Fourteen – Lady in Distress

Chapter Fifteen – Night of Horror

Chapter Sixteen – When Greek Meets Greek

Chapter Seventeen- Escape to Trouble

Chapter Eighteen – The Militiaman's Bride

Chapter Nineteen – Back into the Maelstrom

Chapter Twenty – Just Sheer Bad Luck

Chapter Twenty-one – Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fire

Chapter Twenty-two – Out of the Fire Into the Boiling Oil

Chapter Twenty-three – The Blood Bath of Madrid

Chapter Twenty-four – The House of Mental Death

Chapter Twenty-five – The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Spanish
Revolution

Chapter Twenty-six – De Richleau Speaks of Other Things than
War

[Chapter Twenty-seven – The Cat Jumps out of the Bag](#)

[Chapter Twenty-eight – The Treasure Hunt Begins](#)

[Chapter Twenty-nine – Armistice for Two](#)

[Chapter Thirty – The Break for Home](#)

[Chapter Thirty-one – Plot and Counter Plot](#)

[Chapter Thirty-two – Dark Stars in the Ascendant](#)

[Chapter Thirty-three – One Must Die](#)

[Chapter Thirty-four – Simon Aron goes to War](#)

[Chapter Thirty-five – Who Goes Home?](#)

THE GOLDEN SPANIARD

Chapter One – A Debt of Honour

The Duc de Richleau exhaled the first cloud of fragrant smoke from one of the Hoyo de Monterreys which were his especial pride and dismissed his servant with a nod. “You may go, Max. On no account are we to be disturbed.”

The girl, who was the only other occupant of the beautifully appointed little dining-room in the Duke’s Mayfair flat, raised one tapering eyebrow in humorous interrogation.

De Richleau smiled and shook his head. “A charming compliment, Condesa, but I am old enough to be your grandfather —almost.”

She knew his statement to be true yet marvelled that a man of his years should retain such a splendidly virile appearance. His age showed only in the lines that time had etched on his lean, handsome features and the grey hair which swept back from his magnificent forehead. Many a young man would have envied him his wiry figure and the grey eyes which regarded her with such piercing brilliance from beneath slanting, ‘devil’s’ eyebrows.

He waved the lighted end of the long cigar with a graceful sweep beneath his aquiline nose so that he might savour its aroma and went on softly, “When an attractive young woman rings up an elderly man she has not seen since childhood, accepts a luncheon invitation, but suggests that her host shall entertain her at home—and alone—it’s obvious that she wishes to discuss something highly private. Tell me, Lucretia-José de Cordoba y Coralles, in what way can I be of service to the daughter of my old friend?”

“You have been in Spain recently, Duke?”

“Not since King Alfonso left it.”

“That’s over five years ago. Much has happened in the interval. S. M. el Rey withdrew, as you must know, not from any weakness but in the spirit of the highest self-sacrifice. He hoped that by doing so he would save his country from being deluged in the blood of a civil war.”

De Richleau’s eyes narrowed a little. “Certain shrewd observers appear to think that his going only postponed the evil day until—well—any time now.”

The whole being of the girl opposite him seemed to change. She was, perhaps, twenty-five and only remarkable at the first glance in that her golden hair combined with markedly Spanish features gave her a most unusual type of beauty. Throughout lunch she had made the usual small-talk of her class, and no one would have suspected that she had a thought in her head outside clothes, social engagements, and her latest love-affair. Now, her whole figure tensed. Her fine grey eyes went blank but her jutting chin and the set line of her red mouth gave her an expression of extraordinary strength and determination. De Richleau suddenly realized that his dead friend's daughter had grown into a fascinating and extremely dangerous woman.

His old heart warmed within him as she asked, "Just how much do you know?"

"Nothing," he lied amiably. "Only the gossip of the clubs, which leads one to believe that all is not well with Spain."

"You *do* know something then. That makes things ever so much easier. I take it I can speak freely to you as one who'll be with us when the clash occurs?"

De Richleau smiled. "Need you ask, Condesa? Don Alfonso has honoured me with his friendship for thirty years and I have similar ties with many of your leading families. However, as a naturalized Englishman, apart from my sympathy for my personal friends, the affairs of Spain are no concern of mine."

"That is untrue. If the classes must fight it will be the concern of every man and woman who believes in justice and freedom and decency that the right side should win. If the Reds get the upper hand in Spain this summer they'll get it in France next and the rest of the world—even your self-satisfied England—will follow."

"There may be something in what you say but perhaps you would care to tell me a little about how things stand at the moment."

For a good five minutes Lucretia-José spoke clearly and rapidly of the complicated political situation in Spain. Suddenly she rapped the table with her clenched fist. "I speak of what I know! The Extremists have been smuggling in arms for months. They intend to seize power by force knowing that the present Government hasn't the strength to resist them.

Every property-owner, every officer, every devout Catholic in Spain will be massacred this summer unless measures are taken to prevent it."

"These measures, of course, are already being taken?" the Duke suggested smoothly.

"Yes. Our only chance is to act before they do."

"In whose name, the King's?"

"No. I wish from my heart that it could be so but at the moment such a move would not be practical. The Army chiefs have agreed to suppress all opposition and appoint Calvo Sotelo as Dictator."

"An admirable choice," agreed De Richleau thoughtfully. "As a civilian he'll secure much greater backing from the man in the street than any General could hope for. However, interested as I am and greatly as I value your confidences, Condesa, I do not yet see your object in making them to me."

Lucretia-José smiled enigmatically. "As you probably know, my father was the principal shareholder in the *Banco Coralles* of Madrid. It has always been a family affair like the old Coutts or Martins over here. Since his death last year I have inherited his holdings."

"Then you are fortunate indeed."

"Most people would think so, but my father was a great Royalist. From the time S. M. el Rey went into exile our palace in Madrid and our many other properties have remained closed. As I was educated in England I have not entered any of them since I was a child."

De Richleau's firm, slightly cynical mouth softened a little as he said gently, "I too have known what it is to be an exile."

She shrugged. "Fortunately I have my work. Father was always convinced that, in time, there would be a restoration. As he had no son he added his own name of José to mine when my mother died and looked to me, as the last of the Cordoba y Coralles, to do my share in bringing it about."

"It's to be hoped that these—er—measures that you speak of will soon enable you to take your rightful place in Spain again."

"Thank you, Duke. But in the meantime I have to provide adequate protection for the 82,000,000 pesetas gold reserve which I have lying in bullion in the vaults of my bank in Madrid."

"*Eighty-two million!*" repeated the Duke. "That really is a tidy little sum."

“It is enough to pay the entire army of Spain, officers and men, for six months, or to purchase an Armada of aeroplanes from a neutral country, in the event of civil war.”

“I see, and you wish to use it for some such purpose?”

“I hope that won’t be necessary. If the risings planned to take place in every garrison town are properly synchronized the affair should be over quickly and there will be very little bloodshed. The danger is that certain Generals may delay to see how their bolder colleagues get on before taking action. If that occurred in Madrid and the tables were turned on them, the Reds’ first action would be to confiscate all the gold in the banks. My fortune might then be used to purchase the means of destroying my hopes and my dearest friends.”

“And how do you propose to guard against this unpleasant contingency?”

“Quite simply,” Lucretia-José smiled, and when she smiled she was very beautiful indeed. “I intend to make over my entire holding to someone I can trust and that person is going to be an Englishman. No Government, Pink, Red or Purple will dare to risk falling foul of Great Britain by seizing eighty-two million pesetas which is the property of a British subject.”

De Richleau sat bolt upright in his chair. “My dear Condesa, I hope—er—” he floundered suddenly, for once in his life caught napping; “I sincerely trust you have no thought of doing me this honour.”

Lucretia laughed outright at his consternation and nodded firmly.

“Of course. That’s just what I mean to do. I’ve brought all the documents with me already signed and witnessed. I’m afraid it’ll mean your paying a visit to Madrid and remaining there until the trouble is over. You must be on the spot to protest against any attempt at confiscation. But I know you will do me this great service in memory of my father.”

“No, no!” the Duke protested. “I beg you not to ask it of me. I know little of finance. I should be certain to fall foul of the Jacks-in-office. If there is a revolution I should probably start shooting Bolsheviks and get hanged to a lamppost for my pains. I am too old for such excitements; much too old. And why, in Heaven’s name, should your choice fall on me—when we hardly know each other?”

Lucretia’s grey eyes grew grave again. “For two excellent reasons. In the first place, my father has often told me that you are utterly fearless, as

cunning as a serpent, as ruthless as Fate and to be trusted without limit.”

“I’ve never been trusted with millions in pennies, let alone millions in pounds, before,” grunted the Duke with a glint of humour in his eye. “Go on, young woman, let’s hear your other reason.”

“That this is not a one-man job. Failing all else they might attempt to make away with you hoping that on your death the bullion would revert to me. You must sign blank transfers to another Englishman you can trust implicitly, and it would be better still if there were a third at hand who could take over from him if it became necessary.”

“Ha, ha!” exclaimed De Richleau, “I see it all. Some time or other your father must have spun you some silly fairy-tale based on a little trouble I and some of my friends got ourselves into a few years ago in Soviet Russia.”

“Exactly! But it was no fairy-tale. It was the story of three heroic men who ventured into the very heart of the Forbidden Territory to save a fourth who was their friend; of how they rescued him and, with all the vast resources of the Kremlin pitted against them, fought their way back until they crossed a friendly frontier. It was you who led them and it is to you that I appeal—”

“No!” the Duke thrust back his chair and stood up. “No, I flatly refuse to involve my friends in this dangerous business.”

Lucretia jumped to her feet and slipping round the table seized his hands. “But, Duke, I beg you to! Find them! Find them! Take them with you to Madrid. This gold may mean the very life or death of Spain. Please! Please call those wonderful men to your side once more. They won’t refuse you when they know how much there is at stake.”

De Richleau shook his head violently. “It is impossible. Richard Eaton’s staying with me here, but he’s married now which puts him right out of it. Simon always was a man of peace. Rex might come, but why the devil should I ask him to risk his neck?—and, God knows, I’ve had my fill of fighting. No, my dear, you must find someone else to do this for you.”

“It’s not for me,” her voice was low, imploring. “It’s for the thousands of decent people who can’t help themselves but have got to be protected somehow from mass shootings and every sort of horror. The Coralles fortune may prove much more than a pawn in the game. In the name of my father who used to say he loved you as a brother, I ask you to keep it out of evil hands.”

The Duke thrust her away from him and in an endeavour to combat the sentiment of her appeal spoke with sharp formality. "Condesa, I have never allowed my emotion to get the better of my common sense. I regret, but it is impossible for me to serve you in this matter."

"So!" she stepped back and, snatching up a balloon brandy glass, flung it down on the table where it shattered into a thousand fragments. "All right then! I must remind you that you owe your life to my father's good will. As his heir I now claim that life in so far as you may risk it in going to Spain on my behalf. If you have any pretence to being a man of honour you will fulfil your obligation."

For a moment there was utter silence in the quiet room, the passion had died out of Lucretia's eyes, which were now cast down. She stared with faint but growing embarrassment at some scattered fragments of the goblet she had smashed. Suddenly she heard a faint chuckle and, looking up, saw with amazement that De Richleau was laughing at her.

"You win, Condesa," he murmured with an elegant little bow. "I will collect those two unattached friends of mine and we will take a little trip to Spain."

Chapter Two – The Duke has a Very Queer Experience

Lucretia-José Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles had gone, leaving De Richleau the virtual owner of her millions. The papers she had deposited with him were all in order. They included letters of introduction to her representatives in Madrid and even a complete set of blank transfers already drawn up so that he could pass on the trust merely by signing them and writing in the name of one of his friends.

He had only to go to Spain and present his credentials in the right quarter. No one could dispute his right to the money, he reflected with some satisfaction as he slowly paced the big sitting-room which so admirably set off his personality.

It was not so much the size or decoration which made this room in the Curzon Street flat so memorable for those who had been privileged to visit it, but the unique collection of rare and beautiful objects it contained. A Tibetan Buddha seated on the Lotus, bronze figurines from Ancient Greece, beautifully chased rapiers of Toledo steel and Moorish pistols inlaid with turquoise and gold; ikons from Holy Russia set with semi-precious stones, and curious carved ivories from the East. They were no purchases of an idle dilettante but each had a definite association with some episode in the Duke's long career as a traveller, conspirator, and soldier of fortune. The walls of the room were lined shoulder-high with books, but above them hung lovely old colour-prints and a number of priceless historical documents and maps.

De Richleau hummed cheerfully to himself as he cleared a table of its jewelled crucifix and signed photograph of King Edward VIII to make space for a big Atlas which he pulled from one of the shelves.

He was much better acquainted with Spanish affairs than he had admitted to Lucretia-José and was aware that ever since the combination of Socialists, Anarchists, Communists and Syndicalists into a '*Frente Popular*' had given the Left a victory over the larger but divided parties of the Right in the elections of the previous February, a pusillanimous Liberal Government had been powerless to control the extremist elements which had put it in power. From its very inception they had bullied it into doing their will by organizing the most appalling series of strikes that had ever

paralysed the business of the country. A bad winter had helped them by filling the cup of bitterness of the peasants in the South to overflowing so that whole villages revolted and attacked the *Guardias Civiles* who were supposed to keep order. In April, Zamora, or 'Old Boots' as they contemptuously termed the non-party idealist elected as President of the Republic on King Alfonso's departure, had been forced into retirement and the Liberal Socialist Azaña had taken his place. By May the Government no longer had sufficient authority to prevent the peasants seizing the land on many great estates, and in the cities gangs of hooligans openly showed their contempt for a police force muzzled by a cowardly gang of politicians. Now, in July, affairs were in a desperate state. Over 600 buildings had been burnt down in the last four months; mostly churches, convents, clubs and offices of the newspapers which inclined to the Right.

These constant, unchecked, local demonstrations of mob-rule had had their natural reaction; a great growth of militant Fascism. Property-owners, great and small, professional men of every category, and devout Catholics of all classes were flocking to join the civilian armies of Gil Robles, the Catholic leader of the *Accion Popular*, the largest single party in Spain, the Monarchist *Renovacion Española* or the *Falangists* under Primo de Rivera's son.

It seemed their only resource in a land already gripped by the 'Terror,' unless they fled the country as many elderly people with money had been doing for weeks past.

De Richleau corresponded with many well-informed people all over Europe and he had known for a long time that a bloody clash in Spain was becoming inevitable. Highly placed Army officers had actually written to him of their fears that, unless some concerted action was taken they would be arrested on some trumped-up charge, thrown into prison, and replaced by men either incapable or unwilling to lift a hand to save the country from total disruption.

The more the Duke thought over his mission the more it pleased him. It would be good to draw a blade again, if need be, in defence of all the principles which he had always considered stood for a sane and decent world. He would hardly have hesitated for a second before acceding to Lucretia-José's appeal if he had not realized from the very first that such a trust was too big a weight for one man to bear. He was loath to draw his

friends into it without consulting them first, but now the die was cast he was sublimely confident that he could count on their co-operation.

Simon's subtle brain would be invaluable in such a business and his connection with the great financial houses of Europe would probably prove useful also. De Richleau's granite features softened for a second as he thought of the brilliant, nervy young Jew whom such a curious chain of circumstances had led him to love almost as a son. And Rex, what a blessing his herculean strength might prove, as it had so often before, if they encountered real trouble. Besides, Rex was one of the finest amateur airmen living; he could fly them out to Spain. How fortunate that he had recovered now from the tragic loss of Tanith. Well, it was nearly three years ago since Rex's young wife had died in giving birth to her first child—little Robin. How time marches on. De Richleau thought again of how he and his friends had fought the Devil—fought the Devil himself—and won, for Tanith before that wedding. Having triumphed over such mighty odds, how, when they were once reunited, could they fail in this new encounter where only the human forces of evil were arrayed against them?

It was characteristic of the man that, having taken on the business, he had set about his preparations without a moment's delay. Simon had been out when De Richleau had telephoned his office, but a call to his house had resulted in the information that he would definitely be in at seven o'clock. Rex, however, who was in London for the season, had been in and had asked the Duke to have cocktails with him at six.

Lucretia having spent most of the afternoon explaining her project in detail, it was close on five already but De Richleau knew that he still had ample time to make some notes before setting out and he opened the Atlas at the map of Spain.

As his eye roved over the peninsula, the least cultivated and most mountainous of all the countries in Europe except Switzerland, a thousand memories came flooding back to him. His first visit as a boy of twelve when, outside her great cities, Spain had still been almost unbelievably primitive. Great days out hunting bear in the forests of the Pyrenees. Nights in San Sebastian and Madrid. A mighty coup against the gaming tables in Alegeciras long before the war. The bells of Seville and the strong sunlight on the old Moorish buildings of Toledo. A little cove on the Basque coast caught his eye. It was over a quarter of a century since he had been

there but he could see its deserted golden sands hemmed in by high cliffs as clearly as though it had been yesterday that he had fought a duel there early one summer morning after a night spent in a beautiful woman's arms.

For a long time he pored over the map; carefully measuring distances and, in the process, recalling to his mind after the lapse of years the main streets of cities, the guttural ch's of the Spanish language and the long ranges of barren mountains that made so many portions of the country almost inaccessible. Yet, when he closed the Atlas with a sigh he was still thinking of the lovely Spanish lady who had so nearly cost him his life.

At ten to six his great silver Hispano-Suiza was waiting at the street door. The chauffeur and footman were clad in grey liveries and wore tall, wide-topped grey Persian lamb *pepenkas* at a rakish angle on their heads. Many people often turned to stare with interest or admiration at such an unusual display of personality when the Duke drove about London and some of the *nouveau riche* among his neighbours who could, if they had wished, have afforded a precisely similar turn-out but lacked the courage to appease their envy, spoke of it as the most vulgar ostentation.

It is quite true that De Richleau possessed a flamboyant taste in such matters, but that anyone should dream of questioning his indulgence of it never even crossed his mind. If he ever thought of the matter at all it was only to reflect upon the sadly degenerate age into which he had been born; an age in which he must content himself with a mere couple of men seated in front of him in a motor-car, whereas many of his ancestors had usually driven through the streets with sixteen outriders preceding them. Completely oblivious of the looks of admiration or envy which were cast at his equipage, he was conveyed smoothly through Hyde Park to Knightsbridge, remarking only, in the light of the early July evening, how lovely the flowers were looking in the beds. A few moments later he was duly deposited on the doorstep of Mr. Rex Van Ryn's little bachelor house in Trevor Square.

As De Richleau was shown up to the first-floor room which ran the whole width of the house, the great, hulking American came forward to meet him beaming all over his ugly, attractive face.

"Well, now, this is just great!" Rex boomed as he towered over the slender Duke. "I haven't a notion what's brought this sudden visitation but

I'm mighty glad to see you."

"Thanks, Rex." The Duke sank into a comfortable chair. "I'm glad to have caught you, as my business is somewhat urgent."

"Go right ahead while I fix the cocktails. You know my old motto: Make 'em strong and drink 'em quick. It takes a sixth to make an appetite."

"How I envy you your magnificent thirst," smiled De Richleau.

"Unfortunately I can't stay long but I'll join you while I can."

"Good! Now let's have the works."

"I had a young woman to see me to-day and she requires our assistance in a rather delicate matter."

"Well, she's welcome if she's any friend of yours."

"She's the daughter of an old friend now dead. I should warn you, by the way, that this affair may possibly lead us into danger."

With a shrug of his mighty shoulders Rex turned away and rammed home the top of the cocktail shaker. "Oh, shucks! Danger's never stopped us doing anything we wanted yet. Is Simon in on this?"

"Not yet, but he will be. I'm going to see him directly I leave you."

"Fine! And who's the dirty dick we're going to beat up in the interests of your girl friend?"

"It isn't a 'him' but certain political forces with which we may be drawn into conflict. Like myself, of course, you are a diehard anti-Communist."

"Sure, but I'm a diehard anti-Nazi too for that matter. The things those skunks have done to the poor wretched Jews in Germany just doesn't bear thinking about."

"Thanks." In one of his elegant, slender hands which, on occasion, could so unexpectedly exert a grip of steel, De Richleau took the froth-topped glass that Rex proffered him. "Naturally we all deplore these senseless excesses against an unfortunate minority, but they are incomparably less terrible than the wholesale slaughter of an entire property-owning class, as has happened in Russia.

"However," he added with a fatherly twinkle in his eye, "international politics have never been your strong suit, Rex, and I'm confident you value my judgment sufficiently to leave that part of it to me."

"Sure!" agreed Rex.

"That's splendid then. And you know me well enough to realize that I should never dream of taking a hand on any side other than the one which

stands for the maintenance of law and order.”

“Naturally. Stability is the only thing worth raising a dust for in this crazy world to-day. If we could only give Roosevelt the air at the next election...”

De Richleau shot him a swift sideways glance and cut in quickly, “I know what all you rich Americans feel about Roosevelt; but let’s not talk about that. Our job is to prevent certain funds being used for the possible murder of scores of people like ourselves in a few weeks or months from now.”

“Hi! Just wait a minute,” Rex said quickly. “I thought you wanted me as your strong-arm man in some private feud, but this sounds a different box of tricks altogether. What sort of a call are you making on my time?”

“I need your help certainly for the next few weeks and possibly for several months.”

Rex suddenly began to look anxious and worried. “I say now,” he exclaimed, “that’s just too bad. You know I’d do anything for you—anything. For the next week or so you’ve only got to say the word and I’ll go beat up anything you like to name without even asking a reason. But from the first week in August I’m booked for a trip that simply can’t be side-tracked.”

“But, Rex—surely!” De Richleau paused, utterly aghast. “Surely you wouldn’t put any ordinary engagement before a personal appeal from me when I’m going into danger.”

“Oh, come now, don’t put it that way,” Rex pleaded. “Here, have another cocktail. Let me think a bit. This is a ‘muddle,’ as Simon would say, a god-darned awful muddle, the sort of muddle I’ve never been in before and I don’t like it one little bit.”

“The situation seems quite clear to me,” the Duke remarked with some acidity. “You have already made some plans for August and now I descend on you, unexpectedly it is true, but with the earnest request that whatever they are you should abandon them in favour of participating in an affair which may mean life or death to many people, myself included. The choice lies, of course, entirely with you.”

Rex turned unhappily away. “I’m sorry, old chap—sick as hell. But it isn’t quite like that and, unfortunately, I can’t tell you about it. I feel quite terrible about having to refuse you but I’ve given my word and from August on I’m not my own master.”

“I see,” said De Richleau glumly. “In that case there’s nothing more to be said. It’s a sad blow as I had counted on you. However, if you’re free for the next few days you could, perhaps, fly me out to Spain?”

The big American whipped round as though he had been shot. “Spain?” he repeated, his mouth hanging open. “Good God! Why Spain?”

“Because that’s where the trouble is coming in which I mean to take a hand.” De Richleau leaned forward suddenly. “Is anything the matter. Rex? You’re looking very queer.”

“No, I’m fine, thanks.” Rex swiftly sank another cocktail. “But I can’t fly you out to Spain. My old kite’s—well— dismantled just now—all in bits, you know.”

“We could hire another,” suggested the Duke.

“Sure, of course we could. Why didn’t I think of that—” Rex floundered awkwardly. “But, well, I just hate Spain— never could bear the sight of a bullfight—cruel lot of devils, Spaniards. Besides, the truth is I’m flying very little these days. I—I’ve lost my nerve a bit, maybe.”

The Duke stood up. “How very unfortunate for you,” he said gently. “I think I will be going now.”

Rex stared at the carpet, a wretched, hang-dog expression on his normally cheerful face. “I just don’t know what to say,” he muttered. “I never dreamed I’d live to see the day I’d have to let you down.”

“Nor I,” replied the Duke coldly. “But there is no need to apologize, my dear Rex. If I come out of this business alive we shall doubtless dine together and revive pleasant memories of the days when your nerves were made of steel.”

Chapter Three – A Most Unexpected Encounter

De Richeau's anger at Rex's defection was swiftly drowned in his utter bewilderment that such a thing could possibly occur. He did not believe for one instant that the great-hearted American had really lost his courage, and he puzzled his wits in vain for some explanation of his friend's extraordinary behaviour as his car bore him smoothly to Simon's house in St. John's Wood.

Mr. Simon Aron still lived in his rambling old mansion on the north side of Lord's Cricket Ground. It lay at the bottom of a *cul-de-sac* which branched off from a quiet street of private houses standing secluded behind high walls in their own gardens.

As the Hispano neared the passage-way that led only to Simon's house the Duke saw, to his annoyance, a taxi enter it just ahead of him and that a battered two-seater was already parked at its far end. Evidently Mr. Aron had other visitors.

The taxi disgorged two seedy-looking individuals who entered the garden gate with De Richeau and walked up the short covered way to the house just behind him. All three paused on the doorstep, and as he pressed the bell the Duke heard the other two exchange a few sentences in Russian. Knowing that language he caught the words: "Whatever you do, Cheilakoff, remember that these people will be mostly intellectual dabblers. You will scare them off at once if you start talking of the executions which are certain to be necessary."

'What the devil's all this?' thought the Duke, coming out of his depressing rumination about Rex's extraordinary conduct with a start. He was unable to hear more, however, as at that moment the garden gate slammed again and Simon came quickly up the path.

He was dressed, as usual, with extreme neatness, but even the skill of his expensive tailor could not conceal his narrow shoulders and short-sightedness caused him to walk with his head thrust forward between them when he was in a hurry.

De Richeau reflected with a smile that his friend really *was* rather like the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, who feared to be late for the Duchess's party.

Their greetings were rather muddled as Simon obviously did not know his other visitors and the butler opened the door just as he reached the steps.

“I’m afraid I’ve called at an awkward time,” said the Duke, “but I wanted to see you urgently and I was told you would be home for certain at seven.”

“Ner,” Simon answered with his characteristic negative and a little shake of his narrow bird-like head. “Always pleased to see you. Fact is I’ve lent the house for a meeting but it doesn’t start till a quarter past. Come into the library.”

The butler had taken charge of the two foreigners and was showing them into the great blue-and-gold *salon* as De Richleau followed his host into the room on the right of the front door.

“Well, what’ll you drink?” Simon asked with his friendly, wide-mouthed grin. “Hardly the time of day for a bottle of Y’quem, is it?”

“No,” agreed the Duke a shade regretfully. It was one of the bonds between the gifted young Jew and the elderly French exile that they were both great connoisseurs of fine wines, cigars, and the good things of the table. “Besides, I have been drinking cocktails. Give me a brandy and soda.”

While Simon was mixing the drinks De Richleau stared out of the window. Quite a number of people were now making their way up the covered path. Comparatively few of them were British in appearance and although their faces showed them to be mainly intellectual types their clothes were mostly of the ready-made variety and the women among them were definitely dowdy.

On Simon’s touching his elbow he turned away and for a couple of minutes the two friends exchanged amenities over their drinks. The Duke then plunged into the business that had brought him.

Simon’s first reaction to his friend’s plea for help was quiet but definite assent. Yet, as De Richleau began to give particulars Simon started to rub one finger up and down the great arc of his unquestionably Semitic nose; a certain sign that he was extremely worried.

Suddenly he jerked out, “This is a muddle—a really nasty muddle. I don’t like the sound of it a little bit. I’d rather you didn’t tell me any more about it either, because—well, if there *is* going to be a blow-up in Spain my sympathies will be on the other side.”

De Richleau sat up and stared. “Good God, Simon! You can’t mean that! You’re out of your senses!”

“I’m not. Look what’s happened in Italy and Germany. No one can call their souls their own. D’you think I want to see Spain go the same way?”

“Never mind Spain. How about this country? If you had to choose would you rather live under a Fascist or Communist Dictatorship?”

“Communist every time.”

“But, my dear Simon, you’re a capitalist—and a darned rich one. They’d not only take part of your money as the Fascists might, but the lot, and put you up against a brick wall in addition.”

“They might rob me of my money and, because of it, of my life, but at least my people would not be persecuted on account of their race.”

De Richleau sighed. “I’m sorry, Simon. I appreciate your feelings, but it never occurred to me that you would associate the Spanish Conservatives with the Nazis. Actually, of course, they are poles apart.”

“Don’t you believe it,” Simon flared. “When the Spanish Right was in power its methods were identical with those of these German bullies—moral and physical torture applied to anyone who opposed them. Besides, if the Communists are going to try to get control of the country the anti-Communists have got to line up with the Fascists—haven’t they? It’s their only chance.”

A worried frown creased the Duke’s broad forehead. Apart from the fact that they had risked their lives for each other in the past his friendship with Simon was based upon their mutual love of beautiful things. When they met they rarely talked politics but discussed their latest discoveries in the world of art, and both of them could linger lovingly over a jade carving or a page of prose. Never before had De Richleau heard his gentle, diffident young friend speak with such heated vehemence; he was seriously perturbed and at the same time extremely curious as to what lay behind this outburst.

Normally Simon was far too quick-witted ever to give away anything that he did not wish another person to know, but Monseigneur le Duc de Richleau was a wily man and he saw in a flash that if only Simon could be induced to carry on his tirade his present agitation might cause him to let something slip out which would give his listener a clue.

Suppressing his annoyance, therefore, the Duke murmured with a mildness completely foreign to his nature, "Dear me. I had no idea you were an atheist, Simon."

"Atheist!" repeated Simon, his nice brown eyes still hard with anger. "I'm no more an atheist than you are. And what's that got to do with it?"

"Aren't Communists all atheists?" asked De Richleau innocently.

"Who cares what the Communists are." Simon gave an impatient shrug. "In Spain they're only a handful. Not more than a couple of thousand members of the Party in the whole country. Their only use is as a possible rallying point against these Fascist swine in an emergency, because they're well organized. What concerns thinking people is all the millions of honest, decent men and women who ask nothing but their right to live in reasonable freedom and security under an enlightened Republican Government. There's been religious toleration ever since Alfonso was kicked out and people can be Catholics, Protestants, Freethinkers, anything they like—just as they can here. Who but a criminal lunatic would ever want Spain to return to the state when those dirty, blackbeetle priests had the power to order everybody's life from the cradle to the grave—and grew fat on their blackmailers' profits?"

De Richleau shrugged. It was not his game to be drawn into an argument. "If there aren't many Communists, there are plenty of Anarchists. What's that huge organization of theirs called?" he pretended to search his memory. "The U.C.T., isn't it?"

"You're getting muddled," Simon replied quickly. "There's the U.G.T., *Union General de Trabajadores*. That's the great Trade Union which practically embodies the whole Spanish Socialist movement. Its strength is in the workers of Madrid and the miners of the Asturias. But I think you mean the C.N.T., *Confederacion Nacional de Trabajadore*. That's pretty well as big but its members are all Anarchists and their stronghold is Barcelona."

"That's it, that's it, the C.N.T. Well, surely you wouldn't like to see these Anarchists killing half the people in Spain— would you?"

Simon wriggled his narrow shoulders uncomfortably. "But you don't understand! They wouldn't kill anybody unless it was absolutely necessary. People here have the most crazy ideas about Anarchists. Seem to think they're all just bloodthirsty ruffians. It isn't so at all. Most of them are fine,

friendly, simple people. Real idealists who feel that the world's in such a filthy muddle that it'd be best to scrap everything and start all over again with a clean slate. Hell of a lot in it, you know, when you think where all the old corrupt systems have landed us. Of course—Spanish people always have been idealists. That's why the Anarchists' doctrines have been accepted as a life-line by hundreds of thousands of Spaniards while they're almost unknown in every other country. I'm not talking only of the city workers either. It is a staggering fact that there are as many Anarchists among the backward peasants of Estremadura as there are in Barcelona. They're tough, too, and they'll fight like hell when it comes to a show-down."

De Richleau had learned all he wanted to know, so he remarked with sudden acidity, "You seem to be very well up in Spanish affairs, Simon?"

"Ner." Simon suddenly began to wonder if he had been talking too much and his eyes flickered swiftly from side to side. "Ner," he repeated. "Only know enough to protect my interests in the markets."

"I see." The Duke glanced casually out of the window again; another little group was walking up the path. "Forgive my curiosity, Simon, but who are all these queer people?"

"They're arriving for the meeting I told you about—it's in aid of a charity I'm interested in."

"Really?" De Richleau's smile was bland. "They don't look a very useful lot for such a purpose. Not very prosperous, I mean."

"It's not one of those Mayfair shows where the helpers expect to eat half the profits and grumble at the band."

"I should be delighted to contribute to anything in which you are interested."

Simon's eyes flickered uneasily again. "Awfully kind of you but—well, it's hardly your affair. You see it's a Jewish charity to help these poor devils who've been slung out of Germany."

"How very queer."

"Queer? I don't get you."

"Why, in view of what you say, that at least eighty percent of the people who have arrived at your house in the last quarter of an hour should be as Aryan as I am."

Simon was on guard now. His full mouth slowly broadened into a wide grin and, with a sudden gesture peculiar to himself, he gave a little nervous laugh, stooping his bird-like head with its great beak of a nose to the hand that held his cigarette.

“Well now, I’ll tell you,” he chuckled. “Like most non-Jews, a good half of the time you don’t know a Jew when you see one. Out of the forty-odd million practising Jews scattered up and down the world you might spot a fair proportion but the rest have intermarried so now. Takes another Jew to detect the more subtle characteristics of his own race in a stranger. The best of us still stick together though, when it comes to helping our own people. That’s why this crowd looks a bit different from what you might expect.”

De Richleau nodded. The explanation was clever and sound enough but he was not taken in by it. He had seen plenty of fair-haired Jews in his time and knew straight-nosed ones to be by no means uncommon; quite apart from the red herring of intermarriage which Simon had sought to draw across the trail. Yet he would have bet his last penny that the great majority of the people arriving at the house had not got a drop of Jewish blood in them. Simon was lying, but there was nothing to be gained by saying so. Instead, the Duke remarked quite pleasantly, “Perhaps I was misled owing to there being so many foreigners among them.”

“That’s it,” Simon agreed, patting him on the shoulder. “Charity’s a world affair. Representatives of nearly every country meet here and the same thing happens in other centres, New York, Paris, Warsaw, Prague and so on. Gives us a chance to exchange information and—er—arrange emigration lists.”

“Yes, yes, I quite understand.” The Duke was hardly listening to him now. It hurt him abominably that Simon should consider it necessary to lie to him and the ugly truth that not one but both his friends had failed him was coming home with all its strange and worrying significance. He was not afraid to take the field alone but he knew that his chances of success would be decreased enormously and, in addition, he was bitterly disappointed that what might have proved a dangerous but stimulating adventure in the company of his old companions must now be a desperate and lonely ordeal.

Finishing his drink he stood up. "Well, Simon, I'm afraid we've drifted rather from the affair on which I came to see you. Politics are devilish things and one of their worst evils is that, at times, even the best of friends can't see each other's points of view. However, I do understand your very natural bias against anything which might be even remotely connected with Fascism, and I can only say how sorry I am you find it impossible to help me."

"Wish to God you weren't going," Simon burst out. "Can't you call it off?"

"No. That's out of the question."

"Well, er—don't know what you're going out to Spain to do but, whatever it is, do your damndest to get it over before the month is out."

"I doubt if that is possible."

Simon's eyes flickered wildly. "That's bad—damn bad. But watch your every step then, and—don't use your own name. Dukes aren't very popular in Spain these days. Of course it's only a money-market rumour—at least—can't tell you how I know, but I'm pretty certain there's going to be blue murder there the first week in August."

"Thank you, my friend." De Richleau had a very shrewd idea how much it had cost Simon to give that warning and he spoke with genuine appreciation. "I'll take care of myself. Fortunately I've had a little practice at that sort of thing. I'd better go now and I do hope I haven't kept you too long from your meeting."

"Ner. It hasn't started yet. They're still arriving." Simon jerked his head towards the window.

The Duke was already moving towards the door but, as he caught one swift glimpse of a slim figure before it was hidden from view by the porch of the house, he suddenly stopped dead. Her clothes were different from those of the beautifully-turned-out girl who had lunched with him that day; these were mannish and ill-fitting while the golden hair was drawn back skin-tight into a small bun on the neck instead of being charmingly coiffeured in curls on top of her head. Yet he knew he could not be mistaken as he said lightly, "I see your new friends aren't all unattractive. That girl seemed a bit severe but she's devilish good-looking. Who is she?" Tense as a cat about to spring he waited for Simon's answer. At last it came.

“She’s only been here once before. Her Christian name’s José, I think, but they call her The Golden Spaniard.”

Chapter Four – The Most Dangerous Woman in Europe

For all he saw of the streets and the people on his way back to his flat De Richleau might as well have been a blind man. His mind was entirely preoccupied with the fact that, impossible as it seemed, his two friends had deserted him. He must set out now alone and face unsupported any dangers which might arise through his strange trusteeship.

That there would be dangers he had little doubt as he reflected on the proverbial dilatoriness of Spanish Generals. King Alfonso's unpopularity and eventual fall were mainly due to the way his incompetent Army chiefs had allowed the Moroccan War to drag on year after year; draining the life-blood from Spain in constantly recurring demands for fresh levies of conscripts until Primo de Rivera had become Dictator and, at long last, settled it once for all. But Primo had died, an exile in Paris, only a few weeks after his fall, and what other strong man did Spain possess?

Primo's son, José Antonio, head of the *Falange Española*, was almost an unknown quantity and very young to assume such an enormous responsibility. Gil Robles, the Catholics' champion, had already lost much of his prestige by his hopeless shilly-shallying. Calvo Sotelo certainly appeared the best bet but would he be able to control the Generals?

It was clear enough too that the other side was equally busy preparing its own bid for power, and it seemed to De Richleau that whichever way things went there were bound to be several days of fierce street fighting, with its attendant horrors of looting and murder by uncontrollable mobs.

One thing gave him a sad consolation. The reason for Rex's pathetic excuses to escape joining him was now clear. Rex could be enthused into anything by either Simon or myself, De Richleau argued, and he's booked to go abroad in the first week of August—the very week Simon warned me that the Revolution is timed to start.

On the question of what they were planning the Duke had already made up his mind. He thanked his stars that there was little fear of his coming up against them in Spain—that would have been too ghastly. No, Simon disliked physical violence far too much to get himself mixed up in any actual fighting. But he was busying himself with the affairs of the Revolutionaries, not a doubt of that. His charity meeting was pure

moonshine. The people arriving at his house had been Socialist delegates; De Richleau knew the type too well to mistrust his judgment.

What were they meeting about? Simon's game was finance, and Money was a powerful weapon. That was just where he could be supremely useful to them if he chose to place his far-seeing brain at their disposal.

What part was Rex destined to play in all this, the Duke wondered. If he were going abroad early in August it was almost certain that Simon meant to go too and he would never send Rex to risk his life in Spain alone. If it were not Spain to which they were going, where else could it be? Russia, perhaps, so that Simon could act as a connecting link between the Spanish Bolshies and their Moscow backers. The Russians had no cause to love either Rex or Simon but stranger changes of heart had been witnessed in these days of constantly shifting international line-ups. The Kremlin's outlook was very different from what it had been when they had pitted their wits against it six years before. What if they *had* shot up a few Soviet soldiers and secret police in the old days? There were a million and a half more candidates for the same jobs coming of age every year. If Simon and Rex turned up in Moscow draped in Red Flags, with hammers and sickles plastered all over them and well vouched-for by the Spanish Revolutionary leaders, they would be given more caviare and sweet champagne than they could comfortably tackle, instead of a cell in the Lubyanka.

That was the game, then. Rex was to fly Simon back and forth from Moscow whenever necessary because he had taken on some sort of advisory post with the Spanish Reds about their finances.

Having reached this conclusion the Duke's thoughts reverted to Lucretia-José. She had been the very-last person he had expected to see at Simon's house but the reason for her presence there was abundantly clear. She had spoken of her 'work' for the restoration of the Spanish Monarchy after lunch. As the houses of her family had been closed ever since Don Alfonso's withdrawal it was clear that her father had deliberately kept her from any contact with the Spanish nobility. Instead he must have schooled her to assume a dual personality and, under an alias, gradually to worm her way into the councils of the enemy. That she had succeeded was beyond doubt, otherwise she would never have been appointed as a delegate to this secret meeting that was being held in London.

De Richleau considered for a moment getting in touch with her in order to find out if his surmise about the part Simon was to play were correct. He would have liked to see more of her in any case—a lot more—but he decided that he must not risk it. She had said herself that it would be wiser if they were not seen together while she was in England, and now he knew the truth about her he could appreciate that there was a twofold reason for her caution. If the Reds learned that he was associating with the heiress to the Coralles millions he would be a marked man from the moment he entered Spain, and if one of the agents who knew her as The Golden Spaniard spotted her in the company of a Duke with known Monarchist sympathies her whole position in their organization might be undermined.

As he thought of the patience and courage Lucretia-José must have displayed in her long climb from the ranks of the Revolutionaries to a seat on their inner councils he was filled with wondering admiration. It meant that for years she must have played a lone hand with extraordinary skill, all unsuspected by her enemies. Real brains, razor-sharp wits, and nerves of iron were requisite to pass unscathed through such an ordeal when the least slip meant exposure, and De Richleau counted these qualities beyond all praise. Even so he hated the idea that she should be mixed up in such a desperately dangerous business and have to associate with what he mentally called ‘that blood-lusting rabble.’

On the latter point he need not have bothered himself in the least. His assumption that her father was responsible for her assuming a second identity was only partially correct, and his mental picture of her as a spy in Simon’s house alone among her enemies, endeavouring to avoid notice and secretly hating all the people about her, was an entire misconception. She was quite at her ease and rather enjoying herself.

Her strange vocation had been born of a wildly romantic idealism, engendered by much reading of fiction and histories of those days when the Chivalry of Spain had saved Europe from the Moors, and of later centuries when the heroism of her great Captains had made her the mightiest power in the world. Her father had only gradually been won round to Lucretia’s project but having at last consented had helped her enormously. He had secured for her all the immense mass of data she had to master before she could make a start, and by spreading a rumour that she was the victim of a wretched skin trouble, which disfigurement

rendered her so sensitive that he was unable to present her to his Spanish acquaintances, he had protected her from the risk of recognition when she entered on her new role.

At first she had loathed the people with whom she had to mix. Their whole outlook was so utterly at variance with her own passionate belief in the fitness of a Catholic and Monarchist Spain that it proved an almost unendurable strain to refrain from screaming at the blasphemies they uttered. Only the fact that she knew their jargon backwards and the story that she was the illegitimate daughter of a Catholic priest, which they swallowed greedily enough, gave her sufficient cover to remain unsuspected when she turned white from sheer horror at finding herself alone among these ghouls who thirsted for the blood of her friends and her class. In those early days the very smell of the unwashed crowds who gathered in the dreary meeting-halls had filled her with such nausea that it had been a struggle to prevent herself being physically sick. She felt that she would never be clean again from mental and bodily contamination but, as the months passed, familiarity with such surroundings brought a subtle change in her attitude.

She had begun to look with new eyes upon these denizens of a strange, squalid, twilight world. Some she recognized as professional trouble-makers who scraped a living from the meagre collections obtained after addressing meetings, but most were honest people made bitter by the injustices of fate. Once she had grasped the appalling conditions under which many of them were born and died, the ignorance that condemned them to slavery all their lives and how a whim of fashion or the ill-timed increase of a tax could rob hundreds of them of the bare pittance on which they lived, a new horror gripped her. She felt a terrible urge to give and give in order to alleviate a little of the suffering around her. But to do so would have been to betray herself. Moreover she was quick to realize that even her father's riches would have done no more than the application of a little ointment to a cancerous sore.

The next stage had come with her gradual advancement; as a speaker meeting other speakers and with her election to a few not very important committees. It was then that she began to receive and accept invitations from minor leaders and saw them for the first time when they were not

cursing capitalists or thundering atheistic blasphemies from their soap-boxes.

Before long realization had come to her that in their private lives most of them could be as gentle, as kind, as courteous and much more generous, within their limited means, than the people amongst whom she had been brought up. She found that they possessed abundant humour too and an almost unbelievable fortitude when fate dealt harshly with them.

Yet her discoveries had not turned her for one moment from her purpose. Learning to know them, to admire some and even think of a number with genuine affection had convinced her more than ever that they were quite incapable of governing their own destinies. If their conditions were to be bettered they must submit to having their lives ordered for them; and not by a set of corrupt politicians but by those of her own caste who were above graft and self-seeking.

Her dual life had now become second-nature to her. As the Condesa Lucretia, it was her duty to betray their subversive operations in order to protect those whom she considered best fitted to govern her country; but as José Levida, by which name she was known among them, she showed a genuine sympathy for their aspirations to better the workers' lot and a personal friendliness which many of them had ample proof went far deeper than mere words. This extraordinary capacity for keeping her work and her emotions in separate, water-tight compartments made her, as far as the forces of Revolution were concerned, the most dangerous woman in Europe.

About forty people were gathered in the big blue-and-gold drawing-room which ran the whole length of the back of Simon's house and its chairs had all been turned to face a small buhl table behind which sat the chairman of the meeting.

He was a stoutish, fresh-faced Englishman of moderately prosperous aspect and benign expression, but one glance at his blue eyes showed that he would tolerate no disorder.

With business-like brevity he introduced Comrade Hay P. Hinkler as a visitor from the States who had made a special study of Spanish affairs, in his capacity as Professor of Economics, and could give them an unbiased account of the events that had led up to the present situation.

The Professor was a thin, scraggy man with untidy hair. Lucretia had not encountered him before but after he had been speaking for three minutes she wrote him off as negligible. He was boringly erudite upon the awakening of the proletariat which had led to revolutions in other countries, but she could see at once that he was hopelessly ignorant about the real state of Spain and had no appreciation of the backwardness of the Spanish workers. However, he knew the complicated history of Spanish politics in the present century backwards, and Lucretia, who knew it even better, listened with polite resignation.

He related how King Alfonso had broken his oath to the Constitution by refusing to summon the Cortes so that they might confirm or annul, by their vote, the powers Primo de Rivera had taken to himself on seizing the Dictatorship, and of how a public promise had been given that the Dictatorship should only last for a period of 90 days, to tide the country over a crisis, but had been arbitrarily maintained for six years.

When he passed to the way Primo had suppressed the Liberal Press and closed the Universities he became almost vehement, but he tailed off again when he entered on the tangle of warring policies which divided the parties of the Left during their first period of Government after the ex-King's expulsion.

He then spoke of the Reactionary Government which had succeeded the Liberals and taken a bitter vengeance for all that its supporters had suffered during the three years the Progressives had held power. They had side-tracked the new agrarian laws, overdue for half a century, by which the wretched lot of the peasants was to have been ameliorated. They had protected and encouraged their old cronies, the greedy priests, who had fattened like vultures for generations on the living flesh of Spain. Their tyranny had ground like an iron-shod heel into the necks of the workers until the miners of the Asturias could bear no more and revolted.

That 1934 rebellion had proved abortive as they well knew. Hundreds of gallant men who had made a despairing stand for the remnants of their freedom had been mercilessly butchered by the soldiers sent against them.

The nation-wide horror at those brutal atrocities had returned the Progressives to power again in the Elections held five months ago. The present Government were enlightened men of liberal views. All they asked was peace in which to right the wrongs from which the bulk of their

country men had suffered all too long and a fair deal would be given to all classes. But would they get that peace? No. The Professional Army, the hereditary curse of Spain, stood sullenly in the background. It had made and unmade Governments for as long as any of them could remember. Now, it was up to its old tricks, and abundant proof would be laid before them that its chiefs were actively engaged in plotting a new Military Dictatorship.

Would they allow the Spanish people to be crushed unaided and suffer a renewal of slavery under another Mussolini, or were they prepared to assist their Spanish brothers in maintaining their own constitutionally-elected Government by force of arms?

“That, folks,” ended Professor Hinkler with simple dignity, “is the question I have been asked to put to you. If you do not give your help it means that one more bulwark of Democracy goes down. And it is not Spain alone which will be affected. With the cessation of freedom there the French Fascists may be emboldened to show their ugly claws. With Europe a Fascist bloc from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, what hope have the peoples of other nations of retaining their systems of Government based on the will of the people? Speaking for the United States centre, from which I come, we answer this appeal in the spirit of our great President Abraham Lincoln. Whatever it may cost us this must be done lest the word Democracy perish from the vocabulary of the peoples of the world.”

Lucretia-José hardly bothered to look round. Perhaps she had slightly underrated the Professor. The fact that he had maintained an academic calm, except when speaking of the reprisals against the Reds for their attempted revolution of 1934, had lent a certain weight to his arguments, but whoever had made that speech on fundamentals the result would have been the same in such a gathering. Although the delegates were mostly foreigners they all understood English and had come with a broad idea of the issues at stake. The faces about her were set in grim determination or glowed with fanatic eagerness. She joined with automatic enthusiasm in the ovation accorded to the Professor.

When it had subsided the chairman vouched for the contents of certain sworn documents which were read out by a Spaniard who translated them into English. Lucretia-José noted with satisfaction that they disclosed nothing of vital importance, but she listened with keen attention so that

she might inform the right people about possible sources from which they came and enable an attempt to be made to stop further leakages.

Dutch, Czech, French and Polish delegates, German-Jewish exiles and Italian ex-patriates, all testified in turn to the willingness of their organizations to devote a portion of their funds to financing the Spanish people's coming fight for freedom. It was no more than Lucretia-José had expected, but her interest quickened when the Russian delegate introduced Comrade Cheilakoff as a special envoy sent by the Soviet Government.

Cheilakoff spoke in short guttural sentences. He told them that he was a member of the Comintern and that his organization were not only prepared to assist the Spanish people with arms but the Kremlin Government would, if the Spanish Regular Army revolted, send airmen, tank operators, and other military specialists to co-operate with the Army of the People, against it.

He had hardly sat down before Lucretia-José was on her feet. She was only one of the half a dozen Spaniards present who had been sent to represent different sections of the Spanish *Frente Popular* but she meant to get in first.

She thanked Comrade Cheilakoff's Government through him for their generous offer but, she asked, was it not dangerous to accept? If aid was openly received from a foreign power, who knew what would follow? Mussolini and Hitler were nearer neighbours than Comrade Stalin. It would be even easier for them to give similar assistance to the Spanish Fascists. That, at all costs, must be avoided. She spoke for the F.A.I., the inner organization of the Spanish Anarchists which controlled the great C.N.T. They would be grateful for money and supplies of arms but they were opposed to foreign intervention. For seven minutes she succeeded in holding up the meeting by a glowing dissertation on Anarchist ideals.

When the blue-eyed Chairman checked her, another member of the F.A.I. got up to support her views but a Madrid Trade Union boss from Largo Caballero's U.G.T. followed and pointed out that if only they could induce the Government to arrest the Army leaders civil war might yet be prevented. On the other hand, if the Government continued to shilly-shally and they had to fight, it would still be the legally elected Government and, as such, had a clear right to import foreign military specialists if it wished;

whereas the Army leaders would be rebels and it would be a very different matter for a foreign power openly to give them aid.

The representative of the small but well-organized '*Party Comunista*' an off-shoot of the Comintern, was naturally in favour of accepting the assistance offered by his Russian friends, but a woman Trotskyist from the P.O.U.M. opposed him venomously, on principle, owing to her organization's hatred of all things connected with Stalin's regime.

For a moment the decision hung in the balance. Then a new speaker took the floor. He was a youngish man and short in stature but his quick gestures betrayed a restless energy and his wiry figure abundant strength. His black eyes flashed in a lean, tanned face, and although his English was far from perfect his words carried a passionate conviction.

Lucretia-José had never seen him before and leaned over to ask her neighbour who he was.

"Cristoval Ventura," came the whispered answer. "He is a U.G.T. man from the Asturias."

Ventura supported his colleague from Madrid but urged an additional reason why the Soviet offer should be accepted. He was, he said, a native of Oviedo. He had participated in the blow for liberty struck there two years before. For seven days they had held the city. Hundreds of gallant men, and women too, had laid down their lives for their beliefs. Untrained, ill-fed, but with unflinching bravery they had flung themselves in masses on the machine-guns of the enemy until by sheer weight of corpses the guns had been silenced. Even when artillery was brought against them and they had seen their little children blasted to death in the searing flame of the bursting shells, there had been no thought of surrender. They had fought on to the very limit of human courage and endurance, but they had been defeated in the end because the Army chiefs had sent aeroplanes and tanks to subdue the heroic workers. If, as now seemed inevitable, they were to be called on to renew the struggle, those who had survived the siege and the brutal butchery of prisoners that had succeeded it, were ready to lay down their lives as gallantly as their comrades who had fallen; but they could have no hope of victory unless they were supported by the most modern weapons of war manned by friends who had been trained in handling them.

Even before a vote was taken Lucretia-José knew that Cristoval Ventura had defeated her. No one thought it strange that she should oppose the Russian offer as they all knew that the Anarchists were idealists who disapproved equally of Stalinism and Fascism, but she had hoped, under that cloak, to prevent Russian officers and technicians being sent to the help of the Reds. Only five of the delegates voted with her and the rest recommended that help of any kind should be accepted by their Spanish associates.

The only other business of the meeting consisted in the election of Trustees for a Special Fund, an account for which was to be opened in London. Mr. Simon Aron did not put himself forward for election and neither did anyone else suggest his name, as the comparatively few delegates who knew him personally were aware of his wish that he should not be asked to assume any official position in the movement.

Throughout the debate he had sat silent and self-effacing at the back of the room; knowing perfectly well that it did not matter in the least whom they appointed. Any fool could sign papers, as would be necessary from time to time, but none of them knew anything about money. It had already been arranged that his firm should handle the foreign exchange for the Fund. With gentle, smiling persistence he would courteously annihilate any silly notions the Trustees might have and before the end of their first session they would be only too happy to rely on his guidance. Perhaps, even, they would depart thinking they had proposed matters just that way themselves.

When the arrangements were concluded he pressed a bell and sherry was brought in. It was of two kinds, a dark golden, medium sweet wine and an almost straw-coloured, bone-dry Manzanilla. He knew that the majority of the people there would go for the first, a drinkable but very inexpensive type. Simon was one of the most generous men in London but he was far too sensible to waste fine liquor on people who did not understand it. The Manzanilla cost nearly three times as much per bottle, but that was for the Spaniards who, of course, knew about such things and would quite certainly take the drier wine—they did.

Lucretia-José did not see Cristoval Ventura cross the room but looked up to find him standing right in front of her.

“We haven’t met before,” he said in Spanish, “but I’ve often heard of you. The Golden Spaniard is almost a legendary figure now among the Comrades. Are you fixed up to-night or will you dine with me?”

The invitation came with so little warning that she was quite unprepared for it; but she liked his dark, smiling eyes and his black hair which would have been unruly if he had not plastered it well down.

“I should like to,” she replied, speaking in Spanish too, as she wondered where he would take her. She was quite inured to eating in the little places which catered for the poor of Madrid when she accepted invitations from the Comrades but the richer among them often mingled with the class they sought to destroy in the fashionable restaurants. This young man was well-dressed and obviously an educated type. If he had money it was more likely that he would take her to the Savoy Grill than to a tea-shop but she hoped that it would not be one of the *de luxe* places. In Madrid nobody knew her as anything but José Levida, whereas in London she might encounter an old school friend or one of half a dozen other people who were aware of her real identity.

“How about the Monico?” he suggested. “I hardly know London at all but a friend of mine told me that it was quite nice.”

“I don’t know much about London either,” she replied, “and I’m quite content to go anywhere you suggest.” Actually she thought his choice a happy one as it assured her a good dinner, but she would not be running as much risk of recognition there as she would have in some places he might have named.

“And now what shall I call you? For you José sounds queer —since it is a man’s name.”

“I do a man’s work,” she smiled.

He gave a quick glance round, and seeing they were alone in their corner, went on quickly, “Well, I shall call you Doña José. I wonder if you feel about it as I do. This ‘Comrading’ each other all the time and all the other silly jargon these people think it necessary to use makes me positively sick. And I’m none the less an ardent Socialist for that.”

She nodded. “It’ll be rather a relief to talk without the ritual trimmings for a change. You don’t need to tell me you’re as sound as the rest, either. Anyone who’s heard you speak could never doubt that.”

He laughed and it was a deep joyous laugh that gave her a queer, happy feeling. "I'm terribly sorry I had to go against you on that motion but we've just got to have those Russian planes. Without them we wouldn't last a week."

"Well, it's settled now," she shrugged. "You must have had a ghastly time in Oviedo."

Cristoval Ventura's nice face suddenly went grim. "We did. The worst came after we were forced to throw in our hand, though. The reprisals were brutal beyond belief. My elder brother's an advocate. He didn't take part in the fighting. He's not even one of us, but he made a public protest about the atrocities those devils were inflicting on the wretched miners who'd fought so gamely. The soldiers got him and while some of them held him down on the floor of his office others smashed both his legs to pulp with the butt-ends of their rifles. They did it, they said, so that anyhow he should not be able to stand up when he opened his mouth again."

"How utterly horrible," she whispered.

"That's why," he went on, "we've got to be dead certain next time. It's victory or death. There can be no half-way and we'll have to use every devilish weapon the death experts can give us—even poison gas, if need be."

She wore little make-up at such meetings and her face paled a trifle. "No, not gas," she pleaded.

"Listen," he gripped her shoulder. "I'm young yet. There're a thousand things I want to do and see before I die. But somehow we've got to protect the things that are so much more important than ourselves from being trampled in the mire. The only way to do that is to root out the absentee landlords and the Church once and for all. This time we fight with the gloves off and, much as I love my life, I'll willingly give it for all that's best in Spain."

Lucretia-José raised her hand and laid it on her heart as she said firmly, "Yes. It means a fight to the finish and I too am prepared to give my life for all that is best in Spain."

He could not know that beneath her dress there lay a small hard object and that she had taken her oath upon a Crucifix.

Chapter Five – The Other Side of the Picture

Dinner that night at the Duke's flat was not a happy meal. Richard Eaton, and his wife, the adorable Princess Marie-Lou, whom they had brought out of Russia with them, were staying with him for a few days as they often did when in London. His guests always looked forward immensely to the quiet evenings they spent with the Duke. De Richleau knew so many interesting people and could discourse with wit and erudition upon a thousand topics.

Normally it was a joy to listen to his beautifully modulated voice recounting amusing incidents or calling up great figures out of the past to relive the secret history that lay behind the shaping of the modern world; but on this occasion he was sadly distraught. He was as solicitous as ever for his guests and, while the well-chosen courses came and went, talked easily and pleasantly, but both of them knew him too intimately to be deceived. The spark of vitality had suddenly gone out of him and they became certain he was hiding some acute worry.

When they moved into the big sitting-room little Marie-Lou went straight over and perched herself on his knee. "What is it, Grey-Eyes darling?" she asked tenderly.

The Duke smiled ruefully. "Do I show it as badly as all that? I'm so sorry. The two of you had better go out somewhere amusing. I'm not fit company for a dog this evening. I'll feel better to-morrow, I hope, but to-night I'm just a very tired and sad old man."

"Nonsense," Richard protested. "Tell us what's worrying you and you'll feel better at once."

"Yes, please tell us, Grey-Eyes," coaxed Marie-Lou.

"No, no," he shook his head. "I refuse to let you two young people even hear about this wretched business."

Richard stood up, turned the key in the lock of the door, and slipped it into his pocket. "Best get on with it," he said curtly. "You're not going to bed till you do."

De Richleau remained silent for a moment. Apart from his great friendship with Rex and Simon both had been under an obligation to him; he had risked his own neck and sanity to save one from life imprisonment and the other from madness. As both were single he had had no hesitation

in approaching them, but Richard was married, which had ruled him out from the beginning. Even so, if he were told about the affair might he not feel it up to him to volunteer his aid? No, decided the Duke. Not only does being married put him in a different category but I have no claim on him whatsoever. I can tell him the mess I'm in safely enough without embarrassing him, and Marie-Lou is much too sane to allow him to make any quixotic gestures.

"Very well," he said, "since you insist. I've pledged myself to do something I can't carry out and, if that were not enough, two out of my four best friends have let me down."

"Good God!" exclaimed Richard. "You can't mean Rex and Simon?"

"Who else? Since you are the other two."

"But how frightful for you!" Marie-Lou's great violet eyes stared in utter dismay from her little, heart-shaped face.

"It's impossible," Richard insisted. "There *must* be some mistake, but let's hear about it from the beginning."

Marie-Lou flung a cushion on the floor near the Duke's feet and snuggled down with her dark head against his knee. She was very small, but her well-covered figure was perfectly proportioned and her husband was not the only person who considered her the most perfect thing he had ever seen. Richard, his brown hair brushed smoothly back, sat forward in an arm-chair opposite them, a look of extreme gravity on his nice, clear features.

"Trouble is brewing in Spain," the Duke began, "and for you to understand the situation I must tell you a little about what's led up to it.

"As far back as 1924 Spain was on the verge of revolution. With the King's connivance Primo de Rivera brought off his *coup d'état*. Primo was a sound man but he antagonized both the Liberals and the Army leaders. In consequence, when he fell from power in 1930 the King, who had sponsored his Dictatorship, found himself utterly alone. Fifteen months later he was again faced with open rebellion. To quell it without shedding blood he left his country.

"As was to be expected after the fall of the Monarchy the first General Election gave the Liberals an easy win, but the bills they passed against the Church, and the natural conservatism of Spain, soon brought about a swing

of the pendulum. At the second General Election in 1932 the Conservatives came back with a huge majority.

“All might have gone well then but for the extremists. They refused to accept the verdict of the nation and engineered a succession of general strikes which culminated in an armed rising by the miners of the Asturias in 1934. It was financed by Moscow and led by professional terrorists. Over seven hundred buildings in Oviedo were deliberately fired during the week the Reds held the city, and hundreds of property-owners were butchered in their homes. This Bolshevik rising was suppressed and a number of its leaders executed.

“Last February a third General Election was held and the Liberals now have a majority in the Cortes again. But that is not just a normal swing of the pendulum. If the votes of all those who are for the Right had been cast for one party they would have far out-numbered their opponents. As it is they are divided among themselves whereas, in the last election, all the Left parties sank their differences to form a *‘Frente Popular.’* It is their vote which has put in the Liberals, who are only men of straw.

“Now, the *real* masters of the new Government are demanding their pound of flesh. They insist that all those who were responsible for suppressing the Asturias rebellion, officers and police chiefs who only did their duty as well as the Ministers who ordered out the troops, shall face a firing squad. Do you realize what that means?”

Richard made a wry face. “By Jove, yes! If the Government give way no Spanish officer or official will ever give or accept an order to suppress a riot again. Why, damn it all, to do so would be as good as signing the warrant for their own execution the moment the Government under which they were acting went out.”

“Exactly. If these representatives of law and order are flung to the mob it strips all future protection from every honest man in Spain. Small shopkeepers and millionaires alike will be at the mercy of any gangster who cares to blackmail them and every crowd of hooligans which decides to beat them up.”

“What happens if the Government stands firm?” Richard asked.

“The extremists mean to seize power by force; knowing that the Liberals they’ve made their cat’s-paws haven’t the strength to resist them. The Anarchists and other rabble have planned a rising for early in August.”

“Well, what’s the remedy?”

“The other side mean to strike first. It’s now the 2nd of July. About the 28th the Army leaders intend to stage a *coup d’état* and save the country by taking over the Government. However, if certain of the commanders fail to act at the hour agreed they may find themselves overwhelmed by the Reds, who have secret stores of arms.”

“And where do you come into all this?”

“In a private bank in Madrid there are eighty-two million pesetas in gold bars. Should Madrid fall into the hands of the mob they will certainly confiscate it. The only way to protect it was to make it over to a British subject. I have accepted this trust and I am going to Spain to see that this huge sum is not seized by the Terrorists. That’s what I’ve let myself in for.”

“But, Grey-Eyes dearest,” breathed Marie-Lou, “they might even kill you to get it.”

“There, my dear, you have it. I’m not afraid to undertake the mission but I need a second pair of eyes to watch while I sleep and, more important still, someone entirely trustworthy who’ll carry on in my place if any calamity befalls me. The person for whom I’ve undertaken to do this had thought of that. They knew all about our previous exploits together and implored me to secure the help of Rex and Simon. In a moment which I can only now describe as one of reckless and foolhardy confidence I pledged them too.”

“They can’t both have let you down,” Rex insisted.

“I still find it difficult to believe, but it is so. Rex has plans for the first week in August which he says it is impossible to alter, and Simon has been so strongly affected by the Nazi persecutions of his people that he appears to have turned Communist.”

“But, darling, why in the world did you take this on without consulting them first?” Marie-Lou asked sadly.

“I had no choice,” De Richleau shrugged, “and that really is another story.”

“It can’t be,” Marie-Lou objected. “Do go on.”

He smiled down at the exquisite little figure by his side. “Very well, then. Long, long ago I knew a beautiful Spanish lady. We loved each other very dearly and her husband was away on a special mission to one of the Spanish Embassies in South America. For nearly two months that summer

we tasted all the joys that God can give to two young lovers. In those days women were kept very strictly secluded in Spain, but a long purse and a little courage can perform miracles. I used to climb over the wall of her villa outside San Sebastian every night and her well-bribed duenna never disturbed us. But it all ended as such things only too often do. Her husband returned unexpectedly. We didn't even know he was back in Spain but somebody must have betrayed us. He caught me in the dawn one morning coming down a ladder from her bedroom window.

"There was only one thing for it, of course. I had to give him satisfaction. He wouldn't even wait for seconds and we repaired to the sands of a near-by cove. I fired first and missed him. The moments while I waited for him to reply were, I think, the longest in my life. But suddenly he raised his pistol and fired it in the air. He had spared me when he had me at his mercy.

"Several years later, by a strange coincidence, we were thrown together again in circumstances where we were compelled to spend the night alone, but for each other's company. His wife had died only a few months before. He had loved her desperately and knew that I had loved her too. Suddenly the barriers of his pent-up sorrow broke down. He began to speak of her and, so strange is human nature, we found a common bond in our adoration of our dead love. After that strange night together we became firm friends and our friendship only ended with his death last year.

"Now, his only child comes to me. She knew of my devotion to her father and of our duel, but not of its cause. She knows that he spared my life and she is within her rights in claiming that, as a man of honour, I should risk it on her behalf by going to Madrid to protect her fortune from the Reds."

"There's only one thing I can't understand," said Richard quickly. "You're the most deadly pistol-shot in Europe. How in the world did you manage to miss this chap?"

De Richleau chuckled. "That, my dear fellow, is the greatest jest of all. It was I who held *his* life in *my* hand. But if you, Richard, had robbed a man of his dearest possession—a man of whom you had never heard anything but good and one who had never done you any harm—could you shoot him down in cold blood? Of course not! Any decent man who calls such a tune knows he must pay the piper when the dance is ended. I fired wide on purpose and left it on the knees of the gods whether his bullet would kill or

only wound me. But I've no intention of telling her that and she'd never believe me even if I did.

"Well, there it is. It's done me good to tell you about it. I'm laughing again already, you see, and you've no need to worry. I'll manage somehow."

Richard and Marie-Lou exchanged one swift glance before she spoke. "Grey-Eyes dearest, you know what I am when I've made up my mind about a thing and whatever you say you're going to be overruled in this. I'm afraid for you—horribly afraid. But we can't let you go alone."

Chapter Six – The First Round

Richard was not surprised when the Duke shouted something in Spanish at the taxi-driver and the man abruptly turned his cab in a new direction. Spanish was still almost meaningless gibberish to Richard although he had been struggling with a phrase-book for the past few days, but he guessed that De Richleau, having given the man one address five minutes before at the station, had now told him they had changed their minds and wanted to go somewhere else.

Things had been like that ever since they had left England. There is a much greater trade done in forged passports than most people suppose, and the morning after Lucretia-José's visit to him De Richleau had parted with a nice little wad of one-pound notes in a dingy room behind a rubber-goods shop just off Leicester Square. His very careful instructions to the amiable but cross-eyed Swiss, with whom he had conducted numerous other dubious traffickings in the past, had produced just what he wanted that same evening.

In addition to other papers, which he had carefully secreted, he now carried a passport declaring him to be Senhor João da Silva, a metal merchant of Oporto and a Portuguese subject. Its numerous endorsements by frontier officers showed that he had entered and left Spain by it on his lawful occasions at least half-a-dozen times during the past year. Its most recent stamp was proof that he had crossed the border again only that morning. Richard's own British passport showed that he had had it properly visa-ed by the Spanish authorities in London, travelled via Dover-Calais and entered Spain by way of Iran the night before.

Actually neither of them had done any of these things. Both of them had embarked without fuss or bother on Richard's yacht which was lying in the Solent. At two o'clock in the morning she had quietly slipped her moorings and steamed out to sea. With equal lack of ostentation she had refrained from approaching the Spanish coast when Cape Machichaco was sighted. Instead, they had waited until nightfall before cruising nearer in. Long before dawn a very subdued but brave Marie-Lou had bidden them a tender farewell as they slid over the side of the motor-launch from which she had landed them on a dark deserted shore.

They were a couple of miles inland by the time the sun rose and, looking back, had seen that the yacht as no more than a smudge on the horizon of a placid, dark-green sea. It was only a temporary withdrawal, however. Marie-Lou would hardly sleep while waiting for the wireless that might summon her to that or some other quiet bay again. It might be weeks, it might be months, but she would be cruising in Spanish waters until the job was done; ready to take them off without having to produce their papers, in an emergency.

It had proved a long and fatiguing day. A twelve-mile tramp because the Duke would not risk being eyed by the curious on a wayside station, a two-hour wait mooching about the streets of Bilbao because he would not risk entering a café, and then the dreary journey to Madrid in a crowded second-class compartment, punctuated by intervals spent in lavatories in order to dodge the train police when they came through the coaches to examine travellers' papers.

Although it was now past eleven at night Richard knew that the performance was not over yet. The bottle of mineral water, bottle of wine and assortment of foodstuffs purchased ten minutes before at the buffet of the North Station, showed that De Richleau did not intend to let him have a civilized dinner in a decent restaurant.

He did not mind playing up a bit if it was necessary but, for the life of him, he could not see the point of all these extreme precautions. It was not as if they were escaping criminals or being hunted down by the police for some political offence. Spain was at peace with the world and Madrid showed no signs of the coming Revolution. There seemed no reason whatever why they should not have arrived in a perfectly normal way and established their claim to the gold without all this bother. He had a shrewd suspicion that the Duke was thoroughly enjoying himself and he certainly seemed ten years younger since he had started out on this expedition; but Richard preferred comfort to silly mystifications and the tiring journey had made him distinctly irritable.

"What's the idea now?" he asked crossly, as the taxi plunged into a maze of side-streets. "Even if we eat our supper standing on the pavement we've got to sleep in an hotel, haven't we? Why, for God's sake, not drive there straight away?"

“My poor friend,” replied the Duke pityingly, “surely you don’t think I should go to so much trouble to avoid having our passports examined and then go straight to an hotel, where we should have to hand them over to the management for police inspection, directly we got there—do you?”

“Well, we must sleep somewhere. Or is it your idea of fun that we should pass the night on a bench in the local park?”

“Of course not.” De Richleau spoke testily. “You shall have a bed and a perfectly good one. But I can’t guarantee that you won’t have to sleep in your clothes as the sheets will probably be either damp or dirty. I think we’ll stop this fellow now and walk the rest of the way.” He leaned forward and rapped sharply on the window of the taxi.

As they got out the driver became abusive at this second change of plan and the Duke itched to tell him, with appropriate Spanish epithets, that his mother would never have taken a prize in even a village dog show. Instead, he paid the man off with a reasonable, but not too generous tip, as the best way of fading quickly from his memory.

A couple of turns brought them into the *Gran Via* which severs Madrid roughly from West to East. In normal times Madrid does not go to bed as early as other cities and the streets were still crowded with strolling people enjoying the cool air after the long, hot summer day. De Richleau and Richard mingled among them without receiving a single curious glance. Both had left the clothes, tailored with such an eye to easy elegance by Mr. Scholte of Savile Row, behind them on the yacht. They had likewise abandoned their Sulka shirts, Beale and Inman ties, Lobb shoes and Scott hats. Instead, the duke had provided decent-quality ready-mades with appropriate trimmings. They carried no luggage except the bag of provisions and would have passed anywhere as two office workers just returning to their apartment after having been out to buy a cold snack for supper. The fact that both had large-calibre automatics, two hundred rounds of ammunition, and several hundred pounds in English bank notes concealed on them, was not apparent.

At *La Cibels*, the Oxford Circus of Madrid, they turned left into the broad, tree-lined *Paseo de Recoletos* which, with its continuation of the *Paseo de la Castellana* to the north and *Paseo del Prado* to the south, constitutes the other main artery of the Spanish capital. Crossing the *Recoletos* about half-way along its length, De Richleau led the way down a side turning. It was

quiet there after the bustle of the main streets. Five hundred yards farther on he turned north again into a short, narrow way parallel with the *Recoletos*. Tall buildings rose on either side, mostly blocks of flats, but others were large private houses, recalling the days when this was Madrid's most favoured residential quarter.

The Duke paused and stared up at a huge stone frontage that occupied more than one-half of the short street. It was a grim, silent pile as strong as a fortress. Ornamental iron grilles bellied away from the windows on the street level and the glass behind them was thick with the accumulated dust of years. The long rows of upper windows were shuttered and not a single light showed in the whole building.

"Here we are," said De Richleau. "This is it."

"And what is *it*?" inquired Richard dubiously.

"Really, Richard!" the Duke protested, "I happen to know you're an extraordinarily intelligent person, but at times, to hear you talk anyone would imagine you an utter fool. This is the Palace of the Cordoba y Coralles, in which we are going to spend the night."

"What a gloomy barrack of a place. I hope you're right about there still being a couple of beds in it."

"Its contents would probably fetch a million if they were put up to auction at Christie's." As he spoke the Duke stepped up to the great arched porch and, grasping the ancient iron bell-pull, jerked it down.

Its clanging echoed hollowly from somewhere below the street level, coming up to them through a grating close by in the pavement. They waited a few minutes then De Richleau rang again. Another wait and a panel slid back in the door. From behind the iron grille that covered it a pair of eyes stared at them.

The Duke drew a letter from his pocket and, folding it, thrust it between the bars. "From the Condesa," he said in Spanish.

A knotted hand reached up for the paper and the eyes disappeared, but through the opening they could now see the upper part of a squat, thick-necked man thrown up by the light of a lantern which he had evidently set down on the floor beside him. Holding the paper sideways so that the light shone on it his lips began to move slowly, as he laboriously spelt out the contents of the letter.

Satisfied, apparently, he thrust it into an inner pocket and set about unbolting the heavy door. An old-fashioned key grated in the lock and the door swung back. Directly they were inside he turned his back on them to re-lock it.

Swift as a flash the Duke's hand rose in the air. Richard caught one glimpse of the lead-weighted leather black-jack grasped firmly in it and the weapon descended with a soft thud on the back of the Spaniard's head. He slipped to his knees, gave one long groan, and rolling over on his side, lay still.

"Good God!" gasped Richard, "what the devil d'you do that for? The poor chap hadn't done us any harm."

De Richleau was already kneeling by his victim. Thrusting his hand into the man's pocket he pulled out the Condesa's letter and rammed it back into his own.

Receiving no reply, Richard went on a shade anxiously, "I say, you haven't killed him—have you?"

"Of course not," muttered the Duke producing two lengths of whipcord. "I didn't hit him hard and he'll be round in a few minutes. Get that door fastened up. I'll look after him."

Richard did as he was bid and when he turned again the man was lying with his hands tied behind his back, his feet trussed up, and the half of a large handkerchief protruding from his mouth.

"Take the lantern," ordered the Duke. "Our first job is to find this fellow's rooms."

"He'd have led us to them himself, I don't doubt, if you hadn't been so mighty impatient to go into action. You seem to have forgotten that the Revolution hasn't even started."

"No, but our mission has, and if I hadn't acted when I did he would have heard you endeavouring to exercise your feeble wit. I speak the language well enough to pass as a Spaniard and I didn't want him to get even an idea that either of us is English."

Pulling out an electric torch De Richleau led the way out of the vestibule up the marble steps into a great, lofty hall where the light from the lantern scarcely touched the walls.

The beam of the torch flashed round, streaking across a wide curved staircase with a richly ornamental balustrade, up which in times past, all

the haughty Grandees of Spain and their noble ladies had mounted to the reception rooms above. For a second the beam lit a thing like a balloon overhead, a huge chandelier cased in an enormous, dust-proof bag, then it flickered down to a row of three doors under the great staircase.

De Richleau advanced and shone his torch on their handles. All of them were thickly coated with dust as, now they drew nearer to it, they could see was also the staircase and balustrade. The chequered marble flags of the hall had been kept swept, however, so there were no traces to indicate the way down to the basement. A moment later a shiny door knob showed it to them.

“Leave your lantern here,” said the Duke, taking out his automatic. The caretaker’s a single man, I learnt that much from Lucretia, but he may be housing friends or relatives. If so, we’ll have to ensure their silence too.”

They crept down the stone stair. No sound came up to them but a light glimmered dully, throwing an angle of the wall at the bottom into relief. De Richleau peered cautiously round it and saw before him a long, vaulted passage. The light came from a room about half-way along it. Motioning Richard to remain where he was he padded softly down the passage like some huge grey cat, his gun thrust out ready before him. One swift glance was enough to show him that the room was empty and that, with the adjoining bedroom, it comprised the caretaker’s living quarters.

Ten minutes later they had the man down there and tied to his bed. He had not come round but was making horrible snuffling sounds. Seeing that the basement window of the room was hermetically sealed and faced on to an interior courtyard, instead of the street, De Richleau removed the gag while Richard made the injured man’s head as comfortable as he could on the pillows.

The rooms and passage had dirty electric globes dangling from their ceilings but as the switches failed to work it was clear that owing to his long absence the dead Conde had had the supply cut off.

Taking the oil lamps from the caretaker’s bed-and sitting-rooms, the two friends secured the man’s keys and proceeded upstairs. Little clouds of dust arose with each footfall as they made their way up the grand staircase and when the Duke unlocked the doors of the great *salon* at its head a scene of chill desolation met their gaze.

The old masters, which the Duke remembered so well, Goyas, Murillos, Velasquezs were covered in grey sheeting, the chandeliers encased in grimy bags, the chairs and sofas ranged against the walls were shrouded in their dust-covers, and thick dust lay like a velvet pall over everything.

“We may as well feed here as anywhere,” the Duke remarked. “I don’t doubt all the other rooms are in much the same state. While you’re getting the things out I’ll go and have a look round upstairs.”

By the time he returned Richard had cleaned a lovely inlaid table with the aid of a dust-sheet pulled from one of the chairs, and spread out their provisions upon it.

De Richleau perched himself on a corner of the table and filled a cardboard cup with wine. “I’ve found two rooms facing on the courtyard that will do for us,” he said cheerfully. “I was half-choked with dust when I shook out the coverlets but I’ve collected half-a-dozen extra ones from other rooms since there’s no bedding. We’ll probably be able to make ourselves a little more comfortable to-morrow but anyway we’ll be safe here for the next few weeks.”

“Few weeks!” echoed Richard aghast. “Surely you don’t mean we’ve got to stay in this place indefinitely?”

“Why not? We’ve got about two hundred rooms to share between us, a splendid library and some of the finest art treasures in the world at examine at our leisure.”

“But what about the poor devil you slogged, downstairs?”

“He’ll have to remain our prisoner, I fear. You see, if I hadn’t shown him that letter he would never have let us in. Now he’s seen it he knows that two friends of his mistress have been given the run of the house. He would naturally have thought it queer if we had proposed staying here, seeing the state it’s in. Worse, the letter was among the documents Lucretia-José prepared before she came to see me and, later, I had no opportunity to get her to write another. As my real name was mentioned in it this chap is the one person in Madrid who knows that I am in Spain. He’s certain to have cronies of his own and I dared not risk his gossiping about our presence here. But you need not worry yourself over him. He’ll be all right by to-morrow and I’ll make him a present of a year’s wages before we leave.”

“If you do that he’ll wish you came along and laid him out once a month regularly,” Richard grinned. His fine white teeth met in a ham roll and he

munched for a moment before adding: "But if he's got cronies what happens when they come round to pass the time of day with him?"

"I've told you that I speak Spanish well enough to pass myself off as a Spaniard. I shall answer the door and tell them that one of his aunts who has a little property is dying in the country and I've taken his place while he's gone off to see that his family don't do him out of his fair share."

"Well, that's that," Richard agreed. "But honestly, is all this melodramatic stuff really necessary? Secret landings, snooping about in ready-mades and pigging it here—I mean?"

De Richleau smiled indulgently. "My dear boy, you hardly seem to appreciate the rather remarkable feat we have performed. There was nothing whatever to prevent our arriving in Spain in a normal manner but, had we done so, the Government would have had us, our address and our description duly pigeon-holed. We are 'aristos', remember, and all our kind are under suspicion now. The *Seguridad* police would most probably have had us followed and tumbled to our game. In any case we should have had hell's own job to get away without trouble once the storm breaks."

"And now—" Richard prompted.

"And now, we've taken the game out of the hands of our potential enemies before it's even started. Mr. Richard Eaton and the Duke of Richleau vanished from the face of the earth when they stepped on board your yacht in the Solent. No official of any nationality has the faintest idea where we are and we have succeeded in penetrating to the scene of operations without even showing our faked passports. The Madrid police do not even know of our existence; yet here we are, in the centre of the city, with a roof over our heads and beds to sleep in as long as we care to use them. We have succeeded in making ourselves a sort of microscopic lost legion—an unknown cypher. We can strike or disappear at will just whenever we like. Surely you see the immense advantage of that?"

A slow smile lit Richard's face. "Yes. You're a wily old fox and I take off my hat to you for having got clean away with the first round."

Chapter Seven – The Duke Makes Soup, but not for Supper.

When Richard woke next morning he felt much more cheerful. The scanty bed coverings had proved ample owing to the warmth of the summer night, and seven hours' dreamless slumber buried in the feather mattresses had restored his normal good spirits.

By the time he was up he found that De Richleau had already dealt with the caretaker. Pédro, as his name proved to be, had become so stiff from being trussed up all night that when he was unbound he had been incapable of showing resistance. His position was fully explained to him and, after his first outburst of colourful oaths, he had seen the wisdom of retiring from the business end of the Duke's gun into a large but windowless storeroom selected as his prison.

As Pédro's small stock of eatables included four fresh eggs the problem of breakfast had been solved without difficulty. De Richleau's interest in food was by no means merely academic. He could have earned a comfortable income any time as chef in a good hotel and the omelette he produced on this occasion was a joy to taste. Baths were not quite so easy as Pédro apparently never indulged himself in that manner but they made do with some large kettles of water boiled on his stove.

The first job was to get in touch with Señor Trueba, the manager of Lucretia's bank. It was situated close by in the *Paseo de Recoletos* but De Richleau had no intention of showing his face there. Since there are no street call-boxes in Madrid he went into a tobacconist's, bought some of the little slotted brass coins that are necessary for operating a public telephone, and rang up the bank.

When he got through, all he said to Trueba was that the person he was expecting had arrived and was speaking from No. 81702. Would he leave his office and ring that number from another *estanco* at once.

This resulted in a call coming through a few moments later during which even the telephone operator at the central, and only, exchange would have been hard put to it to identify either of the speakers. An appointment was made for 10.30 just inside the south-west gate of the *Retiro* Park, and the two friends set off in that direction.

Richard had only visited Madrid once before and that had been in Primo's time. He remembered the magnificent motor roads that the Dictator had built from one end of the country to the other and how the streets of Madrid were then so much cleaner than any stranger, who had heard tales of the proverbial dirtiness of Spanish cities, might have expected.

He noted that things had sadly deteriorated. It was not that the streets were actually ill-kept, but many of the better-class shops showed empty windows with 'to let' posters pasted over them, and instead of the crowds circulating swiftly, intent on their business, an atmosphere of uneasy expectancy caused them to congregate in the open spaces. Month after month of strikes by dozens of different unions affiliated to the U.G.T. or C.N.T. had brought commerce almost to a standstill. Each day witnessed the closing of more private houses and the flight of their owners abroad. In the broad *Paseo del Prado* there was a certain activity as numerous booths and fun-fair attractions were being erected for the summer festival, but even here there were many more loungers than helpers.

Little groups of police stood silent on the corners. They looked tired and despondent. It was a long time now since the Government had proclaimed a 'State of Emergency' throughout Spain, and for weeks past they had been called on to intervene in almost constant clashes between the Fascists and the Red-Shirts.

Although it was still early the streets were glaring in the summer heat, but *El Retiro*, with its curving, tree-lined drives and wooded areas, made a great oasis of leafy shade in the eastern part of the city. Its flowers were over and its grass sadly parched, but the attention of the two friends was concentrated on the few pedestrians passing in and out of the gate.

After a moment a thick-set, middle-aged man with a round, swarthy face approached them. "You are strangers, are you not?" he asked in excellent English. "Is this your first visit to Madrid?"

"No, Señor," replied the Duke, "I am a metal merchant and this time I am here on behalf of my firm to collect some money."

"Indeed? Well, as it happens, money is my business. I am a banker and if I can be of any assistance I should be happy to place the services of my organization at your disposal."

"That is most kind. May one enquire the name of your bank?"

The stranger produced his card. On it was written '*Don Lluís Trueba. Director General. Banco Coralles, Madrid.*'

In return the Duke took a letter out of his pocket and handed it over. "I think," he said, "when you have glanced at that we had better move on. We shall attract less attention than if we stand here talking."

Don Lluís nodded, and turning towards an almost deserted avenue the three fell into step.

De Richleau introduced Richard as "my secretary Hamish McGlusky" and added, "The Condesa will, of course, have given you particulars of the reason for my visit?"

"Yes, she made her wishes quite clear. I do not conceal the fact that I consider the transference of our entire gold reserve to you as an extreme measure. But crisis after crisis has so weakened the Government that even the most moderate people are being forced into taking one side or the other. I'm afraid a clash is now quite inevitable, and when it does come God knows what will happen. In any case my business is to carry out the Condesa's instructions."

"Then you do not question my title to this gold and my absolute right to do what I like with it?"

The banker smiled. "I shall not do so, Duke, when you have given me further proofs of your identity and shown me the documents given you by the Condesa."

"Good. By the way, I should be glad if you would call me da Silva. I am carrying a Portuguese passport while in Madrid and João da Silva is the name upon it."

"Ah! It is for you then that four suitcases arrived from England by aeroplane two days ago?"

"Yes. I do not wish to be seen by any of your people at the bank so I can't collect them. But later we must arrange for their delivery. With regard to showing you my papers, I shall be delighted to do so if you will call at the *Palacio Coralles* between nine and ten to-night."

"But the *Palacio* is shut up—has been for years."

"Exactly. It is still shut up to all outward appearances but nevertheless we are staying there."

"You must find it very uncomfortable," Don Lluís laughed.

“Caution must be put before comfort in such an affair as this,” the Duke replied. “I am relying on you to prevent anyone, even the most trusted member of your staff, learning of the Condesa’s intention.”

“As it is purely a paper transaction there is no reason whatever that anyone should know of the transfer except ourselves.”

“Unfortunately it’s not quite as simple as that,” De Richleau said slowly. “You see, I’ve had some experience of revolutions. In Russia, for example, the property of British subjects was not respected and the same thing may occur here if the mob leaders get control. My taking over the bullion formally will not give it *certain* protection. Therefore I intend to remove it.”

“The Condesa said nothing...” Don Lluís began doubtfully.

“But you have already agreed that, subject to my papers being in order, the gold is mine to do what I like with.”

“Well—yes. I suppose that is so. Do you mean to try to get it out of the country?”

“I should very much like to.”

The banker shook his head. “We have to notify the Government regarding shipments of bullion. I am quite sure they would never issue a permit for such a large consignment to leave Spain.”

“I didn’t think for one moment that they would,” De Richleau smiled. “The only alternative, therefore, is to get it out and conceal it in some safe place until the trouble’s over.”

“My dear—er—Señor da Silva, I’m afraid your suggestion is quite impractical. To start with, think of the risk of a holdup. How can you possibly protect this vast sum? There are any number of criminal gangs in Madrid who would murder you without compunction to obtain such a haul.”

De Richleau shrugged. “If it remains in your bank half a dozen of these gangs may raid your premises during a time of disturbance? In which case you are almost certain to lose it. Whereas, once it has been moved, there’s no reason at all why anyone, criminal or otherwise, should learn of its whereabouts. If the worst happens you may be sure we shall defend it resolutely.”

“But you cannot possibly appreciate the difficulties of this thing your propose,” protested Don Lluís. “The weight of such a sum in gold bars is

colossal. It runs, literally, into tons. Without help, which means letting others into the secret, you could not shift it.”

“I hope to, nevertheless. How is it made up?”

“Without my papers I cannot give you exact details but it is packed in approximately two hundred boxes. Most of them contain either four bars each of 400 ounces or eight bars each of 200 ounces, but in a few of the four-bar boxes which are of Australian origin the bars weigh 440 ounces apiece.”

“What, then, is the average weight of a box?”

The banker made a quick calculation on the back of a letter.

“Nearly a hundred and ten pounds—in your measure just on eight stone. You see! It would be hopeless even to attempt such a task.”

De Richleau shrugged. “It’ll be a laborious business, and take time, but we shall manage all right. The thing which worries me is how we’re to get it out of your vaults without anyone knowing what we’re up to.”

“You could remove one bar each at a time after office hours every night. But to get it all out that way would take nearly a year and I do not see how I am to prevent the night-watchman from guessing what is happening, after your first few visits. All such people belong to some Union or other these days. They spy upon one’s every movement and he would be sure to report us.”

“Can ye no send him oot, on some job, for a wee while?” Richard suggested. In his new character as Hamish McGlusky he felt it up to him to attempt the role. His accent would have horrified a Scot but it registered with the banker as some queer form of English and he replied, “On a single occasion, yes. But if I did that night after night he would be bound to smell a rat. Wait, though! —I have it!”

Both Richard and the Duke looked up expectantly, until Don Lluís went on:

“In the early days of the Coralles banking venture all business was transacted in the *Palacio*. It was nearly a century later that they built the present offices on what is now the *Paseo de Recoletos*. At that time it was the bottom of the *Palacio* garden and a portion of the garden still occupies the space between the two buildings.”

“Yes?” said De Richleau, “Yes?”

“The vaults of the bank lie under that piece of garden. In fact they abut on the *Palacio* cellars, from which there is a private entrance to them. If only we could get that open.”

“If?” Richard echoed, breaking into Irish, “Why, sure an’ we will.”

Don Lluís frowned. “No one except members of the family has ever possessed a key and I doubt if that door has been opened in this century. Moreover, the electric wires for the burglar alarms are carried across it.”

“You could shut off the electricity while we cut the wires and insert additional lengths so that they could be carried over the top of the door,” said the Duke. “As for the door itself, if it is as old as you say, the lock will be strong rather than intricate. However, failing all else, I have no doubt that we can blow it in with dynamite.”

With a horrified gesture Don Lluís threw up his hands. “*Por Dios!* How can you make such a proposal! To *me*—who am responsible for this bank. In my keeping there are many other things besides the bullion. Millions of pesetas’ worth of securities and private safe deposits which contain fortunes in jewels.”

“Then the best service you can do your clients is to advise them to remove their possessions,” De Richleau said abruptly. “If the Bolsheviks become the masters they won’t make any proposals to you. They’ll take the stuff openly while they hold you up with a gun. Or, more probably shoot you right away as an example, to keep the rest of your staff quiet.”

“I know it,” moaned the banker, “I know it.”

“Then let me beg you to be sensible about allowing us to force this door.”

For nearly ten minutes the banker put up a most determined resistance but eventually the Duke’s inexorable logic won him over to the extent of saying:

“It would be the Condesa’s wish, I suppose.”

“Unquestionably.”

“Very well, then,” Don Lluís sighed. “But where do you propose to get your dynamite from? I have none. I do not even know what such stuff looks like.”

“Don’t worry.” The Duke’s mouth tightened into hard line. “I’ve often found it useful before. There is some in one of those suitcases which you are holding at the bank for me; only it is coated with soap and made up to

look exactly like the shaving sticks I habitually use. Incidentally I'd be greatly obliged if you would check those suitcases in at the cloakroom of the Atocha Station after the *siesta*; bring the tickets along to the *Palacio* and push them through the letter-box. Then we'll be able to collect the bags ourselves this afternoon without risking a visit to the bank or your being seen delivering them at the *Palacio*."

"Just as you wish," Don Lluís agreed with a resigned shrug. "I am truly sorry that the state of my poor country should make such subterfuges necessary. Whatever our political convictions, we Spaniards pride ourselves on our hospitality and I should have been so happy to entertain you while you are here, but it seems that is impossible."

"I fear so," agreed De Richleau. "But I am greatly cheered by knowing that we may count on your full co-operation in the difficulties that lie before us."

"I dislike the whole business intensely," the banker said with conviction. "But since it has to be I am very glad the Condesa sent someone as well fitted to undertake it as yourself."

"Thank you," the Duke murmured cheerfully. "We shall rely on you then. I think we might turn now and before we reach the gate we had better separate."

By the time Richard and the Duke got back to the centre of the city it was nearly midday and the shops were closing down for the three-hour *siesta*. Knowing that they might be up all night the Duke suggested that they should follow the Spanish custom and, during the heat of the day, Richard was glad enough to doze on his big bed.

At four o'clock they sallied forth again to purchase a good store of the best provisions the shops had to offer and various items at an ironmonger's. On their return they found that Don Lluís Trueba had duly pushed the cloakroom checks of their suitcases through the letter-box.

Collecting the bags meant a fatiguing journey, as De Richleau would not hear of their hiring a taxi at the station. He thought it much too risky to allow a man to drive them up, baggage and all, to the presumably empty Palace. Instead, they humped the suitcases, hopping a bus part of the way, and waiting to slip into the Coralles mansion until the narrow little street in which it was situated was empty of passers-by.

Once they were unpacking Richard considered the fag of securing the cases well worth it. After the night before it would be a joy to get into cool, silk pyjamas again and have his personal belongings round him. In addition, regardless of heavy Customs dues, the Duke had imported two hundred of his famous seven-and-a-half-inch Hoyo de Monterrey cigars which would console them for being deprived of many other things.

Don Lluís turned up at a few minutes past nine. After a careful scrutiny of the Duke's genuine British passport and papers he pronounced himself satisfied. De Richleau then presented him with a pair of wire-cutters and asked him to go round to the bank, give the night watchman something to occupy him, switch off the electric current and, descending to the vault, sever the alarm wire which ran across its private entrance to the Palace. It was agreed that when he had completed his task he should return.

De Richleau had already located the door and, a search of the bureaux in the Palace having failed to reveal a key to fit it, decided on extreme measures.

Richard was ordered to wait in the hall so as to be on hand to let Don Lluís in directly he got back, but neither were to come downstairs until the Duke told them they might do so.

He issued these instructions with impressive firmness because he was about to undertake an appallingly dangerous operation. Sticks of dynamite are not dangerous. They can be handled or transported with little likelihood of an explosion. On the other hand, they are practically useless unless one has some more sensitive explosive with which to detonate them. Such things cannot be moved without grave risk and to carry them on one's person, even for a short time, is to chance being blown to pieces.

The Duke had got his dynamite into Spain but he had nothing to set it off with so he meant to transform it into burglars' 'soup' which would serve him even better.

First, with flour and water he made a little dough, then, leaving it on the kitchen table, he took a stick of the explosive. Cleaning it carefully of the soap with which he had camouflaged it for passing through the Customs, he placed it in a small saucepan, covered it with water and set it on Pédro's oil stove. Adjusting the wicks he brought it very slowly to the boil. A green scum, the essence of the dynamite, consisting of nitro-glycerine, gradually formed on top. Beside him the Duke placed a tiny glass phial, laid on its

side, its open end slightly tilted upward. With a hand as steady as a rock he took a kitchen skewer and gently, gently, gently inserted it into the oily scum. He had a handkerchief tied over his mouth and nose so that even his breathing would not impinge on the deadly brew, yet he held his breath as, with infinite care, he collected a pin-point of scum on the end of his skewer and transferred it to the inner lip of the glass phial.

The least jar, one awkward movement, even the dropping of a book on the floor while the saucepan was boiling would have blown De Richleau in mangled shreds all over a devastated kitchen.

Fortunately his task was now not a long one. He did not wish to blast in the door of the vault, only to shatter its lock which was old but much too strong to be destroyed by firing a pistol into it. Three times the skewer transferred an almost imperceptible portion of the scum to the little phial; then he had enough nitro-glycerine for his purpose, and edged home the cork. The whole operation had taken just over an hour.

Turning out the oil-stove he made his way upstairs, his face grey and streaming with sweat, as Richard noted with concern. Don Lluís had been back twenty minutes but he was in such a state of nerves at the thought of participating in a business so diametrically opposed to the habit of years that he could not stop his hands from trembling.

"All well?" asked the Duke.

"Yes," said the banker. "I told the watchman I had come for some important papers. There are three doors to unlock between the office and the vault and I had to lock them again when I came out. That took a little time but the rest of the business was easy. The electric current for the vault is on a separate circuit to that for the rest of the bank. I switched it off from my room before going down and I cut the wires as you directed."

"Good. Please remain here, both of you. In no circumstances are you to come below until after you've heard the explosion."

Leaving Don Lluís with Richard, De Richleau returned to the basement. Collecting his hunk of dough from the kitchen he carried it to the door of the vault and proceeded to press it methodically into the key-hole until it would hold no more. With a pencil he then made a hole in the dough just large enough to hold the glass phial.

Going back to the kitchen he nerved himself for another desperate undertaking. He had to carry the phial to the door of the vault. If his grip

on it was too light he might drop it; if he pressed the fragile glass too tightly it would break; in either case he would be blown to atoms.

Taking off his shoes so that he could tread lightly and firmly he gingerly picked up the little phial. Letting his body go slack he stole down the passage and with infinite care inserted it in the hole in the dough. With a little more of the dough, which he had left handy, he stopped up the small, round opening.

With a sigh of relief he tiptoed back along the corridor to its end, about twenty feet away, and mopped the perspiration from his forehead. Replacing his handkerchief he stepped behind the angle of the wall, picked up an empty bottle he had placed there for the purpose, flung it at the door with all his force and ducked back.

Chapter Eight – Don Lluís Turns Burglar

In that confined space the blast of the explosion was so terrific that anyone with the Duke would have thought it would wake the dead—let alone bring the still-perambulating citizens of Madrid at the run to see what had happened. Actually, the vault being ten feet below the level of the garden, even the people in the nearest houses only heard the explosion as a muffled thump which passed quite unnoticed.

Up in the hall Richard and Don Lluís felt the floor quiver under them and heard the big bang distinctly. With an uneasy glance at each other they hurried down to find De Richleau calmly examining the damage.

The nitro-glycerine had done its work and a jagged hole showed where the lock had been, but the bolts and hinges of the door were so rusted that it took the conspirators over half an hour and a pint of olive oil before they could get the door open wide enough to obtain entrance to the vaults.

De Richleau set to work at once with some lengths of wire he had bought that afternoon to repair the burglar alarms; and rendered thanks to all his gods that they were of a primitive, old-fashioned pattern instead of the complicated defences that would have been met with in one of the big national banks. When he had finished the wires were all connected again but carried in one thick bundle over the top of the door so that entrance and exit would be possible in future without breaking them. Don Lluís having cut off the electricity the wires were still dead, but it was decided that for him to visit the bank a second time that night, for the purpose of turning over the switch which would revitalize the system, was to take too great a risk of arousing the night-watchman's suspicions. Instead he agreed that it would be best to blame himself the following morning for having forgotten to do it after his hurried call that evening.

Well before twelve they were free to proceed to their real business. The vault consisted of a corridor and a number of locked rooms giving on to it. The banker led them to the bullion chamber and producing his keys unlocked it. The gold was stored in a great stack of small, iron-hooped boxes measuring roughly 15 x 8 x 8 inches and there were 203 of them. It was only when they endeavoured to pick up the first that De Richleau realized the true magnitude of the task before them.

To say it was 'as heavy as lead' was no adequate description. Each little box was as much as a strong man could manage to struggle along with. Soon they were stripped to their vests and sweating like stevedores in the uncertain light of their oil lamps. Every one of those absurdly small wooden cases seemed heavier than the last as they levered it from the stack and dragged it the twenty yards from the bullion chamber to the cellars of the Palace, but at least they were free from any threat of disturbance as three steel doors separated them from the offices of the bank.

If they had shouted with all the power of their lungs the night-watchman could not have heard them and, even if he had, he had no keys to the vaults which would have enabled him to come down and investigate. His only resort would have been to ring up the police and Don Lluís's apartment. Even the police would have had to wait for Don Lluís with his keys before they could have got in and Don Lluís was there, burgling his own bank, and as weary of the job as either of his associates.

For six hours they worked without ceasing, except to take a few rapid puffs at an occasional cigarette, but when, at last, the Duke called a halt, it seemed that they had hardly made any impression on the great pile of little cases.

Don Lluís relocked the bullion chamber. "No one will visit it until a new consignment of gold arrives," he said thankfully, "and that is not likely to occur in the near future now that the peseta has started to fall. We have a saying in Spain, 'Mr. Money always knows,' and the international financiers know what to expect in our case without a doubt. I am worried about the alteration in the position of those wires, though."

They camouflaged the upper part of the door, over which the wires now ran, by removing the electric globe which hung nearest and tapping it gently on the floor until its loose centre showed that it was broken, before reinserting it in its socket, thus ensuring that when the vault was electrically lit the door would be in shadow. Fortunately the vault side of the door showed no injury to the casual eye as the shattered lock was on the cellar side.

After a last look round to make sure that they had left no traces of their illicit entry, they closed the door behind them and wearily made their way upstairs to the big *salon* of the Palace.

Having once overcome his scruples at participating in such strange operations Don Lluís found, to his surprise, that he was rather enjoying the game and as, like all city-bred Spaniards, he was a born night-bird, he instantly accepted the Duke's invitation that he should join them in an early breakfast.

Richard had already unpacked the provisions they had bought the previous afternoon, while the Duke had unearthed some old crystal goblets and paid a visit to Lucretia-José's wine-cellar, helping himself liberally to a number of bottles of the best. The three of them drew up their chairs to the well-laden table.

For a few moments they ate in silence, almost ravenously after their unaccustomed exertions, but as the generous wine circulated their tiredness seemed to drop from them.

"Am I not right in believing you to be a Catalan?" De Richleau asked the banker.

"Yes, I am a native of Barcelona," replied Don Lluís.

"Most of Spain's best business men come from Catalonia, do they not?"

Don Lluís nodded. "That is a large factor in the country's tragedy. Castile, Aragon, and all the other territories have never produced a middle class. Even to-day 95 percent of the population is still divided into land-owning gentry, officers and officials or, on the other hand, ignorant peasants. In Catalonia alone, owing to the greater industry and initiative of our people, a great bourgeois population developed quite naturally, just as it had done in all the other more advanced States of Europe. Normally these are the very people who would have proved the backbone of the Monarchy. As it is, the central Government has had the incredible folly to antagonize the whole of their Catalan subjects, rich and poor alike."

Richard had manfully endeavoured to maintain his character as a Scot all night. "Dinna ye get their backs up by trying to break away?" he hazarded.

"No, Mr. McGlusky, that is not so," Don Lluís replied with some heat. "All we asked was a reasonable degree of local autonomy and to that we were entitled. We were the first people to drive the Moors out of our territories; For three and a half centuries we were an independent Republic and our record as a sea-power in the Mediterranean rivals the glories of Genoa and Venice. We ruled over the adjoining provinces of Murcia and Valencia; Corsica, Sicily and the Balearic Islands were once in our possession. We

attacked the Turk in Constantinople and for nearly a century Athens was a Catalan Duchy.

“When we united with the other Iberian States it was as an equal partner in a confederation but, little by little, the Spanish Kings robbed us of our honourable estate. We had to supply our quota of men for the armies but in the commissioned ranks the Castilians always received preference. By reason of our greater industry we were richer than other parts of Spain and our wealth was drained in taxation to keep our Castilian masters in idleness.

“It did not end even there. Everyone knows that we Catalans are as different in race from the other Spanish people as the Hungarians are from their old masters, the Austrians; yet the rulers in Madrid tried to destroy our customs, our pride of race and our very language.”

“Eh, but what about this Catalan tongue ye speak of?” Richard asked. “Will it be spoken still by educated people as well as by the backward peasantry and such?”

“*Dios*, yes! Unlike the Valencians, Galicians and Basques who only make a parade of greeting each other in their local tongues before dropping into the Castilian which you foreigners call Spanish, we Catalans never dream of speaking anything but Catalan among ourselves. In the past our novelists, poets and playwrights have made a fine contribution to European literature, and even in the days when the use of our language was prohibited by law hundreds of books, periodicals and newspapers continued to appear in it.”

“Since the fall of the Monarchy, though, such restrictions have been abolished,” remarked the Duke.

“True,” agreed Don Lluís. “Primo de Rivera’s hate of Catalonia proved to be the last straw. To finish the Moroccan War and deal our race a mortal blow at the same time, he conscripted practically every able-bodied young man in Catalonia. He even went to the length of ordering the tickets on the exhibits in the Museum to be destroyed and replaced with new ones in Castilian. The result was the Pact of San Sebastian where the representatives of Catalonia met the Socialist leaders of all Spain in August 1930 and agreed to work for the overthrow of the Monarchy in exchange for the restoration of Catalan liberties. Seven months later the Monarchy fell and the Republican Government honoured its bargain.”

“What more would ye be wanting, then?” said Richard.

“And for why is Catalonia so Red to-day?”

Don Lluís spread out his hands. “The *Lliga*, that is the Catalan Conservative party, lost its prestige owing to its support of the Monarchy. Can you wonder that the Catalan workers turned Anarchist when they were so persecuted? It was the *Esquerra*, the Catalan Left, which won them the rights for which we had all been striving so long, by helping to kick out the King. Naturally it is Señor Companys and his *Esquerra* which still rule the roost there to-day.”

“Then you think that in Catalonia a military revolt will stand little chance of success?” enquired the Duke.

“None at all. The Anarchists are far too strong there. They will only use it as an excuse to murder their political opponents; people like myself who are members of the old *Lliga* and owners of factories. They want to run everything themselves by hundreds of little Soviets, each member of which would be responsible only to his own Workers’ Council. The rest of Spain can go hang for all they care. They will suppress the revolt, massacre the rich, and then turn their energies to attempting the sort of thing which failed so lamentably in Russia.”

The Duke nodded. “In that case you will be safer in Madrid as there is a fair chance here of the Army getting the upper hand.”

“Everything depends on the resolution of the Generals. If they fail us we shall all be dead before the summer’s out.”

“As a banker, what view do you take of Calvo Sotelo for Dictator?”

“We could not have a better man. As Finance Minister in Primo de Rivera’s Government he proved most able and he showed great political acumen in resigning just before the Dictator’s fall. Also he is just the right age—forty-three. Old enough to have had experience but young enough to display the energy we need in a National Leader.” Don Lluís stood up.

“Well, I must be going. Shall I come again at the same time to-morrow—or rather, to-night?”

“Yes, or earlier if you can,” De Richleau agreed as he led the banker downstairs. “We are more than grateful for all the help you’re giving us.”

It was fully light when he let Don Lluís out into the street and the people of Madrid were emerging from their homes to face another day of torrid heat.

Upstairs Richard was preparing for bed when the Duke rejoined him and remarked, "Well, so far so good."

"Yes, you're a wizard," Richard smiled. "It's going to be one hell of a job to shift all that stuff but we'll do it, given a bit of time. Having actually got into the vault and made a start gives you Round Number Two."

De Richleau nodded. "We've been lucky so far. Don't worry if I'm not about when you awake. I'm going out shortly and I shan't be back till midday."

"What?" exclaimed Richard. "But you must get some sleep after a night like we've just been through."

"I can't spare the time to sleep yet," the Duke said quietly. "I shall be fresh enough after I've had a shave and a tub. You see, I daren't delay the preparations for Round Three, and we may not win that quite so easily."

Chapter Nine – The Succession of Culs de Sac

For the best part of a week Richard's life became one of sheer drudgery. Most of each day he slept the sleep of exhaustion, but for over twelve hours each night he dragged more of the gold from the bullion chamber to its new resting-place in the cellars of the Palace. Those silly little boxes, each one of which contained the equivalent of nearly a quarter of a million shillings, looked as if they could be picked up with one hand yet, when one came to lift them, their weight was so great that they seemed nailed to the floor. His muscles ached intolerably for he had to strain them to their utmost pitch each time he raised a box on to the low, wheeled trolley that Don Lluís had provided on the second night of their wearisome undertaking. Since the trolley could not be got over the ledge of the door, the floor of the cellar being a few inches higher than that of the vault, it had to be unloaded there and the boxes dragged or carried the remainder of the journey.

At times Don Lluís or De Richleau helped him but the panic which was now affecting all rich people in Madrid caused the banker to be overwhelmed with business. Having opened the bullion chamber each night for them after his office closed down, he had to go off to attend urgent conferences and, as he had to work all day as well, he was compelled to snatch what sleep he could in the early hours of the morning before paying another visit to the Palace, on his way to his office, for the purpose of checking the night's removal and relocking the chamber.

The Duke slept little except during the three hours of the midday *siesta*. He prepared the meals, at which he was much more adept than Richard, looked after Pédro, and did the shopping. He was strongly against Richard going outside the house since he could not pass as a Spaniard and some officious plain-clothes man might start asking him awkward questions; but he was out himself a good portion of each day and often far into the night.

He accounted for these long absences by saying that since he was described on his fake passport as a metal merchant it was essential that he should live up to the description. In order to do so he had procured certain information from the Madrid Chamber of Commerce and had started in to play the metal market. Whenever he talked of lead, zinc and scrap he

seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself and he declared that he was making a lot of quick money. All sorts of funny people were buying supplies for, apparently, the oddest reasons, although the regular dealers knew perfectly well that the real destination of these purchases were the secret munition factories which were working overtime to supply the innumerable private armies soon to be loosed by the various political leaders of Spain. The transactions of a rather eccentric Portuguese who insisted on cash settlement for every deal whether he bought or sold therefore aroused little comment.

As prices were rising by leaps and bounds De Richleau could scarcely have failed to make a profit and having an extremely astute financial brain into the bargain he was actually lining his pockets with remarkable speed. Lucretia-José having instructed Don Lluís to debit her personal account with any sums which De Richleau might require while he was in Spain, the matter of finance presented no difficulties; but as he traded on a cash basis the banker did not know the identities of the people with whom the Duke was dealing.

That was the crux of the matter. Richard was naturally intrigued to know what deep game his friend was playing but the Duke could be as close as an oyster when he chose. He had implicit trust in Richard but did not wish to risk any chance remark being made in the banker's presence which might give away the names of those new cronies of his among the metal merchants of Madrid whom he found it politic to cultivate in the evening as well as for business purposes in the day-time.

In such spare time as De Richleau had between his comings and goings he helped Richard if work was proceeding with the bullion, but if the vault was closed, as it always was during the bank's office hours, he busied himself with Lucretia-José's art treasures. He could not bear the thought of leaving so many lovely, irreplaceable things at the mercy of any mob which chose to break into the *Palacio* during a riot, and was doing his best to protect some of them.

It would have taken months for any one man to have cleared the countless rooms and galleries, but as a connoisseur he was able to select quite a number of the most valuable bronzes, clocks, miniatures, ivories, snuff-boxes and other articles of value for burial in the garden. The furniture, tapestries and books were beyond him, but he removed the pick

of the Old Masters from their frames, untacked them from their stretchers and rolled them into two long bundles.

On Saturday, the 11th of July, the last case of gold had been removed from the bullion chamber. Knowing that they were nearing the completion of their work both De Richleau and Don Lluís had remained at the *Palacio* to help Richard and, when the job was finished, they all ascended to the big *salon*. The Duke signed the last receipts and handed them over. In return Don Lluís presented him with a great sheaf of assay certificates issued in connection with the gold; each contained the number of one bar, particulars of its exact weight and fineness, the name of the assayer and the date. A fresh bottle from one of Lucretia's best bins was broached to drink her health coupled with the toast that sanity under a sound Government might soon return to Spain.

Don Lluís looked very tired. The strain of the past week had told heavily upon him but he wished them all good fortune and tactfully refrained from questioning them upon their future plans.

As he rose to go he informed them kindly that, although he might find himself in difficulties during the coming weeks, if there were anything he could do for them they had only to let him know.

"Thank you a thousand times for all you have done already," the Duke replied. "If we all come safely through this we must foregather next time you come to London. In the meantime, if we meet by chance here it is best that we should appear not to know each other."

"You may, perhaps, require further supplies of money?" Don Lluís hazarded.

De Richleau shook his head. "Many thanks, but I don't think so. I've already drawn sums which must have rather surprised you but, of course, I shall duly account for them to the Condesa. I now have ample moneys in hand to see us through."

When the banker had departed and the front door was relocked behind him the Duke slowly crossed the great, empty, echoing hall and again climbed the grand staircase.

In the *salon* Richard was sitting at the table in his shirtsleeves. The night was suffocatingly hot and he was so tired that he had not bothered to put on his coat again after they had finished their work.

De Richleau walked over to the marble mantelpiece they were using as a sideboard and began to take the wire off another bottle of champagne. "What a bore it is that we have no ice," he said, "but at least we are now free to talk."

"I'd rather sleep," Richard murmured. "I would, too, if I wasn't so damned curious to hear what's behind all these metal deals and nightly junketings you've been at during my hours of solitary toil."

"Good. You've done a fine job, Richard, every bit as important as my own but with none of the fun I've had. It has been great fun, by the by, to sting some of these *Madrileños*. My only regret is that I had not longer to do it in."

"Yes. You're an avaricious old brute except where your personal friends are concerned."

The Duke chuckled. "I suppose that's true. But, you see, this sort of people paid taxes to keep my ancestors and now it is I who have to pay taxes to keep their poor relations. One must get one's own back somehow, mustn't one, especially with the supertax at its present high level."

"I don't know. Marie-Lou and I never grudge paying our supertax. We always feel rather grateful that we have an income big enough to warrant the charge. Anyhow, you're only joking. Let's get back to business. What do we do now? Sit here till all the King's horses and all the King's men march up the street and march back again?"

"Have an Hoyo; " De Richleau pushed over the box of cigars, "and tell me what you think will happen if in a few days or weeks there's a blow-up and the Reds get control of Madrid."

"They shoot up poor old Don Lluís in his office, if he's mug enough to be there to be shot at, and go down to the vaults. Directly they see that busted door they'll come through to the cellars, find the gold and pinch it."

"Full marks. That is just what they will do. Therefore we have now to remove the gold to a safer hiding-place."

Richard puffed with satisfaction at the cigar. "If you're counting on me to turn myself into a pack-mule and take it to the coast you'd better think up another one."

"I have already done so. Unfortunately the coast is too ambitious a move to contemplate but I think we might get it out of Madrid in a day or two."

"How? You'll need lorries and men to load it."

“I know, and at the moment I have no plan to secure either. The lorries are easy enough but the men are the difficulty— men who will not talk afterwards about having visited this place.”

“If you’re going to get help, and it seems to me that you must, why couldn’t you have let the helpers shift it straight from the bullion chamber instead of landing me with two-thirds of the blasted business?”

“Because the helpers would then realize that they were removing something from the vaults of the bank, whereas now they can only know they are shifting some cases from the cellars of a private house.”

“I see. Well, that’s sound, but I’m afraid they’ll guess it’s gold in the boxes owing to their ghastly weight.”

“Not necessarily, if we change the markings on the cases, as we can easily do with a pot of paint. There are other metals which weigh nearly as heavy as gold.”

“So that’s the game.” Richard grinned, “hence the metal business, eh? I suppose you’ve been fixing some place to which we can safely take it.”

“Take it and *lose* it,” supplemented the Duke, his grey eyes shining, “and this is where you come into the game again. By this time to-morrow night I hope you will be the proud owner of a metal-goods factory.”

“Like Jurgen, ‘I’ll try any drink once,’” Richard agreed. “But why me? I don’t know any of your new friends. Surely they would accept you as a purchaser much more readily.”

“No. It must be you for one very definite reason. My passport is a fake. Señor João da Silva has no real existence. Whereas your passport has only been tampered with for present purposes. God knows what may happen in the next few weeks, but if Richard Eaton buys this property he can always establish a legal claim to it afterwards, and that is of the first importance.”

“D’you mean to put me up as a mug Englishman, or the sort of chap who’s paid a hundred pounds to act as a nominee so that in times of civil commotion a factory can fly the British flag?”

“The rich mug, I think. You see, officially, we shall part company afterwards, because I’m at my old game of building up a succession of *culs-de-sac* for the enemy to blunder into once they get busy.”

“I get it—baby and all,” laughed Richard, “but I’ll hold it for you. When do we see this bird who’s going to sell me a dud factory?”

“To-morrow afternoon. His name is Arturo Gomara and we are to meet at his house—as it is Sunday.”

“Well, the better the day the better the deed,” Richard yawned. “You can tell me all about your *culs-de-sac* in the morning.”

De Richleau had bought an alarum-clock on his first shopping expedition but, for once, there was no need to set it so both of them slept on until midday. They lingered over their simple lunch, deriving enormous pleasure from their unaccustomed ease after the gruelling week they had been through, but at a quarter to three the Duke said that it was time for them to start.

“Why? It’s early yet,” Richard demurred. “You said this chap was not expecting us till half-past four.”

“True, but he lives out in the Garden City of *Ciudad Lineal*, and it will take us some time to get there. Also I wish to make another call, to unload the pictures, first.”

A few minutes later they left the *Palacio*, each with a fat roll of canvases, neatly tied up in linen, underneath his arm. From *La Cibels* they took a tram to the western extremity of the *Gran Via* and, from there proceeded northward on foot.

As they passed the ex-Royal Palace, which dominates the whole countryside from its height on the east bank of the Manzanares river, Richard noted that it now had a dreary, unkempt air in spite of the fact that the President of the Republic had quarters there. Gone were the magnificent mounted sentries of the Cavalry of the Guard, with their braided pelisses and glittering dolmans that he recalled so well, and half the windows of the building were now thick with grime. As some compensation to the brightness of the city there were many pretty girls about and most of them looked smart and attractive dressed in their Sunday best. Six years before, the promenaders in Madrid’s streets had been almost entirely male, but the coming of the Republic had brought about the emancipation of women in Spain and respectable girls were now accustomed to strolling about in pairs without fear of molestation.

The day was intensely hot again and across the river in the open spaces to the west of the city innumerable people were enjoying their Sunday leisure. Many of the older members of the family groups were still sleeping after their picnic lunches unheeding the children who played riotously near

them; the younger folk were flirting and laughing together or, paired off in couples, sat silent in dreamy bliss. In the far distance, beyond the great, partially-wooded sweep of grassland, the jagged edges of the Guadarrama Mountains stretched glittering against a pale-blue sky.

In a short street not far from the ex-Royal Palace De Richleau halted before a well-kept private house which bore a coat of arms above its door showing it to be one of the Scandinavian Legations. To the butler who answered his ring he said in Spanish, "Kindly give these two packages to the Minister without delay," and the canvases were handed over.

"Pretty casual way of parting with a collection of Old Masters worth a fortune— isn't it?" Richard remarked as they walked back towards the *Gran Via*.

"Not really," De Richleau smiled. "All I had to do was to telephone yesterday and ascertain that the Minister is the same good fellow who's been *en poste* here for the last eleven years. He was a great friend of Lucretia's father and has been to the Coralles Palace scores of times. He'll recognize the pictures at once and know to whom they belong, so naturally he'll take care of them till things are all right again."

Back in the *Gran Via* they succeeded in struggling into a crowded Yellow Tram. As it proceeded more and more people flung themselves on to it; packing themselves like sardines on the front and rear platforms and even clinging to its rails. The streets too were full of traffic; cars, horse-drawn vehicles and pedestrians, nine-tenths of which were moving with them in an easterly direction.

"Where are all these people off to?" enquired Richard.

"*Plazo de Toros* out at *Las Ventas*," replied the Duke, "they're off to the usual Sunday bull-fight. That's the one and only thing which holds a greater interest for them than politics."

"It's a fascinating game to watch but devilish hard on the horses," Richard commented.

"Yes. That's the Spanish streak of cruelty coming out. Queen Ena hated it so she used to shut her eyes when she was compelled to attend on State occasions. It was that more than anything which made her so unpopular. Don Alfonso damaged himself enormously too by his attempts to divert public interest from the bull-fight to horse-racing. He kept a splendid stud and an excellent trainer, a Belgian named De Nerter, I remember. The King

persuaded all his richest Grandees to start stables so that they could race against him, but the people wouldn't have it. They boycotted the meetings and, of course, he had all the *Matadores*, who are the idols of the populace, to contend with."

At *Las Veritas* they edged their way through the good-tempered thousands who were swarming towards the bull-ring, and boarded a White Tram on the suburban circuit which took them to *Ciudad Lineal* where Señor Arturo Gomara had his house.

As they approached it the Duke remarked, "We should be on an easy wicket. I selected this fellow because he's a real bad lot. The sort who's liable to be hung by his dirty neck whichever side wins. He knows what's likely to happen to him and he's simply jittering with fear. By buying his place we give him a chance to quit the country so I ought to be able to get it at my own price."

The house of the metal-goods manufacturer proved to be a new and pretentious building with a white stucco front and hideous china animals dotted about the parched grass before it which did duty for a garden. De Richleau had explained to Richard on the way out that it was not usual for Spaniards of Arturo Gomara's class to invite strangers to their homes on such short acquaintance but that the approaching crisis had caused him to waive formalities.

Señor Gomara let them in himself and with the air of a conspirator led them to a garishly furnished room. He was a huge man with a stomach which hung down between his thighs when he had eased himself into an upright arm-chair where he sat with his slippered feet spread wide apart.

Richard was duly presented and they exchanged amiable grimaces as neither could understand the other's languages; the ensuing conversation between Gomara and the Duke took place in Spanish.

After swapping the usual meaningless courtesies they followed the Spanish tradition of discussing everything they could think of before approaching the business upon which they had met. It was half-an-hour before the purchase of Señor Gomara's aluminium plant at Valmojado was broached and then he casually said that he had changed his mind. He did not intend to sell.

De Richleau pretended intense surprise and declared that he had thought the whole thing settled except the price of the stock, which was to

be fixed on the books Gomara had promised to produce that day.

"I don't want to disappoint your friend," Gomara said unctuously, "but it hurts to part with an old family concern like this after having spent so many years in it. The workmen now —they're like chums almost with me. I'd have to pension some of the older ones too, so if I took less than 230,000 pesetas, stock included, I'd ruin myself."

"Is that so?" The Duke was now reassured that nothing had occurred to render the deal impossible and his voice was dangerously smooth. He knew from inquiries he had made that the grotesquely fat Spaniard was lying. The factory had not been in his possession more than eighteen months and he treated his hands abominably. The fellow was not worth wasting valuable time on, De Richleau decided, and must be brought to heel by being shown the future in its blackest guise.

"You are going to be ruined anyhow," he snapped abruptly, "Make up your mind to that. The Fascists have little use for people like you and the Reds will have you shot the moment they've seen your record—as I have. I'm giving you the chance to save 80,000 from the wreck and get out while the going's good."

"Eighty thousand!" screamed Gomara in a high falsetto, "But..."

"Eighty thousand I said, and not a peseta more. Do you know what the workers in Russia did with your kind of employer? They soaked them in petrol, lit it and danced round them while they burnt to death. That's going to happen here."

"But the plant alone cost me 200,000," wailed Gomara, spreading out his pudgy hands.

"All right. You have a car. Take us out to see it to-morrow morning when it's working."

The Spaniard shuddered and drew back. "No," he said hurriedly? "No, I do not go to the factory often. I have not been there for some weeks."

"Months, you mean. You're afraid those *chums* of yours among the workers might lynch you, eh?" sneered the Duke. "Pull yourself together, man, and talk sense. Do you accept my friend's offer and pay me my commission or do I find him what he requires elsewhere?"

"A hundred and sixty thousand," pleaded Señor Gomara, "a hundred and sixty thousand and it is his. You as good as agreed to pay a hundred and forty thousand yesterday."

De Richleau laughed, but it was not a pleasant sound. "Yesterday was one thing—to-day is another. The Revolution, with all the bloodshed and festering wounds, and looting and torture that it will bring in its train, is twenty-four hours nearer.

Have you ever thought about death? I don't suppose so, but it's time you started. The great shadow is creeping nearer to you every moment you remain in this house."

Gomara's prominent eyes bulged under their heavy lids. He crossed himself quickly and wheezed, "But there is still time— time to cross the frontier into Portugal."

"Yes, if you leave at once. And eighty thousand pesetas is a useful sum to take with you. Far better than remaining the theoretical owner of this factory out of which you'll never see a penny piece again."

"It is a cruel bargain you drive but... but..."

The Duke stood up and taking a wallet out of his inner pocket produced a thick wad of bank-notes. "I brought the money in cash as I promised," he said coldly. "You intended to sell anyhow, so you had better produce the contract you said you would have prepared and fill in the figure. The two of you can sign it and my friend can get it witnessed later. We need not observe the formality of the witness being present. It is preferable that a Spaniard who is remaining in Madrid should do it, rather than myself, since I am returning to Portugal in the next few days."

With a groan Gomara heaved himself up out of his chair and waddled over to an oak bureau from a drawer of which he took the contract. De Richleau counted out a pile of notes on a small table and the Spaniard checked the amount.

"But there are only seventy-two thousand here," he protested.

"My commission of ten percent makes up the sum," the Duke said sharply. "You do not think I would risk waiting until to-morrow to collect that—do you?"

Gomara's eyes flickered towards Richard but De Richleau went on: "Don't bother yourself about this English fool. He does not understand a word we're saying."

The contract was duly signed and Richard became the owner of a small aluminium-factory at Valmojado, a village situated about twenty-five miles south of Madrid. Five minutes later the two friends left the house.

“If I were given to spitting I would spit now,” exclaimed the Duke, directly they were outside. “Even talking to that swine was enough to leave a dirty taste in one’s mouth. It’s brutes like him who are the worst enemies of the poor. There were plenty of blackguards among the old aristocrats but at least they could be looked to for leadership in times of national crisis; whereas the Arturo Gomas of this world sweat their labour unmercifully and give nothing in return.”

“If what one hears is true plenty of the big landowners in Spain are every bit as bad,” rejoined Richard. “But the great thing is we’ve got the factory.”

“Yes, and that horrible fellow made me so angry that I forced him to sell it to me for forty thousand pesetas less than I meant to pay originally.”

“Was that quite wise? He’ll bear you a lifelong grudge and that might prove awkward if we ran into him again later on.”

“Don’t worry. He’ll be heading for the frontier as soon as he can get his passport fixed. I was counting on that to round off my succession of *culs-de-sac* when I picked him.”

“Right-oh. Let’s hear just where we stand in this maze you’ve been building up.”

“Certainly, but here’s our tram. We’d best not talk while we’re in it.”

When they were back in the centre of the city and walking side by side down the *Calle Alcala*, De Richleau spoke again. “This is the situation. First, although we’ve been here just a week, the authorities still have no knowledge of our presence in Spain. Second, only Don Lluís Trueba knows it was we who removed the gold from the vaults of the bank. Once we’ve got it to the factory all enquiries through him will be blocked. I’ve no doubt that he’s perfectly trustworthy, but the very best and bravest can’t guarantee that they won’t squeal under torture. By keeping him out of our new plans I have ensured that, even unwillingly, he can’t possibly give away to our enemies the new hiding-place we’ve chosen for the gold.”

“One minute!” Richard interrupted. “He knows you’re passing under the name of João da Silva and have speculated on the metal market. You had to let him in on that so he’d play the right cue if he ran up against you by chance during any of your business dealings.”

“True. But all my deals were made in cash so he has no idea with whom I’ve been dealing. Even if they got the name of João da Silva out of him it

would take days of hard work to check up on all the metal merchants the Portuguese has done business with during the past week.”

“And if they do trace da Silva to Arturo Gomara?”

“No investigations will show that the Portuguese had any more transactions with Gomara than with half a dozen other people, and by that time he’ll be out of the country. That is Block Number Three.”

“Say they visit the factory—as a matter of routine?”

“They’ll find that Gomara sold it to a perfectly respectable Englishman, Mr. Richard Eaton, and not even Don Lluís knows your real name, so they’ve no possible means of connecting you with da Silva. Block Number Four.”

“I don’t agree. Owing to your admirable tuition I can now say ‘the room of this lady, who is my niece, must be next to mine’ or ‘please see that the champagne is not over-iced’ and a few more useful little phrases of that kind—but that’s not enough Spanish with which to go and take over a factory. You’ll have to come out there to settle me in.”

“Of course, but now I’ve finished with Don Lluís and Señor Gomara I propose to change my identity again. Yesterday I bought new sets of clothes for the two of us. As Mr. Richard Eaton, factory owner, you must have better garments than you are wearing at present. You may not like them very much as they are of the rather flashy, sporting variety, but just the thing that foreigners expect an Englishman to wear abroad, and they’ll give you quite a different appearance. For myself I have bought much cheaper and rather eccentric things. Also I shall become more youthful by dying my hair black. From this evening on I carry my second fake passport which describes its owner as Hypolite Dubois, French chef. I shall accompany you out to Valmojado as your cook, valet and interpreter—in fact a very handy man to have about the house.”

“That seems all right,” Richard admitted, “except for one small point. Don Lluís does know that you had another Englishman, or rather Scotsman, with you. If he’s forced to tell all he knows mightn’t the people we are up against start looking for me?”

“My dear boy,” laughed the Duke, “there are thousands of Britons in Spain, and we told Don Lluís that you were my secretary, Mr. McGlusky. A secretary normally accompanies his employer. If they ever get as far as that it only brings the hunt back to João da Silva and—Mr. da Silva, where is he?”

Disappeared into the blue, my friend. If you're visited by the *Seguridad* Police at the factory all you have to do is to produce your own papers which cannot be questioned. You've never heard of Mr. da Silva and, for all you know, he's sitting on a walrus sailing out to sea."

"You are a tough baby, as clear old Rex would say, and..." Richard broke off suddenly to exclaim delightedly, "Good God! Talk of the devil!"

De Richleau's glance had followed his. Facing them in a moving car only a few yards away sat Rex and Simon. With one shove that nearly threw Richard off his feet the Duke thrust him behind the side awning of a café they were passing and dived in after him.

"What the devil are you up to?" cried Richard striving to regain his balance.

"Hell!" exclaimed the Duke. "I hope to God neither of them recognized us. Fortunately Simon was looking the other way."

"But hang it, man, why shouldn't they recognize us? Don't you see what's happened? They've both thought better of it. They come out here to find us and lend a hand."

The car had sped on. De Richleau shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid that's not it, Richard. I didn't tell you. I didn't know myself for certain—although I had a pretty shrewd idea they were up to something. I knew both of them were lying to me anyhow."

"What on earth d'you mean?"

"Rex said he had lost his nerve for flying—which is absurd. He told me he couldn't give me his help because he had pledged himself to go abroad with someone else in August. Who could possibly have a claim on him that he would not have tried to wriggle out of, for my sake, except Simon?"

"When I was last at Simon's house the place was full of people. He tried to bluff me that it was a charity meeting but I soon saw that all unawares I'd stumbled into a hotbed of Communists. He had obviously got at Rex before I had the chance."

"But—surely you don't mean that our two best friends are on the other side?" gasped Richard.

"That's just what I do mean." De Richleau's voice was hoarse and strained. "It never entered my head that they would actually come to Spain. And civil war's a horrible thing. Brother will fight brother. Every man

will go armed and shoot before he thinks. God save us from coming up against these two when the fighting begins.”

Chapter Ten – Death in Madrid

Lucretia-José and Cristoval Ventura sat down at a corner table in the first-floor room at Botin's. The little restaurant was famous the world over for its sucking-pig and for the huge brick oven on the ground floor where the piglets were baked, the fire of which was reputed not to have gone out for over a hundred years.

Since their first meeting at Simon's house in London the two had seen a lot of each other. They had travelled back to Spain together and Cristoval having 'for certain private reasons' arranged his transfer from Oviedo to the Madrid headquarters of the U.G.T., they had spent most of their free time in each other's company since their return to the capital.

Both were desperately busy, as affairs in Spain had now reached the boiling-point, but since they were ostensibly working for the same cause their undertakings brought them into frequent official contact and every evening they managed to snatch a few hours together.

That afternoon he had taken her to the Bull-Ring but not in the cheap, unshaded seats, because he was not that kind of Socialist. The fact that they had enjoyed the shelter of the big canopy and had sat among the rich bourgeoisie had not prevented him from putting in the best part of four hours at his office afterwards collecting the confidential reports concerning the safe delivery of supplies of illicit arms to various Trade Union bodies all over Spain; nor her from making a flying visit to the Anarchist H.Q., after which she had turned in several very useful pieces of information to a fruit-seller who was one of the pillar-boxes of the Monarchist organization, *Renovacion Española*.

They had met again at ten o'clock for dinner; a late hour to dine according to the rest of Europe but quite a normal one for Spaniards. Offices in Madrid open at the usual hour but the *siesta*, during which most Spaniards usually undress and go to bed, cuts the three hottest hours out of the day. To adjust the loss of time offices and shops keep open till eight or nine.

Foreign visitors find with surprise that the *thés-dansants* do not begin in the big hotels till seven, that ten o'clock is the hour for dinner, that

theatres start at eleven and that the night-clubs do little business until the crowd arrives at two o'clock in the morning.

Lucretia-José and Cristoval were used to the late night meal. They sat down very happily opposite each other and ordered the dish of the house—sucking-pig—with a bottle of *Rioja*.

While they sipped their bone-dry *Tio-Pepe* sherry and waited for the dish to be prepared they did not talk Marxist theories or Communist experiments but just those delightful nonsenses that two young people of the opposite sex talk the world over when they are having an evening off to which they have looked forward immensely.

He was head over heels in love. Her serene, beautifully chiselled face came perpetually between him and his work, and it required an immense effort to keep her out of his thoughts each time he had to concentrate on important papers. As he looked at her now the curve of her cheek and the contour of her breasts filled him with unfathomable joy. Just to be sitting opposite her was the most heavenly bliss and, happiness piled on happiness, she obviously enjoyed being with him.

Like most Spaniards he was of a violently jealous temperament, and the very idea that she might be even casually interested in another man would have torn him with agony. As it was she gave him her time, apart from the great work, whenever he asked for it and she never so much as mentioned the name of another male acquaintance. There was not a thing in the world to mar those perfect moments for him. He thought her the most intelligent, companionable and beautiful woman he had ever met and he adored her utterly.

After their first few meetings Lucretia-José had found herself in a very queer state. She had tried to analyse it but failed completely. Two short-lived but hectic affairs, both before she was twenty and both with Englishmen whom she had met at the country houses of ex-school friends, had convinced her that she knew all about love, but her intense preoccupation with her work and the surroundings in which she did it had barred her from the social acquaintances she would normally have made during the past five years. Plenty of her male associates had shown a desire for her company in no way concerned with the cause of the proletariat, but she had skilfully evaded their advances. In a few cases where the interest displayed had not been too openly amorous, pleasant

friendships had developed, one particularly with a University Professor who came from Granada, but every one of the Socialist speakers and leaders she knew lacked some quality which might have been able to stir passion in her. The fact was that she had been drawn to the two young Englishmen only physically and to a few Spanish intellectuals only mentally, so she really knew very little about love at all.

Cristoval Ventura had attracted her immediately. His vibrant voice, strong, well-kept hands, merry eyes and quick, decisive manner singled him out for the admiring glances of many women and, in addition, Lucretia found him her intellectual equal. From the first she had accepted his invitations readily for the double reason that he was not only a man of some importance in his party, and therefore a possible new source of information, but also because she enjoyed being with him. Soon she woke up to the fact that although she was automatically passing on any new bits and pieces about the Red organization that he casually let drop she was not even attempting to worm any secrets out of him deliberately. That was a nasty shock and for twenty-four hours she had panicked badly.

It seemed inconceivable to her that she had fallen for a Red. It was one thing to consort with them for her own purposes and while doing so to forget, at times, the great gulf fixed; but quite another to admit for a second that she could really care for one of these mentally-warped, atheistic monsters who were out to destroy all that was best and finest in her dearly loved Spain.

At first she would not admit it, although she recognized some of the symptoms she had experienced with each of the young Englishmen; a sudden thrill when his hand touched hers accidentally, a deplorable preoccupation with his likes, dislikes and opinions, a reacting in her own mind all that he had said and done at their last meeting and sometimes, at nights, a terrifying pleasure in imagining what it would be like to feel his strong hands gripping her fiercely.

She was utterly horrified at the position in which she found herself and would have broken with him if she could, but their work brought them constantly together as long as she remained in Madrid and to leave the city at this fateful time would have been a direct betrayal of her cause. Those panic hours had driven her half crazy, but calm came again when she realized that she could neither fight nor run. She decided that the future

must sort itself whatever pain it might bring her. Now that the hour of trial was at hand, to abandon her hard-won position in the confidence of the Red Leaders was unthinkable but she must dissociate Cristoval with them entirely in her mind. That was the only way, and if love had come to her it must take its course however inevitable the bitterness of its ending between them must surely be.

Since the taking of that decision she had lived only for the moment; working feverishly still to assure the success of the *coup d'état* but refusing to think of it as a thing that was actually going to happen, bringing blood and death, in which Cristoval might be involved, to Madrid's streets. She never allowed their talk to drift in that direction and, as he was only too glad to get off the subjects which occupied most of his days and nights, they sometimes spent hours together happily forgetful of the day or month and the black shadow that was ever drawing nearer.

At the moment they were talking of the bull-fights they had seen that afternoon. Like most Spaniards they considered the horses killed in the ring of little moment. The poor brutes were invariably old crocks which would otherwise have gone to the knacker for slaughter, and they were now always put out of their pain within a few moments of being wounded. Their participation was necessary in order to tire the bull sufficiently for the matador to play it with that superb grace and skill which renders bull-fighting as great and exacting an art as the ballet. Both of them were genuine *aficionados* who understood the extraordinary subtleties of the sport, and they spoke with accustomed ease of *adornos*, *pase de pechos* and *media veronicas*.

In Cristoval's opinion no matador of the present day could compare with that magnificent killer of bulls, Juan Belmonte, and he began to describe in detail a beautiful *corrida* he had seen the famous veteran fight two years before.

The relation of this epic had only just got under way when Lucretia's heart missed a beat. From two tables away a man was regarding her quietly but fixedly. He looked about fifty and was rather poorly dressed. His dead-black hair was parted very far over to the left and on the right it was brought in a flatly plastered, downward-curving sweep across his forehead, thereby giving the impression that he was a very low-brow type indeed;

while over one of his cheeks and a part of his chin there spread the purplish stain of a sadly disfiguring birthmark.

Lucretia dropped her glance for a second, then quickly looked again. There was only one face in which she had ever seen grey eyes of such piercing brilliance. There could be no question about it; that vaguely shabby and distinctly unprepossessing individual was Monseigneur le Duc de Richleau.

She had reckoned that by this time he would certainly have reached Madrid but had imagined that he would have arrived under his own colours and have stayed openly at the Ritz or the Savoy, relying on the power of his Embassy to protect him in the event of riots. Several times since their meeting in London she had rather regretted not having confided in him fully that secret work compelled her to fraternize with supporters of the other side. That would have ensured his respecting her incognito if they ran up against each other in Spain, but such a chance meeting had seemed unlikely since she rarely went to such places as she anticipated he would frequent.

Now she reprimanded herself for having let Cristoval take her to Botin's. It was only a small place but of the sort that foreigners who were rich gourmets were liable to ferret out. If De Richleau had been staying at the Ritz he might quite well have come along to eat a sucking-pig and, finding her there, have gaily greeted her as "Condesa." Such a situation would have been utterly catastrophic and she would probably have paid for her lack of forethought with her life before she could do the Reds further damage. Quite a number of people had been quietly put out of the way in Madrid by both sides during the last few weeks.

Her pulse steadied with the realization that De Richleau himself being quite obviously disguised there was little likelihood of his making some frightful *faux pas* which would give her away, but she still felt that queer tightening inside which always came to her when she had been skating on dangerously thin ice.

The Duke had purposely stared at her until she recognized him although he was perfectly well aware of the fright that seeing him there might cause her. He was delighted at this chance encounter because he had been hoping to run across her for several days. Pure chance had informed him that she was ostensibly in the ranks of the enemy, and not knowing how

far Don Lluís Trueba was in her confidence he had not dared to question the banker about her; but he needed her help now urgently.

Richard was heartily tucking into his portion of sucking-pig all unaware of the mental disturbance which his friend's presence had caused at another table. After having been confined to the dusty seclusion of the *Palacio* for a week he was delighted to be at liberty again and thoroughly enjoyed this little celebration which the Duke had proposed.

De Richleau's voice, pitched very low and almost toneless, recalled him from vague speculations as to how the roses were looking in the gardens of his lovely old home, Cardinal's Folly. "Richard, we are in luck. Don't look round, but the woman for whom we came out here is at the corner table behind you. It's essential that I should talk to her. She's with a man but presently we must join them. This is going to be a ticklish operation because the opposition firm think she is one of their supporters and I don't know the name she works under. She doesn't know I'm—er—a French chef, either. I must have a little time to think out the best procedure."

"Take as much as you like," said Richard amiably. "The longer the better as far as I'm concerned. I'm enjoying my dinner."

The ruins of the sucking-pig were removed and an *omelette flambée* took its place. De Richleau gave Richard time to eat his half and then said softly:

"This is the drill. In a minute you will glance round casually. She's dressed very simply but you can't mistake her because she's incredibly beautiful—at least, I think so. Anyhow, she's the only woman in the room with golden hair. Directly you see her looking at you, get up and go over to her table. As we're in Spain and we don't want to precipitate a riot you will first apologize to the man for breaking in on them. Then say to her, 'excuse me, Señorita, but I feel sure we met at my friend Simon Aron's house when you were in London a fortnight ago. If you remember you were kind enough to express the hope that we should meet again when I came to Spain.' That she's never seen you in her life doesn't matter. The mention of Simon will give her the tip that we're on to her game and that she has nothing to fear. Spaniards are always very courteous so it's almost certain that they'll ask you to sit down. If they don't you must make conversation till they do. When that happens ask permission to bring me over. Jokingly you will infer that I'm an awful Bolshevik and an old employé of yours who is travelling

with you because he can speak a little Spanish. You're here because you've heard there's trouble brewing and you love any form of excitement. Use your own name. But don't mention the factory. Off you go."

Lucretia-José saw the Duke's companion turn and catching her eye suddenly half-smile at her. As he rose from his table she noticed that he was a rather nice-looking young man but wearing a hideous, mustard-coloured jacket and obviously English. With quick trepidation she wondered what was going to happen now, but Richard's opening gambit soon reassured her.

The whole affair was settled with surprising ease and swiftness. Cristoval immediately asked Richard to join them and Lucretia said at once that as he was with another man he must bring his friend to their table too.

Monsieur Hypolite Dubois was duly presented, more wine was ordered and they settled down cheerfully to one of those interminable discussions in which any Spaniard will joyfully participate until daylight.

Cristoval felt no twinge of jealousy. Lucretia's acquaintance with Richard was clearly a casual one and he, apparently, was only the pleasant sort of fool that no woman of her attributes could possibly become interested in. If Cristoval had met that many-gifted Pocket Venus, the Princess Marie-Lou, he would have had cause to think differently, but Richard played his part well without overdoing it and the Spaniard took an immediate liking to him. The fact that he was on such friendly terms with his old servant, too, showed him to be a decent fellow.

The 'servant' was a little diffident at first but once he found that they were all good Democrats he became 'the life and soul of the party.' The only thing upon which he was serious, as became a sound member of the French *Fronte Populaire*, was politics. He had no quarrel with Richard, saving his presence, but he was. anti-clerical, anti-capitalist, and anti-conscription to an almost fanatical degree.

Lucretia-José was enchanted. She could have grown sick with laughter, if she had let herself go, at the spectacle of this Grand Seigneur, dressed as a mountebank, propounding these strange doctrines.

In deference to Richard the conversation was conducted mainly in English and time drifted on unheeded as they talked of the political situation. Cristoval had now apparently accepted the two strangers as sympathizers on the grounds of Richard's intimate friendship with Simon

Aron and 'Comrade' Dubois' advanced views. Without touching on any confidential matters the young Spanish Trade-Unionist spoke his mind quite freely. The army was plotting again. Up to its old dirty tricks. But when they sprang their mine they would get one hell of a surprise.

"But how," asked Richard, "can the man in the street, who wants a fair deal, possibly win out against well-armed troops?"

Cristoval shrugged. "That we have machine-guns too—it is no secret—and thousands of good fellows made trained to use them. The reason we come out on top, though, is that within a week of, as you say, the balloon going up, the other side fight among themselves. The army, in no land, can override a whole people. Not unless it has a big part of the people behind it. Of our top-dog Generals not one wants the Monarchy back and nobody of them is Fascist. Whom can they make reliance on? The *Renovacion Española*?—that is a Monarchist organization. The Fascista—what we call *Falangists* here?—they have no like for army chiefs or Monarchists either. The *Action Popular*—Gil Robles' old Catholic Party?—two-thirds of them are Republicans and they make daggers drawn at the *Falangists* of the young de Rivera. In Navarre the *Carlists* are strong—yes, but they want their own pretender as King; for the *Renovacion Española* and Alfonso's family they have no use at all. The *Lliga*?—pouff! They are nothing now—and have interest only in Catalonia. So there you see! The army itself is split plenty in all these factions. Also many of the less high officers and battalions of infantry are with us. The Generals—they cannot win, I tell you. They will be shot—and a good thing too."

Quite unwittingly the young Socialist had expressed the Duke's own fears and that was why he had taken such intricate measures to secret Lucretia-José's great horde of gold. It was that gold he wanted to talk to her about, and although it was now nearly one o'clock in the morning he had no intention of breaking up the party; on the contrary, he was determined to keep it going until some chance enabled him to get a few words alone with her.

Richard was contesting Cristoval's statement. "What about this chap Calvo Sotelo?" he asked. "They say he's a pretty shrewd bird and that all the parties of the Right might be willing to sink their differences until they'd got the Left well under, if he was appointed Dictator."

“*Si, si,*” Cristoval agreed. “He is a real danger—that one. The fools have a trust in him and will not believe us that he is a rogue. He is *Falangist* but only moderate *Falangist*—you understand. All parties of the Right and half our people also believe they get fair deal if Sotelo becomes head of new Government. That man—he is the greatest enemy to Democracy in Spain.”

De Richleau brought the conversation back to lighter topics. Saving the Señorita’s presence, he said, he was a Frenchman, old now, alas, but still young enough to take pleasure in youthful beauty. Did the Señorita herself think that, apart from her own loveliness, the ladies of Spain could compare with the ladies of France? He was a stranger in Madrid. He had seen a few pretty girls in the streets but he would be interested to have her honest opinion.

Lucretia played up without batting an eyelid. “That’s a challenge we can’t ignore,” she cried, and added in Spanish to Cristoval, “Let’s take them along to the *Alhambra*.”

“You don’t want to go to that sort of place,” he demurred quickly.

“Why not?” she contended.

“Well, it’s full of tarts.”

“What’s that matter as long as they’re pretty ones?” she laughed. “To hear you talk anyone would think we were back in the dreary old days of the Monarchy. Plenty of respectable women go to all the night-clubs now. I shall be with you and we can have a box. Come on. Let’s show them the sights. That’s the least we can do for strangers in Madrid.”

“All right, if you wish it,” he agreed at once. “I shall have to leave you, though, a little after two, because there is something on to-night and I have been warned to report at the office at half-past. Still, I won’t be gone more than an hour and you’ll be all right with them till I can get back and fetch you.”

De Richleau’s hope had been that if he could get them to a dance place Cristoval might meet acquaintances who would occupy him for a few minutes, but having understood the whole conversation which had just taken place he was overjoyed to know that the Spaniard would be definitely out of the way for so long.

They picked up a taxi outside and drove to the *Alhambra*. Having passed through the vestibule they entered a large, lofty room, half dancing-hall, half theatre. There was a stage at one end now occupied by a dance-band,

three tiers of boxes running round the sides, and tables below them on the floor, only the centre of which was used for dancing.

When they were shown to a box in the second tier Richard quickly secured the *carte des vins* from the waiter, but Cristoval insisted on playing host. "In Spain," he said, "it is never permit for visitors to pay. Order, please, champagne, also anything else you would like. We do not have to drink the champagne but without it they refuse to us the box."

Seeing that Bollinger was not priced higher than most of the other brands on the list Richard ordered a bottle and he was somewhat surprised when De Richeau asked for a brandy and soda. Enlightenment came when the champagne arrived. It bore the name of Bollinger but had a green stripe right across its label. Rather unhappily Richard settled down to drink his quota of its sweetish, fizzy contents which had little resemblance to the magnificent *cuvées* he associated with the famous cellars at Ay. He consoled himself with scanning the occupants of the place.

It was fairly full. There were quite a number of officers in uniform but only half a dozen men in dinner-jackets, the rest were in lounge suits. None of the women was in evening dress but a good number were hatless and wore pretty afternoon frocks. Those ladies of the town who were unoccupied could be distinguished by the fact that they had no male escorts and sat about in couples; the more expensively dressed pairs refraining from taking the floor and remaining in their private boxes. Richard noticed that none of the men ever went up to the girls and asked them to dance. Instead waiters brought little notes of invitation to the favoured ones and pointed out their senders, upon which the lady in question took a quick glance at her would-be partner and looked away again or, if she liked his appearance, beckoned him over. It seemed a very civilized way of transacting such matters.

Cristoval took Lucretia-José down to dance. "They're a good-looking couple," Richard remarked, "but it's a pity he's so short."

"I wouldn't say he's short," replied the Duke. "It's she who is on the tall side for a woman. She's about five eight I should think, and she carries herself magnificently which makes her appear even taller. By Jove! She is attractive."

De Richeau's gaze was riveted on Lucretia. Richard said no more but glanced at his companion with mingled curiosity and apprehension.

Women of all ages often found the Duke attractive but it was rare for him to express more than an academic appreciation of female loveliness. Something in his tone recalled to Richard the words of the song from the 'Maid of the Mountains' "And when he thinks he's past love—it is then he finds his last love—and he loves her as he's never loved before." He hoped with all his heart that De Richleau was not going to complicate matters by developing a sudden and uncontrollable passion for the beautiful Golden Spaniard.

By two o'clock the place had filled up. Hardly a box remained unoccupied and there were few vacant tables left on the floor. The Duke and the Trade Unionist were deep in politics again. Under pretence of enthusiasm for the cause De Richleau was making the most of the opportunity to get all the information he could. Where were the Unions strongest? he asked. Would the Anarchist C.N.T. co-operate with them? Where was the Army expected to strike first? When did Cristoval think the blow would fall?

"That we would like to know," Cristoval smiled. "It was to have been June. The new class conscripts come in then—the old class are made free. New ones would not be so much— what you say—under the influence of the officers, as the old. Then we learn it is postpone till August. But now, the date, we believe it is advance again. No matter. We have had time enough. We are ready. The first big move, it is planned for to-night. What it is I do not know. But it is we who make it. We wait no more but strike to defend our liberties."

As he finished speaking he stood up. "You excuse, please, I go now. Later I return. It may be that I have interesting news."

He had been sitting beside and partly behind Lucretia so when he had gone De Richleau took the vacant chair. By moving it a little further back he was able to arrange himself so that his head was not visible even to the people in the boxes opposite. He knew that Madrid was swarming with political agents and spies from all over Europe and he had no intention of giving one of them the chance of learning what he was about to say through lip-reading.

"Don't turn your head but listen," he said quietly. "Now and again make a remark to Richard so that if anybody outside is watching it will look as if you're carrying on a conversation with him."

While a disjointed and almost meaningless exchange of sentences passed between the two younger people the Duke's voice went on in a smooth low monologue. Lucretia-José listened intently to the full and clear account of all that her friends had done since they had arrived in Madrid.

When he had finished De Richleau picked up one of the paper fans that the waiter had placed on the table beside the champagne cooler and handed it to her. She knew quite enough of such matters to appreciate the meaning of the gesture and, opening it, began gently to fan herself so that the lower part of her face could not be seen from outside the box.

"You have been very clever," she said, "and very wonderful. That day when I saw you in London I knew in my heart that I could not have chosen better. I thank you both and Spain will thank you when what you have done can be revealed publicly. The Reds are not only buying rifles, hand-grenades and machine-guns now, but also aeroplanes. I have proof of it. That gold might have been used to buy planes and bombs to destroy thousands of Spanish homes."

"I'm afraid we're not out of the wood yet," murmured the Duke. "We've only got it as far as the cellars of your Palace. We've got to transport it to the factory out at Valmojado."

"How do you intend to do that?"

"It's such a colossal weight that we can't do it without help —that's the trouble. I need six lorries and at least thirty trustworthy men."

"When do you want them?"

"The sooner the better."

"You shall have them to-morrow night. After midnight it is fairly quiet in the quarter of the city where the Palace is. I will have them report to you at twelve-thirty."

"Good. I felt sure you would be able to arrange something if only I could get hold of you. Who will these men be?"

"Officers whose loyalty will be beyond question, dressed in civilian clothes. I shall have fifty of them especially picked for the job. More would only get in each others' way but it's important that the lorries should be loaded up and on the move with the least possible delay. Someone high up will also see that a squad of the *Guardia Civile* closes the ends of the street while loading is in progress."

“Admirable. Now. The size of these boxes is fifteen inches long by eight broad by eight deep. Fifteen by eight by eight, and each has two iron hoops round it. There are two hundred and three of them. Do you think you can get me a set of duplicates made during the day?”

“They will have to be if you wish it. Those who are directing know that it is more important to protect the safety of this bullion than to secure the allegiance of half the Spanish Air Force. The bulk of it is not with us but their planes are obsolete and every obstacle must be put in their way which will hamper them in buying new ones. What do you wish done with the duplicate set of boxes?”

“Have them filled with cement and nailed down. The same six lorries can pick them up in the morning on their return from delivering the bullion at the factory. I will issue further instructions about them then.”

“That shall be done. I gather that you have not visited the factory yet?”

“No. We go out in the morning to take over. And there’s another thing I want you to do for me. See what information you can get about the men who are employed there. Nearly every man in Spain is registered as a member of some sort of Party now. There are almost certain to be a few *Falangists* or strong Catholics amongst them. I must have their names and anything else you can let me know of their records.”

“I can get that through the local organizations.”

“One more thing. Where are you living, and would it be dangerous to get in touch with you if we need further assistance?”

“The Reds knows me as José Levida, an Anarchist who has just sufficient money to support herself and devote all her time to working for the Revolution. I have a small apartment in a large block of better-class workers’ dwellings near the Hippodrome. I chose it because people are coming and going at all hours of the day and night. The address is *Rios Rosas No. 33* and the number of my apartment is 17. I am also on the telephone, 27064. Can you remember that?”

“Rios Rosas No. 33, Flat 17 and ’phone 27064,” the Duke repeated. “I shall not forget.”

“As to getting in touch with me,” she went on, “I see no reason at all why you shouldn’t now. It would be best if we were not seen together often, but since you’ve established yourselves so cleverly as Red sympathizers there will be no danger in our greeting each other openly if we meet. Be

very careful what you say if you telephone me, though. All sorts of people are tapping the line these days to pick up what they can and nearly every operator on the exchange is working for one party or another.”

“Good. That’s settled, then. What do you wish me to do about your caretaker, Pédro?”

“Give him plenty of drink from the cellar but keep him a prisoner.”

“Right. Now, what is the latest information about the rising?”

“Cristoval was right. We have advanced our date again. Even I do not know the exact hour but operations will commence within five or six days from now.”

“Thank God we’ll have that bullion safely salted down by then. There seems a risk, though, that the Reds may beat you to it. I saw two—er—people I know in England who’re on their side in the street this afternoon. Originally they told me they were going abroad in the first week of August but they didn’t say where. The fact that they’ve turned up here in mid-July proves things are getting pretty warm.”

“You mean Simon Aron and the big American, Rex Van Ryn—don’t you? Though how you knew that I’d been to Mr. Aran’s house has been puzzling me all the evening.”

“I was with him at the time and saw you coming up the garden path through one of the front windows. It didn’t need any great intelligence to guess what you were up to there. What have Simon and Rex come out here for—do you know?”

“Something to do with money. Mr. Aron is acting in an advisory capacity to the Red Finance Council.”

“Keep your eye on him if you can. Rex is not dangerous but Simon’s as clever as a cartload of monkeys and as slippery as an eel. I’d rather be up against ten Generals or Trade Union leaders than have to pit my wits against Simon on his own ground.”

“You know him well, it seems?”

“I know and love both of them. They are the other two of the three men your father told you about who were in Russia with me, and there is a request I have to make to you. Thwart their activities if you can but I beg you—and I would still beg you if they brought about my death—to use your utmost influence to protect them from your Monarchist or Fascist

friends. If they fall into the hands of the Army leaders have them deported but see to it that no harm befalls them.”

“Once things start to happen it may not be easy to keep in touch with them but for your sake I will gladly do everything I can to ensure their safety.”

“Thank you. It seems that things are starting to happen already. You heard what Cristoval Ventura said about the Reds’ first blow being struck to-night. Have you any idea what he was referring to?”

“None, unfortunately. I only know that it will not be a general rising.”

“Do you believe there is anything in his theory that the parties of the Right will be brought to destruction by fighting among themselves?”

“No. There are admittedly wide differences in their views about the future of the country but in this emergency our only hope was to combine against the Red menace. All the important leaders have sworn a solemn oath to accept the orders of Calvo Sotelo and his advisers for the salvation of National and Catholic Spain.”

“Well,” the Duke reached forward and picked up his glass, “here’s a health to him.”

Richard divided all that was left of the ‘*Bollinger Green Stripe*’ between Lucretia-José and himself. “Cristoval more or less warned us about this stuff,” he smiled turning round, “and it doesn’t seem very lucky to toast the new Dictator in such a poor bottle, especially on the morning of the 13th. Still, here goes. To Calvo Sotelo and the salvation of National and Catholic Spain!”

For some time they continued to talk in a desultory manner, scarcely conscious of the colourful throng of dancers on the floor below, and all three preoccupied with thoughts of the momentous forces which were so inexorably gathering to rend the country from end to end.

It was nearly half-past three when Cristoval rejoined them. He looked neither cheerful nor cast down, only a little tired. “A business most unpleasant,” he said abruptly. “These methods of the gangster—ugh, they are horrible. But sometimes necessary if we are to make safe our Spain. Some of our men have just killed Calvo Sotelo.”

Chapter Eleven – The Price of Secrecy

Four hours' sleep was all that De Richeau and Richard allowed themselves. There was much to be done on this fateful Monday which had opened with the assassination of the Nationalist leader.

By nine o'clock the two friends were out on a shopping expedition. Their purchases consisted of a large supply of provisions, mostly tinned goods, a great number of tins of paint, and a set of stencils. Having carried these back to the *Palacio* in several journeys they divided the provisions, setting aside some special tinned delicacies to take with them to Valmojado and carrying the rest up to a bathroom on the fourth floor of the house. They next went down to visit Pédro.

The unfortunate caretaker had long since given up both pleading with and abusing them. They never visited him without their guns in their hands but always spoke to him cheerfully and quite evidently had no intention of harming him provided he behaved himself. Actually he now thought himself rather lucky not to have fared worse as they gave him plenty of wine and fed him much better than he had ever been fed before.

"No, my man," said the Duke, who had removed the stain from his face and had his hat pulled well down to hide his dyed hair so that he appeared much as Pédro had always seen him. "We are leaving here temporarily so we intend to give you a change of prison. We may be back to-morrow night or perhaps not for three or four days but if, when we do get back, we find you've made any attempt whatever to escape I shall just not bother further with you but shoot you out of hand. Understand?"

Pédro nodded morosely.

"Right then," De Richeau waved his automatic casually towards the door. "Walk march and no monkey-tricks or you'll get a bullet in your back."

The caretaker was shepherded upstairs to the fourth-floor bathroom. It was sixty feet above the ground and looked out on the inner court of the Palace. Even if Pédro had been able to get the window open he could have yelled his head off before anyone would have heard him, and would have had to risk breaking his neck if he had attempted to regain his freedom by jumping out. As it was, De Richeau had taken the precaution of screwing

four thick, wooden bars across the closed shutters outside, a few days before, in preparation for just such a transfer of their prisoner, and this made it impossible to open them. The room contained nothing whatever except its toilet accessories, black with the dust of years, a small arm-chair which had been carried in for Pédro's comfort, a pile of bedding flung down in the bath since it was doubtful if he would use it for any other purpose, the provisions which would easily last a week and a considerable supply of wine which Richard had carried up that morning.

Having told Pédro that it would be quite useless for him to attempt to burst open the door, because they intended to erect a barricade outside, they locked him in and piled some heavy furniture against it.

"He won't get out of there," chuckled the Duke when they had finished. "Our only risk is that his friends may break in to find out what's happened to him. That's unlikely, though, as three of them have called in the past week and those have probably told the others by now that he's in the country. Even if they do decide to investigate I doubt if they'll look up here. It's much more likely that they'll clear out again when they're satisfied his dead body's not littering up the basement. Come on. Let's get down there."

Downstairs they opened up two tins of paint; a large one of grey and a small one of black, both of which were of a special, quick-drying variety. De Richleau had no intention of trusting anyone an inch further than he had to. He had planned to paint each of the bullion boxes over and stencil new markings on them so that they should give the impression that they contained small-arms ammunition. He knew that their frightful weight might give away their real contents to anyone used to handling munitions, but that neither ordinary people nor officers from the crack Spanish Regiments were used to heaving boxes of small-arms ammunition about.

In preparation for his scheme he had arranged with Richard that the boxes should not be restacked after they had been moved but laid out in rows along the corridors of the huge basement. It was not necessary to move any of them again but, since there were over two hundred of them, it took a solid four hours to paint the lot. When the job was done each bore a neat row of capital letters and figures on its lid and a large swastika, indicating that they came from Germany, which was made by a quadruple application of the 'L' in the stencil set.

They had a short break for lunch and afterwards changed their clothes, Richard becoming again the Sporting Englishman and the Duke his French man-of-all-work, Hypolite Dubois. They then set out for Valmocado.

The Duke has ascertained that although it was twenty-odd miles away it could be reached by bus in just under the hour, and a long, low, comfortable motor-coach took them out there. As is often the case abroad strangers were talking together much more freely than they would have done in England. While the autobus sped swiftly along one of those fine, smooth, metalled roads that were a legacy from the late Dictator, Primo de Rivera, the talk was all of the death of the unfortunate Calvo Sotelo.

Only that afternoon the authorities at the East Cemetery had telephoned *Seguridad* Headquarters to know what they were to do with a body which the police had left in their mortuary early that morning. The corpse had been shot through the breast and the right eye. The news that it was that of Calvo Sotelo had spread through the city like wild-fire.

Many rumours about the affair were current, and as far as the facts could be ascertained they seemed to be on these lines. A few days earlier a gang of Fascists had shot down a member of the police force, who was known to be a staunch supporter of the Reds, as he was leaving a cinema. A friend of the dead man had sworn to be revenged. At three o'clock that morning a squad of police had driven up to Sotelo's apartment in a van and, rousing him from sleep, produced a warrant for his arrest. He had not appeared particularly concerned about it as numerous other Reactionary leaders, including young José Antonio Primo de Rivera, were already in prison and, after a careful examination of the warrant, had gone quietly with his captors. The next thing his family learned was that he had been brutally murdered.

The passengers in the auto-bus, who included a number of working people, were frankly horrified. Everyone agreed that such a cold-blooded outrage was beyond all limits. A Fascist rising was now a certainty and the equally dreaded Reds would swarm out to challenge their supremacy. No one could predict how matters would end but they were quite convinced that whichever way it went they would be the sufferers.

Most of them, till then, had become so inured to rumours of coming risings and *coups d'état* that they no longer believed in them. The majority did not care who ran the country as long as they were allowed to earn their

living in peace. Mussolini and Hitler seemed to have improved the state of things in Italy and Germany, according to certain papers, but Stalin was doing wonderful things in Russia with his Collective Farming and Five-Year Plans, according to others. Whoever came out on top there would be new taxes; but probably trying to feed one's family under the Falangists would be no worse than under Largo Caballero and his U.G.T. They rather inclined to the popular sixty-seven-year-old Socialist. But, of course, he was out for himself just as much as the dead Sotelo had been. To hell with all of them. Yet if one said that, the whole country would go Anarchist, which must be prevented at all costs. No, if you thought it over, perhaps, after all, that might not be such a bad thing.

De Richleau, not wishing to draw attention to himself, took little part in the discussion. The birthmark, which was the high-spot of his disguise, made him more conspicuous than he cared about as it was. He pretended to be slightly deaf and confined himself to supporting the majority who were for keeping the peace at any price.

Richard could understand little of what was going on so he spent most of the journey gazing out of the window. Having crossed the Manzanares, which in the July heats was no more than a trickle of water in the middle of a broad, dry ditch with concrete embankments on both sides, they passed through some straggling suburbs, the sister towns of Carabanchel-bajo and Carabanchel-alto, then entered the open country. It was flat, highly cultivated but deserted except for a few women working in the fields under the torrid sun. No cottages or villages broke the monotony of the road; only, here and there, the long wall of a private enclosure with a latticed *gazebo*, like an airy summer-house, perched on one of its corners, and it was difficult to realize that they were only a few miles from a capital city.

At Valmojado the Duke and Richard were the only passengers to descend. The auto-bus deposited them in the little square and sped on to other towns. A yellow stucco church with a cross-surmounted dome occupied one side of the square; the paint was flaking from its tall doors and some ragged children played listlessly on its steps. There was a small hotel and half a dozen blowsy-looking general shops. In the centre of the open space several rows of trees had been pleached to form a shady canopy; beneath it was a well round which some peasant women with coloured handkerchiefs draped over their hair stood gossiping.

The Duke went over and inquired the whereabouts of the factory. They answered with ready smiles and voluble information. "Down the street there, Señor. It is five minutes' walk— not more. There can be no mistake, it is the only factory here. Does *El Señor* seek Juan Coello, the manager? Wait but one moment, Señor, and my son shall show you. Pépé! Pépé! Come here, you good-for-nothing."

A merry-eyed but painfully thin urchin led them down a cobbled street the newest building in which must have been well over a hundred years old. Here and there semicircular topped arches pierced the frontages which had been mellowed to a uniform hue by time and weather. The dark shadows in their recesses contrasted strongly with the glare outside. The street dwindled into two rows of peasant hovels, through the low doors of which could be seen more live-stock than humanity, and it ended in the fields where the factory stood on the extreme outskirts of the townlet.

The place looked quite modern, only about ten years old, and consisted of three long, low buildings with glass roofs slanting towards the north, a square smelting-house from which a fifty-foot chimney rose, a two-storied block of offices and a number of corrugated-iron sheds.

"Evidently built in Primo's time," remarked the Duke. "Valmojado isn't on the railway but the Dictator's fine arterial roads would have opened it up to transport by lorry. Some shrewd fellow chose this place because he could get the ground for next to nothing and at the same time have a supply of labour handy that had never before been tapped for commerce. It will suit us admirably."

Little Pépé was suitably rewarded for having been their guide and they entered the factory office. The three clerks were a seedy looking lot, and Coello, the manager, was a little rabbit of a man who smirked and salaamed all over the place directly he had seen the documents which proved Richard to be the new owner. De Richleau's signature as Hypolite Dubois was now on the contract as witness, so it was all in order. Señor Gomara had not informed him that he was thinking of disposing of the property, Coello said, but he did not appear at all distressed by this sudden change of masters once he was assured that he was to be kept on in his job.

The Duke acted only as an interpreter. He spoke without deference but clearly indicated that Richard was his boss and gave Coello to understand

that Richard's family had big metal interests in Birmingham. Richard, as a younger son, had been sent out to develop what would be no more than a small subsidiary in Spain.

Richard looked grave, said little, except to ask Coello staccato questions through De Richleau, and led the way everywhere without hesitation when they started on a tour of the factory.

In the first shop to which they were taken Coello presented the foreman of the works, Jacinto Vincente, and it was soon obvious to them that Jacinto was the real power in the place. He was a fine old chap of over sixty with a handsome grey moustache brushed fiercely upwards on either side of his full-lipped mouth, blue eyes, hook nose, mahogany skin, and wearing a pair of gold rings in his ears; a regular pirate of a fellow.

De Richleau explained that as Richard's interpreter he would have to see a lot of Jacinto and expressed the hope that they would work well together. The old foreman declared that it would not be his fault if they failed to do so and took charge of the tour of inspection.

When it was over Coello was told to inform the hands that they would all be retained, subject to good behaviour, and the principals returned to the office.

The Duke exchanged a few sentences with Richard in English, then said to Coello, "Mr. Eaton is anxious to inspect the books as soon as possible so he has decided not to go back to Madrid this evening. He is sending me in to collect our luggage and directly I return we can settle down to the job."

Coello looked very surprised. "But why to-night?" he expostulated. "We could do that to-morrow or Wednesday."

"The English are a very impatient people," smiled the Duke. "They altogether lack the sense of leisure which is so charming in you Spaniards. Mr. Eaton too has a fondness for doing a lot of his work at night. He says he does not wish to keep you up and that he will ask you any questions that may arise in the morning."

"*El Señor* is most considerate but I will stay willingly. It may be that he will not understand our system of bookkeeping."

"My own chequered career has included some months in the office of a Spanish commercial house so I hope to be able to make things clear to him. The only trouble is that the people at the local hotel will not be pleased if they have to wait up for us until three o'clock or perhaps later."

“No, they would not like that,” Coello agreed. “Valmojado is a quiet place. It has not even a cinema. Everybody is in bed and asleep before midnight.”

“Well, it cannot be helped. Mr. Eaton will have to pay extra for someone to stay up for us—unless...” De Richleau’s face suddenly brightened as though he had been struck by a great idea, “unless there is somewhere we could doss down here? You know how eccentric these English are. They seem to take pleasure in discomfort, but they are good masters.”

Coello looked doubtful. “There are six or eight camp beds and some blankets packed away upstairs. We have suffered from many strikes in Spain these last few years and they are used for the police guard which protects the plant when riots are threatened, but...”

“Let us see them,” De Richleau cut him short, and in a few moments matters had been arranged. He was to return to Madrid by the last bus which passed through Valmojado at 8.40, and come back in a hired car with the ‘luggage’ while Richard dined at the local inn. On the Duke’s return both of them would burn the midnight oil over the ledgers and, later, sleep on the premises.

By this time the factory-hands were going off for the night and by seven o’clock Coello and his staff, somewhat dazed by this invasion but by no means unhappy about it, departed leaving Richard and the Duke on their own.

De Richleau heaved a heavy sigh once Coello was out of the yard in front of the office building. “Well, that’s that.” He jangled the manager’s keys. “We’re in possession. Although, if they’d run to a night-watchman, Lord knows how I should have got rid of him short of murder—and that might have been a little awkward to laugh off in the morning.”

“If they have to have police protection here when a strike is on I wonder they’re not afraid of sabotage or someone breaking in to steal stuff in normal times,” Richard hazarded.

“No, no. The Spaniards are honest people. If they strike they strike, and they’ll even kill to secure what they’re after. But when there’s no dispute on the masters have nothing to fear whatever. I was only afraid they might have a watchman as a precaution against fire, but they’re incredibly slack about that sort of thing and it looks as if Gomara was so mean that he

preferred to run the risk of falling foul of his insurance company rather than pay one. Now they've all gone, let's have another look round."

Their second inspection included a visit to the corrugated-iron sheds. Most of these were used as warehouses and contained stacks of aluminium goods, which had been Gomara's speciality, but two held stores of raw material and one was empty.

"This is where we'll put it," said the Duke. "Fortunately the lorries can get right up to that end door, so our friends won't have far to carry it. The fact that the door is only secured by a padlock is not of much importance. The stuff is much too heavy for anyone to run away with, and if anyone decides to break in deliberately, just to find out what's here, they'll do it whatever locks we have on the door."

"Why not bury it while we've got the chance?" Richard suggested. "We'll have the men here to help us and they needn't lug it farther than the edge of that ploughed field over there."

De Richleau shook his head. "No, my friend. Bringing it here is only another stage in the bullion's Odyssey. I shan't be happy till I've got it out of the country. You've heard of the alchemists, of course, the old fellows who spent their lives trying to transmute base metals into gold. I propose to reverse the process and I hope to be more successful."

Having locked up again they strolled along to the little hotel, where De Richleau arranged about a meal for Richard; after which they sat drinking *Vermouth et Sippon*, with a slice of lemon, together until the bus arrived.

When he got back to Madrid the Duke went straight to the Atocha Station where, for a peseta tip, he secured from an obliging porter a few railway labels bearing the printed word BARCELONA.

On reaching the *Palacio* he placed the labels on the big table in the *salon* where any curious person would be certain to see them. Next he stole quietly up to the fourth floor in order to ascertain if Pédro was behaving himself. There was no sound of scraping or battering so presumably the caretaker was not attempting to escape. De Richleau waited for a little while until he heard the prisoner noisily clear his throat, then, having satisfied himself that the man was still there, he tiptoed quietly downstairs again. Setting his alarm-clock for 12.15 he arranged himself comfortably on a sofa and was instantly asleep.

When the alarm roused him from his all-too-brief slumber he refreshed himself with a wash and by 12.30 he was downstairs waiting to receive the help that Lucretia-José had promised to send him.

Two minutes later the lorries drew up before the door with a punctuality quite un-Spanish; but they were manned by officers who were preparing to risk their necks in a desperate endeavour to get control of their country and this was all part of the same business, which made a difference.

Their Chief was a grizzled, elderly man with the scar of an old wound on his cheek. He wasted no words. "Your orders, Señor?"

"You have six lorries with you?"

"Yes."

"Good. Bring in your men. We shall need them all. I wish them to form a human chain. The goods they have to load are heavy so that will be quicker than carrying them." De Richleau led the Chief straight down to the basement while his followers spread themselves out with quick efficiency. Four remained outside on the steps and pavement, twenty straddled the hall, a dozen took the stairs and the remainder began to heave up the long line of cases.

Several stumbled and nearly fell as they took the weight of the first box to reach them but they all braced themselves to the strain and almost tore their muscles out in an endeavour to show each other that they were quite as capable of heaving ammunition around as the troops they had so often seen at the same job.

In a few minutes everyone of them was sweating profusely but the boxes were moving along the chain much quicker than the Duke had dared to hope.

"This is what I want done," he said to the grizzled leader. "Directly the first lorry is loaded with thirty-seven boxes, send it off under your second-in-command. He is to pull up at the side of the road four hundred yards past the last house in Carabanchel-alto and wait until the other five lorries join him there. The next four will follow immediately their cargo of thirty-seven boxes each is on board and we will travel on the sixth with the remaining eighteen."

"Very good."

"Are your men armed? "

"Yes."

“Send six men with each of the first five lorries. Give the officer in charge of each party orders that he is not to stop for anybody. If necessary he is to fire on anyone who tries to prevent him carrying out his instructions.”

The Chief turned away and issued his orders. The first lorry moved off. The second took a little longer to load, the third longer still and the fourth and fifth were the very devil owing to the progressive decrease in the number of loaders and their increasing exhaustion. Gritting their teeth, panting and stumbling, the remaining twenty-five men manhandled the last eighteen boxes on to the sixth lorry and the job was done.

In the meantime De Richleau had gathered together his belongings, the four suitcases, the tinned delicacies and the many tins of paint. With the Chief and the balance of the sweating officers he clambered up into the lorry and as half-past two chimed from a near-by church it moved away from the ancient *Palacio*.

At the end of the street they passed one of the little groups of *Guardia Civile* who had kept them free from those crowds of curious people who collect even at night. No sign was exchanged between the *Guardia* in their picturesque uniforms and the officers in civilian clothes. They picked up the rest of the convoy, which had arrived without incident at the rendezvous beyond Caraban-chel-alto, and proceeded at a steady pace to Valmojado.

Not a light was to be seen as they passed through the sleeping townlet and Richard was pacing slowly up and down the road outside the factory waiting for them.

With aching backs but no signs of shirking the officers set about a renewal of their labours. De Richleau took the Chief aside and asked, “Did the person who sent you say anything about another consignment of boxes?”

“Yes, we are to pick them up at a certain address on our way back to the lorry park. My further instructions were to come from you.”

“This is what I wish you to do. Have a label written out for each box addressed to *The Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles, care of the Manager, Credit Lyonnais, Barcelona*. Give those labels to some of your least trustworthy privates to stick on. It is important that information about this second consignment should trickle through to the other side. You will then send them quite openly to the Atocha Station and despatch them by goods train to Barcelona.”

“That shall be done.”

The unloading, direct into the shed, was much quicker than the loading had been as all hands were able to form squads which relieved each other every ten minutes in tackling the loads as lorry by lorry drove in. By half-past four all the bullion had been stacked in the corrugated-iron shed. There were three casualties, men upon whose feet boxes of that damnably heavy gold had been dropped, but the officers were a resolute lot and piled into their lorries without a murmur about the gruelling night's work they had accomplished. With a word of thanks the Duke gripped the hand of their grizzled Chief. The first flush of the early summer dawn was showing faintly in the eastern sky as the lorries rattled off through Valmojado.

De Richleau stretched himself wearily but there was a little note of triumph in his voice as he said, “Richard, my friend, we've done the worst half of our job now we've got that damned gold out of Madrid. And the whole thing's been carried through without a single hitch.”

“That's all you know,” retorted Richard. “You were wrong about their not having a night-watchman here. He let himself in with his own keys and when I got back from dinner I found him sitting in the office.”

“The devil you did! And how did you get rid of him?”

“I didn't,” Richard gulped. “I'm afraid I've killed him.”

Chapter Twelve – The Storm Breaks

Poor old boy,” said De Richleau gently. “That was rotten for you.”

“It isn’t me!” Richard burst out. “You know well enough it’s not the first time I’ve killed a man—but before it’s always been an enemy. Somebody who would have killed *us* if they’d had half a chance. This was different. Just a poor devil going about his duties.”

The Duke put his arm round his friend’s shoulders. “I’m terribly sorry I let you in for this. Try to remember, though, that one life doesn’t count very much in a game where we shall save thousands—if only we can win it.”

“Yes, if! But this enormously increases the odds against us. “

“I know. We can’t abandon ship because we’ve no means of taking the gold with us, and how we’re going to explain this fellow’s death or disappearance utterly defeats me at the moment.”

Richard nodded. “Perhaps I ought to have told you before they started unloading the bullion, but I worked it out while I was waiting for you that the one vital thing was not to upset your plans for getting it clear of Madrid.”

“You were right there. Now things have reached boiling-point we should have risked everything by taking it back to the Palace. There was nowhere else to *cache* it and if we’d cut and run from this place with the lorries we should have had the police after us for murder. Tell me exactly what happened.”

“When I got back from the inn, about half-past ten, I saw a light in the clerk’s office. Using my own key I let myself in and tiptoed down the passage. By standing on a chair I got a peep through the skylight over the office door. There was this chap settled down for the night, apparently. He was lying back in one chair with his feet up on another. Beside him on a third were some bread and garlic, half a litre of wine, a bunch of keys, an ordinary alarm-clock and a night-watchman’s clock. He had a newspaper spread over his face to protect it from the light and as I listened I heard him snoring. After I’d done it I found the alarm-clock was set for twelve so evidently he was in the habit of snoozing between his rounds. I suppose he

was a bit late this evening in turning up and Coello forgot to tell us about him in the excitement of the take-over.”

As Richard paused the Duke said quietly, “Go on. What did you do?”

“I tiptoed out of the building again and sat down here on the road-side to think things out. I didn’t know what time you’d turn up but I judged it might be any time after two. By then he’d got to be got rid of somehow.”

“Yes.”

“The devil of it is I can’t speak more than a few words of Spanish. If I could have, I felt I might have mugged up some yarn to persuade him to clear off. Then I realized that as he arrived after the others had left he wouldn’t even know that I’m supposed to be the owner of the place. My next idea was to go and find Coello. But I hadn’t the faintest notion where he lived. It occurred to me that if I went back to the inn and said his name often enough somebody might eventually lead me to him. By that time it was nearly half-past eleven. It meant rousing the people at the inn and, as I suddenly saw, even if I did succeed in getting hold of Coello through them, I couldn’t speak Spanish to him either.”

“You were certainly in a bad fix, Richard,” De Richleau agreed. “I suppose you then decided to knock the watchman on the head?”

“More or less. You know how obliging these Spaniards are —and how argumentative. It seemed to me that if I once started anything they’d try and dig out all sorts of people who know a few words of French or English. I visualized half a dozen of them congregating here and disputing among themselves as to what I wanted—added to which I couldn’t think up any plausible excuse for sending the watchman home for the night, anyhow. The chances were I’d only collect a nice little crowd that would still be here talking when you turned up with the bullion, and I couldn’t afford to risk that.

“I didn’t intend to kill the fellow but he was a big chap— darned nearly as big as Rex—and if we’d got to grips he’d have throttled me with one hand. I dared not chance mucking things up by not outing him at the first blow. I found a handy length of old iron in the yard, tiptoed in again just before midnight and let him have it good, hard and proper.”

“You had your gun,” said the Duke mildly. “You might have held him up and locked him in somewhere.”

“Yes, I might have,” Richard agreed sarcastically, “but. didn’t. If I had, you’d now be faced with the jolly little job of murdering him in cold blood.”

“Why?”

“For one thing because there’s nowhere here I could have shut him up from which he wouldn’t have heard the lorries arriving and, for another, because I couldn’t have done it without showing him at least part of my face. He’d have learnt too much for you to free him or risk trying to keep him hidden in a place like this where there are scores of people about every day. “

“Quite true. Your decision to stun him was best. And since he didn’t even know what hit him we might have persuaded him that it wasn’t one of us—if only you hadn’t overdone it. Let’s go and look at him.”

The watchman was still spread out on the two chairs just as he had been sleeping except that his arms now dangled limply.

“Have you touched anything?” asked the Duke.

“Nothing except the catch on the alarm-clock, which I pushed back to prevent its ringing, and, of course, it was by feeling his chest that I found his heart had stopped beating.”

De Richleau lifted one of the man’s hands and let it drop again. “*Rigor mortis* hasn’t set in yet,” he remarked, “although it’s getting on for five hours since you hit him. He’s not cold yet either. Give me that mirror off the wall.”

As Richard unhooked a toilet-glass from above one of the clerk’s desks the Duke moved round to get a better view of the wound in the man’s head. It was a long depression in the thick curly, black hair, now matted with dried blood, on the top and; little to the side of the cranium.

Taking the mirror De Richleau held it over the man’s lips After a moment a faint mist appeared on it.

“Good God!” exclaimed Richard. “He’s still living.”

“Yes, we’re in luck. If you’d hit him a blow like that on the temple or base of the skull he’d be dead as mutton. But suppose as he was lying back asleep he presented the top of his head to you and that’s what saved him.”

“Can we bring him round—d’you think?”

“No. He’ll probably remain unconscious for a couple of days and when he does come to he’ll have such bad concussion that all his memories will

be hopelessly confused. He won't even be able to swear to it that he ever reached this office."

"If only he doesn't die after all."

"He won't die. Look at the strength of him. We're in luck, I tell you. If you'd deliberately judged the force of that blow you couldn't have done better. We'd have had endless trouble if he'd come round to find himself tied up. As it is he knows nothing at all and all we have to do is to get him out of here."

"Where to?"

"We'd have carried him up the street if it had been a little earlier but that's too risky now. We'll have to put him out in one of the factory yards, face down as though somebody had attacked him."

"Sounds pretty brutal but I suppose it must be done."

"It's summer time so there'll be no change of temperature to affect him and the hands will be coming to work in an hour. Ha! Look at this! The very thing to provide a motive."

De Richleau had been fishing about in the man's pockets and he triumphantly waved a membership card of the Spanish National Socialist Party. "This chap's a J.O.N."

"What's a J.O.N.?"

"A Spanish Nazi. They're tied up with the Fascists now and the whole boiling are known as *F.E. de las J.O.N.s.*"

Ramming the papers back in the watchman's pockets the Duke grabbed a letter-file from a near-by shelf and ran through it until he found a blank half-sheet. Tearing it off he picked up a pen and printed across it in bold capitals 'U.H.P.'

"What's that for?" asked Richard.

"'Up the Proletariat' is a free translation. It's the general war-cry of the Reds. We'll pin this on his back and when his friends find him they'll think he's been attacked by his political enemies. The police won't even bother to hunt for finger-prints in a case like this and we'll set the hands of his alarm-clock at 9.15, then smash it. You were at the hotel having dinner then and they'll believe it gives the time of the assault because it'll look as if he broke the clock in his fall."

"How about his night-watchman's clock?"

“Nothing to worry about there. Fortunately you laid him out before he made his second round. The card’s only punched round eight o’clock so it gives nothing away. I’ll fix the alarum-clock. You pick up all his other things with your handkerchief and stuff them into his pockets.”

The watchman weighed a good sixteen stone but ten minutes later they had him outside, lying forward on his face as though he had fallen like that after being struck down.

Returning to the office they straightened things up and cleared away all traces of his presence there. Fortunately he had bled little and, owing to the angle at which he lay, most of the blood had become congealed in his thick hair. After a last look round they locked up downstairs and mounted to the room above where two of the camp beds had been set up for them. Half dead from fatigue they dropped straight off to sleep.

When they awoke sunlight was streaming through the uncurtained windows but no sound of work penetrated to them from the near-by factory or the office below; they had slept right through the morning into the *siesta*.

“No news is good news,” said the Duke cryptically and, as the events of the previous night flooded back into Richard’s mind, he knew the remark inferred that as the watchman must have been found hours before and they had not been awakened, they were not suspected.

The offices were deserted and having made the best toilet they could in the clerks’ wash-place they locked their temporary bedroom and set off for the centre of the town. At the sleepy little inn the landlord, a big, dark-eyed man wearing a picturesque sombrero, received them courteously and agreed to have a *paella* cooked for them although it was long after the usual hour of the midday meal. The Duke had had no chance to talk to him the previous evening but they soon found that Gaspar Perez already knew all that anyone in Valmojado knew about them, gossip being the main recreation of the place.

De Richleau asked Perez to drink with them while the meal was being cooked and the landlord readily consenting, they sat down under a vine-covered trellis that faced on to the square. From him they learned quite a lot about local feeling. Don Ignatius, the curé, was a good man; if there were more like him there would be fewer anti-clericals. On the other hand the Capuchin Fathers in the small monastery at the eastern end of the

town were very unpopular. 'Way back in 1837 when the lands of the Church had been taken over by the State, all the Religious Orders had put their money into commercial enterprises. In spite of the laws passed by the Republican Governments of the last few years to restrict their activities they still owned what virtually amounted to monopolies in many industries. The small traders who had to pay high wages could not compete with the monks who, under their vows of poverty, worked for their bare keep. Could it be wondered at that they were hated? The Mayor of Valmocado, Don Rubén Reyes, was very Red. It had been the municipal elections of five years before that had sent the King packing and nearly all such rural bodies were strong supporters of the Left. Nobody wanted Don Alfonso back, anyhow.

The *paello*, a *risotto* of rice and chicken, was served by Perez's laughter, the Señorita Anita, a pretty, smiling girl of twenty-odd who, her father told them, was soon to be married to a local schoolmaster. Perez did not seem too pleased about the matter and they guessed that he probably dreaded a drop in his turnover on her departure as Anita's good looks must have attracted quite a lot of custom to the inn.

As they were finishing their meal a Sergeant of Police crossed the square towards them. Richard drew out a cigarette and lit it to steady his nerves. He felt certain the assault on the watchman had been traced to them and that the Sergeant was coming to march them off to jail. With acute anxiety he listened while De Richleau and the policeman exchanged several sentences in Spanish, but his fears had no foundation. The Sergeant had learned that they had taken up their residence in Valmocado the night before and seeing them in front of the inn had decided to examine their passports there in order to save himself a journey to the factory.

Having taken the notes he wanted the Sergeant appeared quite satisfied and accepted a glass of cognac. In the meantime a crowd of ragged urchins had gathered round. Perez came out of the inn to drive them away but Richard would not let him and took them over to the nearest grocer's where, in halting Spanish, he purchased a quantity of sticky sweets for distribution among them. The mothers, once more assembled round the well in the square, watched the proceedings with interest and chorused, "*Mil gracias, Don Ricardo, mil gracias,*" as he strolled back to the inn.

Gossip had even carried his name to them already and his gesture to their children had earned him their good will.

In the heat of the afternoon De Richleau and Richard walked slowly back to the factory? Just before they reached it they met a knife-grinder plying his trade in the deserted road.

“Knives to grind,” chanted the fellow giving them a quick glance. “Knives to grind, Señors. I make ’em so sharp they’ll cut the throat of any Monarchist—or even an Englishman for that matter.”

The Duke caught the almost imperceptible wink which accompanied the last words and taking his penknife from his pocket he went over to the man. “Do you do any business with the factory there?” he asked.

“Some, Señor.” The man took the penknife and applied its edge to his whirring stone before going on softly, “Jacinto Vincente, the foreman, is a good customer of mine and his two sons are to be trusted. Jacinto will tell you of others who are with us but watch out for Matias Falcon. He is a spy of Don Rubén Reyes, the Communist Mayor.”

“Thanks,” said the Duke, duly paying up when his blade was handed back to him. “I will remember.”

To Richard, as they walked on, he said, “We’re in luck again. That was Lucretia’s agent and he was evidently waiting for us. He tells me that fine old foreman is an anti-Red and we couldn’t have a man better placed to help us.”

“Good. What’s the next move?”

“I’ve got to get old Jacinto on his own for an hour at least and I’m afraid Coello may be difficult. He’ll probably think I’m trying to get some information to his detriment out of Jacinto and not want to leave us alone. I’m afraid you’ll have to invite Coello to dine with you at the inn.”

“But hang it, I can’t speak Spanish,” Richard protested.

“No matter. It’ll be excellent practice for you. The best way to learn any language is to struggle along trying to make yourself understood by somebody who doesn’t speak a word of your own. You’d have jumped at the chance if I’d asked you to take Marie-Lou out in the same circumstances.”

“That would have been very different.”

“I admit that Coello is a poor substitute but it can’t be helped. After all, he is your manager, so it will seem a pleasant courtesy on your part.”

When they entered the factory office Coello made no mention of the night-watchman. Whether they had found their previous night's inspection of the books satisfactory seemed to be the manager's only anxiety. The Duke told him that so far as they had gone all seemed in good order but that several more sessions would be necessary before they could complete their work.

Richard proffered his invitation and it was accepted with almost pathetic eagerness. Coello was an inoffensive little man and his only anxiety was that his petty pilferings, by no means unusual in such a business, should not come to light. He had a Gorgon of a wife and a growing family to support, so dismissal would have meant hell for him in his home as well as an acute financial crisis.

Just as they were leaving the office the manager remarked quite casually that their night watchman had been discovered half-dead early that morning. With an expressive gesture he spread wide his arms and declared:

"God alone knows where it will all end. Such assaults happen almost daily now that politics have turned every man's brain. This fellow was a J.O.N, and the Socialists made mincemeat of him. Within a week his friends will take their revenge on one of the U.G.T. people. See if I am not right. You are lucky indeed not to have such strife among your workers in Birmingham."

When the Duke had translated, Richard said the man was to have every attention and that he would bear any expenses in connection with the case. As well as salving his conscience to some extent, this made an excellent impression on the listening clerks. Coello was smiling all over his chinless face as he bowed the two friends out into the factory yard on their telling him that they did not wish to take him from his work but meant to make another tour of the shops.

They soon contacted the swashbuckling old ruffian they were looking for and De Richleau asked him in a quiet aside if he had recently seen the local knife-grinder.

"Yes, Señor," replied Jacinto. "He's a good friend of mine, that one, and he told me this afternoon that you would have a word to say to me."

"Good," muttered the Duke. "Can you return here at eight o'clock—when we can talk alone?"

“Yes. Where shall I find you?”

“In the office. I will leave the back door open. The rest of the place will be shut and empty.”

When the staff had gone Richard and Coello adjourned to the inn together while De Richleau excused himself from accompanying them on the score of a touch of malaria picked up in the tropics years before but to which he was still subject occasionally. Bed, he said, was the only place for him while his shivering fits lasted but he would be all right again in the morning.

Conversation during the meal proved heavy going but Richard laboured gamely on and Coello was only too anxious to make a good impression. When they were drinking their coffee things cheered up considerably, as the pretty Señorita Anita had noticed their difficulty while she was serving them and, abandoning a group of young men, came over to Richard’s table. She could speak a very little text-book French and her accent was strange, if enchanting, but her laughing attempts to help them understand each other made a much happier party of it.

If Richard could not speak Spanish he lacked none of the qualities of a good host and soon he was buying drinks for most of the habitual patrons of the place. Coello gained a reflected glory from his new master’s generosity and would not have gone home till morning if it had not been for the awful, gnawing thought of his termagant of a wife who was waiting up for him.

His reluctant departure at a few minutes before midnight broke up one of the gayest parties Valmojado had known for weeks and the ‘mad Englishman’ who had the crazy eccentricity of sleeping on a camp bed in one of the storerooms of his own factory was voted a good fellow by all concerned.

When Richard got back he found the Duke in bed. “Well, how did things go?” he asked at once.

“Talk softly,” the Duke replied. “These floors are only made of matchboard and the new watchman is in the office downstairs.”

“So I guessed from the light. But it’s a thousand to one against his talking English.”

“I’m worried,” the Duke said in a low voice. “Our luck’s so phenomenal that it’s too good to last.”

“Why?”

“Well, from the first everything went like clockwork in Madrid. Then, if I’d worked on it for months I couldn’t have found a more suitable factory than this to shift the goods to— it’s so beautifully off the beaten track. Next we run into Lucretia-José at just the right moment. We get the stuff out here without a hitch and you even get away with near-murder without the least suspicion attaching to you. Now I find that the man who really runs the factory is not only one of us but an absolute top-notch and he’s guaranteed he’ll see us through the next part of the business. It’s uncanny.”

“Old Jacinto’s turned up trumps, eh?” Richard commented, kicking off his shoes.

“Yes, he comes from Navarre and he’s a Carlist. His father and his grandfather before him were Carlists and he’s a chip of the old block.”

“What exactly is a Carlist? They’re the chaps who wanted to sling out Alfonso, aren’t they?”

“That’s it. After the eccentric and immoral Queen Isabella was deposed in 1868 Spain was very unsettled for a period which included a few years as a Republic. Her younger brother Don Carlos then tried to get the throne but the present Don Alfonso’s father got there first. There was civil war and the Carlists were defeated but they’re just like the supporters of the Stuarts were with us in the eighteenth century, and such loyalties die hard. Later they made another attempt to seize the country which was called the Second Carlist War, and they’re still hoping that one day they’ll be able to put a Carlist king on the throne.”

“They don’t see eye to eye with Lucretia-José and her friends, then?”

“No, but they hate the Reds like poison and they’re staunch Catholics, so they’ll fight like hell to establish National and Catholic Spain.”

“Just what have you plotted with this old tough?”

“I had to trust him absolutely. But I knew I’d have to do that anyway with whatever loyal workmen Lucretia put me on to here. You see, the one thing I daren’t attempt is to rail that gold to the coast as it is. The Customs people would never let it through. We’d lose it for certain. Therefore we’ve got to disguise it somehow. I thought of all sorts of tricks but I came to the conclusion that the best way was to smelt it down and attach it to some

other metal so that it could be made to appear as part of various commercial articles which are normally exported out of the country.”

“How about weight?” Richard demanded.

“That bothered me a bit at first but I think I’ve got over it. Take an aluminium saucepan. Say it weighs a pound. Pour thirty-five ounces of gold into its bottom. It will then weigh about three and a half pounds. That’s no more than the weight of an *iron* saucepan. Paint it over and it will *look like* an iron saucepan. Get the idea?”

Richard wriggled down into his bed and pulled the blanket over him. “Yes, I get it,” he grinned. “But how many saucepans have you got to treat before you’ve disposed of the Coralles fortune?”

“Between nine and ten thousand.”

“My hat!”

“Yes. It’s hardly the sort of job one can do at a sitting and, of course, it’s all got to be done in secrecy during night sessions and over week-ends when we can get the factory to ourselves.”

“There aren’t anything like nine thousand saucepans in stock though—are there? “

“No. We’re very lucky to have twenty-two gross as it is but we shall use other things as well; buckets, cups, ash-trays, frying-pans, kettles, dust-bins. They can all be given false bottoms of appropriate quantities of gold and painted over. Then we can rail them out as ordinary commercial goods without arousing suspicion.”

“And Jacinto considers this a practical proposition?”

“Yes. His two sons, Carlos and Basilio, are already employed in the factory and he’s prepared to answer with his life for two more men, Esteban Braga and Manuel Dario. That makes seven of us altogether. In a ten-hour shift we ought to be able to deal with somewhere between five hundred and a thousand articles a night.”

“The job sounds simple enough once you’ve got the liquid gold running out of the furnace but there’s the hell of a lot of carrying to be done.”

“That won’t prove difficult because there’s no reason why we shouldn’t unpack it now and bring it over a bar at a time. The bars weigh less than two stone each. Two men humping gold, one on the furnace, three men fetching and removing pots and pans and the seventh painting over the goods when the gold’s cooled off. That’s how we’ll work it.”

“Someone in the office is almost certain to query the shifting of such a large portion of the stock from one place to another and you’ll have to lock the stuff up once it’s been treated.”

“We shan’t move anything but just treat and replace it. Beside, you’re a ‘mad Englishman,’ remember. You’ll fly into a frightful temper and threaten to sack everybody if they try to interfere with your crazy notions of running the business. What’s more, you’ll insist on all the stock sheds always being kept locked up.”

“How about the new night-watchman?”

“He’s only a temporary and Jacinto is going to see to it to-morrow that he’s replaced by one of his sons. Whichever it is will still be able to help us.”

“You certainly seem to have thought of everything.”

“I hope so. It means that we’ll all have to half-kill ourselves fetching and carrying for the next fortnight, but if our luck holds we’ll have the gold on its way out of Spain before the end of the month. Now let’s get some sleep. Goodnight.”

On the Wednesday morning they made a tour of the sheds. Trade was bad owing to the general unrest in Spain and a considerable portion of the goods had been in stock for many months so there seemed no likelihood of their suddenly being required for urgent orders. Aided by Jacinto, they made careful notes of the items which were sticking worst and decided to treat them first.

In the afternoon they received a visit from the Mayor, Don Rubén Reyes, a short, bald-headed man with quick, intelligent eyes. He had failed in his own business owing to the competition of the ‘Church commercial’ and in consequence was a deadly hater of all priests. His interest in local politics had proved his sheet-anchor as he was a shrewd fellow with a ready tongue and a dictatorial manner. He came to size up the new owner of the aluminium factory.

He disapproved of Richard before he even saw him. Don Rubén was well-informed enough to realize that however loudly the English might bang their democratic drum they were all capitalists at heart. ‘A nation of shopkeepers’ Napoleon had called them, and Napoleon had been right. However, Richard made a better impression than might have been expected owing to the serpent smoothness of his interpreter’s tongue.

De Richleau knew that if Don Rubén went away unsatisfied he might cause them all sorts of trouble; a sudden and quite arbitrary strike among their workmen being the least disagreeable thing they would have to face. The Mayor was just the sort of nasty little political louse who grew fat on ill-educated people struggling for self-expression and he exerted legal blackmail through the power of his office on every available occasion. De Richleau loathed the type yet only honeyed words dropped from his tongue. He said that his master and himself knew little of Spanish politics but they hoped that all concerned in the factory would benefit by the change of ownership. Mr. Eaton was already planning to build a club-room for his employes. He was also of a very charitable disposition and would be happy to contribute five hundred pesetas to local good works if Don Rubén would distribute that sum on his behalf.

Don Rubén accepted without any show of eagerness. He went away making a mental note that the two foreigners were harmless politically and easy plucking for a considerably larger sum than the five hundred pesetas he had in his pocket. He could not know that before he was a fortnight older one of them would stick a large knife through his liver with as little compunction as one kills a rat. In quite a cheerful frame of mind he visited the inn and spent half an hour ogling Anita, who both detested and dreaded him.

That same afternoon Dom Ignatius also called at the factory. He was a gentle old man and came to beg quite openly for the poor of his parish. On Richard's behalf De Richleau gave him also five hundred pesetas but on the express understanding that he was not to mention the gift to anyone. The Duke was extremely anxious that they should not gain the reputation of being pro-Church as it was most important that they should appear absolutely neutral in the event of a clash. As he remarked to Richard afterwards, "For a total of just under £30 we've bought temporary immunity from trouble with the Mayor and the good will of the Priest. We'll have to do some more palm-greasing later but it's worth it."

At eight o'clock that night old Jacinto returned to the factory with his two big sons, Carlos and Basilio, and their two friends Esteban and Manuel. The Duke knew that he was taking a great risk in divulging his secret to so many people but no other course was open to him and he had carefully assessed the possibility of betrayal. Cupidity could be ruled out as they

could not carry off any large quantity of the gold and men of their type would have been faced with almost insurmountable difficulties if they had attempted to convert even a small portion of it into money. Further, he was prepared to pay them a month's wages for every night's work they put in, with the promise that when the job was completed they should each receive a bonus which would keep them free from want for the rest of their lives. The only real danger was that one of them might go over to the Reds or get drunk and give something away in his cups. The safeguards against such possibilities were their strong Catholicism and the iron discipline under which De Richleau meant to put them.

He assembled them in the office and first asked them to take an oath of irrevocable secrecy upon the crucifix. An atheist might have shrugged contemptuously at the solemn rigmarole the Duke made each of them repeat after him but to these Spanish Catholics Hell's flames were very real indeed and each of them felt they were pledging their immortal souls as they took the oath.

De Richleau then explained to the four younger men the work he wanted them to do, the immense importance of it to the cause they had pledged themselves to die for, and the material reward for their help which he would gladly give them.

They proved not only willing but eager as this was clearly a chance to serve the best interests of their country according to their beliefs and it promised each of them a small fortune in addition.

The Duke went on to say that to avoid comment being aroused in the town by their indulging in unusual expenditure, he meant to pay their month's salary for each night's work to Jacinto every morning, to be held in trust for them until the business was completed. Also that they must abide by the rules he intended to lay down for them for their waking and sleeping so that they would be able to support their onerous nights of labour in addition to their usual day's work at the factory. Jacinto would see to it that their daily shifts were made as light as possible during the secret operations. Carlos, who had been appointed night-watchman, and would therefore be able to sleep during the day, was to undertake the heaviest work at night—that of carrying the gold bars to the furnace. Later in the proceedings Basilio would appear to sprain his ankle so that he could get several days off from work. When he was better Esteban and Manuel

would go down with 'flu with the same object. They must not altogether neglect the ordinary occupations of their leisure but no one of them must ever go to a wine shop to drink alone; they must go in couples so that they would act as guards upon each other's tongues. Finally, verbal instructions would be issued from day to day as to how each of them was to spend his next twenty-four hours and the routes by which they would come and go from the factory for the secret shifts.

In the Second Balkan War De Richleau had been Chief of Staff to a Turkish Army Corps and after the World War he had commanded a division of White Russians against the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, so he knew all about planning a campaign in detail as well as on broad lines. Jacinto had seen to it that the smelting plant was cleared before the works closed down and by nine o'clock they made a start on 'camouflaging' the gold.

On the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights the work proceeded entirely to schedule and good progress was made. The conspirators had an inestimable advantage in that Jacinto virtually controlled the factory. Coello and his three clerks were concerned solely with the business end and so rarely left the office.

The night-work was arduous but none of them spared themselves and the Duke's arrangements for periods of sleep excluded any likelihood of their breaking down under the strain. He soon found that Richard, who was set to repainting the articles after they had been dealt with, could not possibly keep up with the output alone, so he ceased carrying stacks of kitchen utensils, to help him. Even then they lagged behind the brawny Spanish workers so, as they were free to sleep any time they wished during the hours when normal work was proceeding, they decided to put in the three hours of the *siesta* each day painting pots and pans as well. Jacinto locked them into one of the sheds soon after the hands had knocked off and let them out again just before the men came back.

It was a dreary business working stripped to the waist in the semi-darkness of a corrugated-iron shed while the midday sun fairly sizzled down on its roof, but somehow they stuck it and their reward each morning was to see a fresh pile of little sawdust-lined boxes from which the gold contents had entirely disappeared.

They were too engrossed in their work to worry much about what was going on in Madrid, which seemed a million miles away from their quiet

backwater, but they heard rumours of increased tension in the capital. It seemed that a great number of officers had been summoned from their regiments to participate in some special conference and the sight of so many of them walking about the streets had given rise to all sorts of wild stories. The great majority of the citizens still knew nothing of the army plot or the Red counter-plot to thwart it, but this display of military force was rousing their apprehension. At Calvo Sotelo's funeral there had been further shooting and the police were now making no attempt to cope with demonstrations by the Reds.

After their labours with the paint-pots during the *siesta* hours on the Saturday De Richleau said to Richard, "I've arranged with Jacinto for his lads to put in two special shifts during the week-end but I think we ought to take a trip to Madrid."

"It would be a grand change," sighed Richard. "But oughtn't we to stick it here? The more hours we put in while the going's good the sooner we'll be done."

"I was thinking of Pédro," said the Duke. "It'll be a week on Monday since we barricaded him into that bathroom and we can't let the poor fellow starve. As we're only painting the goods now, Jacinto and the others won't make any less headway on account of our absence. We'll have to sleep in the *Palacio*, of course, but we can get back here by to-morrow night."

By six o'clock they were in Madrid and the change of atmosphere which had taken place was at once perceptible. There were many more loungers in the streets, yet the city was ominously silent. Everyone was waiting for something to happen but no one seemed to know quite what. De Richleau questioned several people but they could only shake their heads and mutter that the Cabinet had met for a special session. It was thought that the Government was about to fall.

Having bought a fresh stock of provisions they let themselves into the Coralles mansion and went upstairs. The empty *Palacio* still seemed to be haunted with the ghosts of its past glories and gave them the same eerie feeling as they had had on their first arrival.

The barricade of furniture outside the bathroom was still in position. When they had removed it they found Pédro stretched out semi-nude on the floor inside. The heat of the place was like a furnace from its having

been shut up for five days during the torrid July heats. The hot room of a Turkish bath could hardly have been worse and they noticed that the unfortunate caretaker had lost considerably in weight.

He implored them to let him out and promised by the Virgin and all the Saints not to breathe a word about them if they would, but De Richleau had to steel his heart against this pathetic appeal. To cheer the poor fellow up a little he presented him with a thousand pesetas in crinkly notes, but having brought him up a fresh supply of wine they locked him in again and re-barricaded the door.

In the dirty, untidy *salon*, which had been their living-room for a week, they made a scratch meal on some of the food they had brought with them. When they had finished the Duke looked across at Richard.

“Tired?” he asked.

Richard stretched. “No more than I have been since we started this fantastic racket. I shall dream I’m heaving gold bars about or painting saucepans for the rest of my life, I think. Still, I’ve had an easier time this week than I did last. Why d’you ask?”

The Duke’s grey eyes glittered. “Because I’ve an idea the party’s on. History may be in the making here in Madrid to-night. How about going out into the streets for an hour or two instead of going to bed?”

“I’m game,” Richard grinned, standing up, and a quarter of an hour later they left the Palace.

It was just after nine o’clock. The streets were still crowded and the throngs showed no signs of dispersing to go home to dinner. The cafés were doing a roaring trade. As is the custom in Spain each displayed beside its sign the words ‘*Tertulia so-and-so*’ meaning that it was the meeting place of an informal club—each political, of course—where the Spaniards might indulge their natural passion of declaiming the iniquities of every other party but their own.

In the *Prado* dense crowds, which overflowed the pavement into the broad, tree-lined street, were slowly circulating. Not a single policeman was to be seen anywhere. The moving masses had an unusual black density about them. Soon De Richleau realized the reason; although it was Saturday night no soldiers with an evening off were mingling as usual with the people.

Having walked for some time they were passing a crowded café near the *Puerta del Sol* when a man and woman got up from an outside table. The Duke jumped it before anyone else had a chance to do so. He was soon in conversation with his neighbours and translating scraps of information for Richard's benefit. "The Cabinet is still sitting. Señor Casares Quiroga, the Prime Minister, is said to be re-forming the Government. It is hoped that Azaña, the old Leader of the Left who is the strong man of Spain, will take power into his own hands but ever since he became President a few months ago he's adhered strictly to the Constitution."

"What has caused the crisis?" Richard asked.

"The sort of thing I expected," muttered the Duke. "Rumour has it that on Thursday General Francisco Franco abandoned his command in the Canary Islands and flew to Morocco. Yesterday several regiments revolted there. That's why the troops have all been confined to barracks in Madrid."

A bearded man near by was hammering the marble-topped table at which he sat. The Duke politely joined issue with him. A whole circle of people were soon backing one or the other of them. Time drifted on. The waiters in their white aprons bustled about serving round after round of drinks. By eleven o'clock the crowds showed no signs of thinning but were thicker than ever in the streets.

A new rumour spread from mouth to mouth. There was fighting in Cordoba. The young Fascist leader, Primo de Rivera, had escaped from prison and was leading an insurrection there. The Cabinet was still sitting. They had issued a statement condemning the Moroccan revolt and adding that "nobody, absolutely nobody" in Spain itself "had taken part in this absurd scheme."

In spite of this, wild stories which had no traceable origin began to circulate. The black-bearded man was full of 'things he had heard' earlier that evening. The veteran General Cabanellas had made a *Pronunciamiento* in the North and the energetic General Mola had joined him. The streets of Seville had been running with blood all day. The versatile Queipo de Llano was commanding there. General Goded, the Military Governor of the Balearic Isles, had declared for the Insurgents. Juan March, the banker who had made a fortune out of the tobacco monopoly, was behind him and had promised to finance the revolt. General Franco had actually landed with his Moors that morning and taken Algeciras.

The occupants of the café passed on these alarming tidings to each other with bated breath. This was not just one more scare, it was a genuine crisis. These Generals were people whose names really counted. Almost to a man they had been anti-Monarchist and had actively participated in the bringing-in of the Republic five years before. Now they were making *Pronunciamientos* right and left and calling on their troops to support them in an effort to re-establish National and Catholic Spain.

Soon after midnight there was a brief scrimmage on the pavement. The crowd was pushed to one side and a band of armed men suddenly appeared. They had little in common except that they all wore automatics strapped to their waists. Many of them were unshaven and dressed in baggy, shapeless clothes.

Their leader was a small, dark man. He issued a sharp order. His companions spread out along the frontage of the café shouldering back the crowd and at the same time preventing anyone from leaving it.

“Your papers, Comrades,” he said quite civilly to the people who were sitting at the table nearest him. They all produced their *Cedulas Personales* and having glanced swiftly at them he passed on. Table by table he made a methodical examination of the documents produced. Richard handed over his British passport and the Duke that of Hypolite Dubois. The man looked at them and gave them back remarking abruptly, “You’d better get back to your hotel. We don’t want foreigners mixed up in this.”

As they stood up he spoke to the bearded man; who protested that he had left his papers at home. At a sign from their leader two members of the armed patrol jumped forward and seizing the indignant man, emptied his pockets on to the table. The leader shuffled quickly through them and gave a jerk of his head. The rumour-merchant was dragged outside and the patrol straggled off with him shouting in their midst.

“Poor devil,” sighed De Richleau as he and Richard walked away. “He was evidently the chap they were looking for. Planted there most probably as an *agent-provocateur* to spread those rumours and influence the crowd. Now they’ve got him it’s unlikely he’ll see to-morrow’s sun.”

“D’you think there was any truth in those yarns of his?”

“Oh, yes. Although he was apparently only retailing gossip the chances are he was giving us accurate information obtained from some secret headquarters. The Generals are making their bid for power now. I haven’t a

doubt of that. The thing that worries me is: what the devil has happened to Fanjul?"

"You mean the General Commanding here?"

"Yes. As far as one can see he's sitting calmly in the Montana Barracks—just letting the Reds get away with it."

"He may be having trouble with his men."

"My dear boy, they can't all be mutinous." De Richleau spoke with sharp exasperation. "If I had even half a battalion of loyal officers and N.C.O. s behind me *now*, while there's still no organized resistance worth talking about, I'd storm the Telegraph Building and paralyse half the communications in Spain. He must *know* what's going on. By this time he ought to have arrested the members of the muddle-headed Government and be busy establishing machine-gun nests on the tops of corner buildings so that they could command the principal streets. To-morrow it'll be too late. While he's shilly-shallying somewhere in those barracks the Reds are gaining control of the capital. God alone knows what his criminal weakness may cost later in blood and death."

"I suppose this is just the sort of mess-up Lucretia-José feared?"

"Yes, bless her! What a man that girl would have made, Richard. If she'd been in command here the whole thing would have been over by now and the three of us would be lunching to-morrow at the... Hallo! What's that?"

The sound of shots came from a near-by street but they ceased abruptly. "Not Fanjul, anyhow," said Richard.

"No, just some poor chap who's been shot down trying to escape from these gangs of toughs."

The cafés were emptying like magic but the pavements were still thick with people; in the roadway bands of armed Marxists were now passing every few moments, many of them rattling by in lorries. Here and there they had flung a cordon across the street and were demanding to see everybody's papers before they would let them through. Twice between the *Puerta del Sol* and the *Café de Sevilla* the Duke and Richard had to produce their passports.

The patrols were not unfriendly. They were mostly *Partido Comunista* well organized by leaders who knew just what they were about. Now and then a man was pulled out of the crowd and hustled down a side turning to a waiting van. All cars were being stopped and searched.

No one attempted to contest the arbitrarily assumed authority of the patrols. Police, soldiers, *Guardias Civiles*, even the *Guardias de Asalto* which had been specially formed since the coming of the Republic to counteract the influence of the old Monarchist *Guardia Civile*, had all disappeared leaving the population of the city entirely at the mercy of the Marxists.

The crowd was now thinning rapidly. Silent and scared the people were making for their homes. To avoid constant questioning the Duke and Richard slipped down a side street and entered the maze of narrow turnings off the *Calle Jardines* and the *Calle de la Aduana*; the red light district of Madrid. A crowd of roughs had broken into one of the cafés and a bottle fight was in progress. The sound of smashing glass mingled with the shrill screams of the women.

A little farther on a burly ruffian was dragging a girl into a dark alleyway. Catching sight of the two friends she began to yell, "*Socorro! Socorro, Señores!*" and Richard made to dart forward to her help.

Next moment De Richleau's hand closed on his arm in a grip of steel. "Steady on, man," he muttered. "There'll be plenty of that in the next few days but we've just got to shut our eyes to it. Our own job comes first. It's going to be hard for us but no matter what horrors we may see it's absolutely imperative that we shouldn't allow ourselves to become embroiled."

A few minutes later they entered a wider thoroughfare which was half filled with a stationary crowd all staring in one direction. Farther along a lurid glare lit the scene. A gang of hooligans had set a church on fire and were dancing in front of it.

"We'd better turn back," Richard suggested.

"Yes. No sense in trying to push our way through this crush." As the Duke spoke the horn of a motor sounded. A large car had entered the street and was coming slowly down it towards the crowd.

"Darned fool," commented Richard. "If that driver had any sense he'd stop, turn round and get his boss home some other way."

Instead of stopping the driver proceeded to nose the bonnet of the car in among the people and began to hoot incessantly. A chorus of abuse and angry catcalls came from the mob. The black silhouettes dancing in front of the burning church stopped their capers abruptly and came surging down

the street towards the scene of this fresh excitement. In a moment they had surrounded the car howling like demons.

The door of the car was torn open and its solitary occupant dragged out. He seemed to be shouting a phrase in Spanish but what he said could not be heard above the din. He was a slight, pale-faced man in dark clothes. The red flames from the church lit his features.

Richard had already turned away. "Come on," he said. "According to your dictum we mustn't get mixed up in this." But De Richleau did not seem to hear him.

"God's death!" he groaned, "I knew our luck was too good to last."

Swinging round abruptly Richard saw that the Duke had already whipped his blackjack from his pocket. He also glimpsed the white face and terrified, protruding eyeballs of the poor wretch the hooligans were now carrying shoulder-high towards the burning church. It was Simon Aron.

Chapter Thirteen – The Miracle

As though impelled by two catapults, the Duke and Richard flung themselves headlong into the yelling crowd. Gone were all thoughts of their mission and the imperative necessity of keeping out of trouble. Nothing mattered now except saving their old friend from a horrible death at the hands of the very people whom he had come out to Spain to help.

The intention of the mob was all too clear. Half a dozen brawny ruffians had the still struggling Simon in their grip and were bearing him along stretched out at full length on a level with their heads. They were now twenty feet away from the car and heading for the church. They meant to pitch him into the roaring flames.

Thrusting, pushing, clawing at the people in front of them, the Duke and Richard fought their way through the milling throng, seeking to head off the little group that was carrying Simon. Even as they barged their way to the rescue, using their elbows freely on the ribs of the people about them, whether men or women, they realized the frightful odds that were against them. The church-burners numbered a good fifty not counting the many wild-looking women with them, and the crowd of onlookers consisted of some two hundred poorly dressed people who certainly could not be expected to risk the fury of the Anarchists by coming to the rescue of some unknown rich man when he had attempted to run them down in his luxury car.

That terrible lust for inflicting pain and death which at times grips even orderly decent people when their normal instincts are submerged by the primitive passions of the herd, had now inflamed the spectators as well as the hooligans. Raising their clenched fists on high they screamed: “Burn him! Burn him!”

De Richleau knew that any attempt at rescue by force must inevitably prove hopeless. Their only chance of bringing Simon alive out of that maddened mob was by using all the wits that God had given them. If the church had not been burning already he would have suggested setting it alight—anything, anything, *anything* to distract the mob’s attention from their present purpose.

He reached the church ten yards ahead of the men who were carrying Simon and leapt up the steps. Richard was only just behind him and, shielding his eyes from the glare, stumbled to his side. Turning on the topmost step they faced the shrieking rabble that swirled below.

“Don’t use your gun,” panted the Duke. “They’ll murder us if you do.”

The heat was ghastly. The doors of the church had burnt away and fallen inwards but the interior of the building was now a roaring inferno. There was little smoke but gusts of scorching hot air poured out making the backs of their necks and ears feel as though they were already on fire.

Suddenly De Richleau flung both his clenched fists above his head. “Comrades!” he bellowed in Spanish, “Comrades!”

It was his dark figure, like that of an avenging angel, in the very centre of the fallen doorway, silhouetted against a background of leaping flames which caught the attention of the mob more than his stentorian shout.

The yelling gave way to an angry murmur and when he burst out again with all the power of his lungs his words could be heard like a clarion call above the crackling of the furnace behind him.

“Friends of Liberty! Proletarian Brothers! What would you do? Who are your friends and who are your enemies? It is the Fascists who seek to trample you in the mud!”

A howl of execration went up at his mention of the Fascists. Sweat was streaming down De Richleau’s face and he gulped in a searing breath of hot air before thundering forth again. “Who will help your Fascist enemies to deprive you of your liberties? Hitler and Mussolini.”

Another yell of hate went up drowning his next words but he bellowed on “... Germany and Italy. And who will help you to fight them? France and England! The workers of the free Democracies who are the true friends of the Spanish people.”

A vague murmur of approval ran through the crowd. Their attention was now firmly held as the gasping Duke panted out, “I am a French Comrade. My friend here is an English Comrade. We are with you heart and soul. What report of our Spanish Brothers shall we take back to our own people? Are we to say that they are gallant Sons of Toil who do not fear to fling themselves upon the machine-guns of the oppressors? Or do we say that they are lower than brutes? Bestial savages; who in their blind stupidity spend their time burning peaceful people...”

His voice was drowned again in angry shouts but one came louder than the rest, "What's all this to do with the dirty capitalist we pulled out of the car?"

"That's just it," De Richleau shouted back. "He's an English Comrade too. A man from Communist Headquarters sent out to help you. We know him! Look at his papers. You'll see I'm right."

The wretched Simon was lowered to the ground. A man in a blouse thrust a hand in his breast pocket and pulled out a bundle of papers. There was no Communist Party ticket among them but Simon's British passport was there.

The Duke and Richard staggered down the steps from the blazing building and, half-stifled by the heat, joined the group about Simon.

"You see," gasped the Duke, "he's English. He's one of us."

Simon wriggled his neck and managed a feeble smile as Richard patted him on the shoulder.

"He's got no Party ticket," said the man in the blouse doubtfully.

"He tried to run us down in his blasted car," said another.

"Go on! Don't be stupid. He hasn't hurt anyone. Let him go," said a third.

"That's right," chorused a fourth. "The French and English are all good Democrats. Let them go."

For a moment their fate hung in the balance but the tide was definitely turning in their favour. Simon had his wits about him again and was talking in jerky Spanish assuring his listeners that he had come to Spain to work in their interests.

A section of the crowd was already moving off to seek fresh excitements; a few straggle-haired harridans had begun to dance again on the steps of the church. All seemed about to end well when there came a sound of trampling feet and a cry went up, "Here's Fulchio Zorolo and his boys! *Viva, Fulchio! Viva, Fulchio!*"

De Richleau cast an anxious glance down the street and said swiftly to the man nearest him, "Who is the chap they're cheering?"

"He's an Anarchist—like us," came the quick reply, "and the terror of the Reactionaries in the Quarter. Now he's turned up we'll ask him what he thinks before we let you go."

The mass parted to make way for the Terrorist, and a gang of about twenty variously armed ruffians who crowded on his heels. Fulchio Zorolo

was a huge man standing a good six feet three and broad in proportion. His head was curiously small for his enormous body. It was round as a cannon ball, shaven close, and set on a short, thick neck. His greasy shirt had blood-stains on it and was open to the waist showing his hairy chest which glistened with sweat. Two abnormally long arms also covered with hair dangled at his sides like those of a gorilla. In one hand he carried a butcher's chopper which was clotted with half-dried blood.

"Well, Comrades, what's on here?" he cried with horrible joviality, his wide mouth stretching almost from ear to ear in a grin which showed uneven, blackened teeth. "Found some dirty capitalist for me to try my axe on?"

A gabble of voices explained the situation. At the words "driving into us in his car," Fulchio spat. At the mention of "foreigners" he spat again.

De Richleau held out his passport and in a voice made husky by his previous efforts began to state his case afresh.

Fulchio waved aside the passport. "I can't read," he said abruptly. "If you're on our side let's see your Party cards."

"They haven't got any," one of the original crowd informed him.

"Oh, yes, they have," he cried with a leer. "Everyone carries their Party tickets about with them. Look at this!"

With a sudden swoop he grabbed Simon's hand and held it out for the others to see. It was a little dirty from his recent struggle but delicately moulded and the nails on the slender fingers were carefully manicured.

"Is that the hand of a Worker, Comrades?" Fulchio roared, flinging Simon's arm away from him with a gesture of disgust. "No—the hand of one who battens on the sweat of the poor. They're spies, all of them. Chuck 'em in the church and let 'em burn."

The fickle mob had been swayed again. "Spies! Spies!" they shouted and shaking their fists crowded in on the three Englishmen.

Even when they stood in the middle of the street the heat from the blazing building was so intense that the sweat was pouring from them all, but before the hideous, yelling faces that were now thrust into theirs the three friends backed towards the steps. They were hemmed in on either side and no other course than retreating into the scalding air which billowed out of the church was open to them.

For a moment the crowd hesitated, driven back by the frightful heat, but at a yell from Fulchio they made a rush to drive their victims through the high doorway. A whirling melée on the top step ensued. De Richleau hit out with horrible and deadly precision with his black-jack, smashing in the faces of his aggressors. Simon, unarmed but desperate, flung himself at Fulchio's knees and brought the big Anarchist crashing down beside him. Richard had clubbed his automatic and was using it as a giant knuckle-duster. At his feet Fulchio, who had fallen on his back, was grabbing at Simon's throat. Without the least scruple Richard kicked the great brute savagely in the groin. Fulchio let out a scream of agony and rolled down the steps clutching wildly at his lower stomach.

The mob gave back, temporarily beaten, but the three friends were now half-roasted and almost exhausted. Their scalps prickled, the skin on their necks was rising in blisters, they gulped and gasped in the suffocating air.

Fulchio was lying in the gutter roaring with rage and pain. He swayed up into a sitting position and pointed at Richard. "Get me that one! Get him for me alive! I'll skin him! I'll skin him!" The mob rallied to obey.

The Duke saw that the end had come. In the next attack they must be overborne by weight of numbers or retreat into the church where they would be burnt alive. He had been in many tight spots but this was the worst that even he had ever encountered and there was no way out of it. In a few moments now they would be dead. The only thing to do was to kill as many of the rabble as possible before they were killed themselves.

"We're for it this time," he gasped. "Use your guns and let them have it in their stomachs. Sorry I dragged you into this, Richard. See you in the next world, Simon."

"I—I never carry a gun," panted Simon.

"Here, take this," De Richleau thrust the blackjack into Simon's hand and drew his own automatic.

The Anarchists were now a packed mass in the middle of the street; muscular young men, shrivelled old crones with wispy hair, hard-bitten, middle-aged workers, and girls with painted faces from the brothels close by. They had excited each other to a pitch of absolute frenzy and seemed like a pack of ravenous wolves in human guise. The whole line of them moved forward impelled by no word of command but by the primitive impulse to rend and kill.

De Richleau got in two shots, Richard only one, Simon had no chance to use the blackjack. As the mob reached the steps there was an awful crunching noise which increased to a roar that drowned all other sounds. The human wild beasts paused for a second, their heads suddenly flung up. Piercing screams of terror issued from their gaping mouths only to be cut short by a crash like thunder. The great statue of the Virgin surmounting the peristyle of the church came hurtling down upon the Church's enemies. With it came huge blocks of masonry and an avalanche of rubble, killing, maiming, burying half a hundred people. The three friends still stood defiant on the topmost step roasting alive where they stood, but still unscathed.

Great clouds of dust belled up obscuring half the street. These millions of particles reflected the glow from the flaming pile. The scene was like a primitive painting of the damned in Hell.

"A miracle!" gulped the Duke, "A miracle! Holy Mother of God, we thank thee!" and he sprang down the steps into the chaos that reigned below.

Richard and Simon tumbled after him. All three instinctively turned sharp right before reaching the huge pile of débris. Utter confusion was reigning there as scores of people half-blinded by the dust tried to drag the mangled bodies and whimpering wounded from beneath the huge limbs of the statue and other great blocks of stone.

There was another rending crash as the roof on the church fell in. Fountains of sparks shot high into the air and great tongues of flame leapt upwards, but by that time the three friends were fifty yards down the street. Only one person recognized them as they fled. It was a tall, lean woman. She began to shriek a warning that they were escaping after all, but Simon cut it short with a back-handed blow from his fist which sent half her teeth down her throat.

Two minutes later they had put three streets between themselves and the church. By comparison they had hardly noticed their burns before but now they felt as though they were alight all over. Their clothes were singed, their faces blackened, the sweat they had exuded was congealing on them and they could easily have been mistaken for members of the mob that had tried to murder them.

"Where are we going?" Richard gasped suddenly.

“Back with me,” Simon gulped. “Impossible to say thank you but—if we reach the Palace Hotel all right—at least I’ll guarantee the safety of you both till we can make other arrangements.”

The Duke placed a hand on his arm. “Forget it, Simon. I’m only glad we happened to see you when we did. I’ll willingly agree an armistice until we’re all in better shape to take the field again.”

“An armistice?” Simon groaned. “I suppose that’s it. But *must* we go on like this? For us to be on opposite sides is terrible.”

“We *must*,” said Richard bitterly, “as long as *your* friends continue to throw parties like they did to-night.”

“Ner. That isn’t fair,” Simon protested. “You can’t condemn Liberal Spain because a few poor devils know no better than to use the only form of protest they’ve got against people they believe responsible for their misery.”

“Please,” cut in the Duke, “Please. While we’re together let’s not talk of these things. Whatever happens we mustn’t let our feelings make us bitter against each other.”

In silence, except when they were forced to show their passports, they traversed the length of the *Calle Alcalá* and turned into the *Prado*. It was two o’clock in the morning but almost every window in the huge Palace Hotel was lit up.

Two men with rifles lounged on the steps and one of the hotel porters, also armed, was standing with them. His uniform-coat was unbuttoned, his cap on the back of his head, and he was smoking a large cigar. As Simon came up the porter gave him a nod of recognition and, glancing at his companions, said, “Friends of yours, Comrade?”

“Yes. They’ll be staying here to-night,” Simon answered and as they passed into the vestibule he volunteered to the others, “Place was taken over at midnight. Everyone slung out except people like myself who have quarters here already. Must see if I can get you rooms?”

He walked over to the bureau behind which a Committee, composed of certain members of the hotel staff and other armed men were sitting. Richard sank down in a vacant chair, the Duke leaned wearily up against the wall and let his aching head sink into his hands.

Simon came plodding back. “It’s all right,” he said. “Double room on the third floor facing the street but it’s got a bath. That’s the best I can do for

you.”

“It sounds Heaven,” Richard murmured. “I only wish to God the back of my neck wasn’t hurting so.”

“Have you got any bicarbonate of soda?” De Richleau asked suddenly.

“Bicarbonate, yes,” Simon nodded. “Always take it with me wherever I go in case I get indigestion.”

“It’s the finest thing in the world for burns. Take us to your room first and we’ll see what we can do to draw the sting out of the scorching.”

Simon led the way up to his room on the second floor where they cleaned themselves up as well as they could while refraining from washing their skin where it was blistered. Then they dressed each other’s burns with the bicarbonate, using some of Simon’s clean handkerchiefs which they wound round their necks as bandages.

“Where’s Rex got to?” asked the Duke, when they had done.

“Rex?” repeated Simon with as much surprise as if he had been asked about the Archangel Gabriel.

“Yes, Rex,” said De Richleau testily. “And for goodness’ sake don’t try and pretend he isn’t in this with you. We saw the two of you driving round Madrid together in a car last week.”

Simon grinned sheepishly. “Well, I’ll tell you. He flew me out here ten days ago but we didn’t expect things to come to a head quite so quickly. So he flew back to England last Tuesday.”

“When’s he coming out again?”

“That,” grinned Simon, “is—er—more than I can say.”

“Any chance of getting a drink before we turn in?” Richard inquired. “I’ve got a throat like a lime-kiln.”

“Yes. How about a magnum?” the Duke supplemented. “I can’t go to bed with a throat like I’ve got after that roasting.”

“Fraid we’ll have to go downstairs for it,” Simon said. “The floor waiters have all packed up but orders have been given for the lounge waiters to remain on duty.”

“It’s interesting to know that you Proletarians still command your slaves,” Richard remarked sarcastically.

Simon refrained from replying but De Richleau spoke for him. “Shut up, Richard. We’re Simon’s guests and it’s not for us to criticize how he chooses to run his household.”

In order to keep the bandages on the backs of their heads and necks they gingerly adjusted their hats and went out into the corridor. The lifts were still working and as they stepped into one two other men coming from the opposite direction entered it behind them. De Richleau's back was turned towards the strangers and his dyed hair hidden by the hat and bandage. One of them suddenly slapped him on the shoulder and cried cheerily, "Hallo! da Silva, you old ruffian. What have you been up to?"

Turning, the Duke recognized him instantly as a metal merchant with whom he had done considerable business and whom he had cultivated socially during the week that Richard had been transferring the gold from the vaults of the bank to the cellars of the Coralles Palace. De Richleau could have killed the man cheerfully but his face remained quite impassive as he said, "I'm afraid there's some mistake. I don't think we've met before."

The Spaniard's jaw dropped directly he saw the black swathe of hair across De Richleau's forehead and the ugly birthmark over cheek and chin. "Sorry," he murmured, "My fault, but from behind you look just like a Portuguese with whom I recently had some dealings."

As they left the lift and the two men walked on ahead Simon suddenly bent his bird-like head and chuckled into his hand. "Grand disguise you've got—particularly the birthmark—and your Spanish is so good even a Castilian might mistake you for a Catalan or a Portuguese."

De Richleau shrugged and forbore to reply.

The great, circular lounge, where the most elegant *demi-mon-daines* of Madrid were wont to sip their cocktails and receive *billets-doux* from the gallants who desired a date with them, was now full of men. Among them De Richleau recognized several well-known Spanish politicians and, although they were all in civilian clothes, many of the men present had pistols strapped to belts round their waists.

Some of the larger tables were being used as desks and the men behind them were constantly stamping or signing papers for those who queued up in front of them. Others were issuing instructions to various groups or talking earnestly together over rounds of drinks as they waited for news or orders. There was much coming and going and it was obvious that the hotel was now being used as some sort of Socialist Headquarters.

The three friends did not get their magnum, but after a while a waiter produced two bottles of drinkable champagne stuffed head to tail in a bucket of ice. When Simon took out money to pay, the waiter shrugged, and with a wave of his hand, walked off. Most of the people round about were drinking champagne but no one except an Englishman could be sufficiently mad to think of paying for it on such a night.

The first bottle was despatched virtually at a draught apiece and the cool wine went down like nectar. Over the second they lingered for some time. Their burns were easier now and the natural reaction from their ordeal having set in they were half-torpid from fatigue; yet so relaxed that it meant an effort to drink up and go to bed. Their weariness had affected their brains as well as their bodies and this, with the fact that a temporary armistice on political differences had been agreed with Simon, had lulled the Duke into a false sense of security. He would never otherwise have exposed himself to recognition by lingering unnecessarily in a place so packed with potential enemies. Even his encounter with the metal merchant had not revealed the full risk he was running, to him, but that risk came home to him like an electric shock when he saw Cristoval Ventura coming towards them.

Richard had told Cristoval that he had met Lucretia-José at Simon's house when he had done nothing of the kind. They had used Simon's name to win the confidence of the Socialist leader. If that came out the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance. Lucretia had played up to Richard. If the story of their meeting was proved a lie Cristoval would not only mark them down as probable spies but, far worse, suspect Lucretia-José.

The moment when Cristoval paused before their table De Richleau held his breath. His brain was racing wildly but he could think of nothing, nothing, *nothing* which might avert the threatening danger. There seemed no option but to let things take their course and deal with eventualities to the best of his ability when the moment came.

The young Spaniard was dressed as usual except for an automatic on his hip. His smile took in all three of them as he said, "So you have been making wars already—you are all bandage up."

Richard got in before the Duke, "My friend Dubois and I had the good luck to pull Aron out of a bit of a mess. Some of the Comrades are over-

excited to-night and they mistook him for a bloated capitalist because he was driving in a car.”

“Then you know each...” Simon began, but De Richleau cut in quickly, “Would you believe it, they were about to throw him alive into a burning church.”

“*Demonios!*” exclaimed Cristoval. “But you arrived to pull your friend from flames in time, eh? Good works that, good works!”

Richard plunged into a description of the scene. Whenever he faltered the Duke leapt into the breach with comments and additions. Simon sat glancing backwards and forwards from them to Cristoval, a benign smile on his face. De Richleau, on tenterhooks, watched him covertly, striving to judge if he had accepted the fact of their knowing Cristoval and Cristoval knowing that they were friends of his, or if that amiable smile cloaked the preparation of a dozen awkward questions which might come popping out.

In an endeavour to break the party up at the earliest possible moment, De Richleau gave a prodigious yawn and rose slowly to his feet while Richard was still speaking. Simon followed suit and Richard made to do so but, in rising he put his hand behind him and his gun dropped out of his hip pocket on to the chair seat.

“Oh, damn,” he said. “I shall never get used to carrying one of these things.”

Cristoval smiled, “At present it is wise, yes. But soon we hope it will not be necessary.”

“Well, we’re for bed,” declared Simon. “I didn’t know you knew my friends but we must all meet again. Throw a party when the muddle’s over.”

“*Si, si.* That would be good. I met Mr. Eaton and Comrade Dubois last week...”

“At Botin’s,” cut in the Duke. “The sucking-pigs there are marvellous. We must eat one together...”

But Cristoval was not listening. He had turned to Richard who, having picked up his pistol had started to unload it, and asked, “Since that night at Alhambra, have you seen our friend, the beautiful...?”

God help us, thought the Duke, here it comes.

Chapter Fourteen – Lady in Distress

A shattering report drowned the rest of the Spaniard's sentence. Richard's gun had gone off. The bullet thudded into the carpet, and a little cloud of acrid blue smoke curled up from its barrel.

There was a sudden hush in the big lounge, followed by a terrific clamour. Everyone there was in a state of high nervous tension. Nearly every seated person in the room sprang to his feet. Two or three tables were overturned and the crashing of glass added to the pandemonium. On all sides men whipped pistols from their holsters and pockets while above the din sounded a piercing whistle and a shouted order, "Guard the doors! Guard the doors!"

Richard and his party were instantly surrounded by a score of excited Socialists crying, "What has happened? Is it a spy? Was it an attempt at assassination?"

Cristoval Ventura stood with his feet splayed apart and his hands on his hips rocking with laughter. "*No, no,*" he assured them in voluble Spanish. "It is my friend, here. He was unloading his gun and it went off by accident. He is an Englishman and not used to handling weapons, but he and his companion, the Comrade Dubois, saved Comrade Aron to-night from being roasted to a cinder by a mob of lunatics. It is all right, I tell you. An accident. An accident which might happen to anyone not used to firearms."

Richard apologized profusely for his carelessness. Fortunately no harm had been done and, reassured, the crowd went back to their urgent business of organizing the Revolution or resting from their labours.

"Well, I must make off," Cristoval extended his hand. "I have much to do before sunrisings."

The other wished him good night and walked towards the lift together. Simon said he would see his guests to their room on the third floor. As they walked down the corridor he remarked to the Duke, "I—er—gather you're calling yourself Comrade Dubois."

"Yes. Did you not advise me yourself that it would be unwise for me to travel in Spain under my own name?"

"Um," Simon nodded. "I'm glad you took my tip."

The double room was a big one and it had a private bathroom attached but both had already been occupied. The sheets of the bed were turned back and rumpled. An expensive *crêpe-de-Chine* frock had been thrown over the back of a chair and some girl's lace-trimmed chiffon undies lay scattered on the floor. A man's hat and gloves reposed incongruously among them. Two large wardrobe trunks and a hat-box stood open displaying other feminine garments. In the bathroom used towels were lying about and the whole place smelt deliciously of a subtle, heady perfume.

"Your friends don't seem to have given the people here much time to clear out," the Duke remarked to Simon.

"Ner. They seem to have gone to bed early. Hard luck on them but Revolutions can't be kept waiting for lovers or honeymooners or whatever they were."

Richard picked up a silk stocking of cobwebby texture. "I wonder where the owner of this pretty thing is now. I wouldn't care to be in her place if they lugged her away in the things she stood up in."

"Don't be an ass," said Simon irritably. "Naturally they'd have let her dress but she probably chose tweeds or something sensible. If she's a foreign visitor she'll be safe in her own Embassy by this time. If not, she'll have taken refuge in one of the convents."

De Richleau gave an angry grunt. "Much protection a convent would be. The mob will burn them directly they've finished with the churches. But let's not think of such horrors. I shall fall asleep where I stand if we don't get to bed."

Simon nodded. "We'd all better sleep late. I'll come along and collect you early in the afternoon. In the meantime you won't walk out on me, will you? You see, I don't know what your game is and..."

"No, no," De Richleau cut him short. "We won't abuse your hospitality by blowing up the place and we'll see you again before we depart. Good night and happy dreams."

"Thanks. Good night, Richard," Simon paused just inside the open doorway to add, "and—er—sleep well, dear Comrade Hypolite."

"Eh?" the Duke swung round. "How the devil...?"

Simon's dark eyes twinkled in his tired face. "Saw it on your passport, old chap, when you showed it to the Anarchists. That's how I was able to

register you and Richard for a room here without asking what names you were going under.” He softly closed the door behind him.

De Richleau locked the door, pulled off his coat and slumped down on the bed. “We should never have come to this place,” he said bitterly. “I’m getting old, Richard. I completely lost my head.”

“Nonsense,” Richard answered with a tired smile. “How could either of us think clearly after being so damn’ near death and half-roasted into the bargain? Naturally we took the first chance that offered of somewhere we could be sure of a good night’s sleep. Particularly as it came from Simon. I wonder, though, how much he really twigged?”

“He knows that I’m Hypolite Dubois and he knows that I was passing as da Silva, the Portuguese, but nothing’s come out to connect us with the factory at Valmojado and, praise be to all the gods, you scotched his learning that we know Lucretia-José. Letting off that gun was a superb piece of work, Richard absolutely superb.”

Richard looked doubtful. “It saved our bacon for the moment but I’m still scared he may have tumbled to why I did it. He knows so well that I’ve carried a gun too often to go letting it off by mistake—and he’s sharp as a needle.”

“Yes. Ordinarily he would have seen through your little trick in a second; but remember he’s as done in as we are to-night.”

“But we’re not out of the wood yet. A similar situation may arise later on.”

“I doubt that. People normally raise the question as to where mutual acquaintances have met only when they first learn that they know each other. However, nothing will induce me to sit about in that lounge again.”

Rolling into the broad bed in their pants and vests, the delicious perfume of its recent occupant strong in their nostrils they switched out the light and fell instantly asleep.

Richard dreamed, and a very strange dream it was. For hours on end he was fighting hooligans and trying to prevent them from throwing somebody into a burning church, but their intended victim was not Simon. It was his own wife, the adorable Marie-Lou. A ghost then seemed to rise out of the hideous, screaming mob; a pale, serene-faced, haloed figure carrying a little child. The human beasts shrank back terrified cowering away from the radiant light that shone all about the calm wraith of the

Holy Virgin. She walked slowly through their midst and, picking up Marie-Lou, Richard dived into the lane formed in the crowd by the holy apparition.

After a moment the figure faded and the mob was after him again, but now they were in a big hotel. He ran through a crowded lounge still carrying Marie-Lou and somebody fired a pistol at him. For days, it seemed, he lurched with leaden feet down interminable corridors with the mob hard on his heels. Then he was in a bedroom looking frantically for a place to hide her before the rabble broke in. He could think of nowhere but the wardrobe. It was a huge affair nearly eight feet in length, but as he wrenched it open he saw that it was nearly filled with shelves and drawers. The hanging space was absurdly small and would not hold her. Suddenly it occurred to him to push her up on to its top. If she lay flat there behind the foot-high ornamental woodwork nobody in the room would be able to see her. No sooner thought of than done. Marie-Lou was up there but she was lying on her side staring at him and would not put her head down. He knew that the mob would break in at any second and tried to shout a warning to her but, to his horror, he found he could not speak. Her body was hidden but her head and shoulders protruded above the woodwork screen. She did not look frightened but just lay there gazing at him, her head resting on one hand and a miserable, hopeless expression on her features.

He then saw that she wasn't Marie-Lou at all. This girl's hair was dark, but not dark chestnut, and her face was a pretty one but there the resemblance ended. There was no sound of the trampling mob now. That had faded away and Richard knew he was lying on his back in an extremely comfortable bed between cool linen sheets. Suddenly he realized that his eyes were half open, but, of course, he was still dreaming. Very cautiously he stretched out a hand under the clothes until it came in contact with the Duke. The events of the previous night were now clear in his mind. He gave De Richleau a gentle prod.

The Duke coughed, turned over, and opened his eyes. The girl's head disappeared at the same second as he jerked himself up.

"So you saw it too," said Richard quietly. "Then I wasn't dreaming."

"I saw something move on the top of that wardrobe," declared De Richleau, grabbing his gun.

“You can dispense with the heavy armaments,” laughed Richard, sitting up. “If you saw anything it was only the poor girl whose bed we’ve been sleeping in. Don’t be afraid, Señorita. We won’t hurt you.”

Slowly the head of the girl appeared again. “You no hurt,” she said with a frightened look. “You no hurt.”

De Richleau quickly reassured her in Spanish and asked her how she came to be up there; upon which any little bird on the window-sill might have observed the strange sight of two gentlemen sitting up side by side in bed holding grave converse with a lady clad only in the thinnest of nightdresses perched on the top of a high wardrobe.

The lady was Doña Favorita de los Passos-Inclán. This with the fact that her father was General de los Passos-Inclán, emerged only in the later part of the conversation when she had become convinced that the Duke and Richard, far from being foreign Anarchists, were people who might be trusted completely.

She had been very foolish, she confessed, as her father had sent her out of Spain over a fortnight before and she was supposed to be staying with an English aunt who had a summer villa at Biarritz. The aunt, apparently, had not taken her duties as a chaperon as seriously as is customary in Spain and had raised no objection at all when Doña Favorita, who was twenty-three years old, had tentatively suggested going off to Paris for a few days’ shopping. Consent to her expedition having been duly obtained, the charming Doña Favorita had hopped into the first train back to Madrid for the very laudable purpose of healing the heart of a Catholic Deputy which had been quite broken on her departure. One indiscretion, alas, had led to another and she had allowed the handsome Don Palacio Alverado to come up to her room on the night before in order that they might discuss his injured heart in reasonable privacy. They had in fact been in the very middle of the heart-healing process when a couple of shots and a great deal of tumult had aroused them to the fact that the Reds were taking over the hotel.

Don Palacio had hidden her on top of the wardrobe, giving her the eiderdown from the bed to lie on, and gallantly allowed himself to be taken quietly in order to get the invaders out of the room as quickly as possible. When they had gone Doña Favorita had wept a great deal since she greatly feared that poor Don Palacio’s heart was now past any healing. She then

tried to think what she had better do about herself and decided that in case anyone else came into the room it would be best to stay where she was until the early hours of the morning when, the hotel being quieter, she would stand a better chance of dressing without interruption and slipping out of it unobserved. Unfortunately, lying up there in the dark she had cried herself very quietly to sleep. The next thing she knew was when the light clicked on and all hope of escape was cut off by some Englishmen taking possession of her room.

De Richleau promised that they would do everything in their power to save her from falling into the hands of the Reds and suggested that while they had a bath she should get down from her perch and dress herself in her most serviceable clothes. She was to knock on the bathroom door when she had done.

Once the water was rushing into the bath Richard observed, "I'm not complaining, mark you, but I thought acts of chivalry were forbidden us."

"They are," the Duke agreed. "But this young woman happens to be General de los Passos-Inclán's daughter. She'd make a very valuable hostage as a prisoner of the Reds. We must keep her out of their clutches somehow if we can."

Richard laughed. "I thought you'd think up something rather than admit the real truth that short of its absolutely wrecking your own plans you'd do it anyhow."

De Richleau ignored the remark and went on quietly, "Her presence complicates matters a bit as I don't intend that we should leave here yet. Old Jacinto and his lads can be trusted to carry on with the good work at the factory. We're safe here, and comfortable, and I'd like to know a little more about which way the Revolution's going to swing before we quit Madrid again. Besides, the moment we go our armistice with Simon ends and he knows we're up to no good as far as his party is concerned, so he's certain to have us followed. I've got to think up a way for us to get clear of this place without that happening. When we've had our bath we'll both go back to bed."

Ten minutes after they had finished bathing Doña Favorita rapped on the door. Clad in their coats and trousers they went back to the bedroom and found her fully dressed. She had on a very becoming coat and skirt and an absurd hat under which her saucy little features made it easy to

understand the violent injury which had befallen the lucky, or perhaps now unfortunate, Don Palacio Alverado's heart.

"I fear you'll have to spend the rest of the day, and probably to-night as well, in the bathroom," the Duke told her. "You see, we are in a rather unusual position ourselves and if we're to help you it's essential that you should do just as I say without question."

"Of course," she agreed, but added a little sadly, "I'm terribly hungry."

"We'll manage to get you something later in the afternoon, I hope. In the meantime try to be patient and if you hear anyone come to visit us be as quiet as a mouse."

Just as they had locked her into the bathroom the sound of cheering drew them to the window. Opposite, above the dusty, yellowed leaves of the trees, they could see the long upper story of the *Prado* Art Gallery which houses one of the finest collections of paintings in the world. Before it stood the statue of Valesquez, palette in hand. Nearer, and below, was the cause of the excitement: some bands of marching men.

They made a brave sight in the bright afternoon sunshine. Socialists in royal-blue shirts and red ties, Communists in scarlet shirts and Anarchists in black and red. Many of the groups carried banners with slogans on them or huge crossed golden hammers and sickles on a red ground. As they marched they chanted in union, "*Oo-archie-pay. Oo-archie-pay,*" the initial letters U.H.P. of the Proletarian rallying cry.

Farther along the street a barricade had been erected right across the broad avenue with a gap in it only wide enough to permit of a single lorry or column passing through it at a time. On it were perched a number of men in caps, berets and overalls. Some wore only trousers and a singlet as the heat was terrific; absolutely tropical and abnormal even for Madrid in the height of summer. Only a few of them were armed with rifles. A big crowd of women, children and older men were working like a swarm of ants tearing up the pavement to strengthen the barricade.

For a time Richard and the Duke watched these activities, then, stripping off their outer clothes, they got into bed again.

Simon arrived about an hour later. "Hallo!" he said, when Richard let him in. "Not up yet, eh? Thought you'd be famished and ready to go down for some sort of meal."

The Duke moaned slightly and turned over. "I'm afraid we've come off worse than you, Simon. Both of us had our backs to that red-hot furnace longer. I'm really not fit to get up and Richard's little better."

Richard nodded. "We were wondering if you could fix it for us to stay here another night and get some food sent up to us so that we can lie quiet here without going through the agony of dressing."

"Of course," Simon's kind face expressed genuine concern. "Stay as long as you like. I've got plenty of pull with the Committee downstairs. About food, though, I've been down to the restaurant and although the kitchen's running it's mostly cold stuff that's being served. People coming and going and helping themselves all the time. Will it do if I bring you up whatever I can get?"

"Fine, old chap, fine," Richard agreed, and Simon left them, to return twenty minutes later with a big dish of mixed cold meats, fruit, Vienna bread and a couple of bottles of *Diamante* wine.

"Got to go out now," he said, "but I'll be back some time this evening and I'll bring you up some supper. Very glad you're not in a hurry to get off. Want to have a word with you before you do."

"How are things?" asked the Duke.

"There was some street fighting this morning. It's still on. If you listen you'll hear occasional bursts of firing in the distance. We're on top, though. Fanjol's still lying doggo in the Montana Barracks but he can't do us any harm now. So long."

When he had gone they shared their picnic meal with Doña Favorita, whom they found a delightful and amusing person at such times as her mind could be taken off the unfortunate Don Palacio, on whose account she gave way to occasional fits of passionate tears.

It was five o'clock by the time they had finished, so they locked Doña Favorita in the bathroom and went to bed again, where they made up a few out of the many hours' sleep they had lost since their arrival in Spain, but the sound of firing close by aroused them a little after eight.

Jumping out of bed they ran to the window. The street below was now almost empty, but up by the barricade a fierce skirmish was taking place. Some Fascists appeared suddenly to have made an unexpected sortie from a near-by house. By the way people were falling hit near the barricade and scattering in all directions it looked as though a machine-gun was playing

upon them from an upper window of the building. A dozen Blackshirts were visible making deadly play with their automatics.

Crouching among the overturned cars and other lumber of the barricade the Reds put up a stout defence. Suddenly a lorry came clattering up bearing reinforcements for them. A score of properly armed Communists tumbled out and charged the Fascists who were driven back into their late hiding-place. Some of the Communists had their pockets stuffed with hand-grenades and began to throw them. There was a series of sharp detonations and the machine-gun ceased fire. Sporadic shooting followed, the reports coming more faintly, then silence. About thirty of the seriously wounded were collected and driven away in the lorry. Five Militiamen and three Blackshirts lay dead where they had fallen in the evening light.

Simon did not return until nearly midnight. He brought another picnic meal and helped them eat it. Afterwards he said seriously:

“Now I’ll tell you. I’m worried about you people. Don’t know what you’re up to and as long as you’re under this roof I’m not going to try to find out. It’s some anti-Government business, though, and if you’re caught at it in Madrid you’re very likely to get shot. Temper of the people isn’t too good and you can hardly blame them in view of this military conspiracy having been sprung on them.”

“We won’t argue about that,” replied De Richleau. “What’s the situation at the moment?”

“Cabinet sat all night. Señor Casares Quiroga resigned the Premiership at three o’clock in the morning, while we were drinking downstairs in the lounge. President Azaña has belied his previous reputation as the strong man of Spain. Instead of calling on Largo Caballero to form a Socialist Cabinet he asked Señor Martinez Barrio, the Speaker of the Cortes, to form one. Barrio’s Cabinet lasted just three hours. He refused to arm the Workers so he had to go. They had a reshuffle with most of the old lot back under Don José Giralt, who agreed to hand over the arsenals to the Trade Unions. In consequence the Government has committed a sort of painless *hara-kiri*. It’s still the *legal* Government, remember, but it is just doing what U.G.T. Headquarters tell it now. We feared it might pan out that way, but we don’t really mind as the U.G.T. Chiefs are responsible people and it doesn’t matter much if they restore order in the country from the Rostrum

of the Cortes or their own H.Q. Point is, we're masters in the capital and the Rebellion's fizzling out."

"What's happening in the rest of the country, though?" asked Richard.

"Franco landed in the South with a handful of Moors but he's up a gum-tree now because the Navy has proved loyal and they've closed the Straits. He can't bring over any more of his troops and in a couple of days he'll be out of ammunition. Mola's had a temporary success in the North but in spite of the fact they're Catholics the Basques have stood solid for the Government and a big force from Bilboa is being sent against him. Goded landed in Barcelona from the Balearics and is giving, a little trouble there but he doesn't stand an earthly against the Anarchists and Catalan *Esquerra*. The biggest shot of all, General Sanjurjo, the chap the Insurgents pinned their hopes on, crashed near the frontier when flying from exile in Lisbon to some unknown destination. He was to have taken supreme command of the Rebels; instead he's been burnt to death."

Simon paused after this, for him, unusually long statement and added jerkily, "You see, the whole show's a washout. Don't want you to go on risking your necks at some quixotic job which can't cut any ice now even if you pull it off."

"Thanks, Simon." De Richleau managed a tired smile. "Luckily our job is as good as done."

"Is it?" Simon sat up suddenly. "I'm so glad. Makes it much easier for me to try and persuade you to clear out. Honestly, it's not going to be healthy for people with your views in Madrid these next few weeks. Why not go home?"

The Duke appeared to consider the suggestion, then he said slowly, "There's no real reason why we shouldn't now, although seeing the unsettled state of the country I should have thought we'd be safer here than trying to reach the frontier."

"No, no! You're wrong there. Madrid with its mobs is much more dangerous for you. Now I'll tell you. If you're going to stay I've no means of protecting you once you've left this hotel; but if you'll agree to quit Madrid I'll do my level best to see you get safely to the frontier or within walking distance of the nearest Rebel forces—where you'll be among friends."

"How do you propose to do that?"

“Have you put on the list of foreigners to be deported. Send you off under an armed guard that has special instructions to turn you loose if any body of Insurgents looks like preventing their reaching their destination with you.”

“That’s nice of you,” murmured the Duke. “The trouble is, though, my incurable love of excitement. Having seen the beginning of this affair I’d like to see its end. So I don’t think I can accept your offer.”

Simon’s eyes flickered swiftly from side to side. “Pity, that. I’d hoped you’d see reason because I more or less planned this little trip for you in my own mind when I woke up this morning. I suppose you realize there’s nothing to prevent my having you both arrested and sent off that way?”

“Our armistice having been agreed in the street should surely end in the street.”

“Of course, and I wouldn’t dream of infringing it. But what’s to stop me having you followed and pinched directly you’re round the corner?”

“You don’t consider that would be taking an unfair advantage?”

“Ner. You say yourself your job’s done, so I’m not trying to put one over on you. I only want to lessen the risk of your getting into trouble—as it’s pretty certain you will do if you stay in Madrid.”

The Duke smiled. “You’ve forgotten one thing. Richard and I are armed. What’s to prevent us shooting down anyone who tries to arrest us?”

“You’d hardly be fool enough to do that?”

“Why? You know quite well that we’ve done it before and got away with it. In this case, of course, we might not be as lucky and if we were shot ourselves in the ensuing gun-fight that would be a sad end to your altruistic desires to shield us from harm. Don’t try it, my son. I take very grave exception to being arbitrarily arrested.”

“Um,” Simon nodded. “I feared you might. That’s what’s been troubling me.”

“However,” the Duke went on, “I’m open to bargain with you. I’ll trade my perhaps foolish but none-the-less strong desire to remain here against your kindly wish to see us safe out of it. I make no promise to quit Spain but I will allow your minions to escort us to any train you like leaving Madrid and they can see us off on it—at a price.”

“What’s the price?” Simon asked tonelessly.

“That you will allow two other people to accompany us and give them safe conducts to the frontier or as far as the Government writ runs in these uncertain times.”

“Who are they?”

“Don Palacio Alverado is one—if he’s still alive.”

“And the other?”

“Doña Favorita de los Passos-Inclán.”

Simon rubbed his arched, bird-like nose thoughtfully. “Asking a bit much—isn’t it? A Catholic Deputy and a General’s wife?”

“Daughter,” corrected the Duke.

“So that’s why you wanted to remain on in Spain, eh? Now the Rebellion’s a flop you thought you’d try your hand at a Scarlet Pimpernel act?”

“I have a great admiration for that character but I’m afraid you flatter me, Simon.”

Simon grinned. “Lovely story, you know. ‘Great Adventurer fools Government. Succeeds in bringing Monarchist Deputy and beautiful daughter of Rebel General out of Spain with tame escort of Red Troops.’ Suppose you realize these people are both useful hostages?”

“If, as you say, the Government’s already got the upper hand, hostages can be of little value. D’you happen to know if Don Palacio is still alive?”

“Yes. Remember seeing his name this afternoon on a list of Deputies who had been arrested. They’re all in the Model Prison and safe enough there. But—er—don’t you think it’s a bit thick to ask me to try and get these people released as part of the price I must pay for trying to save you from your own pig-headed stupidity?”

“I do. And therefore I’m not going to try and drive a bargain at all. Richard and I will leave Madrid unconditionally in the way we’ve already agreed but I’m going to appeal to you to arrange for these two young people to come with us if you can. They’re in love, Simon, and they’re in far graver danger than we are. Be a good chap and do some wire-pulling to get safe-conducts for them.”

“You cunning old devil,” Simon grinned. “How can I refuse when you put it like that? I can’t promise anything but I’ll do my best.” They both laughed happily and lifted their glasses to each other on the deal.

“Glad that’s fixed,” Simon went on. “I’ll get off to bed now. Must find out about trains in the morning. Traffic’s been paralysed for the last twenty-four hours but there’re bound to be some trains out to-morrow if only for supplies. You may have to travel goods, but I’ll see what can be done. Sleep well, both of you.”

When he had gone they carried in what remained of their supper to Doña Favorita and told her the good news about her Don Palacio still being alive; also that they had some hope now of being able to get her and her lover either to the frontier or their friends. Afterwards they made quite a comfortable place for her to sleep by collecting the cushions, her fur coat and other gear from the bedroom and placing them with the eiderdown in the bath. Then they went back to bed.

“I wonder where we shall find ourselves this time to-morrow,” Richard said thoughtfully.

“At Valmojado, I hope,” replied the Duke.

“Aren’t you a bit optimistic? You did a neat job of work in jollyng old Simon into getting our tame lovers out of it, but it looks to me as if it means our travelling to an unknown destination too.”

“Not a bit of it. With everything all over the shop trains will only be crawling about the country for the next few days. It may mean a long cross-country walk; but having carried out our promise to Simon about getting on the train quietly I’ll bet you a tenner we’re off it before it’s five miles from Madrid.”

“So that’s the game! But what about the other two?”

“We leave them to travel on with their guard and safe conducts. It’ll be nice if we’re able to see them on their way to safety but the really important thing is that we make a perfect get-out ourselves from this hotel. Simon will believe we’re out of the game which, apart from his quite genuine feeling for us, is what he’s largely after; while all the time we’ll still be very much in it and free to go about our own business without any risk of his tracking us down.”

As they turned over to go to sleep they were both thinking with satisfaction of the neat little plot which was to outwit their good friend Simon Aron. They had, however, failed to reckon with one important factor which caused events to take a very different course from that which they expected.

They were woken in the morning by a dull intermittent thudding. De Richleau, wide awake at once, sat up.

"Guns," he said. "That's artillery at work in the distance."

Richard yawned. "Simon was wrong then, about the Reds having control of Madrid."

"Evidently. It must be the troops at the Montana Barracks. Fanjul is making a bid for the city after all."

"Well, better late than never."

"I doubt it in this case. He's given the Reds a clear two days in which to get organized."

They went to the window and stared down into the street.

Few people were about except patrols on each corner and a ragged column of Marxists. Some of the men leading it wore red shirts and carried rifles; on a hand-cart were piled four machine-guns and a number of cases of ammunition. Most of the marching crowd, about two hundred strong, were armed with all sorts of odd weapons; here and there a woman could be seen among them.

The barricade which had been started the day before was now a long, thick ridge fifteen feet high and twenty feet across. It consisted of overturned cars and vans, furniture from near-by offices, masses of junk from the abandoned fun fair which had been set up a fortnight before in the *Prado*, paving stones and earth. The three dead Fascists from the previous day's skirmish and a dead horse still lay sprawled in the roadway near it.

They exchanged rooms with Doña Favorita for three-quarters of an hour, when she had dressed, in order that they in turn might use the bathroom and dress in it. Swopping rooms again they sat down to wait with what patience they could for Simon and breakfast. The sound of the guns continued to come faintly and occasionally the drone of an aeroplane could be heard overhead.

At last Simon arrived with some rolls and dried figs. "All I could get you," he announced, but he smiled cheerfully as he went on, "everything's fixed up all right. Don Palacio is being fetched from the prison in a U.G.T. van. As soon as it gets here you can join him in it and it'll take you to the station. But where's the girl?"

De Richleau nodded towards the bathroom door. "She's been here all the time. Would you believe it, we found her perched up on the top of the wardrobe when we woke up yesterday morning."

"Really!" Simon's eyebrows shot up. "Poor dear. She must have spent a jolly uncomfortable night of it while you two snored your heads off in her bed. Still, she'll be all right now."

"What's the firing?" asked the Duke as the distant explosions came again.

"Spot of bother at the Montana Barracks. Fanjul tried marching out on us but we've had the place surrounded ever since early yesterday morning. Those are the loyal batteries of the Artillery shelling the Barracks now."

The Duke looked grave. "I thought some of the Infantry Regiments would refuse to follow their officers. They always do in a Revolution but I imagined the Generals would be able to count on the Gunners."

"Well, for once you were wrong. Nobody's backing the Generals at all except a few criminal lunatics like themselves; mad-dog Fascists and medieval Catholics."

"Thanks," said the Duke gently.

"Sorry," said Simon, "I didn't mean anything personal, but it's a fact that practically every sane person in Spain is on the Government side. Even the Air Force, where you'd have thought the Generals had a pull. The Madrid squadrons are up now. You'll hear them bombing the Rebels in the barracks to put an end to this nonsense, on your way to the station."

"Where are you sending us?"

"Valencia or Cartagena. Not certain which yet. But the revolt fizzled out in both almost as soon as it started and communications have been re-established. 'Fraid you may have to wait an hour or two on the platform as nobody knows yet when a train will be starting, but you'll be quite safe among the men I'm sending with you."

"The Government certainly seem to have come out on top," said Richard. "How have they managed to put down a nationwide revolt so quickly?"

"They didn't," Simon replied abruptly. "It was the U.G.T. Directly each General declared martial law in his town we called a General Strike to paralyse all communications. Cut them off from each other so they didn't know what their friends were doing. Nine-tenths of the men weren't with

their officers anyhow. The rest are being dealt with by loyal troops and armed Militia.”

He left them to see if Don Palacio had arrived, and returned ten minutes later to say that the Deputy was below in the van. Doña Favorita was let out and introduced to Simon. She was crying as she thanked him for having saved her lover, and although he endeavoured not to show it he was obviously affected. The party then went downstairs.

In the street a tradesman’s van was waiting; across its ordinary lettering three huge letters, ‘U.G.T.’ stood out in fresh black paint. Beside the armed driver sat a pleasant-faced young man named Antonio Sagasta who, said Simon on introducing him, was to be responsible for them. On the roof of the van perched two more young fellows armed with rifles. Sagasta got down and unlocked the van. Doña Favorita sprang in, and for a moment they left her to her touching reunion with Don Palacio.

The Duke and Richard said good-bye to Simon, who smilingly wished them a happy journey as he handed them the four safe-conducts, and they followed Doña Favorita into the vehicle, the door of which was locked behind them. It was almost dark inside so they could see little of Don Palacio, who at once began to pour out his thanks to them in a spate of mingled Spanish and English. He was tall, had a firm handgrip and a deep voice; but that was all they could gather about him.

The van started with a jolt and began to run south towards the *Atocha* Station. They were moving away from the Montana Barracks but a series of heavy, reverberating explosions came clearly to them. The bombers were doing their deadly work.

Twice the van stopped, presumably while obstacles were moved from gaps in barricades to allow them to pass, and they heard their guards joking with people in the street.

They were running along a smooth stretch not half a mile from their starting-point when there was a sudden shouting following by a heavy crash. The van lurched sideways and they were all thrown in a heap on its floor.

There was a shot, another and another. Someone screamed. There was a violent banging on the door. Before they could scramble to their feet it was burst open and a man shouted, “*Deprisa! Deprisa!* We are friends! Make your get-away!”

De Richleau thought of his promise to Simon, to go quietly to the station; but this was none of his doing. If they stayed where they were the mob would be on the scene in a minute and murder them all without asking any questions. He drew his gun and poked his head out of the back of the van.

“Quick! Quick!” again implored the man who had burst open the van. “See that fellow on the pavement. The one in the beret. Follow him. *Be quick, I say, or you’ll get us all killed.*”

A couple of shots slapped into the van. Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose outside it. The Duke and Richard jumped out together. Don Palacio followed clutching Doña Favorita by the arm.

They saw that a large lorry had deliberately been run into their van from a side turning. Their driver sprawled over his wheel, the blood dripping from his head. Young Sagasta was lying face up in the gutter, his eyes open and staring. One of the other men was staggering down the street at a limping run; he toppled forward, shot again, at the moment they caught sight of him.

As they dashed for the pavement the driver of the lorry backed it away from the crippled van and a dozen of their rescuers began to scramble on to it. A second-floor window in a near-by house was thrown up and there was a sharp report. One of the men in the lorry flung up his hand in a Fascist salute and pitched backwards among his comrades. The others sent a rapid fusillade at the window; its broken glass tinkled down into the street.

Suddenly a machine-gun began to stutter in a corner building a hundred yards away and some Militiamen with rifles came into action on the far side of the road. But the lorry was moving forward again towards the turning opposite that from which it had come and its crew were keeping up a constant fire on anyone rash enough to expose themselves. De Richleau and his friends did not see the end of the fighting. The man in the beret yelled to them, “*Corre! Corre!*” and dived down a side street.

They followed panting; Don Palacio and Richard half-carrying, half-dragging Doña Favorita as they ran. The Duke dropped back to act as rearguard and constantly glanced over his shoulder to see if they were being pursued. They turned a corner before anyone had appeared at the opening of the street.

Their guide slackened his pace a little so that they could catch him up. "Follow me! Say nothing!" he puffed. "You men take off your ties and put them in your pockets. Nobody with a tie on is safe in Madrid now, but collars don't matter."

They did as they were told and slipping round another corner dropped into a quick walk. A barricade loomed up in the distance. Before they reached it the man in the beret slipped into a small bar, muttered something to the man behind it, and pattered down some stairs at its back to the basement. They came out through an area window into a yard; and so into another street.

For the best part of half an hour they twisted and doubled, entering several houses and shops, and leaving by their back entrances, to avoid the barricades. De Richleau knew they were heading roughly west. He was not surprised when they entered the broad *Calle Alcalá*, crossed it and slipped into the red light district on its far side, where he had been with Richard only two nights before.

Off the *Calle Jardines* they entered a small hotel, the ground-floor room of which was evidently used as a public bar. Several poorly-dressed men were lounging there but they all carried guns and had alert, intelligent eyes.

"Wait here with the Señorita!" their guide said to Don Palacio. "You can order yourself and her a drink. You two come upstairs," he added to the Duke and Richard.

They stumbled up some dark and smelly stairs to a narrow landing. The man in the beret rapped out a little rhythm that had a recurring motif on the panel of a door. A sharp click followed as the electrically-controlled lock was released from inside. They passed into a fusty bedroom. An old woman lay in bed there. She had her right hand under a copy of *Claridad*, Largo Caballero's paper, and De Richleau would have made a fair-sized bet that it held a gun. With a little nod at the man in the beret she withdrew her hand and turned a portion of the lamp bracket above the bed. As it operated another secret switch the lock clicked to again and at the same moment the door of a wardrobe swung open. They slipped through it and through an opening in a steel panel on its far side into another passage. At the end of the passage was a single door. Their guide threw it open and stood aside for them to enter.

They passed into a small, windowless room which was lit only by a desk lamp turned downward upon some papers. A woman was seated at the desk writing. An enormous pile of cigarette-stubs lay heaped on a platter at her side. Her head was lowered over her work but by her golden hair they knew instantly that it was Lucretia-José.

"All safe," reported the man in the beret. "I've left the other two downstairs as you directed."

"Good. *Mil gracias*, Fernandez. You may go," she said looking up at the others with a welcoming smile.

"So you were at the bottom of this," De Richleau sighed, sinking into a chair. "I guessed as much. I suppose Cristoval told you he had seen us in the Palace lounge with Simon Aron?"

She nodded. "That made me feel it wise to have an eye kept on you. I learnt you were confined to your rooms and, this morning, that arrangements were being made to deport you with two other people. It was simple enough to have a rescue squad in readiness and the hotel watched until you left for the station."

"It was very good of you to occupy yourself with us at such a desperately busy time. You're looking terribly tired, my dear."

There were great, dark circles under Lucretia's eyes and she passed a hand wearily over them. "Yes, it's no light job playing this double game. For the time being it's essential that every moment I get off from Anarchist H.Q. should be put in here. I haven't slept for over sixty hours."

"Can't you chuck things for a bit now?" Richard urged. "The bombing and the shelling of the Barracks stopped soon after we were rescued, so Fanjul can't be trying to force his way out any more. They're probably having a parley."

Lucretia frowned. "I had the news just before you got here. Fanjul has surrendered."

"I was afraid he'd have to," said the Duke. "If only he'd done something on Saturday night it might have made all the difference, but he left his bid for the city much too late."

"The weak fool!" Lucretia angrily stubbed out her cigarette. "He had trouble with his men but at least he might have led out those who were loyal to him at the proper time. As it is he's only succeeded in getting a lot of good fellows killed to no purpose."

Richard stared glumly at his feet. "Well, that puts paid to any hope of overthrowing the Government. Madrid's gone Red and if what we've heard about other places is true the whole rising is a wash-out. Except for the looting, and shooting of Generals, that's bound to follow, the whole thing's as good as over."

Lucretia-José drew a sheet of paper that had a long list of names on it towards her and with a firm hand struck a line through the word 'Madrid.' "Not many people know as much about what is going on as I do," she said with a tired smile, "but I'll give a few facts:

"General Mola has established his headquarters at Burgos and set up a Provisional Government there. Navarre, Galicia, and many other Northern Provinces have already hailed him as the Saviour of Spain. General Franco has been temporarily cut off from his base in Morocco by the closing of the Straits but reinforcements are now reaching him every hour by air. He entered Algeciras and Cadiz with only a handful of men, but both towns received him with open arms. The great Labour stronghold of Seville, our third-largest city, was taken by Queipo de Llano without resistance. The entire garrisons of Saragossa, Coruna, Toledo, Pamplona, Gijon, and Granada have declared for National and Catholic Spain. One army will advance from the south and the other will sweep down from the north until these Terrorists here are crushed between them. No, my friends. It is *not* over. It has only just begun."

Chapter Fifteen – Night of Horror

That's not so bad," commented the Duke. "I felt from the beginning that you were over-confident in thinking you might gain control of the whole country without serious fighting."

"If we hadn't failed in Madrid we'd be masters of four-fifths of Spain by now," Lucretia contended. "Only Catalonia might have stood out against the new Government if it could have been proclaimed from the Capital, and foreign countries could not have refused to recognize it."

"Perhaps," said Richard. "But you've failed here, so instead of being the new Government your friends are technically Rebels. Before they can arrive the Marxists will have plenty of time to prepare to defend the city and encourage resistance in Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, and lots of other places. It looks like at least three months' civil war to me. Have you got the money to finance it?"

"Yes. We shall collect the usual taxes in the territories we control once things are straightened out a little. In the meantime we have the arsenals of the cities we've taken, to supply us with munitions, and Señor Juan March, the Royalist millionaire, has given us thirty million pesetas to pay our troops with."

"As things have panned out I suppose you'll decide to throw your own millions into the army coffers?" said the Duke.

"Certainly. If it proves necessary. I can't tell you how grateful I am for your foresight in getting them out of Madrid. You might have protected them from confiscation, but we could never have made use of them in such a struggle as it seems we've got to face. How are things going at Valmojado?"

De Richleau told her of their operations during the last week and added, "I want to get back there as soon as possible now. Hardly half the gold can have been dealt with yet and if the factory workers get out of hand they may sack the place—in which case we'd lose it after all."

She shook her head. "If they sack anything it will be the local convent. As far as they know there's nothing at the factory worth the taking, and they don't burn factories unless they've got a very bitter grudge against the owner."

"I think you're right but all the same I'd like to be on the spot again."

"I felt sure you would, so I've made arrangements for you to get out there. The buses have stopped running, of course, and you'll have to walk to the outskirts of Madrid, but if you go to the *Calle Alva* no. 97, just on the other side of the Manzanares, there's a lock-up garage there. Ring the bell four times and tell the man who answers it that you come from Buenos Aires. He'll fix you up with a car. Now, who're these people that were being deported with you?"

The Duke told her the story of Doña Favorita and Don Palacio, at which she laughed a great deal. When it was done, she said, "You certainly seem to have got the best of Simon. Don Palacio will naturally wish to join a fighting unit as soon as..."

"I'm sorry," De Richleau interrupted, "that is a thing I can't allow. I fooled Simon into putting us on the deportation list because it was the only way we could be certain of getting clear of the hotel without his having us followed. But I will not take advantage of an unexpected turn of events deliberately to hand over a very useful man to my friend's enemies when that friend has given him a safe-conduct at my request."

Lucretia puffed lazily on her cigarette. "Aren't you being a little over-scrupulous?"

"Not to my mind. Either Don Palacio gives me his word of honour not to raise a finger in this war, except in self-defence, or I march him back to the Model Prison with my own gun in his back."

"What do you wish done with him, then?"

"Employ him on non-combatant work. You must have secret hospitals where your people wounded in the street-fighting are being tended."

"It shall be as you wish; but what about the girl? The little fool ought to be slapped for having returned here after her father had sent her out of the country. She may find herself compelled to mend a lot of broken hearts she won't care about at all if she stays on here, and I've more urgent things to do than plan the escape of love-lorn maidens."

"Would it be possible to get her into one of the Embassies?"

Richard hazarded. "I remember her saying that her aunt was an Englishwoman."

"That's an excellent idea," agreed the Duke.

“Good. You’d better do that, if you can, before you start for Valmojado. If you can’t, bring her back here.” Lucretia took some papers from a drawer. “These are C.N.T. Party cards, one each for you, with permits to carry arms, and one for her —all in false names, of course. You’ll need them to get through the barriers. Don Palacio will remain here. Naturally you will not mention my existence to either of them.” She pressed a buzzer on her desk.

The man in the beret answered the summons and she said to him, “Matters are arranged, Fernandez. These two will take the girl, but the man’s to be sent to N. 17 as a helper with instructions that he’s not to be allowed to leave the building.”

Richard shook Lucretia’s hand but the Duke kissed it and begged her most earnestly to get a little sleep. She smiled a promise to him as they left her. Fernandez led them along the passage to the sliding panel and through the old woman’s bedroom again. The spring lock on her door snapped-to behind them and they walked downstairs.

Doña Favorita and Don Palacio were still sitting among the unusually sharp-eyed collection of rougns who appeared to be the habitués of the place. Fernandez beckoned to the couple and led all four of his charges into a small private room where the Duke explained the situation to the two lovers.

The Catholic Deputy was most loath to give his parole not to fight beside his friends, but De Richleau insisted on his doing so and at last he gave way. The lovers were then left alone together for a few minutes but Fernandez said he had much to do and with many apologies cut short their unhappy parting.

Doña Favorita did her best to dry her tears and set off with Richard and De Richleau.

They avoided the main streets as far as possible but, even so, they had to produce their C.N.T. cards at several barricades before they were allowed through. Now they had more leisure to observe the state of things about them they saw that the Revolution had already made its mark on Madrid. All but the poorest shops were closed and shuttered, some had been looted, here and there broken windows showed in the upper storeys where the bullets of the street-fighters had been aimed at people shooting down from the houses. They passed the still-smouldering ashes of four

churches and once they had to make a detour to avoid a blazing convent. Trams, buses, lorries, cars had all disappeared except such as had been overturned to form part of the barricades or were now only twisted heaps of scrap-iron from having been burnt by the mobs.

Every few hundred yards they passed more sinister signs of the many conflicts which had taken place while they were safe in their bedroom at the Palace Hotel; crumpled heaps that only a few hours before had been human beings with convictions, passions, hopes. Most of the bodies lay alone where they had fallen, but in one place there was a horrible mound of about fifteen and from their tonsured skulls it could be seen that they were priests who had been massacred. One rigid hand protruded from the pile still clutching a crucifix. Farther along a fat old woman with the haughty beak of an aristocrat hung dangling from a lamp-post; her face was purple and her eyes protruded like those of a Pekinese, the shreds of a beautiful lace *mantilla* still fell about her shoulders.

The Duke and Richard hurried on, shielding Doña Favorita, who was between them, from as many of these horrible sights as possible. In the *Calle Fernando el Santo*, where the British and numerous other Embassies are situated, there was little movement. Like many of the streets they had traversed it struck them as sinisterly quiet, but they noticed the first police they had seen since the outbreak; little groups of them were gathered on the pavement before each foreign-owned building.

“You’d better handle this, Richard,” said the Duke. “I don’t want to go inside if I can help it. I might be recognized. Ask for Cherry Beddenham; he’s one of the secretaries. At least, he was *en poste* here last time I heard from him.”

After a casual glance the police took no notice of them and Richard walked up to the Embassy door. It was open and a fat man was sitting on a chair just inside. Richard made to cross the threshold but the man put out a hand to stop him and asked:

“You British?”

“Yes.”

“Resident in Madrid?”

“No, visitor.”

“What d’you want?”

“To see Mr. Cherry Beddenham.”

“He’s not here.”

“I want to see the Ambassador, then.”

“Sorry, you’re out of luck. Sir Henry Chiltern and all his staff were at their usual summer quarters in Hendaye when the riots began. None of them has turned up yet.”

“Who’s in charge here, then?”

“We are,” said the fat man amiably.

“And who is *we*?” Richard smiled back.

“Committee of British Residents in Madrid. There was nobody but a porter in this place when the trouble started and he said he had no authority to let us in. Well, it’s our Embassy, isn’t it—so with the Vice-Consul’s help we took possession. What do we pay taxes for, I say, if we can’t claim protection when these excitable foreigners start cutting each other’s silly throats?”

“Quite right,” said Richard. “I’d have done just the same if I’d been in your place; but, of course, you’re willing to let other people in.”

“If they’ve British passports, yes. If not, no.”

“This is rather a special case. A Spanish General’s daughter with an English aunt.”

“Nothing doing,” said the fat man promptly.

“Oh, come on,” Richard pleaded. “You must stretch a point at a time like this. God knows what may happen to the poor girl if you won’t give her shelter.”

“Sorry. British passports only. That’s the decision of the Committee; and in any case we’re chock-full of people already.”

“Look here, I’ve got a British passport so I could insist on coming in if I liked, but I’m quite prepared to stay outside if you’ll take this girl in my place.”

“Come in or stay out, just as you like. It’s all the same to me, old chap. But we can’t take her unless she’s got a British passport. Put yourself in our shoes. See those policemen there. The Government’s giving us a fair deal. Those chaps have orders to fire on any mob that tries to rush the Embassy, but that’s only on the understanding we play fair and refuse to shelter anyone except our own nationals.”

“Can’t you take her on as some sort of servant?” Richard suggested. “Members of Embassy and Legation Staffs are entitled to protection

whatever their nationality.”

“You’re telling me,” the fat man laughed. “We might’ve this time yesterday but not to-day. We’ve all been doing what we can in that line already. I’ve got six myself including a Condesa as a cook and a Marquis as a chauffeur for a car that was pinched off me early Sunday morning.”

“I see,” said Richard miserably, but at that moment he caught the eye of a small, slight, fair-haired young man who had just come up behind the fat fellow and heard the last part of the conversation. Richard distinctly saw the young man wink as he edged past them and went out into the street.

Richard thought the reason for that wink well worth finding out so he said good-bye to the fat man and followed the fair one down the road, turning after him round the next corner.

The slim youth had pulled up just out of sight of the police.

As Richard came up he said, “Who’re you trying to wangle into the Embassy?”

Richard replied without hesitation, “Doña Favorita de los Passos-Inclán.”

“The General’s daughter?”

“Yes. She has an English aunt.”

“I’m afraid that’s not good enough. We’re having to be very careful now.”

“Are you on the Committee?” Richard asked, noticing that the fair young man was a good bit older than he looked at first sight.

“No. My name’s Arthur Talbot and I’m British but I only arrived in time to get taken on as office-boy. Still, I think I can tell you the best thing to do.”

“I’d be awfully grateful...” Richard began.

“D’you know the Finnish Legation?”

“No.”

“Well, you can’t mistake it because it’s on the other corner opposite the British Embassy. Behind it, facing on the *Calle de Monte Esquinza*, are the British Commercial Attache’s offices. All the Finns are out of Madrid just like the rest of the Diplomatic Corps during the summer heats. The chap in charge is a Spaniard, and a pretty rotten one at that, but he’s taking refugees in at 3,000 pesetas a head. If you’ve got the money you’ll probably be able to get the lady in there.”

“Thanks a thousand times for the tip.” Richard shook Mr. Talbot’s hand and hurried back to the Duke.

De Richleau was strolling slowly down the street with Doña Favorita. He immediately approved Richard's plan for buying their pretty young protégée an asylum in the Finnish Legation and they turned back towards the building.

The matter was arranged without difficulty. The sleek Spaniard who was making quick money out of his compatriots' fear of death promptly registered Doña Favorita as his tenth scullery-maid, on the money being paid over, and waved her into the hall. It was already crowded with people in the most varied states of attire; some fully dressed, others in sable coats and nightdresses just as they had fled from their homes. They looked bored and miserable and eyed their new companion with disfavour; realizing that she would be one more mouth to feed from the Legation's slender stock of provisions.

Somewhat to the embarrassment of Richard and the Duke, Doña Favorita kissed them both as they turned to take their departure; then burst into tears again before burying her head in her hands and rushing blindly into the mob of people who were sitting on the broad stairs as though at some fantastically grim party.

"Well, that's that," said the Duke when they were outside once more. "I'm very glad we managed to park her safely. Queer, though, how women of a similar class can be such poles apart, isn't it? Favorita's an attractive little thing but she's not fit to clean the shoes of Lucretia-José."

Richard nodded. "I suppose our Golden Spaniard is rather remarkable."

"You *suppose!*" echoed De Richleau. "She's extraordinarily beautiful. The shell of a Madonna with the fire of a Vesuvius underneath. She represents all that is best in Spain. Everything that's worth fighting for here or anywhere else in the world."

"Quite," agreed Richard hastily. "Quite," while to himself he thought, 'By Jove, he *has* got it badly.'

Turning out of the *Castellana* to avoid the barricades again they began to search for a place where they could get something to eat. They had had nothing since the rolls and dried figs that Simon had brought them that morning. Dusk was falling as they entered a small *patisserie* which had the letters U.P.H. scrawled in whitewash across its window and underneath the legend, 'Welcome to all Friends of the People.' There, they rested for a

little while they consumed four large cups of strong coffee, half a stale seed-cake and some fancy biscuits.

When they left the *patisserie* to commence their weary tramp right across Madrid to its western side, night had come. The street lamps remained unlit but the glow from the burning buildings reddened the sky above the stricken city. The number of people in the streets was rapidly increasing; having slept through the day after the previous night's excesses the rats were coming out of their holes to recommence their work of destruction.

As has proved the case with every proletarian revolution the Liberals, the dreamers and idealists who had sown the seed with their innumerable writings and wordy rhetoric, were now left high and dry without a vestige of power with which to put a check upon the thing they had started. The better elements among the Socialist leaders were too busy organizing resistance to the Military Revolt to endeavour to control the mobs that roamed the streets, and the patrols of armed Marxists, who had taken the place of the police, were indifferent or approved their depredations.

The deliberate creation of a 'State of Terror' among the bourgeois is one of the sacred articles in the code by which the Reds of all nations have been taught to secure their rule. Lenin practised it in Russia, Sun-yat-Sen practised it in China, and Bela Kun practised it in Hungary. Trotsky caused more people to be murdered under the same article of faith in one year than the Romans martyred in their arenas during the whole thousand years of their history.

The pavements were still hot from the long day of blazing sunshine, the air was stifling and the hooligans, male and female, only wore a minimum of garments. Led by criminal and sadistic lunatics, who for once were able to glut their revolting secret appetites without fear of being called to account, thousands of normally decent workpeople—their better instincts drowned in looted alcohol—ran laughing and cursing about the airless half-lit streets. What did it matter that the red blood of life flowed in the gutters, that young girls were being violated until they died of exhaustion, and that strong men, fiendishly castrated, screamed like women in childbirth? It was only the putting into practice of the doctrine by which the mobs had been taught they would achieve riches and contentment.

Richard and De Richeleau made the best going that they could although they were called on innumerable times to show their papers and shout aloud their adherence to the 'Sovereignty of the People'. In nearly every street through which they passed some fresh horror was being enacted. Shots rang out every few moments and occasionally the explosion of a hand-grenade as it was flung into some rich man's premises or the depot of a reactionary organization. Cafés were being broken into, the chairs and tables overturned and the liquor looted. Two-thirds of the people in the streets were rolling drunk. In one place some wild-eyed women were openly giving themselves to their men on the pavements; in another a group of nuns were calling on the Virgin to pardon their aggressors until the very moment their petrol-soaked garments were set on fire.

A dozen times De Richeleau had to haul Richard back from an insane attempt to rescue one of the scores of victims. The faces of both of them were white and wet with perspiration from forehead to chin. They were filled with an utter horror and despair that humanity could become so bestial. If they could have called down fire from Heaven to blast these frenzied creatures, dead to all but evil, they would have done it. Not from hate but dispassionately; just as Torquemada sent his victims to the stake in the times of the Inquisition. These leering, drink-sodden wretches were heretics but not just heretics who denied certain postulates of a religious creed; heretics who denied Light and Life itself. Since they were blind and chained in Darkness it was better for them that they should be destroyed and freed.

Only De Richeleau's iron control enabled him to bring Richard and himself through those dark ways where Satan, for a night, had extended his realm to earth. He joked with the Comrades at the barriers, spat upon the crucifix when required and raised his clenched fist in salute to the new Masters of Madrid.

Once they had crossed the Manzanares things were quieter; at last they reached the *Calle Alva* and found the garage. They gave the password 'Buenos Aires' to the man who answered their four rings and with few words he handed over to them a Citroën which had seen much service. It had the Anarchist initials C.N.T. painted on its bonnet and a special, stamped form pasted on its windscreen which, the man said, would carry them safely through the barricades in the suburbs. Seeing that Richard was

half-fainting from nervous exhaustion the Duke took the wheel and they set off for Valmojado.

They had not gone a hundred yards before Richard choked and suddenly burst into tears. He had always thought of himself as rather a tough fellow and he certainly had not cried since he had left his 'prep.' school but the sights he had seen that night had completely unmanned him.

"Steady on, old chap—steady on," said the Duke. "We're out of it now and you won't be called on to witness any more horrors—to-night at all events."

"I know," Richard burst out. "But it's early yet and they'll be at it for hours to come. It's still going on and we can't stop it. Did—did you see what they were doing to that little boy—the fiends! And he couldn't have been more than nine."

"Yes. I was very nearly sick. But try not to think of it any more."

"I can't help it! And the horror of it is it's all really happening. It's not a nightmare. It's true, *true!*"

"I only wish some people in England could be here to see it," De Richleau growled. "Any number of them who're looked on as responsible leaders of opinion simply won't face facts. They pretend to themselves that such things don't really occur in revolutions and just carry on airing their pet theories without the least regard to the hornet's nest they're stirring up. It's a pity some of our irresponsible clergy aren't loose in the streets of Madrid to-night. If they ever got home they might spend a little more time looking into the pretty hopeless state of their own affairs instead of mixing themselves up in politics."

Richard had got himself in hand again by the time they arrived at the first barricade in Carabanchel-bajo. They were allowed to drive through after an examination of their passes and a very decent Militiaman accompanied them on their running-board to see them through the others.

They spoke little for the rest of the run to Valmojado but when they approached the town they saw a red glow over its eastern extremity.

"We'd better ditch the car here," remarked the Duke, running it on to the edge of a field some distance from the nearest house. "We can come back for it later if things are all right but it would be as well to investigate first. It looks as though the local Soviet is making a bonfire of the monastery."

Getting out they tramped down the road to the entrance of the town. No light showed in any of the houses. As they neared the square they immediately noticed a large gap in one of its sides; the church seemed to have completely disappeared. When they were closer they could see that it had been burnt to the ground. Only one side wall was standing and a huge pile of ashes in its centre still smouldered, giving a faint, rosy light.

“Last night’s jollification, I suppose,” De Richleau said curtly, “Let’s go over to the inn. Old Perez will be able to tell us what’s been happening.”

The inn was in darkness but its door stood open. A horrible, unnatural quiet pervaded the place. The Duke pulled out his torch and shone it round. On the floor of the little bar-room they found the landlord; he was quite dead. Smashed glass littered the floor and all the bottles had disappeared from the racks.

“Anita?” whispered Richard.

De Richleau had found an unbroken oil lamp and was lighting it. “We’ll have a look round upstairs,” he said.

The girl was in her bedroom; a small neat apartment gay with pretty chintzes. The only evidence that the mob had entered it was the smashed picture of the Virgin over the small iron bed and the figure that lay upon it.

For a moment they almost doubted that it was Anita. She had aged twenty years in a short week-end. Her cheeks had fallen in and her black hair was streaked with grey. But it was Anita, naked and stretched out in the form of a St. Andrew’s cross, her wrists and ankles lashed with stout cords to the four posts of the bed. She had an ugly wound in the lower portion of her body from which the handle of a big carving-knife still protruded. As they stared at her with a dreadful sick feeling she opened her eyes.

“Water,” she whispered from between cracked lips. “Water.”

Richard felt his head swimming, swayed for a second, recovered, and dashed downstairs. When he returned with a supply from the kitchen tap he found that De Richleau had cut the girl free and covered her up, but she still lay with her arms stretched out above her head. They were too stiff to move after being pinioned for so long.

The Duke looked across at Richard as they gave her the water and gently sponged her burning temples. “The poor child can’t last much longer,” he said. “She’s lost a lot of blood from that diabolical wound, and she started

the bleeding again just now by moving before I could stop her; while I was cutting the last cords. She's bleeding internally too."

Anita did not understand him as he spoke in English, but her lips twisted into the semblance of a smile so they realized that she recognized them.

"Can you tell us who did this?" De Richleau asked her softly in her own language.

"There—were—so many—of—them," her words came slowly. "Don Rubén—was—the first. He always—wanted—me."

She paused for a moment and went on with an effort, "The others were—mostly boys. Didn't mean—just—just—very drunk."

De Richleau nodded. "When was it?"

"Last night." Anita twisted her head painfully. "We heard about—Madrid—in the afternoon. I was—to have—been married—in..." her voice trailed off.

Taking a small metal box out of an inner pocket the Duke slipped four tablets from it into her mouth and gave her another drink of water. "You're going to sleep now," he said placing his firm cool hand on her forehead. In a few moments her features relaxed. She had fallen into a coma.

"Morphia?" asked Richard gently.

"Yes. I'm so glad we were in time to save her the pain of the last spasms."

"Wasn't there any chance at all?"

"Not an earthly with a wound like that in her intestines. She would only have lingered on in agony till the morning." The Duke drew down the coverlet and carefully eased the carving-knife out of the wound. It seeped blood a little but Anita lay still and rigid, almost as they had found her.

They sat there for a little, until, standing up abruptly, De Richleau covered her face. "Come on," he said. "Let's go and find Don Rubén."

"Nothing I'd like better," Richard declared, "but it's up to me to remind you of your own dictum. We've got a job to do and mustn't get ourselves mixed up in other people's quarrels."

The Duke sighed. "You're quite right, Richard. I was out of my mind even to think of it but to see anything beautiful deliberately soiled or broken or hurt drives me insane. We'll get along to the factory."

Yet it was decreed by fate that Don Rubén should not escape the vengeance De Richleau had had in mind for him. As they were about to

leave the inn they saw the Red Mayor of Valmojado standing outside in the moonlight which now filled the deserted square. He was evidently on his way home from the monastery-burning and having noticed the light in Anita's window paused to wonder what was happening up there. His head was still tilted back as he stared at the upper part of the little hotel, probably reliving the revolting scene he had enacted there on the previous night.

After a moment he turned on his heel and walked away. Without a word or even a glance passing between them, Richard and the Duke followed him on tiptoe. In the dark shadow round the corner they came upon him with unexpected suddenness. He was standing there facing the blank wall. It was all over in a matter of seconds. Richard grabbed him by the throat and De Richleau plunged the carving-knife he had taken from Anita's body into the Mayor's liver.

They waited while he choked out his life and turned away from his carcass feeling a strong sense of elation, although it had never seemed conceivable to either of them before that they would ever commit, much less derive pleasure from, a cold-blooded murder.

As they neared the factory a figure rose silently from a ditch near the last block of peasant hovels. It was Basilio, Jacinto's second son. He had been posted there to watch for their coming or that of any curious person who might decide to pay the factory a visit outside official working hours. He and his comrades had been taking turns at this duty since the previous night.

Basilio reported all well; up to the moment, as far as the gold was concerned, and led them to his father who, with the other three, was at work on it.

Old Jacinto had carried on in spite of his fears that some accident had befallen them in Madrid and he was overjoyed to see them safely back again. He plunged at once into an account of events in Valmojado. Rumours of the Military Rising had not reached the town until mid-morning on the Sunday. These had been confirmed by the afternoon and soon after the *siesta* the Reds had held a meeting in the square. Don Rubén had bought a barrel of wine and by his fiery oratory had whipped their passions to a frenzy. By sundown they had been ripe for any mischief.

In the meantime the Catholics and members of the anti-Red organizations had also held meetings. Their numbers were considerably less than those of their opponents but they decided to give battle. The clash had occurred about eight o'clock but Jacinto and his four lads had not been present. He had insisted that their secret work was of far more importance than breaking the heads of a few Reds in a street-fight, and their duty lay in keeping out of it.

To have to desert their friends at such a time had been hard but they had proved not only justified but wise in doing so, since their numbers would have been too few to turn the scale. The Reds had had an easy victory, killing two Catholics, wounding half a score and driving the rest pell-mell to their homes.

Drunk with alcohol and excitement the victors had set fire to the church and looted the inn. That morning there had been many sore heads and quite a number of repentant men, gravely frightened at what they had done, in Valmojado; but such of them as had gathered at the factory had been persuaded by the Syndicalist worker, Matias Falcon, to down tools.

Jacinto and his squad, whose sympathies were not generally known, had shouted for a strike with the loudest, as the shrewd old chap had seen at once that if the factory became ostensibly idle during the day-time as well as at night it would be all the easier to get on with the job of camouflaging the gold.

De Richleau praised him unreservedly for his good sense, and asked, "What has happened to Coello and his clerks?"

Jacinto shrugged. "They're in hiding, I expect—scared of their lives. None of them has been near the place all day."

"And the old priest—Dom Ignatius?"

"Don't talk of it," the foreman covered his eyes. "I am told those devils crucified that good old man upside-down on the doors of his church before they set fire to it."

The Duke crossed himself and the others followed suit. "What part have the police played in all this?" he asked after a moment.

"They would stop it if they could but they are too few. They barricaded themselves into their office and they are there still."

"D'you think the Reds are likely to burn this place?"

“Our main danger lies in the Mayor, Don Rubén. He has become Dictator here in the short space of a few hours. To-night he filled them with wine again and urged them to burn down the monastery. To keep up his prestige he may find it expedient to incite them to fresh acts of violence.”

De Richleau grunted. “Apart from him d’you think the others are likely to attack us?”

“No. They think of the factory as their living and have no quarrel with Señor Eaton who has made himself well liked. He would be wise, though, not to show himself in the town for a bit. At times like this, masters, however good, are always liable to be set upon by the trouble-makers.”

“Just as I thought,” nodded the Duke. “It will be best if no one except yourselves knows of our return. We’ll help here whenever possible and for the rest of the time remain concealed in our room above the office.”

Jacinto agreed that the idea was sound. Since he and his men had declared in favour of the strike they were not regarded with suspicion and would have ample warning if the factory-hands decided on any drastic action.

Richard insisted on returning with De Richleau to fetch the car and they ran it into one of the lock-up sheds. Their night had been an exhausting one mentally rather than physically so when they got back they settled down to painting pots and pans until the first streaks of dawn reddened the sky.

Tuesday passed without episode. Most of the townspeople were too terrified to move out of doors and the roughs were sleeping off the effects of their two-nights’ orgy. On the Wednesday the secret workers had a scare. Coello put in an appearance. He had called at Jacinto’s lodging and, failing to find him there, had come along to see if he was at the factory. The man on watch spotted Coello and Jacinto, warned in time, was able to slip out of the factory so that he appeared only to be taking a casual look round when Coello came upon him.

The manager, having heard about the strike, wanted to consult his foreman as to what terms the men demanded before they would return to work. Jacinto advised him that it was too early to open negotiations yet and that it would be wisest if he kept out of the way until things were a bit more settled. Coello accepted this suggestion with alacrity; only too glad of

an excuse to get home again after so satisfactorily transferring his responsibilities to Jacinto's broad shoulders.

On both nights there was further rioting in the village but it was of a less general nature. The murder of the Mayor, which was naturally put down to an anti-Red reprisal, had taken the stuffing out of most of the mob leaders. They were no longer so eager to take a prominent part in attacking the helpless for fear that they might be marked down for sudden death themselves. A few of the larger houses were sacked and several people killed in the process but these acts were mainly due to private vengeance. It was a fine chance for the unscrupulous to pay off old scores or wipe out their debts and the local moneylender was among the victims.

By Thursday the mob's passion had spent itself, bodies were being collected for burial, and the police came out into the streets again. By Friday the more prosperous citizens who had survived the four-night's Terror removed the barricades from behind their doors and began, diffidently, to go about their normal business, speaking in hushed whispers of the miraculous escapes they had had.

During all this time the secret shifts at the factory were continued while Richard and the Duke put in eighteen hours a day minting gross after gross of pots and pans. Even so they could not keep up with Jacinto's output but the Duke decided that it was best to get the gold camouflaged as quickly as possible. Late on, if need be, they could all put in some extra sessions locked in the sheds and painting at night.

As De Richleau had had the forethought to lay in a stock of tinned provisions on their first arrival at the factory he and Richard were able to live on these eked out with fruit, vegetables and wine which Jacinto brought them each evening.

The room upstairs above the office was stuffy and uncomfortable. Whenever a light was lit there they had to cover the window with a blanket so that no glimmer should be seen from the road and the heat in the little room was sometimes almost more than they could bear. Their washing arrangements were of the most primitive kind and they had no means of cooking anything unless they crossed the yard to the factory furnace.

Little news reached them from Madrid and none that was official. It was generally reported that all classes in Spain were furious at the attack which the Army chiefs had made upon their liberties and were uniting to preserve

them. The Government appeared to be gaining the mastery everywhere. After a three day battle in Barcelona General Goded had been captured and compelled to order his still-resisting troops to surrender. The Revolt had been crushed throughout practically the whole of Eastern Spain. In Toledo, where the officers and cadets of the Military Academy had mutinied, the people now had the upper hand and, having driven the Military back into the *Alcazar*, were besieging it.

It was on the Saturday, after Jacinto had retailed one of these gloomy bulletins, that Richard threw aside a gold-lined fish-kettle he was about to start painting. "What the hell's the good of us going on with this?" he complained to the Duke. "Why not let's bury the rest of the stuff and have done?"

De Richleau smiled patiently. "Sorry, old chap. I know the boredom of doing a job like this hour after hour with only intervals for sleep is enough to drive any intelligent person insane. I would be much more fun to be on the General Staff or scouting in a fast plane, but fighting isn't the only thing that goes to win a war—particularly in these days. We're unlucky this trip, that's all. The work's no worse than they get in a labour battalion—except that we put in double the hours—and it's got to be finished."

"By the time it is the rebellion will be finished too."

"I doubt that. We're in Red territory, remember, so we know nothing of what's happening on the other side."

"But d'you really think we'll be able to get all this stuff to the coast?"

"With Lucretia's help I don't see why we shouldn't."

"If the Insurgents last out till we do it will have developed into a pukka war by then. Is even this amount of gold going to make any difference to either side?"

De Richleau laughed and kicked the heavy fish kettle. "The lining of that thing alone would buy a nice whippet tank, and how many bits of kitchen gear have we handled in the last ten days?"

"God knows. I'm somewhere in my fourth thousand and you must have painted nearly as many."

"Judge for yourself, then, if what we're trying to carry through is worth while."

Richard pulled the fish-kettle towards him again. "You're right. I only wish we had a good York ham to cook in this thing, though."

“Well, you shall have a break to-morrow,” the Duke promised. “It’ll be eight days since we visited the unfortunate Pédro and he must be getting short of food.”

“By Jove, I’d almost forgotten all about him.”

“I hadn’t.” The Duke frowned. “The fellow’s been an infernal nuisance to us but there was no other way to deal with him. Jacinto shall get us some supplies, as shopping in Madrid may not be too easy now. We’ll drive in after dark, wash our supper down there with a bottle of Lucretia’s best—which will be a nice change from this filthy local stuff they call wine—and get back here in the early hours of Monday.”

The following morning the Duke told Jacinto of his intention and added that now peace was fully restored in Valmojado he thought it time for Señor Eaton and himself to put in a public appearance again; so they meant to return quite openly and say they had spent the past ten days in the British Embassy.

At eleven o’clock that night they started for the capital in the ancient Citroën. At Carabanchel they were challenged and had to show their papers but the barricades had been removed and they arrived at the garage in the *Calle Alva* without incident.

The man there told them that provided their C.N.T. cards were all right nobody was likely to interfere with them. Order, of some sort, had been restored and the *Madrileños*, having been swept by a wave of patriotism, were now concentrating their energies in forming columns of Militia to go out and fight the Generals. Murders were still taking place at the rate of about two hundred a night but these were mostly perpetrated by little groups of extremists who, having raided some wealthy man’s house, tortured him until he disclosed the whereabouts of any portable riches he possessed, then took him out of Madrid in a car, shot him and left him in a ditch. Each morning now the police in the outlying districts were bringing in scores of such abandoned bodies but the main streets of the city were comparatively safe.

They removed the big bundles of cooked foods, fruit and bread, that Jacinto had secured for them, from the car, and set out to walk the rest of the way. It was only a little after midnight but the cafés, theatres and dance-halls were all shut and although barricades no longer blocked the streets there was hardly any traffic. Here and there a pedestrian hurried

past, in most cases taking advantage of every shadow and crossing the road rather than meet another. There were occasional patrols who stopped the pedestrians if they saw them and twice the two friends had to show their faked Party cards, but the Terror had been driven underground.

The Duke had been somewhat apprehensive that the *Palacio Coralles* might have been broken into during the disturbances but the great mansion was as dark, gloomy and forbidding as ever when they reached it. Shuttered and grimy as it was most people would have taken it for an empty building and there were many more obvious places to plunder in Madrid.

Having let themselves in they stood in the lofty hall for a moment; awed as they had been when they first arrived by the brooding silence that seemed to envelope them like a living thing. The millions of atoms in the little clouds of dust which were raised by their footsteps as they made their way up the grand staircase shimmered in the light of their torches. In the great *salon* everything was just as they had left it. The ghostly rows of covered chairs stood round the walls and except for one corner of the big room which they had cleaned out during their stay there was dust, dust, dust over everything.

De Richleau sent Richard up to the fourth floor to find out if the pile of furniture outside Pédro's door was still in position while he went down to the cellars himself to choose something specially delectable. When they met again Richard reported that Pédro was snoring in his prison.

"Good. We'll attend to him when we've fed," the Duke nodded. "And later we'll boil up some kettles of water downstairs so that we can enjoy the luxury of a bath. Look what I've discovered." With loving care he was removing the dust from the tops of two bottles of Schloss Johannisberger Auslese, Prince Metternich Estate, Gold Seal 1904.

Richard knew the wine and smiled. "It's years since I've even seen it listed and then it was £6 a bottle. Queer that the finest hocks fetch so much more than the finest clarets, isn't it?"

"Not really. The price of every luxury is merely a question of supply and demand. It simply proves there are more rich people in the world who would rather drink this than Château Ausone, and I'm one of them."

The food they had brought with them was the very antithesis in rarity to that dark-golden nectar; yet given all the money and opportunity in the

world it would have been hard to find anything with which that magnificent wine would taste better than the mild cheese and dry biscuits spread before them.

By the light of a single oil lamp they settled down to enjoy one of those strange, unpremeditated meals that linger in the memory long after the years in which they were eaten have been forgotten.

In the shadows which encroached upon them from the bottom of the long chamber it was easy to imagine the shades of dead Cordoba y Coralles gathered watching these strangers from another land who had invaded this haunt of ancient glories; yet welcoming them with ghostly bows and soundless courtesies as men of their own kind and mettle for whom they were proud to do the honours of their house.

One long-necked bottle was empty, the light from the lamp glinted upon the red glass of the other which was no more than half full, when De Richleau suddenly went dead still, his glass raised half-way to his mouth.

Richard paused in the middle of a sentence and the eyes of both focussed with one accord upon the tall, half-open door. It had only been a very little noise but both had caught it; something had creaked down in the hall.

Very, very gently the Duke set down his glass while Richard rose slowly to his feet. They paused, stock-still again, listening intently. A new noise came; a faint, faint shuffle, as though somebody was moving down below.

Richard leaned forward towards the lamp; his fingers gripped the little wheel which controlled its wick. De Richleau drew his gun. As their eyes met he nodded. Richard gave a swift turn to the wheel, a sharp puff down the lamp chimney, and the light went out.

For the third time a sound full of menace reached them; a stealthy, hesitant tread.

The room was now in pitch darkness. With catlike steps the Duke tiptoed across the parquet until he was ensconced behind the angle of the partly open door. Richard sank down on his knees, shielding himself behind the heavy arm-chair on which he had been sitting, and slipped back the safety-catch on his automatic.

Tense and expectant they crouched there, striving to control their breathing. They could hear their hearts pounding in their chests but they

could hear another sound as well; the pad, pad, pad of regular footfalls.
Somebody was coming up the stairs.

Chapter Sixteen – When Greek Meets Greek

The brains of both were racing at a furious speed. Had they forgotten to lock the street door behind them? If so, had some passer-by found it ajar and slipped in to have a look round out of curiosity? Had a police spy seen them enter the house, and, having picked the lock, come in to find out what they were doing there? Or, had they fallen into a trap? Perhaps Pédro's friends had reported his lengthy disappearance and the mysterious comings and goings of the two strangers who had taken his place. It hardly seemed likely that the *Seguridad* would concern themselves with such a minor matter when all their energies were required in the struggle to suppress that hydra-headed monster now loose—the lawless element of the city. Perhaps a watch had been kept on the *Palacio* for other reasons. They had no idea what had happened to Don Lluís Trueba. It was possible that he had been forced to talk.

With their fingers on the triggers of their guns they crouched there in the darkness ready at any second to hold up anyone who might enter the room.

The footsteps were clearer now as they mounted the last stairs. They did not seem stealthy any longer but deliberate and purposeful. The beam of a torch flickered under the closed half of the door and across the landing outside. The footsteps ceased and a voice rang out shattering the eerie silence.

“Put up your guns, you two, and show a light. We know you're there. It's Rex and Simon.”

“Damn you!” exclaimed Richard with mingled anger and relief. “You great big boob, I might have shot you in another second.”

“Don't you believe it,” Rex laughed, his huge shadow, now lit from behind by Simon's torch, bulking in the doorway. “I know the old firm a sight too well to go sticking my nose in here without giving the huge hallo! Where's the Big White Chief?”

De Richleau stepped out from behind the door. “How's flying, Rex?” he asked amiably. “Have you found your nerve again?”

“Oh, shucks, I never was the goods at lying and I just hated to have to tell you that one. But what else could I do without letting Simon down? He

knew you'd get all het up if you tumbled to it we were going to give the Socialists a hand in Spain."

"Let's forget it," said the Duke as Richard relit the lamp. "I'm sure you'd have misled Simon in the same way if I had been lucky enough to rope you in first. Good evening, Simon; you're looking very glum."

Simon was still standing unsmiling by the door. "Got reason to be," he said abruptly.

"Why? Have you discovered that your 'heroic' mobsmen prefer looting to joining up?"

"Ner. We've got more volunteers than we can handle at the moment. I was thinking of the last time we met."

"When you entertained us so kindly, eh? Well, we shall be delighted to do the same for you whenever the occasion arises. No doubt it will when the Nationalist forces reach Madrid."

"It's your still being here—makes me so sick," Simon shot out with sudden anger.

De Richleau raised his slanting, devil's eyebrows. "But, my dear fellow, we gave you no undertaking we'd leave Madrid. Our only promise was that we would allow your guards to see us on to a train without endeavouring to escape. The fact that they failed to do so was no fault of ours."

"You tricked me!" Simon flared. "At the very time I was going to all sorts of trouble to get you out of it for your own protection you were in touch with the Fascists. You never meant to leave Madrid and you planned that hold-up in which four of our men were killed."

"That's not true," Richard cut in. "We had no idea at all that the Fascists meant to attack the van."

"I'm amazed it could even have occurred to you that we did," De Richleau added sharply. "You should know us better, Simon. The whole affair was arranged by people who knew we were at the hotel—presumably as prisoners—and they naturally took steps to secure our liberty. But we knew nothing of their intentions and we didn't fire a shot at any of your men."

"Basis of our bargain was that you were on parole till you got on the train," Simon said sulkily.

Richard shrugged. "Don't be a fool, man! Would you have had us stand there in the street until we were mown down by machine-guns?"

“Ner—still. How about Don Palacio and the girl? You can’t say you played fair there. Jollyng me into wangling safe conducts for two valuable hostages and then letting them join the Rebels.”

“My dear fellow, do give us credit for some sense of decency,” the Duke broke out. “Doña Favorita has been interned in one of the Legations for the past week. She’s safe there but can do you no harm. As for Don Palacio, I made him give me his personal undertaking that he would not lift a hand in the Civil War except in his own defence. I couldn’t send him out of Madrid but in fairness to you I wouldn’t allow him to join a fighting unit. He’s helping to look after the wounded in some secret depot. Now are you satisfied?”

“Sorry. Did you an injustice about that,” Simon admitted, but he did not smile.

“All right. May we know to what we owe this unexpected visit?”

“Certainly.... Now I’ll tell you. I’ve Spanish relatives on my mother’s side. Commercial people who had a good bit to do with investing the Socialist funds. They asked me to act for them in England, and when I found out that Spain was threatened with a Nazi *putsch* my interest naturally went a bit deeper than just money. Outside Catalonia, Spain’s business men aren’t very bright—not those who could be trusted—anyhow. So I was invited out here as a financial adviser.”

“To whom?” asked the Duke. “The Government?”

“Ner. The Finance Council which runs the Party Funds of the Popular Front. Still, it’s much the same thing now. Government’s down the drain for all practical purposes—under the thumb of Largo Caballero—but I’m working in close collaboration with what’s left of the Ministry of Finance. They’re—er—very sensible people.”

“Which being interpreted out of the ancient Hebrew means they’re doing what you tell them,” laughed Richard.

Simon permitted himself a watery smile. “More or less. Anyway, unofficially I’m in charge of the War Chest. Got to find funds for buying planes and guns and things. It occurred to me there must be a lot of stuff in the banks and safe deposits; negotiable securities, gold and so on, lodged for safe keeping by private people. We’re not pinching it provided its owners declare it but they’ve got to do that under a new law that’s been passed.”

“So that you can pinch it later on,” the Duke remarked.

“Not necessarily. It’s to provide me with some idea of the real resources of the capital and to prevent stuff being withdrawn without our knowledge.”

“I see, and what happens if people don’t declare any such liquid assets—absent owners and so on?”

“Then we confiscate. Those who aren’t with us are against us. If they’re shirking their responsibilities abroad or fighting in the ranks of the Rebels why should we respect their property? It’s to be used for the defence of the Democratic Government. Still, neither case applies to you and I hope you’re going to be sensible.”

“My dear fellow, last week’s excitement must have proved too much for your able brain. I have no assets lodged in any Madrid bank or safe-deposit. Whatever should have led you to suppose I had?”

“Visit I paid the other day to the *Banco Coralles*,” said Simon with a stony stare.

“Indeed! And what has that to do with the matter, pray?”

“Anything removed since the first of July is still liable to confiscation unless it is declared at once. We know there was a large store of bullion there at the beginning of the month, but it’s gone.”

“Dear me!” the Duke smiled openly and derisively. “How very unfortunate for you.”

“Ner,” said Simon, “not really. It’s much too heavy to have been shifted far and I’m determined to trace it.”

“Good luck to you, my dear ‘Lieutenant Schwab’!”

“We found the broken door of the vault and it’s quite clear the stuff was brought through into the cellars here.”

“So that’s the way you got in,” murmured Richard.

Simon nodded. “If I’d ordered the police to break in the front door you might have started shooting through it; so we thought it best to make our call by way of the bank and the vault.”

“But how did you know we were here?”

“On my first visit I found two bedrooms had been occupied on the next floor and a fine array of empties where some people had camped here. Occurred to me they might be back some time so I had the place watched.

The police telephoned me directly they saw you enter the house to-night and Rex and I came along as soon as we could."

"That doesn't explain how you knew it was us."

"Well, I'll tell you. Cigar butts, lots of them and mostly three inches long. Fine stuff and no bands. No one leaves butts that length unless they smoke very big cigars. Besides, I've smoked too many of those special Hoyos not to know their butts on sight. I'm pretty well up in your favourite vintages too and a look at the empties served as a check-up."

"Marvellous!" said the Duke sarcastically. "And now I suppose you think you're hot on the trail of this missing treasure?"

"Yes. It's not in the cellars and there's no lift in the Palace so even with the bank staff to help you it would have taken weeks to lug it up to the attics. But it was you who removed it and you're going to tell me where you've got it."

"My dear boy, your deductions are admirable, positively breath-taking, up to a point. Richard and I certainly made this place our headquarters for several days and as the gold isn't here it must be somewhere else. But why in the world should you associate me with its removal?"

Simon drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket and laid them on the table. "Found these when I was going through the bank manager's private safe," he said quietly. "They're Don Lluís Trueba's receipts for the bullion, duly signed in your own name, and I—er—happen to know your signature well enough to be certain they're genuine."

"Well, I'll be damned!" De Richleau suddenly let out a roar of laughter and collapsed upon the sofa. "One thing I'd never thought of and a direct trail to myself. You win, Simon. It was Richard and I who lifted the Coralles millions."

Simon could not help smiling. "I was lucky," he confessed. "Those receipts wouldn't have meant much to anyone who didn't know you; and the Hoyos and the empties wouldn't have meant anything at all. It was a fair bet you'd come back some time, since you were still in Madrid, if only to have another go at the cellar."

"Well," said Richard, "now you've produced your rabbit out of the hat, and we've all clapped, how about getting up a few more bottles. Rex looks as if he could do with a drink."

“Sure thing!” Rex agreed. “This is one hell of a climate for maintaining an unquenchable thirst.”

“Ner,” Simon intervened. “Business first. I want to know where that gold is.”

Richard shrugged. “Surely you don’t expect us to tell you.”

“Look here! I’m busy. Tell me where it is and I’ll count that a voluntary declaration. If you put me to the trouble of finding the stuff for myself I’ll confiscate it.”

“If it’s once listed, what’s to prevent the Government making a new law by which they confiscate a part or all of it, anyway?” enquired the Duke.

“Nothing,” said Simon. “You’ll have to chance that.”

“Then we thank you very kindly for the offer but we’re not prepared to play.”

“Now listen! If this were a small private fortune I’d let it slide. But the sum involved is so enormous that I’ve *got* to locate it.”

“My dear chap, do be sensible,” De Richleau shrugged. “You know now that Richard and I came out here to prevent the Coralles millions falling into the hands of the Government. Is it likely that having succeeded in removing them from the bank we should tell you where we’ve *cached* them?”

“I can make things damned uncomfortable for you if you don’t.”

The Duke stood up. “Really, Simon,” he snapped, “your recent associations have improved neither your understanding nor your manners. First you display softening of the brain by asking me to betray a trust and now you have the impertinence to threaten me.”

“I make no threats I’m not prepared to carry out.”

“Then you should be ashamed of yourself. Even if we are on opposite sides of the fence in this nation-wide dispute surely there’s enough to occupy all of us without our tilting at each other.”

“Perhaps.” Simon shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot. “Don’t think I’m enjoying this. I hate it. But it just happens we’ve come into collision over this wretched gold. It’s apparently your job to secure it for the Rebels and it’s mine to prevent it reaching them.”

“Your wits against mine, eh?”

“That’s it. And I’ve got the whip hand at the moment.”

“I fail to see that since I have the gold and you haven’t.”

“True. But I’ve got you, and unless you tell me where it is you’re going to prison.”

“What!!!”

“Um.” Simon hurried on, his eyes flickering wildly. “This whole block is surrounded by my men. Either you talk or we’ll see if a spell in the Model Prison makes you more reasonable.”

“But you *can’t* mean that,” Richard protested. “It’s unthinkable.”

“It’s not. And frankly I shouldn’t be sorry of the chance to send you there. As long as you’re loose in Madrid you stand a big chance of being shot up. Once you’re in prison you’ll be out of harm’s way.”

“That’s what the Nazis call preventive arrest, isn’t it?” sneered the Duke. “How about you, Rex? Do you associate yourself with Commissar Aron’s charming proposals for the treatment of your old friends?”

Rex looked wretchedly miserable. “Well,” he hesitated. “I’ll not say I exactly O.K.ed this little idea of Simon’s. To my mind you’re both pretty capable of taking care of yourselves without being spoon-fed, and Lord knows I don’t want to see you behind the bars.”

“Then it seems it’s only with Simon we have to deal.”

“No. I wouldn’t go quite that far. Oh, Hell!” The big American pulled out a handkerchief and began to mop his face. “You see, it’s this way. I’m in this thing with Simon. Whatever he says goes, and I mean to back him. He knows best what’s got to be done for the protection of Democracy.”

“Democracy my foot!” Richard exclaimed angrily. “If you’d seen one half the things we saw a week ago to-night you wouldn’t talk such utter rot.”

“I’ve seen plenty,” Rex retorted. “And I don’t like it any better than you do. But you can’t damn a political faith just because a lot of hobos take advantage of a crisis to commit excesses for a few hours in the streets.”

“A few hours!” cried Richard furiously. “Why they’re still dragging people into cars and bumping them off outside Madrid at the rate of two hundred a night. And what are you smug fools doing to stop it? Nothing! You come here playing at amateur detectives instead of using any influence you’ve got to control the Marxist rabble. While we stand here arguing about cigar butts and gold, scores of people are being murdered— murdered! D’you understand?”

“I know, I know. But if the Fascists had come out on top it’d be every bit as bad.”

"I deny that!" De Richleau said with sudden heat. "For God's sake, you two, try and get down to fundamentals. The Army, the Fascists and the Catholics stand for the maintenance of order and the free practice of their religion. Whereas the people you're tied up with stand for disorder, anarchy, chaos."

Simon whipped round towards him. "That's untrue. We're out to build a better State where men and women will be free. Every type of creation has its birth-pangs and Spain's going through the agony of childbirth now. What do a few lives matter if the lot of a whole people can be bettered?"

"D'you suggest that people are better off in Russia than they are in Germany or Italy?"

"Yes. Not materially, but at least they're free."

"Nonsense. There are still five hundred political executions in Russia every month although it's twenty years since the Revolution."

"If reactionaries intrigue against the State they have to pay the penalty, but bands of young bullies don't pull the Jews out of their beds every day and scrub them like they do in Germany."

"For God's sake, Simon, use your sense of proportion. The German Jew-baiting is horrible, I know, but it isn't wholesale murder."

"Who wants to live under a tyranny like that? What's it matter if a few rich people like you and I go down the drain if we make room for something new and better? Can't you see that all the old systems are rotten? Reactionaries like you and Richard only prolong the misery and international strife that always results from Monarchies and Dictatorships. We're looking to the future. To the time when the common people of the world, who have nothing to quarrel about, will be the masters and there will be no more war."

De Richleau banged the table with his clenched fist. "You're mad! Stark, staring crazy to believe in these fantastic ideas. I'd give my life to-morrow if you could guarantee that there would be no more wars. So would thousands of other people. But we know your insane theories can't work as long as human nature's what it is. You think you've found something *new*, you poor fool. Did you know there was a Communist Revolution in Lower Egypt three thousand years ago? They sacked the Palaces and murdered the rich just as your friends are doing to-night. But where did it get them? They had time enough to develop their perfect State. For eighty

years they lived under Soviets then the graft got so bad they murdered their Commissars and reverted to a Monarchy.”

“It’s you who’re mad!” Simon blazed. “Or worse. You’re as spiritually dead as the mummies you’re talking about. How can you compare conditions in Ancient Egypt with things at the present day?”

“I can and I do. There have always been Masters and there have always been Men. ‘Better one Master than five hundred,’ as Charles II said when he dismissed his last Parliament and decided to rule without it. That’s the answer.”

“But that wasn’t Democratic,” Rex protested.

“Democratic be damned!” roared the Duke. “D’you get better wages, or hours, or more to eat under this myth called Democracy? Do you live longer or have any better chance of achieving security in your old age or for your children? Of course you don’t.”

“You couldn’t better the British Constitution.”

“Who in hell’s name said you could? But that’s based on Monarchy and a national respect for order. Whereas here there’s no middle way. Spain’s got to accept Dictatorship or Anarchy. There’s far less freedom under the Soviets than there is under Hitler or Mussolini. No sane person who knows the facts can contest that. All you’re helping to do is to get your own class murdered. You’ve become the sort of lunatics who’re putty in the hands of the destroyers. The living forces of evil who are out to smash every lovely and decent thing that’s left and the British Constitution among them.”

“That’s a lie!” cried Simon cold with fury. “You deliberately misrepresent the facts.”

De Richleau suddenly went pale. “It’s a long time since anyone’s called me a liar,” he said icily. “Even your privileged position, Simon, does not justify that. You will instantly withdraw it.”

“I withdraw nothing,” said Simon stubbornly.

“I’ll say you will.” Rex stepped between them. “Simon, you’ll take that back. There’re two sides to every question. You’re entitled to your opinion—but that’s all.”

“All right,” Simon agreed. “Since *you* wish it. But I’m not letting up for an instant on my determination to get that gold.”

“Now listen, boys,” Rex said earnestly. “It’s easy to see we won’t get anywhere by arguing. We just don’t understand each other’s point of view.

But one thing sticks out a mile long. It's all wrong for us four to be at loggerheads. None of us is enjoying this party. Why not let's call it a day?"

"What d'you mean?" Richard asked with quick interest.

"Just this. There's two of us out shooting Fascists and two of us out shooting Marxists. Well, we know each other, don't we? Both Simon and I and you and the Duke are going to do each of the other sides the hell of a lot of damage before we're through. That is, if we stay in our respective rackets. Why not let's pair as they do in the House of Commons. Leave these poor boobs to have their shooting-match, and all four of us beat it for home."

"That's the soundest thing that's been said here to-night," declared Richard. "I'm with you, Rex. We'll only stalemate each other if we stay. Let's leave the Spaniards to fight it out. The roses must be lovely now at Cardinal's Folly. All three of you come down and stay."

"What about the gold?" asked Simon.

"We'll leave that put," said Rex. "Neither side's got it at the moment. It can stay where it is until the fuss is over."

"But the other side's got it," objected Simon. "I can't let them get away with it."

"My only undertaking is to prevent it falling into the hands of the Government," said the Duke. "If you'll give me guarantees that it shall remain untouched and be returned intact to its owner when things have settled down again I'll agree to Rex's suggestion."

"Sorry. I can't." Simon shook his head. "With the country as it is I can't guarantee anything. You couldn't if you were in my shoes. You know that."

"I appreciate your difficulty but I am in a position of trust. Without such guarantees I can't leave Spain. However, there's nothing to tie Richard. I shall be delighted if he cares to pair with Rex."

Richard shook his head. "I only came out because of you and I wouldn't dream of leaving without you."

"That's just how it is with me and Simon," agreed Rex sadly.

"Meet you if I could," said Simon, "but I'm in a position of trust too. This gold's most important thing on my agenda. Rebels might use it to buy a whole armada of war-planes— then we'd be sunk. I'll hate to do it but I'm still going to arrest you if you refuse to declare it."

“Is that wise?” asked Richard ominously. “We’ve seen the insides of prisons before, remember—Bolshevik prisons with plenty of armed guards—and the fact that we had to kill a few didn’t stop us getting out. I’m warning you now that having seen the way your Communist friends are abusing their power in Spain I shall have no compunction about shooting any of them you may put to guard us.”

“Special precautions for such dangerous prisoners,” Simon jerked out. “Guards will be answerable to me with their lives for your safety but they’ll be Trotskyites who won’t stand any nonsense.”

“Good!” Richard flashed. “I never did like Trotsky. A vile fellow and a windbag to boot. I’ve often wondered why some White Russian exile hasn’t put a bullet in his guts. I’ll see if I can’t send a few of his followers to hell.”

“Now go easy,” Rex intervened. “This is no time for wisecracks. If Simon’s sending you down for a spell in the Model Prison for the Land’s sake don’t do any monkey-business of trying to break out.”

“He hasn’t got us in there yet,” remarked the Duke. “Has it occurred to you that we still have to be arrested? Simon says this place is surrounded. Well and good, but both Richard and I are armed. I can hardly think the four of us are quite so lost to all sense of reason as to shoot each other up, so it comes to myself and Richard versus the police outside. It’s the same situation, Simon, as when we were in the Palace Hotel. Heads we win tails you lose unless you’re prepared to see us massacred in the street.”

“Not quite,” replied Simon. “Thought of that and came prepared. Got your mask, Rex?”

With a shrug of his broad shoulders and a friendly grin Rex pulled a gas mask out of his pocket and adjusted it over his face. Simon produced one at the same moment and stepped back until he was partly sheltered by Rex’s big body.

“Sorry to appear distrustful,” he said, “but you might be tempted to rush me, and Rex is big enough to stall you both off. See this?”

He held up a three-inch-long glass tube that was a good half-inch in diameter and nearly full of a brownish liquid. “It’s tear gas,” he went on. “Quite harmless. I just throw a few drops about and your eyes will start to irritate abominably. You’ll both cry your hearts out and in the meantime you won’t be able to see a thing. The police’ll arrive at my signal, disarm you and carry you out to a waiting car. No trouble, no shooting, no fuss.”

“Stop!” De Richleau threw up a hand and suddenly laughed again. “You win, Simon. I give you full marks.”

“You’re going to tell me where that gold is?”

“Oh, no. But I’d rather go to prison quietly than have you use that stuff. I know it’s technically harmless but I had it in the War and for days afterwards my eyes were inflamed. If we’re going to be cooped up in prison I’d like to do some reading. Perhaps you could secure me a set of Proust. That’s just the thing to re-read when one has lots of leisure.”

“Do my best,” Simon nodded. “You give me your word you won’t try anything on the police?”

“Yes. When you’ve handed us over to them we’ll go like lambs.”

“I’m so glad. Honestly you’ll be quite safe in the Model Prison and that’s what concerns me more than anything else. I hope, though, you’ll think it over about the gold as I wouldn’t like to have to keep you there indefinitely.”

The Duke relaxed. “Ah, well, I can’t say anything for the moment but if we get tired of prison I may make a bargain with you. I’d have to consult my principals about that. But for the time being you’re clearly master of the situation.”

“I’ll see you’re comfortable and decently looked after,” Simon grinned. “D’you mind handing over your guns?”

Richard and De Richleau surrendered their arms. Rex took both pistols as Simon said, “Sure you won’t change your mind about talking before I call in the—er—cops?”

“No. I can’t do that. Still...” De Richleau hesitated.

“What?”

“Well, since we’re united again it might not be a bad idea to split a magnum before you march us off. God knows when Richard and I’ll see another and there’s some G. H. Mumm Cordon Rouge 1921 of the proper *cuvée* 31 downstairs.”

“Fine,” said Rex. “Lead me to it.”

“Quite certain you don’t mind, Simon?” the Duke asked.

“Ner. Could do with a drink myself. Glad to join you. Show there’s no ill-feeling.”

Taking the lamp they made their way down to the basement. The wine-cellar of the old Palace were on a scale with the building. The outer one,

and largest, contained four rows of bulky oak scantlings upon which a good sixty casks could have been stored. In times past the *Valdepenas* for the servants and light wines for general use would have been kept there but now the scantlings held only a few empty barrels. Two other cellars opened into it, each lined with rows of big stone bins; that on the right contained mainly red wines and that on the left champagnes, brandies, etc.

In the champagne cellar a few old cases had been turned up on end to form seats and a rough table; since the Duke and Richard had used it frequently as the handiest spot to rest and refresh without carting bottles about during their many hours' labour shifting the gold.

De Richleau walked straight over to the bin of Mumm and pulled out a dusty magnum. He carried it to the impromptu table, on which there were two glasses, and sitting down with it between his knees began to untwist the wire as he said, "Richard, you might fetch another couple of goblets from the *pantry*, will you?"

"Right oh," murmured Richard and turning on his heel, he walked back through the outer cellar into the passage.

The slightly rusted wire on the magnum broke and for a few moments the Duke was busy prising it off with his penknife. He then very gently eased the cork with his finger and thumb. It was old wine. No danger of its overflowing. The long cork, compressed as hard as wood from its many years in the neck of the bottle, came out with a gentle plop. A little eddy of infinitesimal bubbles like a trail of smoke drifted out as he set the big bottle down on the table.

"Where the devil's Richard got to with those glasses?" he muttered, and standing up, he went to the door.

Rex was lighting a cigarette at that moment and Simon was poking his beaky nose into one of the bins with the interest of a connoisseur.

"Richard! Richard!" shouted the Duke stepping across the threshold to the outer cellar. Next second he had grabbed the door and slammed it.

In one leap Rex was over the table but as he seized the knob to wrench the door open he heard the key turn in the lock.

De Richleau was already half-way across the outer cellar. He sprang through the door and slamming it behind him locked that as well.

Richard had gone no farther than the passage. He knew, and he knew that the Duke knew, that there were no glasses in the pantry. They were all

upstairs in the *salon* or locked away in cupboards. He had gone off obediently, wondering if De Richleau had got him out of it with the idea that he should attempt to escape on his own so that at least one of them would remain free, but decided that he had better wait there for a little in case some other game was on.

As the second door slammed he flashed his torch. De Richleau was standing there with his hand over his eyes. "Oh, God!" he groaned. "How tragic it is to see two such splendid fellows degenerate into dangerous lunatics. But I've got them locked up now."

"Rex is so strong he could break down any wooden door." Richard's voice was grave. "Besides, they can blow the locks to pieces with their guns." Even while he spoke there came a terrific thump as Rex hurled his weight against the inner door.

"I know, I know," muttered De Richleau. "But the locks are old and solid. It'll take ten minutes for them to break out."

"What's the good of that when the whole place is surrounded by police and we've given our word not to resist them. We'll never be able to slip into the street unobserved."

"That," admitted the Duke, "is damnably true."

"Then," said Richard bitterly, "it looks to me as if we're sunk after all."

Chapter Seventeen- Escape to Trouble

Another thud came on the door of the inner cellar and the sound of splintering wood; Rex was using one of the empty cases to stave the panels in.

“God!” exclaimed Richard, “how utterly maddening to know you’ve tricked them and we can’t take advantage of it.”

“We’re neither dead nor arrested yet,” declared the Duke, “and we’ve got about eight minutes to go.”

“We can’t possibly disguise ourselves in that time.”

“Even if we could the police would pinch us directly we left the house. As it is, they don’t know what we look like so they’ll arrest anyone who comes out either with, or without, Rex and Simon.”

They turned automatically towards the stairs. The unceasing hail of blows that was now raining on the cellar door faded behind them. As they reached the hall Richard asked, “How about the roof-tops?”

“No good. Simon said he’d had the whole block surrounded. When he gets out he’ll be livid with rage and have every house in it searched. Still, come on up to the attics. With a little luck we’ll cheat him yet.”

Side by side they pounded up the stairs, past the *salon*, past their bedrooms, past the landing down a corridor from which lay Pédro’s barricade, to the servants’ quarters under the roof of the big house. Like the old campaigner that he was, De Richleau had already investigated possible lines of retreat when they had first taken up their residence in the *Palacio*.

Kicking the dust up as he ran he led the way to a room where a wooden ladder led to a skylight. Springing up its steps he thrust the skylight up and propped it open with a piece of wood that lay there for the purpose.

Outside, the starlight showed a broad, flat ledge along which it would have been easy to walk, but he did not climb out on to it. Instead, he turned round, sat down on one of the upper rungs of the ladder and said:

“Off with your shoes—stuff them in your pockets.”

He pulled off his own as he spoke and Richard, obeying, asked, “What does A do now? They’re certain to search the attics and with all this filthy

dust we can't possibly hide our tracks even by tiptoeing along in our stockinged feet."

"That's just it," replied the Duke. "I'm hoping the dust is going to prove our salvation. We've laid a fine trail up here to the skylight and there's not the suggestion of another on the whole of this floor. It's a fairly good bet that they'll think we've gone out on to the roof."

"Good idea if we were ghosts but how do we dispose of our physical bodies in the meantime? We can't move out of here without making fresh tracks."

"Oh, yes we can. We're going to walk back along our own."

Quickly but carefully, with his torch held out in front of him, De Richleau led the way on tiptoe out of the attic and down the stairs. On the second floor he paused. Two large, well-beaten paths through the dust showed plainly there. They divided in the middle of the landing and each of them led to one of the bedrooms they had occupied for numerous nights.

"Tired?" asked the Duke suddenly, as they reached the place where the two tracks joined.

"What's the good of worrying about that? We won't get any sleep to-night."

De Richleau smiled. "We might. Anyway I intend to try. There are over two hundred rooms in the *Palacio*. Even if Simon is suspicious of our false trail to the roof at first and has a quick look round, the last places he'll think of hunting for us are the *salon* and our bedrooms. It's a gamble, but if you can manage with one pillow and lie down under the bed instead of on it, leaving your door wide open in case they look in, we might pull it off."

"By Jove! You're right," Richard grinned. "It's a sporting chance anyhow."

They separated at once and disappeared into their rooms. It was abominably stuffy under the great four-poster beds and both of them gave way to sneezing-fits from the dust which rose in clouds as they crawled under the heavy valances, but once they settled down they felt a quite unreasonable sense of security in their precarious hiding-places. At first they listened intently but the doors of the cellars held longer than they had dared to hope. They had been under the beds more than a quarter of an hour before the sound of running footsteps reached them. The elephantine pounding of Rex's feet on the stairs was followed by Simon's quick patter.

Without a pause they passed the landing and raced on; evidently following the trail to the skylight. After about five minutes they came down again and walked straight into Richard's room. He caught the flash of a torch under the edge of the valance and held his breath as he heard Simon say, "These are the bedrooms they occupied."

A moment later they had gone into the Duke's room next door but they only remained there a few seconds. When they came out they entered into a violent argument on the landing.

Neither De Richleau nor Richard heard it all, but scraps of the heated discussion came to them in the silence of the old house. That the fugitives had gone out over the roof-tops seemed to be agreed by the hunters, but upon the procedure next to be followed they strongly disagreed. Simon was for calling in the police and having a house-to-house search made throughout the whole block, but Rex would not allow it. He pointed out that they themselves could not be everywhere at once and that the Duke and Richard, having had twenty-five minutes' clear start, might now be hidden in any one of a thousand places.

He maintained that if the capture were effected without their being present there was too great a risk that promises might be forgotten and a gun-fight ensue.

Simon argued that their friends were now unarmed but Rex refused to risk their being harmed. In the shadows on the rooftops, he pointed out, the Spanish police might easily make some fatal mistake. Much better keep the block surrounded so that the fugitives could not escape, and order a systematic search by daylight in the morning.

Still arguing the two went downstairs but it was quite clear to the listeners on their beds of dust that Rex's stand against immediate action had saved them for the time being. Both felt it was safer to stay where they were rather than risk being surprised by a further visit, so they made the best of the hard floor by turning over on their stomachs and with their heads on their dirty pillows drifted off to sleep.

A little after six Richard woke and roused the Duke. They talked over the situation in the light of the scraps of conversation they had heard and agreed, in view of Simon's feeling that they would be certain to get away during the night, that the watchers had most probably been withdrawn, with the exception of those on the front door.

Police were urgently needed for hundreds of special duties so it was hardly likely that Simon would be able to keep a considerable force kicking their heels round the block all day.

They decided that their best hope lay in a policy of masterly inactivity. There was no reason why Simon or his minions should return to the *Palacio* unless they made a room-to-room search of the entire block; the longer the fugitives could remain concealed there the more convinced would any watchers in the street become that they had escaped.

Having collected some of the food they had brought for Pédro, from the *salon*, they went down to the basement and boiled some kettles of water for a hot bath. The rest of the day they took it in turns to sleep on Pédro's bed down there, or watch.

Late that evening they rummaged through his slender wardrobe, which smelt strongly of moth-balls and garlic. His best black suit provided a change for Richard and the Duke made do with a pair of grease-stained overalls. He brushed back his dyed black hair under an old blue beret and removed the 'birthmark' from his face. Both took off their collars and Richard donned a broad-brimmed, black sombrero. Making up the discarded garments into a parcel they proceeded upstairs to visit the caretaker.

As they began to remove the barricade on the fourth floor in front of the bathroom, De Richleau said:

"It's a wonder Simon didn't spot this when he first had a look round the *Palacio*."

"Once he'd done the detective act with the cigar butts I don't suppose he bothered much," Richard replied. "He said, himself, that he was sure we hadn't lugged the gold up to the attics on account of its weight so I doubt if he went higher than our bedrooms. Even if he did, one can quite understand his missing this lot with all the windows shuttered. It's almost as dark here by day as it is by night."

"True, and it's some way from the staircase, but I don't think he can have come up so far until last night, otherwise our tracks in the dust would have given things away—and last night he was in a hurry."

Pédro was pathetically glad to see them. He had come to regard their visits as harmless but necessary to his drink supply and he was down to his last two bottles.

Now that their earlier occupation of the *Palacio* was known to Simon and the authorities, there was no point in detaining the caretaker any longer. When he heard that he was to be released he was overjoyed but his exuberant delight was a little damped when the Duke informed him that he would have to work for his freedom until the following morning. De Richleau did not want him rushing out of the *Palacio*, within ten minutes of their own attempt to escape, to inform the police of what clothes they had worn and what time they had left.

First, Pédro was made to strip and his things were removed so that he could not go out before he had fixed up some sort of garments. Next, they tied his feet and one hand with eighteen lengths of cord in a succession of nautical knots which it would take him at least an hour to unpick with his one free hand.

The Duke then presented him with five thousand *pesetas* in banknotes as compensation for his illegal imprisonment; also a small chisel for the purpose of cutting the lock out of the door when they had fastened it behind them on their departure. The chisel was left on a shelf so that Pédro could not get at it until he had untied his bonds and they reckoned it would be a good six to eight hours before he could give the police any particulars about them.

Night had fallen by the time they crawled out of the skylight on to the roof. De Richleau had no hesitation about the place he wanted to make for. On his first reconnaissance he had noted a tradesman's lift at the back of a building which faced on to one of the streets at right angles to the *Paseo de Recoletos*, but progress was slow as the one thing he hated was heights.

It took them an hour to reach their objective with Richard clutching the Duke's arm. He was in a muck sweat the whole time and swore he could never have done it if he had had to pass so near to those terrifying gulfs in daylight.

The tradesman's lift descended to a small court. Richard was scared that his friend would be overcome by vertigo while climbing down the frail iron framework of which it was constructed but De Richleau shook his head.

"I'm quite all right as long as I've something to cling to," he said. "The worst part of the job's over for me unless we run into trouble down below."

He sat down, gripped the nearest metal strut firmly and swung himself out to one of the thin, perpendicular girders; Richard followed, seizing the

other. It was hard on their palms and fingers as they went down hand-over-hand but they reached the bottom safely three minutes later.

To their joy they found there was no necessity to break into the lower floor of the building in order to get through to the street, for a covered alleyway led from one side of the courtyard to it.

They took the plunge like old-fashioned bathers, one toe at a time. Edging along the alley they gained its corner and stood there for a little while in the shadow thrown by the arch, observing the people in the street.

All of them were passers-by, which seemed a good sign; watchers would almost certainly have been stationary. They could not see either of the corners clearly but decided to risk someone being on the look-out for them there. At a sign from the Duke they braved anything that was to come and, stepping quickly on to the pavement, walked smartly down it.

There was a man on the corner and, displaying his *Seguridad* badge, he challenged them to show their papers. They produced their C.N.T. Party cards, of which Simon had no knowledge, and after a cursory glance the detective allowed them to pass.

In the *Calle Alva* the garage-owner looked at them suspiciously on account of their altered appearance but, after a word with him, they undid their bundle and changed back into their former clothes; De Richleau making himself up again as Hypolite Dubois.

It was necessary that they should reappear at Valmojado as the people there had always known them, but Pédro had never seen them in this guise and the Duke knew that he would describe them to the police as he had seen them last—dressed in his own clothes which they were now abandoning.

One thing worried De Richleau greatly—the loss of their weapons—and he asked the man at the garage if, by any chance, he could supply the deficiency.

“Madrid’s lousy with firearms these days,” the man replied, “what with those the Reds take off our people and those our people snitch from dead Reds. Any preference as to make?”

“No,” smiled the Duke. “Anything which will take 9mm. ammunition.”

The man went upstairs and returned a few minutes later with a brace of Mausers. “Take these,” he said, “and use them to drill holes through as

many of the brutes as you can. They got my boy two nights ago and I'm only waiting to be relieved of this job before I have a cut at them."

On the way to Valmojado they noticed several cars abandoned on the roadside and, in one place, a small private firing party blazed off at some unfortunate, just before they reached an open field where unauthorized executions were taking place.

Near the first building of Valmojado they were challenged. Some Militiamen were now on picket duty there under a soldier in the uniform of the Regular Army. They were so used by now to producing the fake C.N.T. cards that they almost slipped up. To have done so in Valmojado, where they were known as Don Riccardo and Comrade Hypolite Dubois, might have proved fatal.

They recovered their wits just in time. At the sight of the foreign passports there was some argument amongst the men but the Revolution was now nine days old and the sympathies of the other European countries already known in Spain. Italy, Germany and Portugal were definitely pro-insurgent; Russia, France and Britain in favour of the legally elected Government. The travellers were clearly nationals of friendly democracies and, after a moment, the Militia hailed them as comrades. There was much raising of clenched fists and cries of *Salud*, to which they duly responded before driving on.

In the square they found lines of horses tethered to the trees and an odd assortment of wagons. Every room in the little hotel, which had evidently been taken over as Headquarters, was blazing with light and groups of armed Government supporters were standing about, talking together.

It was just midnight when they reached the factory and old Jacinto had serious news for them. After a week of licence the wilder spirits among the factory hands had calmed down and the others were sick of kicking their heels doing nothing. None of them knew what they were striking for and all of them wanted to be paid their last week's wages although they had done no work.

That morning, being a Monday, they had gradually congregated in the main yard and eventually a deputation of them had gone off to interview Coello and Jacinto. In the absence of the factory owner, the manager had offered to agree to any reasonable terms the men put forward, but the trouble was they refused to state any terms.

Their leader, Matias Falcon, was a Syndicalist and for years past it had been part of the policy of the Spanish Syndicalist groups that they would not agree to *any* binding terms with their employers. They were not Communists and lived at daggers drawn with Stalin's followers; Trotsky being their patron saint. Actually the Syndicalists were near-Anarchists by faith but were not prepared to carry individualism to its logical conclusion of destruction of *all* order.

They were at one with the Anarchists in wishing to abolish all forms of Central Government and Local Authority, but prepared to combine among themselves in taking over and running separate factories or large estates on the lines of the original Workers' Soviets. Matias Falcon was urging his followers among the men to sling out the owner's representatives and start working the aluminium plant for their own profit.

Jacinto had stalled off any decision by pointing out that the supplies of raw material had to be obtained before goods could be manufactured and that when they were manufactured somebody had to sell them before there would be any money to pay wages. Such matters could not be carried out by poorly-educated factory-hands like themselves, and so some sort of managerial staff must be retained for that purpose, if for no other. A good proportion of the workers were with him and, after a prolonged discussion, it had been decided to call a meeting of all hands for ten o'clock the following morning.

The situation was an extremely grave one. If Matias Falcon succeeded in his designs the workers would be certain to take over the stock as well as the plant. There was no possible way of moving the gold at such short notice and, unless something drastic were done, it looked as if Lucretia's millions would be distributed over half Government-held Spain and that, during the next few weeks, many a housewife, all unknown to herself, would be cooking in pots and pans worth more than all her other possessions put together.

If that happened it would be impossible to trace each separate article, even when peace was restored, and the Coralles fortune would be irretrievably lost.

"How much work is there still to be done?" asked the Duke.

"We have been at it twelve days, Señor," Jacinto replied. "The camouflaging of the gold is nearly finished. Let us say, another two nights

for that. But there is much painting still to be done; it will be another week at least before all is completed.”

“It doesn’t matter about the men coming back to work and they’re welcome to any profits they can make but somehow or other we’ve got to keep them out of the sheds,” De Richleau said quickly. “I see there are troops now in the town and Regulars among them. D’you think that, at a pinch, we might persuade either them or the police to put a guard on our property?”

Jacinto’s gold earrings glinted in the light from the furnace as he shook his fine old head. “I doubt it, Señor. The column only arrived this evening and they are mostly Marxists. Their first act was to shoot the officers of the *Guardia* and compel the rest to take a new oath of the Republic.”

The Duke and Richard had had plenty of sleep during the last twenty hours so they stripped off their coats and set to work on their pot-painting, but it was a gloomy session and they were no less depressed when they crawled into their camp beds six hours later.

On Tuesday morning the meeting called for 10.30 was well attended. Owing to the principle, now running through Government Spain like an infection, that everyone should have a finger in everyone else’s business, any number of people came along who had nothing whatever to do with the factory; among them Lieutenant Mudra, a broad-shouldered, square-faced man who was in command of the column of Militia, and a dozen or so of his men.

Coello had funkled it and two of his clerks who had turned up kept in the background so, at first, it looked as if the matter were to be argued out between Falcon and Jacinto with the backing of their respective factions.

All but the secret squad were greatly surprised when Richard and De Richleau put in an appearance. Both of them knew that by showing themselves at all they were running into considerable danger. If tempers ran high it was extremely probable that there would be a fight and, as Falcon was reported to have the majority of the men with him, there was a sporting chance that they would decide to lynch the factory-owner and his interpreter.

Actually they had planned their entrance to the yard with great care and had timed it, by watching from an upper window of the office buildings, to coincide with the high spot of Falcon’s first general appeal for the support

of the assembled crowd. Directly they were noticed interest was immediately deflected from the orator to them and he suddenly dried up just as he was getting the men really interested.

Once they had been recognized Richard and the Duke strode forward beaming all over their faces as they raised their clenched fists high in the air and cried loudly:

“Salud! Salud! Oo-archie-pay! Oo-archie-pay!”

This took the wind completely out of the sails of the extremist who were preparing to boo them, while the more moderate men enthusiastically took up their cry and gave them a smiling welcome. For the moment there was no question of lynching. On the contrary, with smiles, handshakes, enquiries and congratulations, they played a part more suitable to a Countess opening a local charity bazaar.

It was recalled that Don... no, no, how one forgets.. *Comrade* Riccardo, had increased wages and outlined plans for the building of a workers' club during his short regime at the factory. Everyone wanted to know what adventures had happened to them and how everything had really gone in Madrid.

Comrade Hypolite stood on a barrel and made a speech in which he congratulated them on the solidarity of the workers against the iniquitous plotting of the Army Chiefs to suppress their liberties. At its end he was given a tremendous ovation and, temporarily, had the crowd in his hands. He then asked what the present meeting was about.

A dozen people all tried to tell him at once but eventually pride of place was given to Jacinto as foreman.

The old Carlist explained the situation and in doing so took the opportunity to address the assembly and point out his own views about there being two sides in making any manufacturing business a commercial success.

Matias Falcon got up to contradict him. He was a young man of not more than twenty-five, with an open face, flashing eyes and a clean-limbed body. His workman's clothes were better kept than those of the others and he spoke well. He agreed with Jacinto that a business side was necessary to any manufacturing concern but, he asked, why should not the workers themselves handle such matters? Buying and selling was not such a difficult thing. They would soon learn the ropes; particularly men like him,

who had gone to the trouble of studying at home and improving himself, as every one of them should do if their freedom was to be of any use to them.

It was only when he tackled the question of the abolition of money and the exchange of goods with other groups of Syndicalists that he lost the interest of many of his listeners.

When his harangue ended it seemed that the meeting was about equally divided but the Commander of the Militia column stepped forward and climbed on to the barrel. It was only when he was helped on to this makeshift rostrum that they noticed he was lame.

Lieutenant Mudra was a man of few words. He told them that he was a Regular Officer, thrice wounded as an N.C.O. in the Moroccan war and promoted to Commissioned rank for gallantry in the field sixteen years before. But had that got him my where? Had it Hell! He was just a lieutenant in an infantry regiment and if he'd lived to be a hundred he wouldn't have got any further. Why?

Because those something, something aristocrats who made up nine-tenths of the officers in the Spanish Army wouldn't give a chance to any man who'd risen from the ranks. For years smooth-cheeked young pups from the cadet schools, who'd never seen a shot fired in action, had been promoted over his head because they were nephews or cousins of one of the Generals, The whole system was rotten—*rotten!*

What did they intend to do about it? he asked. He'd been a royal officer until the dirty Generals betrayed the Workers. He was still a loyal officer, but to the Government of the people, and he owed his present command, not to his rank but to election, because he was the most suitable man to hold it. Men like himself meant to destroy the traitor Generals. It was up to the Workers to destroy the capitalist bosses who hid behind them, It didn't matter a cuss how they ran their factories as long as they outed the bosses. *The bosses had got to go.*

The abrupt, staccato sentences, delivered in a barrack-square voice which penetrated everywhere, by the thick-set middle-aged ex-N.C.O., had a tremendous effect and four-fifths of the crowd began to shout, "Take over the factory, Falcon! Take over the factory!"

De Richleau saw the game was going against him and that the gold, now worth nearly one hundred and twenty million *Pesetas* owing to the recent fall in the exchange, was likely to slip through his hands once and for all.

His only resource was to play for time and so, leaping on to the barrel, he shouted for the crowd to give him another hearing.

He appealed to them for fair play on behalf of the English Comrade Eaton. If they were given a little time he felt sure that matters could be arranged to the satisfaction of all parties. How, for instance, were they to carry on without money to finance the purchase of raw materials—at least to start with? Comrade Eaton's firm in Birmingham was very rich and he was anxious to help them. Given a week they could get in touch with England and make some plan to run the factory on a profit sharing basis with the workers.

"Not good enough! Not good enough!" shouted Falcon and other voices cried, "Too long! Too long!"

"All right—a few days then," pleaded the Duke. "Let Comrade Eaton see what he can do by cable and we will meet again this time to-morrow."

The crowd seemed willing to meet him on the last suggestion but Lieutenant Mudra scotched that. Lifting up his foghorn of a voice he bawled, "Comrades! My column leaves to-night and I want to see this through so they don't cheat you. Give 'er till four o'clock this afternoon and not a moment more."

Upon this the crowd broke up and the Duke, discomfited, retired with Richard to the office. It was only half-past eleven so if they had really wanted to cable to England they could have done so via Valencia and Marseilles with a reasonable chance of getting a reply before four o'clock; but there was nothing about which they could cable to anyone in England. All the same they sent a long telegram to an entirely mythical firm in Birmingham in case some spy of Falcon's in the Post Office should report that they had not done so.

The moment they were alone De Richleau explained the position fully to Richard, who exclaimed:

"How absolutely infuriating—after all the hellish work we've put in. We simply must keep the gold out of their hands somehow."

"There's only one hope now, as far as I can see," the Duke grunted. "I hate to drag Lucretia-José into this, but we've got to get hold of her and see if she can't do something."

They rang up the flat in Rios Rosas but there was no reply and the same thing happened when they tried successive calls, at intervals of twenty minutes, for the next two hours. She was obviously out and even if a telegram might have reached her through the porter of the block they dared not send on because it was certain to be read by the Post Office people in Valmojado.

For a time they discussed the idea of one of them motoring into Madrid to try to find her. Fernandez, at the little hotel in the *Calle Jardines*, where her secret office was situated, would be sure to know her whereabouts or at least where they would be most likely to find her; but they had to abandon that idea because if Richard did not appear at the afternoon meeting it would look like cowardice and De Richleau could not go because he was the only one of the two who could state their case in Spanish.

With ever-decreasing hope they persisted in ringing Lucretia's number and at last, to their sudden elation, they got a reply; but it was not Lucretia speaking. The voice was that of an ill-educated and apparently elderly woman. De Richleau asked when Lucretia would be in, but the woman did not know. He then begged her to get a simple message delivered as soon as possible: 'Syndicalists are taking over at Valmojado this afternoon.'

He made her repeat it twice, stressed the urgency of it, and hung up. It was then a quarter-past three. The Duke got a Union Jack out of one of his suitcases, they ran it up on a short flagstaff over the office block, and there was nothing more they could do.

Chapter Eighteen – The Militiaman’s Bride

By four o’clock the crowd had assembled in the big yard again and, smiling a confidence they did not feel, Richard and the Duke went out to meet them.

De Richleau said at once that they had not received a reply from Birmingham and begged for a further delay on that account, but Mudra would not hear of it. Now that he was, a last, in a position to exert his authority on a larger scale than that afforded by a solitary platoon of soldiers, he seemed to have constituted himself the supreme arbiter in this factory dispute.

The Duke then pointed to the Union Jack, hanging limp against the mast in the gruelling, windless heat, and asked them to remember that the factory was the property of a British subject. Arbitrarily to confiscate such a property was, he maintained, the worst possible statesmanship on the part of the new rulers. He proved very eloquent on the subject but Falcon said that Syndicalists took no more account of foreign Governments than they did of their own. The British workers were welcome to any property in their country owned by Spanish bosses and the sooner they took it the better. He and his mate were going to take over the plant in which they earned their living whoever owned it.

The last shot in the Duke’s locker was almost a surrender to Falcon’s demands. He said that Comrade Eaton was agreeable to the factory being run for the benefit of all by Committee, provided that owner, office staff and workers were all represented upon it. He secretly hoped that if he and Jacinto could get themselves elected to the proposed committee they might yet remain in a position to control the stock and the locked sheds by a little tactful manoeuvring. His proposal was hailed with general applause except by a few extremists and Mudra who bellowed at once:

“No! no! They’re not going to have any boss’s toadies on their committee.”

“Why not? Since they’re willing to help us?” Jacinto countered stoutly.

“Not if I can stop it,” thundered Mudra. “The bosses are cleverer than you and they’ll only cheat you if you do. I’m against it and what I say goes.”

“What’s it got to do with you?” Richard shouted.

It was a dangerous challenge but he made it because, although he could not understand much of what was being said, he could see the way things were going and knew that, now, they could only play for time in the hope that Lucretia-José had received their message and was sending them some sort of succour.

The Duke translated Richard's question with the result that Mudra became furiously angry, but many of the workers, who had not the courage to protest themselves, felt that the soldier was taking too much on himself and they backed up their *ci-devant* employer. Amongst them, strange as it appeared, were Falcon and his little group. With their Anarchist ideals they did not like anyone from outside interfering in their affairs.

Richard had set a better rabbit running than he knew, for soon the argumentative Spaniards had resolved themselves into two new camps. Very nearly all the employees at the factory in one party, and Mudra with his militiamen and a crowd of roughs from the town in the other.

They talked at the top of their voices and all at once. Many began to shout abuse at each other and De Richleau encouraged them whenever he could find an opportunity, since he did not mind if they came to blows now that he had the majority of the factory men with him.

It was in the midst of this uproar that the increasing thunder of a powerful motor caused everyone to turn towards the road. From where he was standing on a packing-case the Duke could see over the bobbing heads of the crowd. It was with mingled feelings of relief and anxiety that he saw a long-nosed racing-car, painted bright scarlet, and with the black initials F.A.I. on its bonnet, pull up with a jerk. It was Lucretia-José—and he had not bargained for her putting in a personal appearance.

She made a striking figure as she jumped out and came swiftly towards them. Her head was bare to the afternoon sunshine except for its smooth helmet of golden hair. Her short, black, pleated skirt, black tie and scarlet shirt provided a fine display of the Anarchist colours and the fact that her pretty legs were encased in top-boots somehow gave her a curious air of authority.

Walking straight into the midst of the crowd she wasted not a moment, but cried, "What's it all about, Comrades? I was passing through Valmojado and I heard there was trouble here. Wherever there's trouble—I settle it.

This is not the time for arguments. We've got to get on with the War! *Oo-archie-Pay!*"

Answering shouts echoed the proletarian battle-cry and a forest of clenched fists was thrust into the air but Mudra only gave her a curious look as he snapped:

"And who may you be?"

"Have you ever heard of *La Española Dorada*?" she cried loudly, thrusting her face up close to his.

"Can't say I have," he replied with a grin, but others in the crowd were evidently better informed. A quick whisper ran round: "It's the Golden Spaniard! *THE GOLDEN SPANIARD!* You know—the Anarchist girl they tell such extraordinary stories about."

Lucretia's exploits, as known to the Reds, were always designed to draw attention to herself in order to strengthen her position as a leader, and most of them, as retailed among the lower ranks of the Comrades, were gross exaggerations; but her picturesque personality had caught the romantic and superstitious imaginations of many Spaniards. Matias Falcon was the first to seize her hand and clasp it warmly. The other Anarchists crowded round her and some of Mudra's militiamen waved their rifles enthusiastically.

"Now, Comrades," she cried, jumping up on to the packing-case beside the Duke but completely ignoring him. "What's it all about?"

Waving the others aside she listened to Falcon's account. When he had finished she stared round in silence for a moment, an angry scowl on her fine features.

"What's this?" she suddenly burst out. "Spain! Liberty! Freedom!—in danger, and you rats stand here disputing which of you are to become the owners of a factory. Have your comrades died on the barricades that you should betray them when the work is only half done, to scramble for *pesetas* in the gutter? Shame on you! Shame!"

For five minutes she flayed them unmercifully with her tongue until their heads drooped sheepishly and none but Mudra and his militiamen could meet her eye. Then she pointed at him and cried in ringing tones:

"Look at the Comrade Lieutenant here. He and his men are on the way to the front. They go to offer their lives for things that we should count more precious than life. Passing through the square here I saw the women

who are marching in their ranks because those ranks are not full enough of men. How can any man who counts himself a man among you suffer such things to be? What sort of Spaniards are you, men of Valmojado, that you remain here grubbing for money behind a screen of Spanish women's breasts? It cannot be true! It cannot be true that you would rather have those breasts pierced and bleeding from the enemy bullets than join up yourselves. I refuse to believe that among Spanish workers such cowards exist!"

A sudden murmur of protest arose as she paused for breath. They were not cowards.... No call to arms had previously come to Valmojado.... No one had asked them to join up....

In a moment she was contrite; immeasurably distressed, leaning down to them with outstretched arms.

She had not known that.... She had wronged them sadly. ... But now was the time to show their manhood. Never had Spain been in greater need of the valour of her sons. Let those who were brave enough give their names to the Comrade Lieutenant as volunteers.

"I'll go," said a brawny workman. "So'll I," shouted another.

Lucretia-José sprang down and flung her arms round the neck of the first, kissing him on the mouth. She did the same for the second and a score of others who pressed forward, fired by her words.

De Richleau watched her without a trace of expression on his face. He loathed the sight of her giving her lips to this crowd of strangers. Yet his admiration for her was unbounded. Quite early in her devastating attack on the factory hands he had seen her game and, from that point, their brains had marched together.

With a diabolical cunning, which he was so perfectly fitted to appreciate, he knew that she was deliberately taking the only possible course to rid the factory of its most dangerous elements. When her appeal came he could, actually, have pointed out most of the men who would respond to it and join up. Not the steadies, the happily-married men and the youngsters who were keen to hold down a good job and get on. Those were the people on his side already who desired the maintenance of the law and order for which he was fighting.

This was a Civil War. No question of patriotism was involved. Only the hot-heads, the ne'er-do-wells, the troublemakers who could be swayed by

any blackguard with a subtle tongue, would chuck their lives away for a myth which, at best, could only bring them a new set of masters.

And so it proved. Twenty-two excited stalwarts linked arms with the militiamen behind the grinning Mudra. They were all men who had supported Falcon in his demand that the factory should be taken over by a workers' syndicate—but Matias Falcon himself was not among them. He too was of the 'steady' type and was a first-class workman, only dangerous to his employers on account of his political ideals.

It was he who brought an end to the jollifications by suddenly shouting: "And what about the factory? We haven't settled that."

Willing hands lifted Lucretia back on to her perch and the crowd fell silent to await her adjudication. She pointed to the flag now gently fluttering over the office building. "Friends! You see that. These works are foreign-owned. We can't afford to quarrel with countries which still hold different views from our own about property; particularly when those countries are anti-Fascist, giving us their sympathy and support. If this were a Spanish-owned place I'd know how to act. As it is, all I can do is to ensure that the owners give you a fair deal—otherwise I'll call on you to strike."

The Duke stepped forward raising his clenched fist.

"Comrade, I speak for the owner who is an English Socialist. Through me he has already offered to run the factory on a profit-sharing basis under a Committee."

"*Demonios!* What could be fairer than that?" she exclaimed and extended her hand to De Richleau, who shook it warmly. "Is the Committee elected yet?"

"Not yet," he told her.

"Who'll serve?" she said and, pointing to Falcon, added, "You for one—no shirking now!"

"Yes," he agreed. "I'm willing."

"Show your fists, men, if you want him," she appealed to the crowd.

In another five minutes it was all over. A Committee of seven had been appointed which consisted of De Richleau, Jacinto, his son Carlos, a gaunt, elderly man who was a nominee of Jacinto's, a harmless clerk from the office, dragged forward against his will, young Falcon, and his uncle who had also refrained from offering himself as a volunteer.

With such a committee the Duke still had the factory virtually in his hands and everybody now seemed satisfied. Actually it was Richard who administered the *coup-de-grace* to any rancour which might have lingered. A word from him to the Duke secured the announcement that Comrade Eaton would like to make a present of a month's wages to each of the volunteers, out of his own pocket, and he further suggested that, if the Committee were agreeable, a double portion of profits should be reserved, *pro rata*, for each of these brave comrades while they were away fighting.

This generous gesture was greeted with frenzied cheers and Lucretia signalized her approval by kissing Richard on both cheeks and the lips. Immediately afterwards Mudra caught her by the arm and cried, with a grin, "What about me?"

She shrugged. "I didn't know you'd done anything to deserve a kiss, Comrade Lieutenant."

"Ha! But think what I'm going to do to them blasted Generals," he laughed.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. "Yes," and kissed him quickly.

"That's the spirit," he cried. "You're a fine gal. Pity there aren't more like you. Now, Comrades! We must all drink a glass to the health and safe return of the new recruits."

Pulling Lucretia by the hand he led her to her car. The long-nosed racer held only two and he eased himself in beside her but they were not allowed to start the engine. The cheering mob tied ropes to the bumpers and drew them in a triumphal procession the half-mile to the inn.

In the Square the rest of Mudra's militia was congregated. Some were lounging about or sleeping; others making leisurely preparations for the next stage of their trek southwards, to Portillo twelve miles away, which was to take place in the cool of the evening.

The column consisted of about three hundred men and sixty women. There were some forty regular soldiers among them; all the rest were clad, men and women alike, in blue overalls.

De Richleau studied this formation of the new citizen army with the eye of a professional soldier. Some of the men were fine, stalwart fellows, evidently used to heavy work and capable of marching considerable distances, but he would have rejected a good third of the column as unfit for active service. So many of them were weedy, underfed youths with

little but enthusiasm to buoy them up; good enough material in a street-fight where it was just a question of kill or be killed but next to useless in an arduous campaign. Their sole equipment consisted of a rifle, bandolier and water-bottle, so its lightness would make the marching easier, but on the other hand it would mean a terribly high percentage of casualties through their lack of proper entrenching tools and steel helmets. Their lack of overcoats mattered little in these ghastly summer heats but they would feel the need of them if the war lasted more than a couple of months, or even earlier if they had to spend a few nights up in the mountains. And their boots, the most important thing to any army after its rifles, were pathetic.

Some of them had doubtless done their year's military service in the past but the majority were either too young to have been called up as yet or were of types that would have been rejected on medical grounds. This complete lack of training in at least half the force would be bound to prove an appalling handicap, and their musketry would be hopelessly ineffective except at close range. The regulars might put up a fair show but they were conscripts and not a very formidable-looking lot. Their sense of discipline had obviously suffered badly already from contact with the militiamen and would soon go to pieces altogether unless they were handled by martinets; but the authority of all officers and N.C.O.s had, naturally, been seriously undermined by the Revolution.

The Duke decided that Franco's Moors and Foreign Legionaries would soon make mincemeat of them. He felt that he could have taken on the whole boiling himself, in open country, with fifty British Tommies or German Jerries to back him.

The militia women were an equally motley crew. Quite a number were tough but staid middle-aged females, sitting quietly with their men; obviously wives of life-long Socialists and as fanatical as their husbands in their creed. A few were rugged old harridans from the markets or young women with the clear mark of the lower-class brothel; but most were fresh-faced factory girls; by no means a beautiful lot, though clean and decent-looking; just drawn into this adventure for the excitement it offered by sharp contrast to their dull, everyday lives.

All of them would probably fight like tigresses when actually in a scrap but the main value of them was their capacity for hounding on their men;

yet against that must be set the slackness, immorality and jealousies, leading to violent quarrels, that their presence with the column was bound to cause.

As the procession from the factory approached, most of those who were sprawling on the ground got to their feet, and when the car was drawn up to the inn they all began to make a clamour round it, mingling with the factory hands. Mudra stood up in the car and pulled Lucretia up beside him. Placing one arm tightly round her waist he shouted for silence and then cried loudly, "Comrades! I've brought you some new recruits. Twenty-two good fellows—and this girl here."

De Richleau and Richard, who were standing close to the car, saw Lucretia start and half-pull away from him. The announcement that she was numbered among the volunteers had evidently come as a complete and most unpleasant surprise to her. She began to speak but the cheering of the crowd round her drowned the words. At last she got a hearing.

"Comrades!" she called. "The Lieutenant is joking. I would gladly go with you but I've urgent work waiting for me in Madrid."

"No work's as urgent as fighting," shouted a young militiaman, and a great roar of approval greeted his words.

"Listen!" Lucretia cried. "I am *Le Española Dorada*, one of your leaders, and my work can be done by no one else."

There were mingled cheers and quick murmurs of interest, but Mudra challenged her immediately. "I thought you were an Anarchist?"

"I am," she nodded. "I'm a member of the F.A.I."

"Well then," he laughed, and his booming voice carried so that most of the crowd could hear. "The Anarchists don't have leaders. They're all on the same level and say that each one must tackle the most urgent job that comes to hand."

Lucretia knew that she was caught. It is an extraordinary anomaly that, although the C.N.T. and its inner body, the F.A.I., constitutes one of the most powerful Trades Unions in the world, it does not officially recognize any one of its individual members as being of more importance than any other. For years past, in order to remain consistent with their principles, the Anarchists had even refused to pay those of their members who represented them on conferences and devoted their whole time to running the great organization. Whatever Lucretia-José's actual importance might

be, officially she was only one tiny cog in the vast Anarchist machine. De Richleau, too, knew that she was caught and watched the scene with such acute anxiety that he bit his lip until the blood came.

"I'm sorry, friends," Lucretia shouted desperately, "but I can't come with you. I can't! I've got to get back to Madrid."

"She's afraid!" howled a deep-bosomed old crone, waving a shot-gun in the air. "She's afraid!"

"I'm not!" Lucretia denied the charge hotly. "I'm not afraid and I'm as keen as you, but I've got other work that must be done."

The woman spat. "Garn! Look at her lily-white skin. She's not one of us. She's the sort as sends the fellows off to get killed but hasn't the pluck to go herself."

The volunteers from the factory crowded round crying "Come on, Comrade! It's through you we joined. Who talked of cowards half an hour ago? You owe it to us to see this business through."

Lucretia looked swiftly from side to side. It was absolutely vital that she remained in Madrid to continue her secret work. No one was so well placed as she to supply her Monarchist friend with accurate information. In addition, she was well aware what sort of fate would be her lot if she were forced into going off with the column. Mudra had taken a fancy to her—that was clear enough. The whole country was, temporarily at least given over to a state of lawlessness. Outside Madrid his authority would be absolute in the places where his column halted for the night. Not a man or woman in this rabble would dare to protest and most of them would only laugh when he dragged her off into his tent or billet. Kissing a score of workmen was one thing; that was just part of her job, but the horror of a forced surrender of herself to the bull-like, middle-aged lieutenant was quite another. Even *her* courage wilted at the thought.

Mudra roared with laughter at her obvious discomfiture. "Don't worry, Comrades," he bellowed. "She's coming along all right. Best get your meal now. We move off in an hour. Before she could protest further he picked her up bodily, lifted her out of the car and carried her into the inn.

"I don't know what the idea is," Richard said suddenly "but this chap Mudra seems to be going a bit too far."

"Far!" echoed De Richleau, nearly choking with anger then he swiftly explained the mess Lucretia had got herself into by coming to their

assistance.

Richard's jaw dropped. "The swine!" he exclaimed. "But how the hell are we going to stop him? We can't take on the whole Column."

"We could join up and go with her," hazarded the Duke unhappily.

"That would mean abandoning the gold."

"Oh, damn the gold!"

"I agree. I'm beginning to hate the very sight of it; and I can quite appreciate what you must be feeling. Still, it *is* important, and she's going to be a very angry young woman if we risk it on her account when it's quite on the cards that with her quick wits she'll think of a way to wriggle out of this mess unaided."

"That's just it," muttered De Richleau miserably. "She'll never forgive me if we bungle the whole thing."

"We'll join up if you like, but I doubt if that would do much good. It's unlikely that our position to-night will be any better than it is now, and if we try to protect her when Mudra starts in on her, we'd only get shot for our pains."

The Duke nodded. "I'm afraid you're right. We must try to get her out of his hands before the Column leave Valmojado. Where's Jacinto got to?"

"He turned back as we entered the square. I saw him."

"Right. I'm going along to the factory. You stay here. Get into the inn, but for God's sake don't start anything. Just mingle with the crowd in there and keep as near to her as possible so that, at least, she has the comfort of knowing we realize what's going on. I'll be back as soon as I can."

As De Richleau turned away Richard began to shoulder his way through the press that choked the trellis-covered space before the inn door. Fortunately the bulk of the militia were now concerning themselves with their suppers. It was the factory people who blocked the way, as they had started to drink the health of the volunteers in *Valdepenas* from a cask on a near-by wagon which Mudra's Quartermaster had broached for the purpose. Richard was forced to join in the health-drinking and cash out the month's money he had promised the volunteers, which delayed him for about fifteen minutes.

At last he got into the small parlour. A dozen of Mudra's troop leaders were there munching hunks of bread and garlic moistened with olive oil. The Lieutenant was seated at the only table with Lucretia and three others.

They were half-way through a *cocido* which he had evidently had cooked for him.

It was the usual Spanish stew which the peasants serve in three courses—soup, meat, vegetables—although all the ingredients are boiled together.

Richard edged round so that Lucretia should see him. At the moment she was putting a brave face on things, joking and laughing with the other men at the table but practically ignoring Mudra. It looked as if she were playing them in the hope that they would fall for her and quarrel with Mudra on her account. Turning over the probabilities of such a development in his mind, Richard helped himself to a mug of wine from a jug near-by. He did not see that her game was likely to get her anywhere. Time was too short for her to intrigue one of the other men sufficiently for him to play a chivalrous role and fight for her to be allowed to return to Madrid. It seemed to him that she was only making a rod for her own back. The others would be keener than ever to carry her off with them in the hope that when Mudra had done with her they might be able to have a crack at her themselves.

Everyone in the smoke-filled room was talking loudly. No one took any notice of Richard, who had found a dark corner where the fading light hardly penetrated. Lucretia-José knew he was there; that was all that mattered for the moment. He watched the four eat their meat course and then the vegetables from the stew.

Time drifted on. He began to wonder what had happened to the Duke. The column would soon be moving. He had been ordered not to start anything; just to stick around and be on hand as a sort of Job's comforter; but every moment he felt more strongly that some sort of desperate action was imperative if Lucretia were to be saved from undergoing the most unpleasant experience any girl with a considerable knowledge of the world could possibly think of.

A furious irritation seized Richard at his inability to speak Spanish. If only he could have done so he felt that he might at least have gone up to the table and created some kind of diversion. Any sort of argument was quite likely to intrigue these Spaniards into delaying their departure—particularly after a heavy meal—but how could he start an argument when he was only capable of stammering such phrases as, "How much does this cost?" or "I wish my eggs to be boiled exactly four and a quarter minutes."

Outside now all was bustle and activity. Through the window he could see a corner of the square. Covers were being drawn over the wagons and horses harnessed up. The militia were making their last preparations for the evening march.

In the parlour Mudra and the others were hacking into a lump of strong-smelling goat's-milk cheese that had been placed on the table. The room was gradually emptying as one troop leader after another left it to see that his detachment was ready for the road. Richard leaned against the wall in his corner. He reckoned that it must be almost an hour since De Richleau had left him. Why the hell didn't he come back or at least send him a written message by Jacinto or one of the others? Lucretia-José was still flirting with the men at the table. Obviously she was playing for time in the hope that some plot was on foot to prevent her being carried off. She glanced covertly at Richard now and again, evidently expecting him to do something. But what could he do? Except draw his Mauser and shoot Mudra where he sat.

That wouldn't do much good, he thought. They all carried pistols and Richard had no illusions as to how they would use them. He would be riddled with bullets before he could kill any of the others. In his mind he began to plan a hold-up.

If he could scare the men into sitting still under the threat of his gun for a few minutes Lucretia might be able to slip away through the back-entrance of the inn. How far she would get without being discovered was extremely problematical. If only the Duke were there he might accompany her and cover her retreat, but all alone it seemed unlikely that she would get clear away. Still, anything was better than to allow her to be forcibly abducted without lifting a finger. Even if he accompanied the column, as the Duke had at first suggested, it was unlikely that another situation so suitable as the present one would present itself that night, and to-morrow... to-morrow it wouldn't make quite so much difference to Lucretia what anyone did. It was clear that De Richleau loved her so no risk was too great to take that might save her.

The men at the table stood up and went out with laughing salaams to '*La Española Dorada*' who remained seated with Mudra.

'That's a spot better,' thought Richard. 'There's only him left to deal with now—except the people outside.'

He was alone in the room with them but appeared almost unconscious of their presence since he stared out of the window while he slowly drank his wine. Mudra was much too interested in the girl to take any notice of the solitary drinker.

One of the troop leaders returned and casually reported the column all ready to move off. As he left the room with a perfunctory salute Mudra got to his feet and grinned down at Lucretia. "Little Comrade—the column waits."

"Let it wait—or march," she cried with sudden venom, "I'm not coming!" and springing up she grabbed an empty bottle by its neck.

With one swift dive he caught her wrist and gripped it so violently that she dropped the bottle with a sharp squeal of pain.

"Oh, yes—you are, my pretty!" he guffawed. "We've got an easy evening's trek, no silly ceremonies about a Communist wedding to delay us—and we sleep to-night at Portillo."

Chapter Nineteen – Back into the Maelstrom

Richard had left it until the very last moment. Never in his life had he had less desire to start a riot. The hideously unpleasant fact that there were the best part of four hundred armed people outside, all of whom would come dashing to Mudra's assistance at the first call, was never out of his mind for an instant.

If the Duke had been with him he did not see that two of them, any more than one, could have materially altered the situation. Even if De Richleau were urgently employed in collecting Jacinto, his squad and any other factory workers they could persuade to come with them, what chance would such a handful stand against this whole column of Militia?

With a little sigh Richard turned to face the struggling group at the table. Definitely making up his mind to intervene before Lucretia started on her enforced journey was, perhaps, the bravest thing he had ever done. Marie-Lou would have been immensely proud of him if she had known all the circumstances and seen him walk slowly but deliberately forward with a smile on his face.

"Excuse me, Comrades," he said quietly.

Mudra turned and threw him an angry scowl. "What do you want?" he shouted in Spanish, still gripping Lucretia-José by the wrist.

"A few words with the Señorita," said Richard in English.

"He wants to thank me for having settled things at his factory," Lucretia said as though translating.

Seeing that Mudra did not understand English, Richard went on smoothly, "I'm sorry my friend's not here but he left me to look after you."

Lucretia managed a smile. "Bless you for your courage! But I've made a mess of things. I'm afraid there's nothing you can do."

"Yes, there is. I've got a gun in my pocket and I can send this brute bumping down to hell."

"No! If I could have laid him out with that bottle the others would only have laughed. Shooting's different. I've got a gun too but I'm not using it—yet."

"If I shot him you could bolt for it out of the back door. I could hold off his friends for a few..."

“*Cara-pe!*” cut in Mudra, suddenly converting a filthy expletive into a harmless one. “Get back to your blasted factory! Can’t you see you’re not wanted here?”

Richard smiled at him, deliberately misunderstanding the angry order to clear out that his tone conveyed. Lucretia was speaking urgently. “For God’s sake, don’t try anything. Those devils out there would shoot you to pieces in two minutes. Killing him wouldn’t save me and things are bad enough without having the blood of a brave man like you on my head.”

“We must sort this somehow,” Richard said firmly. “I’d never be able to look at my face in a mirror again if I let him take you out of here.” His eyes gazed straight into hers and in that instant they knew that they were friends for all time. From their first meeting he had considered her strikingly attractive but now he really understood something of what De Richleau saw in her. She was splendidly courageous and vital and fine.

His hand went to his pocket. “Don’t do it,” she pleaded. “Don’t...”

“Drop that woman’s arm!” The sharp order came from the doorway. In the intensity of the moment they had been deaf to all but each other’s words. No sound of footsteps had reached them but Cristoval Ventura stood there and De Richleau was behind him.

From the sudden tension between Lucretia and Richard, Mudra had sensed trouble and had stepped back. Now he swung round and bellowed, “Who the thundering hell are you?”

Cristoval advanced into the room. His face was deadly white, his black eyes staring. “My name’s Ventura and I’m a member of the Secretariat of the T.U.C.”

“I don’t take orders from the T.U.C.,” growled Mudra.

“You will in this case,” Cristoval snapped. “The Government does what the T.U.C. tells it these days. We *are* the Government and there’s no higher authority than the Secretariat.”

“So what?”

“Are you prepared to accept my orders or do I take you outside and have you shot?”

Mudra laughed. “That’s a pretty story. I could eat a little chap like you. And what about the men of my Column? It’s you who’d be up against a brick wall if I gave a nod.”

“What are the men of your Column going out to fight for? That the men and women of Spain may be *free!* How does that square with their Commander’s dragging off a young woman who’s unwilling? You’re disgracing the army of the people and they’ll see it quick enough after I’ve talked to them for about half a minute. What’s more, I’ve got two lorry-loads of *Asaltos* with machine-guns outside. Quite enough to deal with you and any of your personal friends who may make trouble.”

“Well, well,” Mudra changed his tone. “I’m not saying you’d have the best of it but we don’t want a private war, Comrade. What’s your interest in this girl?”

“That she’s doing work of the first importance for the Republic.”

The Lieutenant shrugged. “I thought she was just kidding about that and only needed a little persuasion to join up. Anyway, there’s no harm done and none intended.”

“Good. Then you’d better march your Column off.”

With quiet deliberation Mudra gathered up his field-glasses, haversack and torch. He nodded cheerfully to Lucretia and said, “If you ever get tired of office work and want to see a bit of fighting, girlie, remember me. I like your face and I like your spirit. I could always find room in my bed for one like you.” Dragging his game leg slightly he walked out of the room.

Richard caught De Richleau’s eye. The Duke was beckoning imperatively from the passage-way. Cristoval was staring at Lucretia so Richard slipped behind him and went out, leaving the two alone together.

Suddenly Lucretia broke down. She put one hand up to her face and burst into tears. In two strides Cristoval reached her and took her in his arms.

“*Querida! Querida!*” he murmured. “It’s all right now. There’s nothing to be afraid of—nothing. Oh, my love, my love.”

She smiled through her tears as she leant against him. “I’m sorry. It’s absurd to give way like this. I’m not usually scared, but—but...”

“There! There, my sweet,” he kissed her feverishly. “It’s men like this Lieutenant who brings shame on us. They do endless damage to our cause by providing the sort of dirt the foreign journalists like to write about, so that half the world thinks we’re barbarians. But there aren’t many like him really and we’re getting them under control. He’s gone now, anyway.”

“Oh, no, he’s not,” came a harsh voice from the doorway. Mudra was framed in it scowling at them as they stood cheek pressed to cheek.

“Come back for me map-case,” he added abruptly, and striding over he picked it up from under a chair. Before going out again he paused to look at Cristoval. “What did you say your name was? Ventura, isn’t it? All right, Comrade Secretary Ventura. We’ll be meeting again some time I don’t doubt.”

When he had gone Lucretia dried her tears and said, “Well, I suppose we must be getting back to Madrid.”

“I came out in one of the lorries,” Cristoval volunteered, “But I see your car’s outside. I’ll drive you if you like.”

“Thanks, my dear. I would like. But first I must find Mr. Eaton to thank him for standing up for me. He was on the very point of getting himself shot on my account when you came in.”

“Yes. I want a word with that French interpreter of his, too. What’s his name—Dubois.”

They went out of the inn together. The Militia column was moving off. Mudra at its head was already out of sight, having turned into a street leading from the Square. The strangely-assorted collection of army and civilian wagons followed; batches of the Militia, men and women mixed, marched raggedly between them without any attempt at military formation. The volunteers from Valmojado made up a squad. They had now been served out with equipment like the others; a rifle, bandolier, waterbottle and suit of blue overalls apiece. Their rifles had been decorated with coloured ribbons by the local girls and a number of these were pressing last-minute presents upon them; buttons and brooches with the sickle and hammer to put in their blouses or caps.

For a second Lucretia’s heart seemed to turn to water as she watched them go. She had sent them; and how many of them would come back? Certainly not all, probably only a handful, and those would now be marked men; work for the execution-squads of the victorious Generals as they relentlessly mopped up all who had borne arms against them in town after town. She had sent these men, now laughing like schoolboys setting out on a spree, to their deaths. They had never harmed her and the thought of what she had done appalled her utterly.

Yet in a moment another thought came to restore her balance. This very evening, far to the north and south, other squads of townsmen and villagers with beribboned rifles were marching out. They too were innocent of any crime which might justify a cutting short of their lives, but they wore swastikas and Crosses instead of hammers and sickles on the brooches in their caps. Those of the Sickle must die in order that those of the Cross should live.

She glanced at Cristoval. His dark eyes were flashing and he smiled with pride as the Column marched out. Not pride in their martial glory, for they had none, but pride in the spirit that animated this ragged band and made it possible for them to go forth so fearlessly against the trained troops of the enemy. For him it was just as necessary that those of the Cross should die in order that those of the Sickle should live.

Lucretia recalled his words spoken on that day less than a month ago, yet already seeming half a lifetime away, when they had first met at Simon Aron's. "It means a fight to the finish— victory or death." And so it was proving. The whole nation was roused so that there could no longer be any hope of a quick ending. Poor Spain was to be purged; purged as terribly as she herself had purged the Netherlands during the Reformation.

The Militia shouted, the girls waved, the townsfolk cheered; the last heavily-loaded wagon passed out of the Square. Cristoval and Lucretia looked round for Comrade Dubois and Richard Eaton; they were nowhere to be seen among the dispersing crowd.

"They're probably on their way back to Madrid," Lucretia suggested, suddenly realizing that the two friends had probably disappeared for their own good reasons.

"How would they do that?" Cristoval asked. "There's hardly a private car left that hasn't been commandeered."

"They probably got a lift from someone passing through."

"That's about it. Dubois said something about their having a look round here to see how things were outside the capital. I expect they came out on a lorry this morning. Let's see if we can catch them."

By the time the red racer was roaring out of Valmojado towards Madrid, Richard and the Duke, who had slipped off deliberately to avoid possible questions, were settling down in the small room above the office at the factory.

“Well, ‘all’s well that ends well,’” Richard was saying. “But it was mighty lucky you found him in when you telephoned the Palace Hotel. He would never have got out here in time otherwise and I’d be as dead as cat’s-meat by now.”

De Richleau nodded. “Yes. I’m sorry I had to leave you to hold the fort all that time, but it was essential that I should go out to the edge of the town and wait for him, so that I could explain what was going on.”

“Lucretia settled the trouble here for us all right.”

“True. But you see what this party’s cost us?”

“You mean having to disclose to Cristoval that we were out here in Valmojado?”

“That’s it. He thinks we were just here for the day. But he’s only to mention having seen us here to Simon and all our hard work’s gone for nothing. Simon knows we’re not in Spain as a pair of goggled-eyed trippers and he’d never let a piece of information like that pass. He’d be out here under the hour with squads of police, to investigate, and the very first person he questioned in Valmojado would lead him straight down here to the factory. The last and most vital of my *culs-de-sac* has now been broken down.”

“Then we may as well consider our goose as cooked.”

“That’s just about it,” agreed the Duke. “But the bird is not yet out of the oven and even then it’s got to be dished up. Lucretia’s escape will be hot news to Cristoval for the next few days and whenever he mentions it we’re pretty certain to come into the story. But fortunately he’s a busy man and so can’t have much time for gossip. There’s just a chance that Simon may not hear what happened at first hand and learn nothing of the part we played. Anyhow, our only course is to hope for that and push on with the job.”

On the Wednesday normal work started at the factory again and the new Committee held its first session. The two Syndicalists, Matias Falcon and his uncle, proved irritating rather than really troublesome to deal with. Quite logically they maintained that the Committee was now the employer at the factory but, with a logic that seemed less sound, that although they were members of the Committee they would not be held responsible for any of its decisions because their creed forbade them to make any bargains with employers, and the Committee was now an employer.

However, when it came down to business they were severely practical. They did not demand absurdly short hours or fantastic wage increases which would have killed all profit. On the contrary they were insistent that all slackers should be kicked out and workers wasteful of material must be warned that if they did not take better care of the common property they must go.

De Richleau soon saw that these men knew what they wanted and, given a fair chance to learn the business end of manufacturing, would unquestionably run the show most economically and at a better profit than it had ever made under the capitalist system. He and they were poles apart on many other matters but in this he gave them his ungrudging admiration, with the feeling that if only all their class were as keen, capable and unselfish, rule of Soviets might be no bad thing. As it was, he did not have to recall the Madrid mobs to reinforce the conviction of years that in practice Soviets were quite unworkable.

His own position was an absurdly easy one as he was not representing an owner who had his property and his livelihood at stake, but one who did not care who got the factory and its profits once the treasure in it had been removed. In consequence he was able to let Falcon have his own way on all major counts and only stood out on minor points, such as retaining the keys, which were of little apparent significance.

The next few days were ones of grave anxiety for the Duke and Richard. At any moment they expected to hear a car draw up and see Simon's narrow head and sloping shoulders pop out; but the secret night sessions went on undisturbed. Jacinto's squad was tiring now. Their sunken faces and irritable tempers showed the terrible strain they had been put to of working for so many days with insufficient sleep in the atrocious heat, but they laboured grimly on; cursing each other for clumsiness one moment and encouraging each other the next.

Jacinto was as good as his word. In the early hours of Thursday morning the last of the eight-hundred-odd bars of gold was melted down and went into the bottoms of some cake tins; the last sawdust-lined box in which the bullion had been packed was consumed in the furnace.

From that point all hands could be employed in the painting. By the week-end De Richleau felt considerably more optimistic as, so far, there had been no sign of Simon. The men, too, although almost on their last

legs, were better tempered for seeing the end of their arduous undertaking in sight and knowing that they were on the last lap of a job which would bring them not only a princely reward but a great satisfaction.

By Wednesday night the job was done, but Richard and De Richleau were not there to witness its completion. Knowing the work would be finished that night the Duke had decided to waste no time in making arrangements for the next stage in the itinerary he had planned for the Coralles fortune.

He had announced to Matias Falcon and the rest of the Committee that now the Government were undertaking the organization of a great Citizen Army, they would certainly require large quantities of cooking utensils. A special price might have to be quoted but it would be well worth cutting profit if they could pull off a really big deal. He was in touch with certain people buying for the Army; particularly a man, now in Madrid, from Alicante who was negotiating the purchase of various stores for the forces that were being raised there.

The Syndicalists had swallowed this bait, hook, line and sinker, giving 'Comrade' Dubois full permission to go ahead and pull off the sale if he could. That ensured there being no trouble with the workmen if a considerable portion of the stock were suddenly to be removed from the factory premises. It now remained to transfer the goods to Alicante after which there should be no great difficulty in getting them loaded on to a British ship. The manner of their transport to the coast was the real problem, and De Richleau was relying on Lucretia-José to help him out in that. It meant another visit to Madrid to fix things up with her.

The two conspirators did not at all relish the idea of this trip into the Capital, as there were now far too many people there who might see them and ask awkward questions, but it was just one of those things that had to be done. De Richleau knew the risk when he climbed into the small Citroën on the Wednesday evening but he hardly thought he was leaving Valmojado never to return.

Chapter Twenty – Just Sheer Bad Luck

For this expedition the Duke had borrowed Jacinto's Sunday-go-to-meeting suit, minus tie and collar, while Richard had borrowed that of Basilio, who was nearer his size. At the garage in the *Calle Alva* they changed into these, Richard shedding his attire as the sporting Englishman and the Duke the cheap French gaberdines in which 'Comrade' Dubois had always gone about. In addition he removed his birthmark and smarmed back the black swathe of hair that he had recently worn plastered across his forehead. After the transformation had been effected it was unlikely that anyone who had seen De Richleau as Dubois would know him again, and their stuffy black suits, relieved only by coloured and heavily fringed silk sashes at their waists, changed their appearance sufficiently to prevent either of them from being spotted by Simon or Rex except at close quarters.

They went straight to the little hotel in the *Calle Jardines* as the most likely place to find Lucretia. She was not there but Fernandez told them that they would find her at the *Café Roma*, which was practically the only big café that had reopened.

Avoiding the lights as far as possible they made their way to the *Calle Ayala* and along to the café. After a moment they saw Lucretia seated at a table inside with two other girls and five men.

"We'll have to go in so she can see us," murmured the Duke and, keeping their hats well pulled down over their eyes, they walked through to a table near the wall where, if they sat sideways, comparatively few people would be facing them.

It was ten minutes before Lucretia became aware of their presence and nodded almost imperceptibly but she did not leave her table to join them.

The café was doing good business and the coloured shirts of the Popular Front men made it a gay sight. Most of them and their women were hatless and armed but they seemed a good-humoured lot and did not attempt to interfere with the numerous civilians sitting tie-less but otherwise in ordinary clothes.

Lucretia's party was a gay one. They talked and laughed incessantly and showed no signs of breaking up, but De Richleau decided that the only

thing to do was to stay there till they did. His main fear was that Cristoval might come in and join them. If that occurred and he recognized them, in spite of their rusty black, the young Socialist might prove most embarrassingly inquisitive, particularly about the sudden disappearance of the Duke's birthmark.

Fortunately Cristoval did not appear but it was a long and dreary wait, occasioning the consumption of innumerable coffees and cognacs, before Lucretia's friends called for their reckoning, and even when they did leave she left with them.

"Is it any good our sitting on?" asked Richard with a yawn.

"Yes, she'll come back," De Richleau nodded and he proved right although it was another twenty minutes before she came in again and, greeting them with apparent surprise, sat down beside them.

"I'm so sorry I've kept you so long," she said softly. "But I didn't dare come and talk to you while that crowd were here and I had rather a job in getting away from them. One of the men was just a bit tight and wanted to sleep with me."

Richard smiled. "I suppose your job entails your putting up with quite a number of those sorts of proposals."

The café was emptying and all the tables near them were vacant now so they could talk in low voices without any risk of being overheard.

"Yes," she shrugged. "But it doesn't mean a thing to me now. I've developed a special technique for dealing with it. I'm terribly sympathetic but the faithful kind, and the only man who can make me feel a single thing is at present in South America. They always fall for that one. It was different with Mudra, though, and I'm most terribly grateful to you both."

Please don't think another thing about it," Richard murmured. "The only thing that worried us was that Simon might get on to our being in Valmojado, via Cristoval."

"I know. It nearly turned my golden locks to silver. I had no chance to tell either of you the other day, but your friend Simon has converted himself into a sort of gold-hunting bloodhound and mine heads his list of missing fortunes."

De Richleau chuckled. "We learnt that during our last visit to Madrid. In fact we had quite an entertaining chat with him when he called on us unexpectedly at your *Palacio*."

“Don’t underrate his ability,” Lucretia said gravely. “He’s an extraordinarily intelligent person.”

“My dear, you never said a truer thing. That’s why we’ve been so worried. If he learnt we’d even been seen in Valmojado he’d be out there inside thirty minutes. You see, he knows it was we who spirited away your millions.”

“I gathered that. And for that reason I’ve moved Heaven and earth to isolate Cristoval from him all this past week. It hasn’t been easy because they like each other; but fortunately Cristoval likes me rather more. I’ve been positively unmaidenly in my demands for his exclusive company every moment he’s not working or sleeping since the Valmojado trouble. He’s on duty, of course, this evening.”

“I like Cristoval,” said the Duke smoothly. “He’s a decent fellow even if he is a Bolshevik. I hope you haven’t found entertaining him too irksome.”

Lucretia flushed and quickly changed the conversation by asking, “What brings you here to-night?”

“We haven’t had a chance to see you alone since we got the stuff to Valmojado. Now, the job is done, or will be before morning, so we shall need your help again for the next move. Unless you have any other idea, I suggest shipping the goods out of the country by way of Alicante. It’s smaller than Valencia and not as Red, so there will be less likelihood of anyone attempting to commandeer our cooking-pots there. Moreover, although Valencia is forty miles nearer Madrid than Alicante as the crow flies, it’s twenty miles further off going round the coast by rail.”

“How d’you propose to get them there?”

“It’s bulk we’re up against rather than weight now. We shall need at least six and probably eight railway wagons to hold the whole consignment. We could, of course, send the stuff off from Madrid in the ordinary way but I’m very much against that as it means its passing out of our hands altogether and entails running the risk of its being split up for despatch by several trains in the main goods yard. In addition, there are far too many Red Party bosses on the look-out here for equipment for their fighting organizations.”

“Yes. I’m all against its being brought back to Madrid,” Lucretia agreed.

“Good. Then this is what I propose. The junction of Aranjuez through which the main line to Alicante passes is only twenty-five miles east of Valmojado. We must get the wagons we require shunted on to a siding

there. If you can arrange that, well and good. If not I shall try and get it done by bribery. There's nothing unusual about a manufacturer being anxious to get a big consignment of goods away quickly to fulfil a special contract and being prepared to pay the official who helps him do it. In unsettled times like these, too, nobody's going to be surprised if the manufacturer has undertaken to deliver personally and wants to travel with his stuff.

"In this way I hope that Richard and I will be able to see the whole of our pots and pans through to Alicante and so prevent any chance of some of the wagons being side-tracked or pilfered. Once we're in Alicante we go a hundred percent. British, and with the British Consul behind us, arrange for these British-owned goods to be shipped out of Spain in a British ship. There's no reason at all for the Customs people to be the least suspicious. In fact, they should be pleased rather than otherwise that a fine export order is going out, as it means badly needed money coming into Spain. Your part is to supply us with lorries for the twenty-five-mile run from Valmojado to Aranjuez. If you could let us have twenty we could move the lot in two shifts, but if you can only arrange for ten it means four trips and a two-day job."

Lucretia shook her head sadly. "My dear friend, what you ask is impossible. Three weeks ago I had the whole resources of *La Renovacion Española* to call upon. Even Army transport could be used for our secret work, as you know. Then, I could have got you a special train if you had needed one but now I doubt if I could raise two lorries for you, let alone ten."

"That's bad luck!" muttered the Duke. "I realized, of course, that a certain portion of your organization here must have been mopped up but I thought it would still be functioning."

"It is—underground. Most of our friends in the garrison were sacrificed, quite uselessly, by Fanjul, which was a sad blow, and we lost a lot of good men in the street fighting. We're losing them constantly through police raids and the hundreds of murders that occur each night, but that doesn't affect the fact that at least a third of Madrid's population is still anti-Red."

"The so-called Fifth Column of General Franco?"

She nodded. "We're working like stevedores to prepare them for a rising when the time comes but all the same we can't move freely any more."

Practically every private car was commandeered within four days of the outbreak. Half the fools know so little about motors they've simply run them till they've seized up and then pinched others. That's why you see abandoned cars in every street. The case with lorries is little better. I could easily get the permits and the men but I can't possibly use C.N.T. lorries for the job and I simply can't think where you'd get others now."

"I suppose we'll have to use horse transport then," De Richleau said. "But that's going to make things infinitely more difficult. The twenty-five miles to the railway would be nothing for lorries, but with mules and horses..."

"Besides, think of the number of vehicles we'd want," Richard broke in. "We'd have a column a mile long and innumerable questions to answer in every village through which we passed with all these blasted Committees everywhere."

"I know," the Duke frowned. "I don't like it a bit. There must be some better way. We'll have to leave it until I've had a little time to think things out."

"Naturally I'd have liked to have it out of the country," Lucretia said slowly, "but at least it's safe where it is now. And that's the great thing."

"Yes, it's safe enough. No one could possibly guess what those pots and pans conceal unless they knew of our association with the gold in the first place. Besides there're seven of us to keep an eye on it at the factory and the new Committee precludes any further trouble with the workers. Give me a day or two to think it over and we'll find a method of transporting it to Aranjuez yet."

"How are things going otherwise?" asked Richard.

"As well as can be expected," Lucretia replied. "Russia is naturally throwing her weight against us but the help we are receiving from the other Dictator countries should balance that. The British and American Governments would both be with us too, I think, if they were not quite so scared of their Labour groups. Everybody wants to have a finger in everyone else's pie these days, and every Democratic country's got its minorities which hamper clear-cut policies. The old rulers used to know what they wanted and get on with the job but, somehow, lately the world seems to have got into a shocking mess."

“That’s largely owing to the decentralization of Governments,” remarked the Duke. “The more the world is split up into separate independent states, the greater the trouble which must inevitably result. Each state endeavours to achieve its own selfish ambitions at the expense of its neighbours. Tariff barriers go up, emigration laws make it impossible for the highly-populated states to disperse their surplus millions into the vast barren areas which could easily support them, and the free exchange of enlightened thought between different peoples tends to become interrupted.”

Richard nodded. “That’s happening even inside the British Empire. During the Victorian age it prospered enormously and no one can say that its peoples were governed harshly. We made money out of our overseas territories but we put our profits back into them and more, we did an immense amount to suppress barbarous customs, prevent tribal wars and bring civilization to countless millions of backward people. Now, a succession of spineless Governments has betrayed their trust. The Empire’s being allowed to disintegrate into a number of separate entities. Some bits of it, like Egypt and the Irish Free State, have broken away altogether, others have gained this thing called ‘Independence,’ but at what a price! Instead of being fully one with us they make their own treaties and have their own representatives. It sounds all right but the day’ll come when these young nations’ll have to face the results of their independent policies.”

“You’re right there,” agreed the Duke. “The fear of foreign aggression is growing in them. They can still look to the Homeland for support if they are attacked, but they will no longer be able to count on the whole undivided backing of the old Empire. In many instances their interests run counter to each other. In some there are Socialist Governments which may decide on peace at any price unless they are attacked themselves. That they should deal with their own internal problems is wise and just, but a great Imperial parliament to which they could all have sent representatives should have been established, so that on Imperial questions the Empire could have maintained its solidarity. Unity is strength, division weakness. There was sound sense in the old Roman symbol of the *fasces*—a bundle of sticks tied together.”

The café was almost empty. Lucretia beckoned to the waiter to bring two more coffees. “Go on,” she said to the Duke. “What would you suggest then?”

He shrugged. “Unfortunately we can’t put the clock back, but a few determined statesmen might stop the rot that has permeated the world since the Great War.”

“How?”

“By refusing to countenance the absurd claims of small minorities. I mentioned Rome just now. No one can say that the Romans were an ignorant or barbarous people, but they stood no nonsense. They ruled from the borders of Scotland to the Persian Gulf and where they ruled they maintained the *Pax Romana*. There were occasional revolts in their frontier provinces but, under them, no wars brought misery to the people of France, Spain, Italy, the Balkans, Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, or even distant Britain for centuries. Latin was the common tongue of all educated people, and whatever their birthplace they could exchange ideas with equal ease in Bath, Budapest, or Baghdad. They did not think in the narrow confines of nationality but as Roman citizens who owned the civilized world between them. The Isis-worshippers, the Christians and the Manicheans were suppressed because they were secret societies having anti-social aims. But apart from such subversive movements which threatened to undermine the State, a Roman could be a Jew or Gentile, Fire worshipper or Epicurean and no one sought to interfere with his religious practices.”

“You think that all national movements should be suppressed then?”

“Yes. Look at the mess there is to-day in Central Europe. The old Austro-Hungarian Empire had no model Government but at least it was a happy country. A few fanatics made trouble from time to time because they wanted to force everyone in their districts to speak some aboriginal peasant language that no stranger could understand, but they were only locked up when they started breaking windows. Under the treaties of Versailles and Trianon statesmen who should have known better split Middle Europe up and created all sorts of new nations to quarrel with each other. Worse, the matter hasn’t ended there because each of them has in it minorities which want to rule themselves, and the appalling thing is that the great powers take these demands seriously. If they go on that way the

only end can be Europe reduced to a patchwork quilt with frontiers every twenty-five miles and the whole place reduced to a Tower of Babel. How can there be peace and progress and the spread of culture in such a madhouse? It is the safety and welfare of the *majorities* that matter, and the majority of people all the world over don't want to be led into senseless squabbles by a handful of the sort of lunatics who in normal times would be boosting nudism, nut-diets, or neo-Gaelic poetry."

"Now! Now!" Richard smiled. "You mustn't let yourself get all worked up about it."

"Forgive me," laughed the Duke. "Sometimes I let my tongue run away with me. Time's getting on. We should be moving."

"Are you going back to-night?" Lucretia asked.

"Directly we've seen you home."

"*Rios Rosas* is simply miles from here."

"No matter. The streets of Madrid at night are no place for a girl alone, especially in times like these."

"Then we'll go to the *Calle Jardines*. That's much nearer and hardly out of your way at all. I've got a room there in which I sleep sometimes."

All Madrid's taxis had either been commandeered or broken down through misuse by the rabble, but they got an old horse-cab and told the driver to take them to the corner of the *Gran Via* and *Calle Clavel*. It was not very late but only a bar was open here and there and the lack of lights gave the streets all the appearance of a war-time city. When the cabby set them down they turned into the maze of narrow ways to complete their journey on foot, since Lucretia was anxious that as few people as possible should ever see her enter or leave the hotel which camouflaged her secret headquarters.

It was unlucky that, just round the corner, a street lamp happened to be outside a small restaurant and that they passed it at the very moment that four men came out. The glare from the lamp momentarily dazzled them after the darkness of the narrow by-way, and they only glimpsed the men as black forms silhouetted against the brightly-lit interior of the place. Richard was on the inside of the pavement and he almost collided with the group but checked himself in time with the intention of letting them pass in front of him while De Richleau and Lucretia walked on.

Without the least warning a fist smashed into the side of Richard's face and he went down flat in the gutter. Next second a heavy boot landed in his stomach. Everything blacked out for a moment except a sickening ghastly mist of pain.

Seeing their leader attack Richard the other three men hurled themselves on the Duke from behind. He spun round whipping out his gun, but before he could raise it one of them had struck his wrist with a length of lead piping. The pistol dropped from his nerveless fingers just as the second fellow hit him on the head. He reeled and went down under a rain of blows that knocked him half unconscious.

Lucretia turned as Richard fell and springing over his twisted body, fled back towards the *Gran Via*. As she ran she thrust a police whistle into her mouth and blew shrilly upon it. Having covered fifty yards she halted, pulled a small automatic from under her armpit and fired it in the air.

Richard, still grabbing his stomach and moaning with pain, was lugged to his feet. The dazed Duke was hauled up beside him. In the light from the restaurant and the street lamp they could now see their aggressors; the man who had hit Richard was the hooligan boss of the quarter, Fulchio Zorolo.

Thrusting his face into Richard's he roared, "It's nearly three weeks I've been looking for you an' now I've got you."

The other people in the restaurant had come rushing out including its proprietor; a corpulent man with a napkin under his arm and a glass and bottle in his hands.

Lucretia's police whistle was still shrilling round the corner and her gun was going off about every thirty seconds as she continued to fire it regularly into the air. While two of Fulchio's men held the half-unconscious victims of their attack, and Fulchio stood glowering before them, the third dashed to the corner screaming that he'd cut her guts out unless she stopped her filthy row. As he reached it a bullet sent his hat spinning from his head and he dived back again.

Fulchio's little beady eyes glared with triumph from the shaven cannon-ball head set so strangely on his enormous shoulders.

"I've got you. I've got you," he repeated. "An' I'm going to skin you alive—understand? Tear yer skin from yer body for wot yer done to me."

“Come on,” urged one of his men. “Come on. That hell-cat’ll bring the police on us in a minute.”

“Police!” Fulchio spat. “That don’t mean anything now.”

“Don’t they?” challenged the fellow who had had his hat shot off.

“Things aren’t what they were! They beat up Carlo’s boys last night.”

“Yes, they’re on the move again,” croaked the third man huskily. “Let’s get these two along to the warehouse. We’ll squeeze their eyeballs out for you then. Take our time at it and no questions asked.”

Richard and the Duke were only just recovering. The arms of both of them were held firmly behind their backs. For the time being they were quite incapable of any serious resistance. At a signal from Fulchio his men thrust them round and half-pushed, half-dragged them up the street.

They had not gone twenty yards before there was the sound of excited shouting and running feet. De Richleau flung his weight sideways, wriggled from the grip of his man and turned in his tracks but the huge Fulchio flung his gorilla arms about him. Richard tried to trip his captor but failed and they fell together in a tangled heap. A challenge sounded, then a volley of shots whistled over the heads of the struggling group. Fulchio’s men abandoned the fight and made to run, but three *Guardias Asalto* were entering the far end of the street with levelled carbines. The hooligans were caught between two fires.

Lucretia and the posse of police who had fired the volley came dashing up; the attacked and attackers were surrounded.

“What’s happening here?” snapped the *Guardia* Sergeant who with his two men had blocked the roughs’ retreat.

“Fascists,” said Fulchio loudly. “Killers. They were at a church-burning on the night of the glorious revolution. They fired on our women. We saw ’em. We were arresting ’em for you.”

“That’s a lie!” cried Lucretia. “Comrade Sergeant, I am a member of the F.A.I. I charge you to arrest these men for an unprovoked assault on two peaceful citizens.”

“They’re foreign spies!” yelled Fulchio. “Look at their papers, Comrade, and see if I’m not right.”

“Come down to the street lamp, all of you,” ordered the Sergeant, “and, you two, produce your papers.”

The small crowd had all taken refuge in the restaurant while the shooting was going on but now they were back on the pavement except the fat proprietor who straddled the top step.

The Sergeant took the passports and read out the names: "Richard Eaton, British; and Hypolite Dubois, French. That sounds all right."

He motioned to his men. "See if they've got any other papers."

While the police stood by, the two *Guardia* troopers thrust their hands into the breast pockets of the two suspects. Each produced two papers only; a C.N.T. Party membership card and a permit to carry arms.

"What's this?" said the Sergeant quickly. "Foreigners with C.N.T. cards. Something fishy here."

Both cards were signed by André Nin, the famous Barcelona Anarchist, but they did not bear the names of Richard Eaton and Hypolite Dubois; neither did the arms permits.

"Where d'you get these?" the Sergeant asked.

"Found them on two dead men," promptly replied the Duke. "We're carrying our own passports. We only took those as interesting souvenirs."

"What did I tell yer?" snarled Fulchio. "They murdered two of our lot to get those cards. They're spies. Foreign spies."

Suddenly he leaned forward and peered in the Duke's face. "That's funny. This one had a birthmark right across half 'is face when we see him before. Didn't he, boys?"

"Yes—that's right," chorused two of Fulchio's friends.

"There y'are!" the hooligan insisted. "When we see him first he was disguised. They're aristocrats. Out here killing the defenders of the People's liberties."

The Sergeant looked at Richard. "Do you maintain your real name is Eaton?"

"Si," said Richard.

"He's right there," cut in a new voice. "Last time I saw him he was sitting swilling champagne in evening dress. His wife's a Princess something or other. Little dark woman with jewels worth a fortune." It was the restaurant proprietor who had spoken.

A sudden murmur of excitement went up. "Princess! *Aristos!* What did I tell you!" while the crowd turned to stare at the stout man on the steps.

“I know the other one, too,” he went on, “but his name’s not Dubois. He’s a Duke and a rich one. They bow and scrape to him in half the restaurants of Europe as Monseigneur le Duc de Richleau.”

Chapter Twenty-one – Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fire

To Richard the restaurant proprietor was only vaguely familiar but De Richleau knew him at once as a waiter called Luis. For a year or two after the war he had been a *sous chef* at the Spanish Restaurant in London at the time King Alfonso's visits had made it so deservedly popular. Later, he had been a floor waiter at the Ritz in Madrid and had served the Duke on his last visit to the Spanish capital. That was six years before, but it is part of a waiter's stock-in-trade to have a long memory for names and faces.

"A Duke! A Duke!" the crowd were crying. "Fulchio's right. They're spies—*aristos*. Leave 'em to us and we'll deal with them."

"Silence!" shouted the *Guardia* Sergeant, and turning to the Duke, "What have you to say?"

"This man's mistaken," said De Richleau firmly. "I am a servant—an interpreter—and my name is Dubois."

"Oh, no, it's not!" said the ex-waiter with equal firmness. "You're the Duke de Richleau all right. Cantaloup melon for breakfast at ten *pesetas* a go. That's your mark. And truffles cooked in champagne for supper. Remember?" He suddenly broke into a facetious imitation of the Spanish equivalent of the Oxford accent, "Waitah, give Madame some more caviah. Waitah, no restaurant worthy of the name ever serves cold lobstah with capahs in the heads. A disgustin' habit."

A howl of laughter went up and the excited crowd pressed in upon De Richleau until the police forced them back.

The Sergeant looked at Lucretia-José. "Comrade, what do you know of these men?"

"I know them as Comrades Eaton and Dubois, visitors to Madrid, from two friendly democratic nations."

"Not good enough!" he said shortly. "They've deceived you and been using these C.N.T. cards to fool other people. They're hand in glove with the Rebels to upset the Government I'm arresting them for using false papers with the object of promoting treason."

There was nothing to be done, absolutely nothing. De Richleau and Richard could only thank their stars that Lucretia had got them out of

Fulchio's hands. Yet in one sense they were out of the frying-pan into the fire. It was conceivable that they might have ransomed themselves from Fulchio since the large sum they had on them in bank notes was sufficient earnest that they were good for a further very considerable payment, whereas there was no hope of their being able ransom themselves from a State prison. Moreover, the very worst thing that could conceivably happen to them had happened. Their identities as members of the old ruling caste was now known. Even Simon might not be able to protect them in view of the damning discovery that the Duke had been carrying a faked passport and that both of them had been in possession of forged C.N.T. Party cards with arms permits to match.

They were marched back to the *Gran Via*. After some delay a police patrol wagon arrived. By way of good-bye Fulchio and various members of the crowd spat in their faces as they entered it—handcuffed.

Lucretia accompanied them to the Model Prison. She had no official position but everyone in Madrid who had was now almost scared out of their wits at the sight of a representative of that terrible body consisting of utterly ruthless idealists, the F.A.I.

Actually she was desperately afraid for her friends since she knew that, from that night on, she would not be able to show herself openly as their protector. It was quite certain that in the morning the word of the ex-waiter who had unmasked them would be accepted; that one of them was a Duke and the other the husband of a Russian Princess. Lucretia could bring no evidence to prove the contrary so her only course would be to admit to having been deceived and disassociate herself from them; otherwise she might become suspect herself and have her ill-important secret work brought to a premature conclusion. All she could do while the night lasted was to maintain her contention that they were foreign Comrades, insist that they should be given as decent accommodation as the crowded state of the prison allowed, and threaten the prison officials with the direst penalties if any harm befell the prisoners before their case had been heard.

The prison people were almost cringingly polite under the ash of her quick tongue. They were mostly good Republicans but men of moderate views who were trying to do a thankless job under most difficult conditions. The last thing they wanted was trouble with the wild fanatics of

the F.A.I, who had already threatened to burn the prison down and massacre the hundreds of prisoners in it. Assuring Lucretia that her friends would be well looked after they bid her a courteous good night.

The Duke's and Richard's handcuffs were unlocked and they were marched off to a cell. It was obviously only built for a single prisoner but a wooden bunk had been fitted above the iron bedstead now that the number of prisoners far exceeded the original accommodation. There was a wash-basin, a W.C., a barred window high up in the whitewashed wall and a steel door without a handle but with a spy-hole in it. Each bed had two blankets and a pillow on it. There was nothing else in the cell at all.

"Well, here we are," said Richard with forced joviality.

"Yes. It was a bad break but one that might happen to anybody." De Richleau lowered his voice. "Be careful what you say, or disguise it. Someone who understands English may have been put to listen in on us."

"D'you think Goldie-Locks will be able to work the oracle?"

"I doubt it. If extreme measures are threatened the person you speak of is certain to attempt something, but otherwise it would be most impolitic on their part. I hope to God they don't."

"We can ask for assistance from the B.E."

"No harm in asking. We are entitled to the protection of our respective Embassies." De Richleau winked, which gave Richard the tip that the fiction of Hypolite Dubois was to be kept up.

"How have we been disporting ourselves since Independence Day?"

"Here on a globe trot. Caught by events. Unable to vamoose."

"And where hitting hay?"

"With daughters of joy, various."

"What! For just on a month?"

"Think of a better one."

"I can't."

"Neither can I. It's thin as a willow wand but it might just go down. I've known Spaniards take that sort of holiday in Paris. That'll do in case we're pulled out for catechising to-night. Let's get some sleep now, we may be able to improve our Odyssey in the morning."

There were no palliasses, only wire mattresses, but they slept in their clothes on the blankets.

In the morning they were given a mess of rice and a drink of coffee. Two hours later their cell was unlocked and a warder marched them along to a large, sparsely furnished room. It was not a proper court and they had no proper trial, but an investigation of sorts was held there.

The prison Governor and three representatives of the Government sat with an interpreter behind a long wooden table. Lounging on chairs at either side of it were numerous people, not members of the tribunal but representatives of the U.G.T., F.A.I., *Partido Comunista, Izquierda Republicana*, etc., holding a watching brief for their various organizations.

The *Guardia* Sergeant who had made the arrest was present, also Lucretia, the ex-waiter Luis, and another man. The Sergeant gave an account of the previous night's happenings and reported that, like numerous other gang-leaders of his kind, Fulchio Zorolo was in his own fortified headquarters, a warehouse he had commandeered for himself, so short of sending a company of troops it was impossible to bring him as a witness.

Lucretia was asked what she knew of the prisoners. She said that she had first met them on a recent visit to London where they had been introduced to her as Eaton and Dubois; two comrades of strong Proletarian sympathies. She had since met them in Madrid and had never had any cause to suppose they were other than they represented themselves to be.

Luis then testified that before taking a small place of his own in Madrid, he had worked in *de luxe* restaurants all over Spain for twenty-five years. He had also worked as a waiter for eighteen months in London and during two seasons at Biarritz. It was at the *Palace* at Biarritz that he had seen Richard, who had had a suite of rooms there with his wife, a Russian Princess. Regarding the alleged Dubois, he was able to go into much greater detail. He could not possibly be mistaken in asserting that the prisoner was the Duke de Richleau, because the Duke was always treated as a star client at any restaurant to which he went and pointed out to junior waiters so that they might know him again. He, Luis, had first seen the Duke at Algeciras before the Great War. Later he had waited on him on numerous occasions in London and lastly he had served him as floor waiter for nearly three weeks when he had had a suite at the Ritz in Madrid in the spring of 1930.

The man Luis brought with him bore out the last statement, having been employed as a valet in the hotel at that time, and also identified Dubois as the Duke. This clinched the matter as far as the Tribunal was concerned.

Richard and De Richleau were questioned as to their motives for coming to Spain and their doings while in the country. Their passports were produced as showing their date of entry and De Richleau at once asked that they should be allowed to have these back as the only available evidence of their foreign citizenship. The request was granted and they then told the story they had agreed upon. It was quite obvious that nobody in the room believed them but they stuck to their account.

When Richard was asked for the names and addresses of the women with whom he was supposed to have stayed, he answered coyly, "Well, let me think now. There was Carmen, and Maria and Consuelo, and Pepita."

"No, no," interrupted the Duke. "Pepita was mine."

"Not a bit of it," Richard protested. "I remember her distinctly; she had red hair."

"Ah, sorry! There were two Pepitas, weren't there. I was thinking of the dark one we picked up in the Negresco Bar."

"Right; then there was Conchita. D'you remember? The nice little thing who sprained her ankle going upstairs to that flat somewhere near the Hippodrome."

De Richleau nodded. "Yes, beastly place. Don't forget the twins we met that first Sunday at the bull-ring. What were their names?"

"I can't think now, but they lived miles out at a place called Tetuan. Oh, and there was Inez, too, and her friend; but that wasn't so funny."

"When their husbands tried to blackmail us, Lord no!"

"Then Dolores, she was very pretty. And those two French girls we found at Molinero's. And the one who tried to commit suicide because her boyfriend had been shot. But she was yours."

By this time the interpreter was fed up, and said so. The Tribunal took his view that further questioning on these lines was quite useless. Either the prisoners were positive Casanovas or incorrigible liars, and in the light of Luis's testimony the latter was almost certainly the case.

However that might be, one fact was clear. Neither Don Riccardo Eaton and the Duke de Richleau nor Comrades Eaton and Dubois had permits to

carry arms; yet the two prisoners had been doing so. That was quite enough to justify their detention.

For the rest, Anarchist Party cards in other names having been found on them and their most unsatisfactory account of themselves pointing strongly to their being engaged in subversive activities on behalf of the Rebels, they were to be strictly confined and their application to see members of their Embassy staffs refused.

As the two were being marched out they heard the F.A.I. representative say to Lucretia-José, "You'd best be more careful how you pick your friends in future, Comrade."

They did not catch her reply but it was evidently something witty as the man burst into a roar of laughter and all the others joined in; which conveyed the comforting thought to the prisoners that her association with them was not suspected to be anything but a casual one.

Back in the cell they sat down on the iron bed side by side and a feeling of great depression swept over them. Unless a much more serious charge than carrying arms without a licence, or even false passports, could be brought against them they were in no danger of losing their lives; particularly as they were not Spanish subjects. But they were very definitely prisoners for a quite indefinite period and in a really modern prison where the prospects of escape were extremely slender.

Their first glance round the previous night had convinced them that any attempt to break out would be sheer waste of time. Only one possibility remained to them. When they were searched everything had been taken from them, but beneath their borrowed black coats they still wore their original waistcoats and sewn into the linings were Spanish and English banknotes worth many hundred pounds. They had now succeeded in getting their passports back and it was possible that they might be able to bribe their way out.

Sitting there doing nothing proved a most extraordinary feeling. It was such an utter contrast to their violent and almost continuous activities of the past month. They had an awful, guilty feeling that they ought to be up and doing; yet there was nothing they could do and nowhere they could go. The sinister quiet of the prison stifled them like some invisible blanket and, when they had said to each other all they dared say in hushed voices and ambiguous phrases, they felt an urge to break it by shouting.

They had no means of checking the passage of time as their watches had been taken from them but, judging by the angle of the sunlight on the wall, the hours seemed to drag with maddening slowness. It was late in the afternoon when the basilisk eye of the warden appeared at the spy-hole in the steel door and his key turned in the lock.

Without a word he handed in a neatly-done-up brown paper parcel about 10 x 6 x 9 inches in size, and slammed the door shut again.

They could only imagine that Lucretia-José had very rashly sent them a parcel of food which might contain some message.

While Richard stood with his back to the door so as to block the spy-hole De Richleau struggled with the parcel. He had no knife so he had patiently to unpick the knots since the string was too tightly done for him to slip it off.

After three frantic minutes he gave a last jerk. The brown paper and some corrugated cardboard remained in his hands while ten French yellowbacks tumbled out and scattered over the floor.

The Duke swore violently and loudly. It was a set of Proust.

Richard gave way to an absolute gale of laughter and a moment later De Richleau joined in. Both of them were tickled by Simon's little jest and they knew there was not a trace of malice in the way he had chosen to let them know he had learned they were in prison.

At ten o'clock that night Simon arrived in person. The two prisoners had already turned in as there was nothing else to do and no lights on to read by, but getting up entailed no more than rolling off their beds on to their feet and at the warden's summons they followed him at once down to a reception-room where they found Simon, Rex, and the Prison Governor waiting for them. After a word with Simon the Governor ordered the warden to remain in the passage and went out himself, leaving the four old friends alone.

"Thanks for the books," said the Duke. "I really do want to read *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* again and it was kind of you to remember my mention of it when we last talked of prison."

Simon smiled. "Had quite a job routing out a bookseller. It took police persuasion to get him to open up his shop, and the poor chap nearly had a fit when I insisted on paying for the books. Few other things here Rex and I've brought you."

“Soap, towels, shaving kit, smokes, matches, insect powder, biscuits and chocolate,” Rex added, handing over two big parcels. “I wouldn’t say you deserve it, though—seeing the way you pulled one on us in that cellar.”

“Oh, come, Rex,” De Richleau laughed. “We only gave our parole not to try anything once you’d handed us over to the police.”

“Oh, sure. I was only kidding. We haven’t been holding it against you, any.”

“Speaking of paroles,” Simon cut in. “What about it? Governor here’s a decent fellow and—er—I’ve got a bit of pull. If you’ll both give your parole now we can make things ever so much easier for you.”

“Is the alternative our being handed over to the tender mercies of those sweet little Trotskyites you spoke of last time?” Richard asked.

“Ner. Never meant that really. Only bluffing. We’re Liberal Socialists. No more Trotskyites than you are and there aren’t any here anyhow. You’ll find the warders in this place a decent lot as long as you don’t try and get out.”

“I’m afraid we couldn’t give our paroles in any case,” said the Duke gently.

“Didn’t expect you would,” Simon grinned. “Pity though, as I could have given you the run of the Governor’s garden. How about the gold? Now everybody knows De Richleau and Dubois are one you’ve landed yourselves in a proper muddle. Government wants that gold pretty badly and even I can’t get you out of here unless you’re prepared to hand it over. If you will, though, you can start for home the moment the deal’s through.”

“It’s no good, my friend. You know quite well I’d never make that kind of bargain.”

“Then you’ll have to stay here. I can get you a better cell and one bath a week, but that’s all I can do.”

“It’s very nice of you to do so much.”

Simon shuffled. “I’ll do anything I can to make things endurable—you know that. Food won’t be up to much as the whole city’s being rationed now but Rex and I’ll send in some odds and ends from time to time. Nasty part is you may be here for months. This war’s going to take some settling now the Rebels have got so much territory in their hands.”

“I imagined the Government weren’t having it all their own way,” said the Duke slowly, “but owing to the censorship we know practically nothing of what’s going on outside Madrid.”

“Well, I’ll tell you. We hold the whole of the eastern coast from the Pyrenees to its southern corner, and most of central Spain including a tract that runs right through to the Portuguese frontier, cutting the two Rebel Armies off from each other. Also we’ve got Bilbao, with a strip about eighty miles deep and two hundred and fifty long which comprises practically the whole of the north coast; and another strip about fifty miles deep and a hundred miles long on the south coast, including Malaga.

“On the other hand, the Rebels have Navarre with about a third of the Pyrenees and a block of country a hundred or more miles deep running south to Saragossa. From there their line runs roughly west along the Douro to the Portuguese frontier, cutting us off from Bilbao. The north-west corner of Spain is all part of that block under Mola, who’s commanding from Burgos. In the south Franco has the coast from Gib. to Portugal and nearly as far north as Badajos. Queipo de Llano’s joined forces with him from Seville and to the south-east they have a wide corridor running through Granada to a strip of coast fifty miles long which cuts us off from Malaga. Majorca’s theirs but Minorca remains ours.”

“I see,” said the Duke. “Then the Government has succeeded in holding about two-thirds of the country.”

Simon nodded. “Trouble is though it’s not going to be easy to subdue the other third. Mussolini’s been backing Franco from the outset; helping him get his troops across from Morocco by plane, and now Hitler’s sending staff officers and technical experts to assist Mola in the north.”

“Meanwhile our old friend Comrade Stalin is just sound asleep, I suppose,” remarked Richard with a grin.

“Ner,” Simon grinned back. “Quite a lot of Russians in Barcelona and Madrid already. They’re flying through via Czecho-Slovakia and war material’s on its way to us from the Black Sea ports. Only point I’m making is that, now the big boys have muscled in, there can’t be any quick decision. Spaniards’ll find themselves just puppets dancing to other people’s tunes.”

“Yes. I quite see that,” agreed the Duke.

“And,” Simon went on, “as each side scores a hit the foreign backers will pump new stuffing into the other so they’ll be able to stay the pace and score a round in their turn. See if I’m not right. Unless the whole of Europe’s involved and the big boys have their hands full, fighting openly

among themselves, this show may drag on for a year or more, and all the time you'll be in prison."

"If I had my way I'd put every Communist leader and every Fascist leader in the world on the Galapagos Islands and let them fight it out together among the cactus," said Richard bitterly. "It's utterly iniquitous that millions of peaceful people should be hypnotized into killing each other because a handful of fanatics want to impose their ideas on everybody else."

"O.K. by me!" grinned Rex, "but you've got to face facts. Like it or not, the killing's on and you're here till the party's over."

"Then you might try and raise me a Spanish-English dictionary and a few text-books so I can amuse myself learning the language."

"Sure. Anything else you want?"

"I'd be glad if you'd write to Marie-Lou. Tell her what's happened but that the Duke and I are quite safe here and that you two are looking after us."

"Is she at Cardinal's Folly?" asked Simon smiling, "or hanging about somewhere off the Spanish coast in the yacht?"

"Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Nothing. Just thought she might be."

"Then send it to Cardinal's Folly." Richard knew that the letter would be forwarded on to an address in Bordeaux where Marie-Lou could pick it up. There would be a few days' delay while it went to England and back but he did not mind that as he had already sent her several unsigned postcards, the last having been despatched only the night before, to let her know in the only way he dared risk, the bare facts that he and De Richleau were safe and well.

When Simon and Rex had gone Richard and the Duke were escorted back to their cell. The following morning they were transferred to another and larger one which overlooked a courtyard. The change raised their spirits considerably as, through the barred window, they could watch relays of prisoners being marched round and round at exercise. The prison was so full that these exercise parties were going on all day except during the *siesta* so there was nearly always something fresh to watch. Most of the groups were composed of men, but about every fourth consisted of women. A further advantage of the new cell was that the two beds in it had palliasses well stuffed with clean straw. It also had a chair and a small

iron table screwed to the floor. Apparently it was one in which political prisoners had been confined, before the Revolution, with an extra bed put in.

Late in the afternoon they themselves were taken down to exercise; and joining a long crocodile marched round the yard in single file for twenty minutes while a dozen armed warders stood by keeping a careful eye on the prisoners. The stretching of their legs made a pleasant break and the two friends passed their second night in prison much more comfortably.

The Spanish grammars arrived for Richard and with the Duke to help him he began to study the language seriously. The food consisted almost entirely of vegetables which varied from day to day in quantity and kind, the ration depending on what the authorities could get hold of, but the Duke and Richard were spared any pangs of hunger owing to the steady supply of oddments which reached them from their friends outside.

With one exception the warders were decent, civil fellows; but De Richleau thought it best to study them for a bit before making any attempt at bribery. Rex was allowed to see the friends for half an hour every three days and brought kind messages from Simon, who was frantically busy. Having been spared the terrible monotony of solitary confinement, the two captives settled down with apparent resignation to the prison routine.

Although they were confined to their cell for twenty-three-and-a-half hours out of every twenty-four, they were soon making contact with other prisoners. Richard had often heard that extraordinary devices were resorted to by men in gaols so that they could communicate with each other, and now he was initiated into many of them. He learnt to talk without moving his lips when at exercise, to palm scraps of paper with messages on them or roll them into balls and flick them with great accuracy; to Morse by covering and uncovering the spy-hole of the cell and to signal to certain of the prisoners in the yard without the guards realizing what he was up to. De Richleau was almost as accomplished as an old lag in many of these practices and by the end of their first week 'inside' they were in a position to tap the constant stream of news which penetrated from no one knew where and ran round the prison like wild-fire.

In the opposite cell there was a good-looking young Conde known to the warders and his fellow prisoners alike as Pépé. He was an amazingly cheerful and extremely ingenious person and the ringleader in the corridor

of all organized attempts to secure better conditions by concerted drumming on the cell doors, slogan-chanting and so on. To their left they had a member of the Madrid Bourse who spent his time thinking up dirty stories with which to entertain his friends during exercise each day, but the occupant of the cell on their right remained an enigma. He was a poor, bent old man who would not speak nor even tell his name to any of the others and the mystery surrounding him was much increased from his calloused hands and other signs which clearly indicated that he came from the poorest class.

The behaviour of some of the prisoners might have led a casual visitor to believe he was in a lunatic asylum as, in fact, quite a number of them had been driven out of their minds by the terrible scenes they had witnessed. There was an old Dowager who stumped round the courtyard every morning carrying an ebony stick and looking neither to the right nor left but staring before her with blank, sightless eyes. It was said her two sons, their wives and all her grandchildren had been killed in front of her and that she had only escaped herself through having been pushed backwards out of a window beneath which were some bushes. Another case was a young girl who screamed as though she had been burnt every time anyone touched her; even if it were only one of the other women prisoners. One man believed himself to be a holy prophet and from time to time proclaimed the end of the world to be at hand in solemn and sonorous tones; another laughed with childish glee every few moments at some secret joke which he kept muttering over and over inaudibly to himself.

Nearly every one of the three thousand prisoners had either lost someone dear to them in the massacres or was in dire anxiety as to whether their loves, relatives and friends were alive or dead. All those who were sane had some almost incredible story to tell of the ferocity of the mobs and their own miraculous escapes. The whole of their thrilling and terrifying experiences could not have been related in half a year.

Richard and the Duke learned brief versions of a few of them every day, mostly from the irrepressibly active and resourceful P  p  , opposite; but it was not only of personal horrors and triumphs that they heard. For the first time they became aware of the true heroism of many of the leaders in the Military Rebellion; so ill prepared on account of the urgent necessity of advancing its date to forestall a Red *coup-d'  tat*.

How General Goded, having accomplished his task in Majorca, had deliberately left his safe command there to fly to Barcelona so that he might lead the loyal troops in that furnace of Anarchy although he knew it to be a forlorn hope before he started. How Colonel Castajon had set out in a small ship from Morocco with only thirty-five officers and, on reaching the Spanish coast, had driven straight inland, without support, gathering volunteers as he marched who could only be armed with weapons captured from the enemy; defeating regiment after regiment of troops who were sent against him until he had penetrated right into the centre of Southern Spain. How Colonel Móscardo, isolated in Toledo hundreds of miles from any other Nationalist forces, had defied the Government and was holding the Alcazar with a few hundred young soldiers and a score or two of Toledo Nationalists.

How Queipo de Llano had taken the great Red stronghold of Seville with only one hundred and eighty-three supporters. He had landed in a plane outside the city, commandeered lorries, and driving straight in had seized the radio station to broadcast the staggering news that the whole Moroccan Army of 40,000 men was advancing on Seville. At that moment the only Moroccan forces in Spain were Colonel Castajon and his thirty-five officers who had landed that morning. De Llano summoned all who loved Spain and hated Anarchy to rally round him. The Reds panicked and, rushing to the artillery barracks in the suburbs, turned the guns on the centre of the town. Whilst the shells burst about the radio building the General bawled into the microphone, "Do you hear those guns? Listen to our glorious Artillery blasting the Red Marxist murderers! Rally to me and welcome the saviours of National and Catholic Spain!" The people in the cafés listening to the loud-speakers, already terrified of a Red massacre, began to cheer. The police, the *Guardia*, and regiments of troops came out in support of the courageous General. Queipo de Llano had taken Seville with the guns of the enemy.

Such accounts put extraordinary heart into the majority of the prisoners; particularly those with strong religious tendencies. Knowing the absurdly small forces with which the Rebellion had started in so many centres they were convinced that God was intervening with miracles on behalf of His children, otherwise, they asked, how could such an amazing series of successes have been achieved? The less religious gave more credit to the

reckless daring of the gallant officers concerned and the old adage that, all parties being given courage, one man with brains was worth ten with brawn.

On 11th August, Colonel Castajon arrived before Badajos; on the 13th he took it. Nothing could have been a clearer proof than his remarkable march that the bulk of the people in the south were heart and soul with the Nationalists. He and his gallant thirty-five had marched two hundred and fifty miles without reinforcements or fresh supplies of ammunition except those gathered on the way. Such a march, including twenty minor actions, would have been utterly impossible if the peasants and townsfolk on his route had proved hostile, but they were welcoming him everywhere as their deliverer.

During their second week of confinement Simon paid his friends another visit. He had been busy on other matters for some days, he told them, but Pédro had been arrested that morning while on a visit to the *Palacio Coralles* to collect some of his belongings. He had been released after questioning but had told all he knew and could be persuaded to bring an action against them for false imprisonment if the authorities wished, although he had refrained from going to the police before on account of the money paid him. This would mean solitary cells and the curtailment of all their privileges. Would they now consider telling what they had done with the gold?

Simon put up a very good show of being in earnest and said that what might happen to them had now passed beyond his control owing to Pédro's statement to the police.

De Richleau would have refused in any case but he was pretty confident that Simon was still the final authority in all matters concerning them and called his bluff. He took the Duke's stubbornness in good part and having produced a couple of bottles of sherry left them with a friendly handshake. They were not moved to solitary cells.

August was drawing towards its close when they had a new excitement. On the night of the 27th there was a sudden series of loud detonations and they caught the distant drone of aeroplane engines somewhere over the city. Madrid had had its first air raid.

Next morning, in the strange way such things were constantly happening, full particulars were known to practically everybody in the

prison. The street lights of the whole of central Madrid had been blacked out with the exception of those in the *Gran Via*, the *Calle Alcalá* and *La Cibeles* so that these lanes of light clearly indicated the Telegraph Building and the Ministry of War to the enemy raider. The bombs had been so well aimed that some of them actually fell in the garden of the War Ministry and shattered its windows. A great deal of precious ammunition had been senselessly wasted by the Militiamen firing their rifles into the air.

The raid was not directed against the civil population and only the manipulation of the city's lights had made the bombing of such an important Military objective possible. The Duke and Richard chuckled a lot at the thought that Lucretia-José and her friends of Franco's Fifth Column must still be holding key positions in the Red capital. Soon, however, their laughter was cut short by a grim sound that they had learnt to know only too well.

A dread hush had fallen on the long corridor. It was broken only by the occasional slamming of a cell door, the faint shuffling of feet, and a loud fearless voice which spoke in Latin. The speaker was a priest in a distant cell and he was giving a general absolution to those who were being led out to die.

Several such purges had occurred during the twenty-two days Richard and De Richleau had been in prison. This morning the Government was exacting a terrible price for the broken windows of its War Office; many cells were being emptied.

A little murmur of prayer was audible as the guards came for the young Conde opposite. He was accused of no crime and had been taken in his bed without warning. His accident of birth was now to cost him his life although his political views were those of the new generation and decidedly Liberal. As he left his cell he said only one thing in ringing tones which all could hear: "May the flowers never bloom again in Spain until this vileness is swept from her soil."

Farther along the corridor other men of less courage were led out. Some gave way to heartrending screams, others begged and implored the guards to spare them.

Half an hour after it was over a warder came for Richard and the Duke. Evidently further victims were needed to make up the number decreed for

this holocaust of vengeance. They went very still at the thought that they too were to take their last walk, but the warder quickly reassured them.

“It’s all right, *hombres*,” he said. “Your friend’s called again—the little one—and he wants to see you.”

With unutterable relief they followed the man along the corridor and downstairs to the waiting-room. Simon was there and, apparently oblivious of the horrors which had only just been enacted, smiled a cheerful greeting:

“Thought you’d like to know,” he said, “I’ve found the Coralles fortune.”

Chapter Twenty-two – Out of the Fire Into the Boiling Oil

‘So the game is up,’ thought Richard. ‘Cristoval has mentioned seeing us at Valmojado and Simon has been out there. What hellish luck after the way we sweated blood to conceal it.’

Simon was grinning all over his face. As neither of his friends made any remark he repeated gleefully, “I’ve found it. Told you I would. You haven’t done yourselves the least good by refusing to talk and sitting in prison here. I’ve traced the missing millions.”

“Have you?” said the Duke tonelessly.

“Um. I had it from one of the *Guardias Civiles* weeks ago that they closed the streets while you loaded it on to eight lorries one night just before the Outbreak. I found a couple of labels you left behind in the *salon* of the *Palacio* too—printed ones for Barcelona. But I naturally took that to be a bit of bluff on your part. Just the sort of false trail you would lay. Now I find you pulled a double bluff. You actually did send it to the most unlikely place in Spain—straight to the stronghold of the Anarchists. Damn’ clever. I honestly congratulate you.”

“Thank you, Simon. But it’s I who must congratulate you on having seen through my little ruse.”

“Not a bit. I’d never have thought you’d risk it. Suppose, though, I should’ve realized you’d be certain to take bold measures. Now, I’ll tell you. I’d never have found out what you’d done with it if it hadn’t been for a man I know in the Railwaymen’s Battalion. They’re the crack troops of the Communists. This chap was wounded and invalided back here yesterday. Went to see him just to cheer him up and by pure chance he mentioned a queer consignment he had had to check out some days before the trouble started. Two hundred and three little boxes all weighing about a hundred ton apiece. Heaviest stuff for its size he’d ever handled, he said, all addressed to the Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles and delivered at the station in army lorries manned by regular troops. Dates tallied. It was the morning after you’d had the stuff collected. Simple, wasn’t it?”

“Well,” said Richard, “having been here over three weeks it will be grand to be at liberty again. Can we walk out with you right away and have a

drink?”

“Ner,” said Simon quickly.

“Oh, come,” said the Duke. “A victor should always be generous, Simon.”

“Ner,” Simon repeated. “Not unless you tell me to whom the goods were consigned.”

“But you know that already. To the Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles, Barcelona.”

“Um, but care of someone else. Unfortunately my friend’s forgotten that part of it and in the riots all the papers at the railway station were destroyed. Cases are in Barcelona somewhere. Can’t have crossed the frontier. Customs would never allow them to go through. I know, too, they were addressed to a business house—not a person—so I’ll find them. Question is if you’d like to come out now and save me a trip to Barcelona or remain here while I make it.”

“Barcelona is a big city,” remarked the Duke.

“And my time’s precious—so we might as well do a deal.”

“That would be to rob you of your full triumph as a detective. I don’t think we’d care to do that. Do you, Richard?”

“No,” said Richard. “We’ll stay here till the treasure-hunt is over.”

“Oh, all right! Have it your own way,” agreed Simon huffily, but a moment later he was smiling again as he admitted, “Of course I see what you’re up to. You know quite well that every hour I spend on this I have to neglect other important business. Quite legitimate tactics.”

“Why do it then?” De Richleau shrugged. “Now great powers are helping both sides with arms this one fortune, big as it is, becomes relatively of less importance.”

“Don’t you believe it! Even if we’re getting arms from outside and getting them on credit that doesn’t prevent the bottom falling out of the Exchange. We’ve *got* to have gold to keep the Government *peseta* at a reasonable level. Must run now. Here’s a little something to console you for my *coup*. Sorry it’s not the Old Original but that’s harder to find than diamonds in Madrid these days.” The ‘little something’ was a bottle of Green Chartreuse.

Back in their cell Richard and the Duke laughed themselves almost silly at the thought of Simon’s face when he prised open the first of the two hundred and three boxes to find it only contained cement.

They had long since given up worrying about the gold. Even if Lucretia could not shift it they felt there was little fear of Simon tracing it now the maximum period of danger in which Cristoval might have mentioned their presence at Valmojado was safely past. There was no reason to suppose that the factory Committee would cease to function and old Jacinto's squad could be trusted to guard the secret of the specially-treated stock with their lives.

"Of course," said the Duke a little later, "Simon only asked the address to which those cases were consigned. If we'd given him that he would have let us out but it would have been sailing pretty near the wind and he's behaved very decently."

"Yes," Richard agreed. "I thought of that too, but I'm glad we didn't. It wouldn't really have been fair."

Within forty-eight hours they were to regret that decision, which sent Simon on a wild-goose chase to Barcelona, more than they had regretted anything for a very long time.

The following afternoon stirring news once again mysteriously percolated through the prison. The two Nationalist Generals, Mola advancing from the north and Franco from the south, had met and joined forces. The Nationalists now held a belt of territory stretching from the Pyrenees to the western coast and right down the Portuguese frontier to the Straits of Gibraltar in the south. Having met during the previous night the united armies were now advancing on Madrid.

The excitement in the prison was intense. Wave after wave of cheering echoed down the long stone corridors and the warders were powerless to check it. The Monarchist Anthem was sung again and again; the captives worked themselves up into an state of absolute delirium and all further exercise had to be cancelled for the day. Wild, impossible rumours began to circulate. The Nationalists were opposite Madrid, they were sweeping all before them, advancing in cars and lorries, the Reds were utterly broken and in full retreat, the Government was abandoning the capital, it would be in the Generals' hands before morning. They were saved, saved, *saved*—if the Terrorists did not massacre them all first.

It was that last awful thought which probably started the real trouble; the knowledge, after weeks of almost unbearable suspense during any moment of which they might have been fetched from their cells and shot,

that salvation was at last at hand yet they might not be allowed to live to reap the joy of it. The urge to attempt an escape became imperative.

The prisoners battered insanely on their doors and a number of them attacked the warders when the evening ration was brought round. The balance of the issue was cancelled as a general punishment, and to avoid further scenes of violence in which prisoners had to be flung back battered and bleeding into their cells.

An urgent plea for quiet and restraint was then sent round through the secret channels of communication. Nobody knew whence it came and it was assumed by the saner men that some leader or group among the prisoners was plotting a properly organized bid for freedom that night and was, therefore, trying to prevent extra guards being put on. After an hour the emotional storm seemed to have spent itself and, except for isolated cases, things returned to normal.

Few prisoners slept that night. De Richleau and Richard did not attempt to. The Duke felt convinced that something was afoot and he was extremely perturbed about it. His long experience as a General Staff Officer made him quite certain that these rumours of a sudden Nationalist dash on the capital were childish nonsense. It was great news that the Generals had succeeded in joining forces but they were hundreds of miles away and they would have to organize a fresh campaign before deploying eastward. All the Red forces of central Spain would be concentrated to defend Madrid and one great battle, if not a series of them, would have to be fought before there were any prospect of the Nationalists even approaching the city. It would probably be several weeks at least before there could be any real chance of their taking it.

In the meantime he and Richard were reasonably safe where they were under Simon's protection; but if there were a prison mutiny and they were involved in it all sorts of unpleasant things might happen.

His fears were justified. A little past one in the morning the silence was broken by sudden shouting and sounds of strife in the block on the other side of the courtyard. Within a few moments the whole great building was a raging hell of noise. Every one of the three-thousand-odd prisoners were screaming, cursing, kicking at their doors, clanking their tin pails and calling on those who had already escaped to free them. The crash of rifle-fire in

the opposite block added to the row and showed that a number of prisoners had actually succeeded in breaking loose.

For twenty minutes the din went on without cessation. Richard had his eye glued to the spy-hole, the Duke stood anxiously watching by the barred window, but nothing happened in the corridor.

Suddenly, through the hurricane of sound, came the slamming of cell doors, then the thud of running feet. The near-by cries changed from desperate frustration to joy and relief. Someone was hurrying along the corridor letting the prisoners out with a bunch of keys taken from a wounded or murdered warder.

“Bring your mattresses! Bring your mattresses! We’re going to burn down the main door!” the rescuer shouted as he hastened from cell to cell.

At last Richard saw him. He was a little dark slip of a man but his firm features showed intelligence and resolution. As he was about to put the pass key in the door a man just released grabbed him by the elbow and shouting something pointed down the corridor. A cell there had been forgotten in the hurry. The little man dashed off. When Richard saw him again he made for Pépé’s old cell opposite and let out a middle-aged merchant who had taken Pépé’s place. Next, he turned to free the inventor of dirty stories, late of the Spanish Bourse.

“Here!” shouted Richard, “Here!” but his voice was half-drowned by the general pandemonium and the man passed on.

Richard hammered furiously on the door and bawled for help until he was hoarse, but it was useless. All he could see now was a scurry of flying figures; the man with the keys had gone. The corridor was emptying rapidly but a couple of minutes later when Richard was peering out again an eye suddenly stared into his an inch away on the other side of the peephole.

“I thought so,” said a voice. “As I didn’t see you I felt sure he must have forgotten to let you out, so I came back.” It was their neighbour of the Bourse.

“Good man!” cried Richard struggling with some of his newly acquired Spanish. “Where is he? Get him for us! Quick!”

“Wait, *hombré!* Wait! He’s on the floor above now, but I’ll bring him down.”

They waited there impatiently while the howling din went on; minute after minute, five minutes, ten, fifteen, twenty, but their friend did not return. Perhaps he had failed to find the man with the keys; perhaps he was shot or burnt or trampled to death during the ensuing hour of riot and confusion. They never saw him again.

Hundreds of prisoners were swarming into the courtyard. It was dark down there and only lit by a yellow swathe of light which streamed from a broken-in door, until some warders started firing down into it from the roof-tops. The mob stampeded like cattle and rushed to force their way back into the building through the one narrow doorway. Scores of people were caught there in a solid jam unable to move backwards or forwards while the bullets of the warders smacked into the living target it was impossible to miss.

Another body of the escapers had gained the roof. They rushed the warders and hurled them over into the courtyard below. The crowd eased back as the firing ceased and, seeing what was happening, left their own dead and wounded to trample the last breath of life out of the unfortunate warders who had been flung off the roof-top.

De Richleau tried in vain to stifle his fury at still being locked in the cell. Once out in the corridor he was certain that he and Richard could have got away somehow during a mutiny on such a large scale. He knew his way down to the reception-room blindfold and had made exhaustive mental notes on half-a-dozen possible lines of escape from glimpsing the vistas through half-open doorways on their numerous trips downstairs. They would have left this crazy mob to its own devices and gone off on their own as many of the most quick-witted prisoners must be doing; short of appalling bad luck anyone with nerve and brains could get clear away during such a turmoil.

Suddenly he sniffed the air apprehensively and swore. "These madmen have fired the place. Can you smell smoke, Richard? I can."

"Yes," said Richard, after a moment. "God, what an end, to be burnt alive here."

"I don't think we need fear that. Thanks be this *is* a Model Prison. The whole place is made of steel and concrete. There's nothing much to burn either. No carpets, curtains, wooden floors, and practically no furniture. But if only we could get out. If *only* we could get out."

The Duke was a man of immense resource and indomitable bravery but he knew that this time he was defeated. The walls and floor were concrete, the door and the window had bars of steel. There was no lock in the door which could be picked and on the inside it was flush without any keyhole or handle. There was just nothing to be done.

The fire which had been started was in the block opposite, where the mutiny had begun. After a time they could see clouds of sparks and smoke going up into the night sky. Behind the lower cell windows red flames flickered against which the black bars stood out clearly but there was little wind, and even if the fire got a good hold it was unlikely that it would spread to the other side of the courtyard for some hours to come.

The two prisoners could now hear the distinct *rat-tat-tat* of machine-guns and the explosion of hand grenades. Evidently the mob had forced its way out of the far side of the building and was being driven back by troops called out to suppress the prison rising.

After a time things quieted down. Then came the trampling of feet in the corridor and the slamming of cell doors again. The exhausted mob having failed in its attempt to break out was being herded back into the blocks and hurled three and four at a time into the nearest cells that offered.

At last the sad morning dawned. Fifty-odd bodies lay sprawled about the courtyard; groans and lamentations came from nearly every cell. No breakfast ration was issued; instead, the tramp of marching feet echoed on the concrete and a squad of Marxists began to pull the prisoners out for examination. Some were taken, others left, according to the names on a long list carried by one of the prison officials. To their dismay Richard and the Duke, having admitted their identity, were ordered to step outside.

“But,” Richard protested, “We weren’t in last night’s affair.”

Yet even as he spoke he realized the futility of arguing. Nearly every prisoner had been loose and how could the authorities know that a few had remained locked in their cells?

Two bearded men in overalls pulled him out into the corridor and led him away; the Duke followed between two others. Their captors were all armed with pistols as well as rifles. To attempt to escape seemed hopeless. Just at the entrance of the building one prisoner broke away. His guards shot him dead before he had covered six yards.

Outside some lorries were drawn up; guards and prisoners were crowding into them and the leading one was already driving off packed to capacity.

With the muzzle of a rifle at his back De Richleau scrambled on to a lorry and wedged himself in next to Richard. "This looks bad," he said gruffly.

"Yes, I'm afraid we're for it," Richard swallowed hard. "What filthy luck to be outed for something we had no hand in."

"What idiots we were to send Simon off to Barcelona, you mean. If he'd been in Madrid he'd have heard about the mutiny and been along first thing this morning to take care of us."

"What the hell are we going to do—jump for it?"

"No good. They'd shoot us like rats. You saw them scupper that chap outside the prison."

"Where are they taking us? D'you think there'll be some sort of trial?"

"There may be. We can only hope there is." The Duke took out his cigarettes; offering them to Richard and then to the nearest guard.

"Thanks, *hombre*," said the man, lighting up.

"Where are we going?" asked De Richleau.

"*Circulo de Bellas Artes, hombre*. You started a fine fire last night so we're going to put you out by sending you for a swim." He laughed, not unkindly, at his own joke.

The Duke knew that the mockeries that the Reds called trials were held at the Arts Club and that, having drained the swimming-bath downstairs, they used it for their executions, so the grim humour of the jest was not lost upon him.

"It looks as though there'll be a trial," he told Richard, "but—old chap—I wouldn't hope too much from it."

Richard nodded. He was still half-dazed by the suddenness with which calamity had overtaken them. The streets through which they passed had many shuttered shops and lines of people queuing up for their various rations at others, but those were the only signs now of the Revolution. The men and women passing on the pavements appeared normally cheerful and scarcely bothered to turn and look at them. It seemed impossible that he would probably be dead in half an hour.

He tried to make himself realize that he would never see the adorable Marie-Lou again, or his little daughter Fleur, or his lovely old home,

Cardinal's Folly, back there in dear peaceful England. He kept on telling himself that it was true, real, definite. All his loves and friends and life itself was passing from him as he stood there rocking from side to side in the bumping lorry. Never again would he smell the new-mown hay or see the lights of Piccadilly. Never more spend a grand evening round the fireside yarning with that wonderful trio of old friends; two of whom had gone so unaccountably astray in the last throw with Fate—and all because of some dirty stinking politicians.

He could have screamed for mercy when he thought again of Marie-Lou, and had he been alone he might have given way as some of the poor wretches near by were already doing; but the Duke; the best, the dearest, and the greatest of all his friends was still beside him. It was somehow impossible to lose face in De Richleau's presence and, even in captivity, he seemed to give forth a strange strength and serenity which buoyed his companion up.

As Richard looked at him he smiled slightly and said in a low voice, very gently, "Keep your eye on me all the time. If there's a chance come in the second I act. If not, take it quietly. It won't be half as painful as a nasty motor smash."

"Righto," said Richard and was immensely relieved to find his voice sounded normal. "I do hope this isn't the end, though—I mean, that we'll meet again somewhere—else."

"But, my son, if we leave together we shall not part." The Duke's voice was firm with absolute conviction. "Surely you realize that. Even my small powers are enough, once the abyss is passed, to draw you up after me."

De Richleau had spent many years delving deeply into strange mysteries and much that was hidden to most earth-dwellers had been made plain to him. Richard was well aware of that although he had not thought very much about it except during the terrible experience they had had a few years before with Simon.

Now, at the Duke's words, all fear suddenly left him. They were going together; all would be well.

He had hardly realized the import of that one sentence when the lorry drew up before the Arts Club. The guards prodded the prisoners into a rough line with the muzzles of their rifles and the whole contingent passed inside. The hall was crowded with the previous loads which had arrived.

Richard and De Richeau took their place in this grim queue which waited to pass before the Terrorist tribunal; its head was already moving through an inner door. During their time of waiting only two men came out again; both white and shaken as they were led away to some unknown destination between guards. Every few moments there came a faint tapping sound as though some machine hammer was hitting a block of concrete quickly and regularly a few hundred yards away; yet it came from somewhere beneath their feet.

The Duke was the first to face the Tribunal. It was composed of two men and a woman. A thin man with a high, narrow skull and an incredibly long nose, evidently the President as he sat in the centre, did what little talking there was done.

“Name?” he asked.

“Hypolite Dubois.”

The man looked at his list. “Alias the Duke de Richeau. Conspirator against the legally elected Government of the Spanish People,” he said drily, and signed to the guards. “Take him down.”

“I demand the right to see a representative of my Embassy,” announced the Duke loudly.

“Not granted,” snapped the President.

“I am a friend of Comrade Simon Aron.”

“Never heard of him. Next.”

As the guards shuffled up to lead De Richeau away he suddenly leaned forward and stared straight into the Terrorist’s eyes. His voice came almost in a whisper but it was very clear: “May the Brothers of the Shadow have you in *their* keeping.”

A little tremor ran through the President such as those which are spoken of jokingly as ‘someone walking over my grave.’ He did not know what had affected him but for a moment those brilliant grey eyes which had bored into his had made him feel afraid. With a quick shrug he recovered himself yet he had an uncanny feeling that he was going to see those eyes again.

De Richeau had passed on and Richard, who had been standing in the doorway, was pushed forward.

“Name?”

“Richard Eaton.”

“Associate of the last. Conspirator against the legally elected Government of the Spanish People. Take him down.”

Richard did not even bother to make an appeal to be allowed to see a representative of his Embassy. In view of the last case it was so obviously useless and his one thought was not to lose touch with the Duke. Hurrying ahead of his guards he caught him up.

At the bottom of the flight of stairs there was a long corridor, a turning, and then some marble steps. As they came down them they saw the swimming-bath.

It was dry of water but on its bottom there was plenty of fresh-spilled blood. In the deep end one squad of Militiamen were passing out some dead bodies while another lot was lining up a batch of prisoners against the bullet-scarred wall. Stationed on the rim at the shallow end was a machine-gun and its crew. The bath was a well-chosen place for executions because it could so easily be sluiced down.

De Richleau had assessed the possibilities of escape each moment since they had left the lorry and decided that it was quite hopeless. With the gun's crew, the two squads at the end of the bath, and the guards, a number of whom stayed on to see the fun after having brought a batch of prisoners down, there were at least forty armed men present. He smiled at Richard and they stood quietly together with about ten other men from the prison, waiting their turn to be shot.

All the bodies had been taken from the bath and piled up on its side to await removal. The next batch of victims was now lined up ready. A machine-gunner was fitting a new belt of ammunition to his gun. The Duke and Richard turned away so that they should not actually witness the massacre. Two Militiamen began to bind the hands of the prisoners in their group.

Suddenly there was a stentorian shout. Every man in the baths swung round to stare at the marble steps. Rex came bounding down them, six at a time.

“Stop!” he yelled. “Stop!” and catching sight of his two friends, he gasped, “God! that was a near one! I didn't wake till ten this morning. When I got the lowdown on what was doing at the prison I thought my heart had stopped. I've been running ever since.”

Richard put his hand over his eyes for a second then took it away again to make certain Rex was really there.

De Richleau drew a sharp breath and released it slowly. "That was touch and go," he said. "Another five minutes, or ten at the outside, and you could only have collected our corpses."

"Whew!" Rex whistled, rolling his big head from side to side on his enormous shoulders. "What a relief. Well, tell 'em it's all right and let's go."

"Tell them..." the Duke hesitated, glancing at some Militiamen who had come up to see what was happening. "My dear fellow, they won't take their orders from us. You must tell them yourself."

"But I can't speak Spanish," Rex complained. "That's why I was so long making this dive. Those fool cops at the prison couldn't understand King's English. I had hell's own job before I found out you'd been taken here."

"Well, what shall I say to them?"

"Oh, the usual gup about your both being good Comrades. *Salud! Oo-archie-pay!* an' all that. Then that you're friends of Simon's."

"Do—do you mean you haven't brought any order of release—or anything?" Richard stammered.

"Of course not. How'd I get it? Simon's the big shot in these parts but he's in Barcelona. I wouldn't even know who to apply to and anyhow I had no time."

"The devil you didn't," murmured the Duke. "This is not looking quite so pretty. How did you get in here?"

"Barged my way in. I'm too big for most people to try and stop when I'm going places. Besides, most of these birds think I'm a batty *Americano*. They just all go jolly and pleasant when I make fancy faces at 'em."

"Then you'd better try that now. I've a feeling we shall need all the queer grimaces you've got in your repertoire if we're to succeed in excusing ourselves from the next bathing party."

Rex grinned widely and lifted his huge clenched fist above his head as he broke into queer mangled Spanish addressing the Militiaman who seemed to be in charge.

The watching Terrorists had been looking curious and suspicious. They now gathered round the hulking American, listening politely and smiled a little at the strange words he uttered but, after a bit, they began to shake their heads and murmur, "*Non comprendo. Non comprendo.*"

De Richleau quickly came to the rescue. He explained with a wealth of idiom and graphic gestures that a terrible mistake had been made. They were not Reactionaries at all but good Comrades, all for the Revolution.

It did not work. Not even for a moment. The men went hard and cold. The Tribunal upstairs, they said, knew its business. No mistake was possible. If their friend, the *Americano*, had been allowed in to say good-bye to them that was one thing, but they weren't such fools as to believe this silly story. As for Comrade Aron, who was he? They didn't know him.

"It's no good, Rex, unless you can get some sort of order for postponement," said De Richleau at last. "We might persuade them to stay the executions for an hour if you've any hope of getting that."

"I'll get it," Rex nodded, seriously perturbed now. "I'll get it if I have to turn every office in Government Spain upside-down."

The Duke spoke to the Militiamen again but they were adamant. They were busy people. They had their work to do. The *siesta* hour was approaching. No, they would not allow a fresh appeal to the Tribunal. The Tribunal had already given its decision. One of the condemned was a Duke, wasn't he? Someone had said so. Well, by all the rotting bodies of the stinking Saints, that was enough, wasn't it? Any more nonsense from the *Americano* and they'd put him in the swimming-bath too.

As this was interpreted in snatches to Rex his face became more and more anxious. It was the ugliest situation in which he had ever been. He began to glance quickly from side to side. There were dozens of these murderous devils lounging round the baths and it had no other entrance but the way he had come.

He decided that Simon's neck wanted wringing for having got them all into this, and that when that normally aimable person got back from Barcelona, he'd wring it. But that wouldn't help the Duke and Richard. They would be dead long before Simon returned to Madrid. They would be dead in a few minutes unless he, Rex, did something.

Several of the Militiamen had turned away to go about their terrible business. Rex's eye fell upon one who had just come up to tie Richard's hands.

Chapter Twenty-three – The Blood Bath of Madrid

You'd better go, Rex," said the Duke.

"Go!" repeated Rex. "Now is that likely?"

"You can't assist us by remaining, and to see the finish of this would be horrible for you."

"D'you think I'm going to let these murderous swine..."

"Steady, man. For God's sake don't start anything. You'll only get yourself killed too."

Richard retreated from the man with the cord. "No!" he exclaimed sharply. "Don't bind my hands. I'd rather take it smoking a cigarette."

"It's the regulation, *hombre*," the man insisted. "Here, Juan, pull this chap's arms behind his back."

"Who's the big shot here?" Rex called in his mangled Spanish.

"I am," declared a lanky fellow who had already done most of the talking. "Keep out of this, *Americano*. We've had quite enough of you." He turned contemptuously away to speak to one of the three men crouching by the machine-gun.

"Damn you! Take your hands off me!" exclaimed Richard as Juan reached out to grab him. De Richleau moved back to his side but was watching Rex intently.

"Out of the way, you," growled Juan to the Duke. "Come on, Manuel. Bring the cord round here behind him."

As the lanky leader turned away Rex put a leg of mutton hand on his shoulder and jerked him round again. "For the last time! Do you call this shooting off?"

The man snarled suddenly, "You *crapa*..." He never finished the word. Rex's left hand closed round his neck like a vice; his right gripped the man's belt. A mighty heave and the Marxist was kicking in the air. Next second he was hurtling through it head-first down into the swimming-bath. His head cracked like an eggshell on the bottom.

The man's feet had hardly left the ground when De Richleau acted. In his pocket he had been clutching a loose packet. It contained pepper hoarded from provisions Simon had sent into prison. As it hit Juan full in the face

the packet burst. Blinded by the fiery grains, he let out a howl of pain. At the same second the Duke snatched the blinded man's gun.

As De Richeau flung the packet Richard side-stepped. Lunging forward he grabbed at the pistol in Manuel's belt. Manuel had both hands occupied with the cord. He gave back quickly. The gun came loose but clattered on the floor. That saved Richard for the moment. A third Militiaman already had him covered. As he stooped to snatch up the fallen gun the man fired. The shot whistled through the air where Richard's head had been. Manuel had drawn back to kick the stooping Richard in the face. A second shot rang out. Manuel reeled and fell screaming, shot through the stomach by the Duke.

The actions of the three friends were almost simultaneous. Within five seconds of Rex's first move two of the Militiamen were as good as dead and a third staggering wildly about convulsed in agony by the pepper in his eyes.

Before the lanky man's head had cracked on the bottom of the bath, Rex had sailed into the kneeling machine-gun crew. His big boot took one fellow in the mouth, sending him flying after his leader. Another felt himself seized by the scruff of his neck and his head was bashed in against a pillar. The third flung himself at Rex's legs but Rex came down on top of him with eighteen stone of weight and drove the breath out of his body.

Right and left, all over the baths, Militiamen were now running, shouting, grabbing up their rifles and drawing automatics. The three friends would have stood no earthly chance, had it not been for the other prisoners. Ten of them were standing near the Duke; six of them were still unbound; two more had just been brought down from the Tribunal.

A moment earlier they had just been standing there resigned or whimpering. Now a sudden flame of hope blazed up in their dazed minds. With one accord they threw themselves into the *melée*. One secured Juan's rifle, another Manuel's, another leapt into the bath and tore the dead leader's pistol from his body. Two more flung themselves on the abandoned machine-gun, swivelled it on to the Terrorists who were charging along the left side of the bath, and opened fire.

The whole long chamber rang, cracked and whined with bullets. Hell was let loose there in this deadly, unpremeditated encounter. The prisoners were madmen, driven insane by the sudden hope of escape when their

very moments of life had been numbered. With desperate courage they flung themselves on the Marxists; even those who were still bound using their feet to kick and trip their appointed executioners.

The Duke was shot through the arm and dropped his pistol. A squint-eyed man rushed forward to club him with a rifle. Richard shot him through the head at point-blank range. Next second Richard was shot through the leg.

Rex was already on the steps waving his own automatic and bawling, "Come on! Come on!"

In the subterranean room the explosions were so deafening that even his bellowing could only be heard at split second intervals but De Richleau turned and saw him. Regaining his pistol with his left hand he made a supreme effort to pull Richard's sleeve with his right over which the blood was streaming. They both turned and staggered up the steps to Rex's side with two other prisoners close on their heels.

With bullets zipping after them they gained the top of the steps and, now out of range, paused a second for a breather. Richard had felt the bullet hit him as though a hot iron had seared him in the fleshy part of his right leg above the knee. The place stung now a little but he was not conscious of any serious pain in the excitement of the moment.

Another prisoner joined them and their group numbered six as they darted round the corner. Rex was leading. He ran slap into two more Militiamen leading a man and a fair-haired boy down to execution.

The machine-gun was still banging ceaselessly below and the other shooting merged into its clatter. Apparently the two Militiamen assumed the fusillade to be caused only by the squads busy on their bloody work of exterminating Rebel sympathizers. Their faces expressed blank surprise as Rex and the rest charged into the passage.

Rex outed one by a violent jab to the chin, De Richleau struck the other on the temple with the butt of his pistol. As they went down groaning the others trampled over them; the man and boy turned and came racing after their rescuers.

Half-way along the corridor one of the escaped prisoners shouted, "Not that way! Not that way!" and barged through a swing baize door flush in the right-hand wall. The rest stopped in their tracks, swung round and followed him.

The baize door opened on to the Club kitchens. "All have been shot if we'd gone upstairs!" panted the new leader. "May get out—tradesman's entrance."

There was no one in the service quarters. Pots, pans and cleaning utensils were lying about just as they had been left when the Club was raided nearly six weeks before. The man who knew the premises pounded into a big scullery with long sinks, out of another door and down a passage. A moment later they were tumbling after him up a narrow, twisting flight of stone steps. At the top was a small lobby and a double swing door with a fanlight above giving on to the street. It was locked.

"Stand back!" yelled Rex, and taking a running kick he brought the flat of his great foot crashing against the lock. It gave with a snap and one half of the door swung open.

"Wait!" cried the Duke. "Wait. For God's sake, *walk!*" But the Spaniards either did not understand or heed his warning. All four men rushed out.

The boy was about to follow when Rex grabbed him by the arm. "You stay with me, kid," he said quickly.

The main entrance of the Club was on a corner formed by the broad *Calle de Alcalá* and a narrower street. Opposite it was a triangular open space where the *Alcalá* and the equally broad *Gran Vía* joined. On the right they merged into one thoroughfare; on the left they were separated by two blocks each tapering to a hairpin bend, the nearer being occupied by the Gas Company's show-rooms and the farther by the *Café Molinero*. Both buildings faced on to the open triangle and were divided by another street, the *Caballero de Gracia*.

In the open space several lorries still full of prisoners and guards were drawn up. As the four Spaniards dashed out into the street the Militiamen in the lorries saw them and, immediately suspicious, called on them to halt. The men raced on unheeding up the broad *Alcalá*. Rifles cracked and De Richleau, who was peering out, saw one man fall. A dozen guards lounging about the main entrance of the Club came swiftly into action and gave chase.

"We can't stay here," gasped Richard. "Some of them will be up these stairs in a moment."

"We'll make for the Aquarium—half-left—just behind the Gas Company's office there!" said Rex. "It's got another entrance in the next street."

“One minute!” De Richleau pulled to the door. There came a sound of hobnailed boots ringing on the pavement and further firing as the Militiamen streamed by in pursuit of the three surviving Spaniards.

“I’ll lead,” muttered Rex pushing past the Duke. “I know the way.” As the sound of thudding feet died in the distance he flung open the door and, lugging the boy by the arm, plunged into the street.

All four of them were half-way across the *Alcala* before a fresh shout went up. Luckily a tram screened them from the lorries for a moment but as they reached the opposite kerb a fresh burst of rifle fire spattered the pavement with bullets. The Duke was hit again, this time in the hand.

The Aquarium could only give them temporary shelter as they had been seen to enter it. Knocking over a man who tried to stop them they dashed through its arcade and out into the *Caballero de Gratia*. Turning half-left again they crossed it at the run and dived into the *Previsores del Porvenir*, a bank which lay a few doors from Molinero’s in the second hairpin block. When they came out of its farther entrance into the *Gran Via* they were walking.

Their only chance now lay in mingling with the crowd. If they attempted to run farther it was certain the sight of them would give rise to another hue and cry. Fortunately the Spaniards had drawn off most of the Militiamen who were not engaged in guarding prisoners.

De Richleau had his blood-soaked right hand in his pocket and his wounded right arm was protected from jostling by Rex walking on that side of him. Richard’s wound was paining him now. A large patch of blood stained his trouser leg and he limped a little but Rex made the boy they had brought with them walk in front to hide Richard’s state as much as possible.

A hundred yards farther up they crossed the *Gran Via* and hurried down a side-street. At last they relaxed a trifle, feeling that they had achieved at least a temporary safety.

“Oh, thank you, Señors—thank you!” the boy cried suddenly, bursting into tears. He was only a little chap of about twelve.

“We’re not out of the wood yet, I’m afraid, but we’ll do all we can to save you,” the Duke told him in Spanish. “Where are you taking us, Rex?” he added in English.

“Only place I can think of—the Tunnel. If we can make it we’ll be safe there until to-night or maybe longer.”

After walking some way through less crowded streets they turned east towards the *Plaza de Colon*. Just before they reached it they came to an empty, boarded-up lot between two great blocks of office buildings.

“Here’s one of the entrances,” said Rex. “You’d best all keep a look-out while I try and gate-crash.”

They formed a sheltering group about him while he examined the padlock on the board door of the hoarding. Richard lit cigarettes for himself and the Duke. They appeared to be chatting casually while actually scanning the streets with anxious eyes. Normally it was a busy part of the city but there were not many people about as it was now after twelve o’clock and the *siesta* hours had started.

“Go ahead,” said Richard suddenly. Rex already had two of his fingers under the loop of iron which held the padlock. He screwed up his face and wrenched, there was a splintering sound, and the screws that held the loop were torn out of the wood. Another anxious vigil followed until one by one they could slip inside unobserved.

Behind the hoarding was a mass of turned-up earth, a big crane and a large quantity of rusting iron material. To the left, under the hook of the crane, appeared a wide, gaping hole. Peering into it they could see its bottom only about twenty feet below the street level. Rex picked up an abandoned ladder, adjusted it at the side of the hole and they all descended into it.

At the bottom of the hole they saw on two sides big arches supported by curved iron girders. The arches led away into impenetrable blackness. In the entrance of one there were some large stone blocks. While Rex drew the ladder down after them the others collapsed wearily upon the stones.

The first necessity was to tend the wounded. De Richleau gave instructions while Rex did the bandaging. Richard took off his trousers and declared that although his wound hurt him it was not now bleeding very much. The Duke had lost a lot of blood and was still bleeding badly. He helped Rex to adjust a tourniquet round his upper arm and they bandaged his lower arm and his palm, a piece of the side of which had been torn away, with the tail of his shirt. All their injuries were flesh wounds but

Richard's thigh muscle had received a nasty tear. It looked as if both men would be *hors-de-combat* for some time.

"What is this place?" Richard asked when the bandaging was done.

"A *Metro* they started to build between *La Cibeles* and the Hippodrome," Rex told him, "They couldn't complete it on account of some tributary of the Manzanares which runs under it and caused a whole section of it to cave in."

"Indalecio Prieto started it when he was in the Cabinet," added the Duke.

Richard frowned. "I thought he was one of the Red leaders."

"He is. Prieto's the U.G.T. chief in the Asturias. Oviedo is his headquarters. But he was Minister of Labour for a time. Some people think he's not quite as Red as he's painted and about the only man in Spain who might agree a compromise with the Fascists, which would lead to a type of modified National-Socialism. He's an able fellow and, if you remember, Cristoval Ventura, who was one of his lieutenants, spoke most highly of him that night we were at Botin's."

"So you know Cristoval?" Rex remarked.

De Richleau nodded. "Yes. Simon's aware of that already but we don't mind telling you any of our secrets now. It's wonderful to have you with us again."

"Hi, wait a bit. Let's get this straight. Because I put on an act way back in those baths I hope you haven't got any funny ideas about my turning anti-Government."

"My dear chap," Richard laughed, "how can you be anything else after having just helped kill about a dozen Government supporters?"

"That's one thing," said Rex seriously. "I had to get you out, hadn't I? Simon would have done the same if he'd been there. That was only a little personal affair, though, and nothing to do with politics. You'd better keep any State secrets you've got right under your hats unless you want them passed on to the right quarter."

"But you must see that they'll be after your blood now. We're not suggesting you should help us assassinate Largo Caballero, or anything, but you're in it with us up to the neck as far as this escape is concerned."

"Is there anything about me makes you think I've gone nuts? Sure I'm in this with you till I've seen you safe some place. Then I guess I'll have to lie

low for a bit until Simon can fix things for me by rendering due apologies about the killings.”

“But, Rex,” De Richleau pleaded, “surely you can’t approve of the ghastly work those butchers in the baths were doing?”

“Lord, no! That side of it makes me feel just awful. But the people up top know what they’re doing and they say it’s necessary. The country’s just got to be saved somehow from falling into the clutches of reactionaries like you. If it’s not, France, Britain, even the States will follow and we’ll all be licking the boots of Dictators.”

“No necessity or cause can possibly be made to justify the shooting of scores of innocent people in cold blood. Think of that child we brought with us.” De Richleau paused and peered round in the half-light. “Where the devil’s he got to?”

With the extraordinary facility for only living in the moment possessed by so many children, the boy had apparently already forgotten his terror and gone off to explore the entrance of the opposite tunnel. When Rex brought him back, fearing that he might fall down some pit in the semi-darkness, he asked De Richleau eagerly if he thought the caves they were in had ever been used by smugglers.

The Duke said it might well be so and that in any case he knew some fine smuggling stories. He then asked the boy about himself.

The little chap’s name was Alonso. His mother was a ballet-dancer; not a very good one, he admitted with youthful candour. They had an apartment in the *Calle Serrano*. Uncle Paulo often came to see them there. He wasn’t really an uncle but he liked to be called that. Uncle Paulo was very rich. He was always bringing them presents; lovely surprises of all sorts for Mummy and stunning toys for Alonso. On his twelfth birthday, last May, Uncle Paulo had given him a marvellous train. It could be run off the electric light and had three engines.

De Richleau questioned him gently as to how he had come to be in prison.

It seemed that one Sunday morning five or six weeks ago, Alonso could not remember which but it was the Sunday there had been shooting in the streets, Uncle Paulo had come to the apartment all pale and shaking. They had hidden him in Mummy’s clothes closet and he had remained there till Tuesday. But then the men with guns had come. They had beaten poor

Uncle Paulo's head in and dragged Mummy and Alonso off to prison. He had been pushed into a cell with a couple of men and he hadn't seen Mummy since. At this point Alonso began to cry again.

They cheered him up as well as they could and Rex found some toffees in his pocket which eased the situation. It was then discovered that the Duke had actually been a smuggler himself. Rex was descended on one side from a real Red Indian Chief and knew all about tomahawks and squaws, while Richard had once driven a real railway engine for a week during a general strike and could fly an aeroplane.

Instead of lying a nameless body among the heap of corpses in the swimming-baths of the *Circulo de Bellas Artes*, little Alonso spent an entrancing afternoon with these exciting new friends. Although he bore the marks of strain and fear from his weeks of imprisonment, he was a jolly little chap and it eased their tired nerves to get away from the thought of the death and suffering which was occurring all around them by telling him fantastic stories of adventure.

Towards the latter part of the afternoon the Duke's and Richard's wounds began to ache and pain them badly so the job of entertaining Alonso fell mainly to Rex. He had taken a great fancy to the boy because in a vague way he resembled a larger edition of Robin, Rex's own little boy of three. Curiously enough, Rex's poor Spanish did not prove as big a stumbling-block as might have been expected; providing he had plenty of time to think out simple sentences he could get on quite well with the limited vocabulary he had picked up during his stay in Spain.

When darkness began to fall they set about discussing the immediate, and extremely precarious, future. Rex having missed his breakfast and none having been served in the prison that morning, all four of them were ravenously hungry. It was obvious that they could not make the tunnel their permanent hiding-place. Richard and De Richleau were in urgent need of a doctor and, although their wounds had been bound up, there was a possibility that they might go septic unless they had proper attention. The Duke was running a high temperature but it was he who decided the matter quite early in the debate by reminding Richard of the Spaniard at the Finnish Legation who took refugees in for a cash payment.

Rex said he had not heard of the cash part of it but he knew that the Finnish as well as many of the South American Legations were chock-full of

people who had no legal right to be there.

They all agreed that they should try to reach the *Calle de Fernando el Santo*, and start at once; because they would be less likely to be challenged by the patrols while the streets were fairly full than if they left their attempt until late at night.

It was quite certain that their descriptions would have been circulated but so many politicals were 'wanted' in Madrid these days that the police could not possibly remember the descriptions of them all. The great trouble was lack of papers which they could show on demand. Rex's were all in order but if the police did not recognize him from his description they might well recall his name as that of the *Americano* who had loosed hell in the *Circulo de Bellas Artes* that day; while Richard and De Richleau had only the passports which had already been registered by the authorities at the Model Prison.

Rex cheered the others to some extent by telling them that war fever had gripped a great section of the Militiamen who had previously roamed the streets and that in the last month many thousands of them had been despatched to the various fronts; also that in the same period most of the bands of hooligans and zealous patriots who had previously made themselves such a nuisance by questioning passers-by had either been suppressed or got tired of their self-appointed task. The police were the only people they really had to fear and as the lights of the city were now dimmed against air raids they should be able to slip along from one patch of shadow to another without encountering trouble.

Richard's leg had gone stiff and he suffered agonies as they helped him up the ladder out of the pit. He was very lame now and could only get along by leaning heavily on Rex.

One by one they slipped out of the board door after having made a careful reconnaissance of the street through the chinks of the hoarding. Alonso had been told that he was to think of their journey as a game in which they were smugglers trying to run diamonds past the police. If he was questioned he was to pretend that he was very ill and did not understand, but if they were arrested he was to take to his heels and run.

Their pace had to be a moderate one on account of Richard's leg but their spirits rose as they proceeded. Madrid had quietened down a lot since Richard and the Duke had last been loose in it. Only every other

street lamp was lit and these had sheets of brown paper pasted over half the surface of their glass. A service of motor-buses was running but these had their blinds pulled down and only showed blue lights for headlamps. The windows in the tall blocks were carefully screened.

They stuck to the main thoroughfares, considering them less dangerous than the chance of being pulled up as the only pedestrians in a byway. The necessity of adjusting their pace to Richard's was to some extent an advantage. It prevented them from arousing suspicion by hurrying and gave them ample time to study the details of the dim vistas ahead. With anxious eyes constantly watching for the police they dreaded, they made their way cautiously from one long patch of shadow to another, crossing the streets innumerable times to reap the maximum advantage of the semi-darkness.

All went well until they reached the very corner of the *Fernando el Santo*. At it a solitary policeman suddenly stepped out from the pitch-blackness of a doorway and said gruffly, "Your papers, Comrades?"

Chapter Twenty-four – The House of Mental Death

Their only resource, short of shooting, was bluff, and summoning the last remnants of his ebbing strength De Richleau put up a magnificent show.

“Keep away! Keep away!” he cried in Spanish, backing hurriedly from the policeman who had accosted them. “My friend’s little boy has a fever and we’re afraid it’s cholera.”

“I’ve heard that one before,” muttered the man suspiciously.

“We’re taking him to see Dr. Mendoza who is a refugee in the Finnish Legation; because he is an expert in tropical diseases,” protested the Duke.

“Come on, let’s see your papers.”

Suddenly De Richleau advanced again, going right up to him. “Just as you wish but for God’s sake don’t delay us. I fear I’ve got it too.” With a quick movement he laid his sound hand on the policeman’s wrist.

As the man felt the dry, burning fingers of the feverish Duke his jaw fell. Almost leaping away he angrily signalled them on; but he did not leave them. He followed them at a respectable distance right up to the Finnish Legation. It proved just as well that he did since three *Guardias Asalto* were posted before it; not only to protect its inmates but to prevent unauthorized people going in.

The *Guardias* were just about to come forward when the policeman shouted a hasty warning. The pseudo-infection party stood aside just by the Legation door while a swift conference was held. The *Guardias* knew of no Dr. Mendoza in the building, but then there were three or four hundred people there.

In any case, cholera suspects could not be allowed to wander about the city. Several cases had been reported already; due, it was believed, to dead bodies being thrown into wells during the early days of the Revolution. All cholera patients were being isolated. These people should be sent at once to the Fever Hospital, but who was going to take them? The *Guardias* could not leave their post and the policeman certainly did not want the job. Perhaps they had not got cholera at all? Better let them see their doctor. If he were an expert he would know, then appropriate measures could be taken.

With a swiftly-suppressed sigh of relief De Richleau pressed the bell. The golden gate within which safety lay was opened to them and they passed provisionally inside.

The Finnish Minister and his countrymen had not returned to Madrid as there were no Finns in the city requiring their protection. It is impossible to believe they were aware that their Spanish representative was piling up a fortune by selling immunity from the Terror to desperate Spaniards by sheltering them under the Finnish flag but that the Finns knew there were several hundred people in their house can hardly be doubted. Unlike some of the great Embassies to whose eternal shame it will be recorded that, under the guise of neutrality, they never raised a finger to save a life, it may well be that in generous humanity the Finns deliberately closed their eyes to the fact that many poor, broken souls had sought sanctuary within their gates.

Once inside, the half-fainting Duke strove to arrange matters. At first the Spaniard in charge said that it was quite impossible to take them in owing to the house being crammed far in excess of its capacity already; but De Richleau opened his waistcoat and asked Rex to slit up the lining. On seeing some of the high-value notes which were neatly stitched into it the Spaniard began to change his tone. He said he could no longer house people for three thousand *pesetas* a head, as he had been doing when they brought him Doña Favorita.

A bargain was eventually struck at twenty thousand *pesetas* for the three men and Alonso; a heavy payment but they were in no position to argue and, including the balance of the cash they had brought with them from England and the profits on the Duke's metal deals, he and Richard still had more than twice that sum on them even after purchasing the Valmojado factory from Señor Gomara.

In addition all four had to give a signed undertaking that if they left the Legation they would not demand readmission to it and that they would not communicate with anyone outside during their stay there. The Spaniard insisted on this mainly for his own protection but also because he did not want to get into trouble through Royalists engineering plots while in his charge.

There were two doctors among the refugees and one room on the fourth floor had been set aside as a sanatorium. Two of the five beds in it

were cleared of a carbuncle case and a man with a sprained ankle for the benefit of Richard and the Duke. Some nuns were in attendance and, suffering as they did from strong inhibitions about the propriety of seeing, much less washing, the male form, the Englishmen found their nurses' standard of cleanliness left much to be desired; but the doctors were efficient and pronounced the wounds troublesome although not dangerous.

The Spaniard in charge reported to the policeman that the name of the doctor they had come to see was Herrero, not Mendoza, and that Doctor Herrero had diagnosed the glandular swellings of the eldest of the men and the boy as mumps, not cholera. Since mumps was not included in the list of diseases scheduled for isolation the question of a dangerous epidemic spreading from the Finnish Legation, if they remained there, did not arise. The Doctor said that as both his patients were running high temperatures he had put them to bed at once, and as the other two might develop the infection at any moment he thought it best to allow them to stay with their friends.

The policeman was fortunately aware of the extraordinarily painful manner in which mumps may affect the adult male so he quickly lost all further desire to interview Rex and Richard. The *Guardias*, who were on very friendly terms with the man who ran the Legation, agreed quite readily that all four of the new-comers should be allowed to accept the preferred hospitality. That they were really another batch of refugees the *Guardias* did not doubt but they kept their own council; partly because they were being very well paid for shutting their eyes to such things and partly because they were decent, orderly fellows who strongly disapproved of the wholesale murder that was going on in Madrid. Doctor Herrero, an olive-skinned Spaniard with a lisp, conveyed the news of their immunity from arrest to the new refugees who were at last able to consider themselves safe.

Rex and Alonso were taken below to a cellar, which was half-full of valuable merchandise that had been stored there for safekeeping by a number of shrewd people just before the outbreak, and were told that they must doss down there as well as they could. Every bed, sofa and couch in the building was already occupied and the majority of its male inmates were sleeping on the floors in the passages.

There were several other men in the cellar already and these shared out various soft goods such as bales of silk and lace with Rex who made up beds for Alonso and himself. It was rather smelly down there and horribly stuffy but not uncomfortable.

Next morning the whole colony of refugees was a-twitter about the new arrivals. De Richleau enquired for Doña Favorita and, chaperoned by two nuns, she was allowed in to see him. This chaperonage tickled him immensely in view of her circumstances at their first meeting but he was much too gallant and kind a man to dream of recalling her little flutter with Don Palacio, much less the top of an hotel bedroom wardrobe.

She was as demure now as the strictest etiquette could demand that a daughter of General de los Passos-Inclán should be; and Richard, after greeting her from his bed, marvelled, not for the first time, at the amount of guile which could be hidden behind a young and charming female countenance.

In spite of this forced repression of her normal high spirits she was unaffectedly glad to see them and listened eagerly to that portion of their adventures which De Richleau elected to give her. It was pointless for him to keep up the pretence of being Hypolite Dubois any longer so he told her his real name and, introducing her to Rex and Alonso, asked her to present them to such people as she knew in the house.

Doña Favorita willingly obliged and so class-ridden was the whole establishment that she gained a temporary notoriety from the disclosure of the fact that her own rescuer had proved to be a Duke.

Rex soon came to hate the place, and the two invalids would not have stayed a moment in it, once they were able to get about again, if their lives had not depended on their doing so. They had only exchanged one prison for another and of the two they were inclined to prefer their old cell.

In the Legation they were able to move freely from room to room and, if the delicacies Simon had sent them before were excluded, they enjoyed slightly better food; but they were never alone owing to the crowding of the building and at times the narrow, bigoted outlook which dominated the inmates of the place drove them almost frantic.

In the prison the captives had spent endless time and ingenuity in passing on a few words of consolation and hope to each other; here, where they could communicate freely, they talked of little but the revenge

they would take on their enemies when the war was won, and malicious tittle-tattle about each other.

An incredible old Duquesa ruled the roost among the refugees. The nine priests among them acted as a kind of sycophantic bodyguard to this old tyrant and a score of spineless men danced attendance on her. Court etiquette and rules governing social precedence had developed to a more farcical degree of formality in Spain during the Victorian era than they ever achieved under *Le Roi Soleil* two centuries earlier at Versailles; and this selfish crafty, abysmally ignorant old woman, whose sole knowledge consisted of church services and the Spanish equivalent of Debrett, had the whole weight of a giant 'snob' tradition behind her.

Most of the other dowagers of rank accepted her leadership as natural and fitting while the broader-minded put up with it rather than face social ostracism. The younger women were kept in a state of tutelage differing little from that imposed on novices in a convent and, after virtually forced confessions, the Dowager's squad of priests dealt out heavy penances in *Paters* and *Aves* to any of them caught intriguing with one of the men. The majority of the rich bourgeois who had bought their way into this grim sanctuary were so pleased at finding themselves cheek by jowl with people of rank that they aped their manners and slavishly followed every whim of the old Duquesa.

So lost were these people to all sense of reality that they frequently spoke disparagingly of many of the Generals who were fighting their battle, referring to them contemptuously as men of indifferent birth and, therefore, of no moment. In spite of the unhealthily congested state of the building they had set aside the largest room in it for a chapel, so this could be used only for religious services which were held three times daily. Only illness served as a valid excuse for non-attendance and the Duquesa openly vented her displeasure on those who did not go to confession at least once weekly.

Social precedence was strictly preserved in the seating at the long tables where the refugees took their meagre meals. No one was allowed to go in before the Duquesa, and when she rose from the table everyone had to get up whether they had finished or not. The question of rank even extended to sanitary arrangements. As there were only seven lavatories in the building for the use of three-hundred-odd people, queues had to be

formed each morning and every member of the huge household had his or her place in a queue allotted solely on social qualifications.

There was, of course, a handful of rebels of both sexes. A few whose social status was so low that the Duquesa could not imagine how they had got in at all and a certain number, mostly much-travelled aristocrats, who refused to be bored by the interminable succession of services. They kept very much to themselves and formed a comparatively gay little *coterie* which had gravitated to two small rooms on the third floor at the back of the house.

Rex had little malice in his nature but he could not refrain from poking fun at the Duke and Richard about the company in which they found themselves. If these were the sort of folks they were fighting for, he said, he would like to see his friends compelled to live with them for twelve months at least. That would be the best possible punishment for all interfering reactionaries.

De Richleau took it in good part, explaining that the Duquesa and her set were only a small section of the Nationalists and the equivalent of the Catholic Black nobility of Italy whose power Mussolini had curbed quite effectively; stupid, narrow people whose continued existence was an anachronism in this modern age; but, he pointed out, pathetic and useless as they might be, they at least did not commit wholesale murder in order to force their political creed upon their fellow-citizens.

The Duke's advent into this almost mediaeval society proved something of a bombshell. The wound in his arm was doing nicely but the tear in the side of his right palm gave him considerable pain, so he was not allowed to leave the sickroom until a week after his arrival.

It was the end of the first week in September and he came downstairs on the day the Socialist, Largo Caballero, at last openly took over the Government in order to strengthen the resistance of Madrid's defenders to the rapidly approaching army of General Franco, who had now been appointed supreme Commander of the Nationalist forces.

De Richleau's rank unquestionably entitled him to the same position among the men as the Duquesa occupied among the women. To the surprise and consternation of a group of assembled Spaniards he firmly but courteously repudiated his right of priority to the second-best privy in the

house at the morning queue. Last comers, he said, should obviously come last, and he was one of the latest group to join the household.

His statement was at first regarded as only a meaningless politeness, but when they became convinced that he really meant what he said it produced an effect which, within those narrow confines, was the equivalent of a major International Crisis. To save face a fat, smooth-tongued priest, named Dom Francesco, pressed the Duke to go first, if for no other reason than because he was a foreigner and a guest on Spanish soil.

The Duke pointed out that at the moment, perhaps fortunately, they were not on Spanish but on Finnish soil. With a worried look Dom Francesco hurried off to place the matter with the utmost discretion before the Duquesa. She refused to believe him. De Richleau had many more quarterings than herself; he could claim half the Monarchs and ex-Monarchs of Europe as second or third cousins. He had the right to be addressed as 'cousin' by them when he was with them. He was one of the very few non-royal Knights of the Most Mighty and Puissant Order, the Golden Fleece, and, as such, himself a Hidalgo of Spain. It was utterly unthinkable that such a man should go after little Condes whose titles dated only from yesterday, and even common merchants.

The diplomatic Dom Francesco tried fresh persuasion, but the Duke stood firm. The whole business of the morning was held up. The situation was becoming acute. What in the world were they to do?

The frightful problem was solved by a tall, bald-headed man who had been watching the proceedings with much amusement. He introduced himself to De Richleau as the Marquis de Mondragon-Villablanca and suggested that in future they should draw lots for their places in the queue. The Duke agreed to this immediately and Dom Francesco gave way. He begged that the matter should not be mentioned to the other men in the house as he was most anxious that it should not get round to the Duquesa via one of their wives but, of course, it leaked out and the whole community was soon either scandalized or tittering over the affair.

This led to a minor revolution and a considerable falling-off of the attendance at the religious services. About a fifth of the refugees went over to the rebels, among whom the witty Mondragon-Villablanca had been one of the original leaders. The Duquesa was furious and saved her

face by spreading a rumour that the 'poor dear Duke' was no longer responsible for his actions as the horrors he had witnessed had turned his brain.

De Richleau attended service once a day, not to appease her, but because he knew that many of these poor people, whatever their outward pettiness, were perpetually tortured by thoughts of what might be happening to their dear ones and found much consolation in the practice of their faith. Therefore he wished to show publicly that he was no mocker at any consolations that faith might offer; but he refused confession and, consequently, the sacrament.

With such a large majority behind her the Duquesa continued to dominate the household and it remained a place of gloom. There had already been one birth and another was expected. A wedding was solemnized with half-hearted rejoicing. Several love-affairs were in progress and an occasional scandal set all tongues wagging maliciously. A section of the men played games of chance, and some among them gambled away piece by piece vast estates which they no longer possessed.

There was no dancing, no attempts to organize lectures, few books other than the works of reference in the office for the men to read and, owing to lack of needles and thread, little needlework on which the women could employ themselves. Debates had been attempted but were soon stopped by the priests on account of the thousand-and-one controversial matters affecting religion, some of which were almost certain to be dragged in. The food was dull and monotonous; all the drink in the place, except water and the daily ration of coarse wine, had long since been consumed. There was only one radio, and whenever Insurgent broadcasts were being given from Seville they were jammed by Madrid; consequently the refugees had to rely on foreign stations and the Duquesa banned dance-music as unsuitable at a time when all should be giving themselves to meditation and prayer. The tedium of the days was increased by the monotonous religious chanting and the vapid tittle-tattle only relieved by impertinent pronouncements as to what the Generals *ought* to do to save Spain.

Richard declared that he did not believe that even life in a German or Russian concentration camp could be quite so grim; at least for those prisoners who behaved themselves. Any group of people, however restricted their liberty, could indulge their natural feelings to some extent

—share jokes and play the fool, as the captives had done in the Model Prison—except here where the priests seemed to delight in sucking the life out of everyone.

His two friends agreed with him and the three of them spent most of their time with Mondragon-Villablanca and his cronies, but whenever they appeared outside this circle they were made to feel the shocked disapproval of the majority, which left only the imperturbable Duke unaffected.

Although their undertaking prohibited them from communicating with anyone outside, general news percolated freely by way of the few Legation servants. Before he was out of bed, too, a carefully-worded chit was smuggled to De Richleau which informed him that Lucretia had been in Valencia when the mutiny at the Prison took place and, on her return, was overjoyed to learn that they had escaped to safe harbourage in the Legation. A few days later Rex had a similar communication from Simon proving that the Red secret service was as good in Madrid as Lucretia's.

The wound in De Richleau's arm healed slowly and the dressings of his hand pained him a good deal. Richard's younger flesh healed more quickly and he was able to forget his injured leg after he had been downstairs a few days. The thought of Marie-Lou was constantly with him but he was comforted to some extent by the certainty that Simon, knowing where they were, would have written to tell her that they were alive and safe.

Early in September Iran fell to the Nationalists. By the middle of the month it was known in the Legation that Franco had advanced to the Guadarrama Mountains, some forty miles north-west of Madrid, and that San Sebastian had been taken after most bloody fighting. Far from being elated at this latter news the Duquesa's following could not say anything bad enough about the Generals for, as they termed it, wasting time and men on provincial towns, when all forces should, in their opinion, have been concentrated on Madrid and their own rescue.

The seige of the Alcazar was followed with sympathetic interest, but Colonel Móscardo was credited with doing no more than his duty. The Spanish Government horrified the world by endeavouring to kill five hundred and seventy women and children in the cellars of the Alcazar by exploding mines beneath it, this being no attempted atrocity by an Anarchist mob but a State affair; the Socialist War Minister going out from

Madrid himself to press the button with great solemnity and taking the Press and all his friends to watch him.

The Government confidently expected that the explosion of the mine on 18th September would blow the whole building sky-high, but it only shattered the south-west tower and killed two of the garrison. They succeeded in repulsing the assault that followed and the siege went on.

The defenders had only rifles, twelve machine-guns which were all more than fourteen years old, and a few dozen rounds of ammunition for a light field gun, for use against the massed attacks of the Reds who shelled them perpetually with heavy artillery, bombed them from the air, and exploded mines to blow them up from below. The garrison did not anticipate for one moment that they would be alive when a relieving force reached Toledo but as long as they could hang on they were preventing an enemy force out of all proportion to their own numbers from being utilized elsewhere.

A telephone line still connected the cellars of the Alcazar with the Toledo Telephone Exchange, held by the Reds, and De Richleau and his friends were touched almost to tears when they heard of one conversation on it.

Móscardo's son had been captured by the Reds. He was brought to the telephone and told to say that he was about to be shot unless the Alcazar surrendered.

"What shall I do?" the boy asked his father.

"All you can do, my son," replied Móscardo, "is to pray for us and die for Spain."

"That is quite simple," said the boy. "Both I will do."

At last on 29th September the news that one of the most epic sieges in history had been terminated by the relief of the beleaguered garrison of the Alcazar brought genuine gladness to many millions of people up and down the world.

In those last days of September and all through early October desperate battles were raging in the Guadarrama Mountains, but the Nationalists could not break through there. The Madrid wireless spoke glowingly of the special valour of the Communist Fifth Regiment, now many thousands strong, and the armoured train from the North Station was said to be doing splendid work.

Now that Toledo had been relieved by the Nationalists, they were also advancing from the south-west. On 21st October Navalcarnero, only

twenty miles south-west of Madrid, fell, and the Reds began to talk of abandoning the capital. Next day Valmojado was taken. Richard and the Duke smiled at each other when they heard that Valmojado was in Nationalist hands. Lucretia now only had to get a message through and the gold-lined pots and pans would be collected and despatched to some appropriate quarter. They congratulated themselves on a good job done but, had they known it, they were congratulating themselves a little too soon.

From October on air raids became frequent. The lights of Madrid were no longer controlled to show up military objectives and Franco's planes were bombing the civil population ruthlessly. Few bombs fell in the Embassy quarter as that was deliberately avoided, but almost every night the refugees could hear the crumping of the projectiles in other parts of the city.

There were many casualties and the Government carried out terrible reprisals by further slaughters of the prisoners in the Model Prison, and wholesale arrests of suspected Nationalist sympathisers.

By early November Franco's Moors and Foreign Legionaries had half-encircled the city. On the 4th they took Getafe which was only ten miles to its south and the Reds were preparing to make their last stand on the banks of the Manzanares. The rumbling drumfire of the guns both day and night was soon added to the constant succession of air raids. The thought now that agitated most people in the Finnish Legation was the very same that had led to the mutiny in the Model Prison: would they still be alive to welcome their rescuers when the capital was taken by a final assault, or would the mobs break in and massacre them first?

That question was becoming daily more acute. The Nationalists were now acting as ruthlessly as the Reds. Their Italian and German airman were driving terror into the hearts of Madrid's citizens. The anti-aircraft guns did little to check the raiders. Night after night tens of thousands of people lay wakeful in their beds listening, listening for the sirens and then sustaining that frightful period of waiting while the enemy planes droned somewhere that always seemed right overhead as they circled to try to find their targets. They shuddered where they crouched as the shattering din of the 'archies,' the whine of falling shell splinters, the awful roar of the bombs, and the rumble of falling débris made the nights hideous.

Even in the day-time they were no longer safe. Raids occurred at all hours. Women went out to line up in the bread queues; many of them did not return. The sky devils dropped their evil eggs from a mile up in the clouds, leaving a trail of wreckage, acrid stink and screaming humanity in the track over which they had flashed in a moment.

The Socialist Government abandoned to their fate the poor wretches who had put them into power, and ignominiously slunk off to Valencia. Only the two Anarchist members of it had the courage to remain and see the party through. A *Junta-de-Defensa* was appointed in the Government's place but its members were kept working overtime in the supreme effort to hold the city. They could not police Madrid as well. The mobs came out again. They had no stomach for fighting the Nationalists and no means of escaping in cars like the Socialists who had loosed them, but they could still prey like packs of wolves on the defenceless while life was in them.

The Embassy quarter was practically immune from bombing. Why? Because the Embassies and Legations were sheltering hundreds of Nationalists. Again and again the mobs swarmed up the *Fernando el Santo* shaking their fists at the blank windows and screaming for the blood of the reactionaries who sheltered in the buildings enjoying diplomatic privilege.

De Richleau began to consider the situation with grave anxiety. If the mob did break in the Spaniards there might or might not be massacred. There was a possibility that the bulk of them would be marched off for some sort of trial, a certain number selected for immediate shooting and the rest imprisoned; but Richard, Rex, and himself were marked men. The death sentence had already been passed on two of them and all three had participated in a riot causing the death of a dozen or more Militiamen. Even Simon and Lucretia would be powerless to shield them if they fell into Red hands now.

On the afternoon of 6th November the Duke was standing at a second-floor window looking down into the *Fernando el Santo*. Once more the howls of a blood-lusting rabble were dinning in his ears. The street was packed with people right across to the British Embassy on the other side of the road, but their faces were all turned towards him. They knew that the Finnish Legation was cram-full of refugees. As though they were one huge beast gentle undulations rippled through them. As they shook their fists at

the upper windows he could see the hate and rage which animated their features.

“This is the worst yet,” he remarked to Richard who was beside him. “I doubt if we’ll sleep under this roof to-night.”

“We’ve got our guns,” said Richard.

Rex, who could easily see over their shoulders and down into the street from his superior height, grunted. “Hur! Lot of good they’ll be with about four rounds apiece. The *Guardias* have stopped them breaking in before, though. I guess they’ll function again.”

The little squad of *Guardias* was now assembled before the door of the Legation. They were arguing, reasoning, pleading with the crowd. It was their job to keep the building inviolate, they said; their honour was concerned in that. It was not right or fair to ask them to give passage, they told the mob leaders. There was nothing they would like less than to have to fire on the people; yet they would be compelled to do so if the Comrades tried to force their way in.

The lean, bald old Marquis de Mondragon-Villablanca came up behind De Richleau and tapped him on the shoulder.

“It’s all up,” he said. “That dirty skunk who’s been representing the Finns here bolted with his ill-gotten gains out of the back door ten minutes ago.”

The Duke swung round. “In that case we’d better get out through the back door too. I’ve seen a lot of mobs in my life and this one means real mischief. They’ll be in here killing people soon.”

“I am too bored with life as it is lived in these days to worry much,” replied the Marquis. “And, in any case, escape by the back door is impossible now. Part of the mob are round there trying to stave it in.”

Chapter Twenty-five – The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Spanish Revolution

For a moment De Richleau considered trying to organize a defence, but he immediately dismissed the idea as useless. He had thought about it several times during the last few days and made tentative enquiries as to how various people viewed it. A number of the men in the Legation had pistols they had brought in with them and, although their ammunition was limited, if they had barricaded the downstairs windows they might have put up a show.

The trouble was that everyone realized it was quite impossible to hold the place for any length of time. A mob might be held off for an hour or two but, as such crowds always contained a good proportion of militiamen who had deserted from the front, they would have hand-grenades as well as rifles and would almost certainly set fire to the building.

Resistance would only serve to infuriate the mob and precipitate a general massacre, argued most of the men to whom the Duke had spoken; whereas, if they went quietly there was a possibility they would only be marched off to prison and, in any case, that would increase the chance of the women, at least, being spared.

De Richleau had seen their point of view and had not sought to contest it. On the other hand, nearly all of them had been shut up in the Legation since the first outbreak and so were much more optimistic about a mob proving merciful than he was. His private opinion was that unless Franco took the city by a surprise assault the whole lot of them would be dead within a few hours of leaving the Legation, and he would have preferred to die fighting rather than pay a second visit to the swimming-baths.

Someone in the crowd threw a bottle full of stones and it crashed through the window below which the Duke was standing. A cheer went up and other missiles followed.

By craning forward De Richleau could just see the shiny, three-cornered hats of the *Guardias*. They were still arguing and pleading with the crowd. Another squad opposite, outside the British Embassy, was calling encouragement to them, but the two squads were no more than a dozen strong, all told, and the crowd consisted of as many hundreds.

“How about trying a get-away over the roofs?” Rex suggested.

“No good,” shrugged the Duke. “The place next door’s a Government building. It houses the *Comité de Transporte*.”

“Sure. But I meant round the corner. Our neighbour there’s the British Commercial Attaché.”

“I know. I went up to have a look round half an hour ago. There’re a score of militiamen with rifles squatting on the roof of the Transport Building and they’d pot us like rabbits if we attempted scrambling along the roofs in the *Calle Monte Esquinza*.”

“Look! Look! What’s going on down there?” Richard pointed excitedly along the street to the left.

They followed his glance and saw that a handful of regular soldiers had descended from a small bus and were forcing their way through the crowd.

“If that is all the help this miserable Government can afford to send their *Guardias* we are certainly lost,” said Mondragon-Villablanca.

“Wait—is it?— Yes!” De Richleau grabbed Richard’s arm and glanced at Rex. “Quick! Both of you—come downstairs.”

They hurried after him, pushing through gloomy groups of people who blocked the stair and landings. In the hall they found the man who acted as Legation porter leaning out of a window talking to someone in the street.

The mob had fallen silent, evidently intent now on watching this development. De Richleau strode over to the porter’s side and thrust out his handsome head. A howl went up at its appearance but his face was lit by a radiant smile. Just below him stood Simon surrounded by six soldiers with fixed bayonets.

Simon’s face expressed sudden relief as he shouted, “Hi! Can you make this fellow let me in?”

“One moment,” called the Duke. “I’ll let you in myself.” Without consulting the porter he ran to the front door and drew back the bolts.

Immediately it was opened the crowd surged forward with a roar but, the soldiers having reinforced the *Guardias*, the mob was driven back.

Simon stepped inside, lugging a heavy pickaxe in after him, and the door was rebolted.

“Well!” smiled De Richleau, “I can honestly say I was never more delighted to see you in my life.”

“Thank God I got your message,” panted Simon.

“Message?” repeated the Duke in surprise.

“Yes, this,” Simon pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and taking it from him De Richleau read out the few typed lines. “*If you want to see us alive again you had better come to the Finnish Legation without a moment’s delay and bring a pickaxe with you.*” There was no signature.

“Oh, this!” said the Duke, handing it back. “Of course. I knew you wouldn’t fail us.”

Simon ran a finger up and down his long arc of nose and squinted over it. As he spoke it was obvious that he was most desperately worried. “This is a muddle. A really nasty muddle. I never remember being in quite such an unholy muddle before. Listen now. I’ll tell you. I can get Rex out by arresting him. Could have done that weeks ago—if he’d been agreeable. But he never replied to my letter so I took it he’d changed sides.”

“Like hell I have!” exclaimed Rex. “You should just live with some of the folk in this place for a bit and you’d offer to buy the Government a great, big, nice, new lethal chamber. I couldn’t contact you but I figured you’d have bailed me out directly you got back from Barcelona.”

“Point is I’ve done it now. At least I’ve got a warrant for you because you’re wanted for being concerned in that shooting affair at the *Bellas Artes*. You started it. Spotted that the moment I heard what had happened, but nobody knows you did. There was blue murder there and about fifty people killed before it finished. Survivors all tell different stories, though. I’ve said you must have shot a militiaman in self-defence and panicked. Bolted and gone into hiding for fear of the consequences.”

Rex grinned. “Swell! I knew you’d fix it all right.”

“Ner. It’s *not* all right.” Simon nervously wriggled his neck. “Government’s left Madrid. Most of my friends gone with it. *Junta-de-Defensa* very different. Got this order signed by a Councillor on it. Young chap called Maximo de Dios, but he warned me they’ve got some awkward questions to ask you about that business in the baths. Still, he knows your previous record’s clean and he’s guaranteed your life will be safe.”

“How about the others?” Rex asked.

Simon’s eyes were quite steady as he said, “that’s where the real muddle comes in. They’re wanted for the shooting too, but...”

“Our earlier histories have not the same spotless Socialist purity as that of Rex,” the Duke finished for him.

“Um,” Simon nodded. “That’s the snag. Tried everything I know but I daren’t take you out of here. Your lives wouldn’t be worth an hour’s purchase. They’ve got it in for both of you. That shooting put the lid on it because they believe you two started it and Rex only mixed in afterwards. I’ve done a lot for Government Spain but now most of my friends have gone off to Valencia I’m next to powerless.”

“We *can’t* leave them here!” expostulated Rex.

“Can’t you use your men to help the *Guardias* to protect this place?” Richard asked.

“Ner. Would if I could but they won’t take orders to fight the crowd from me. Besides they’re too few to make any difference.” Simon tapped the pickaxe which the Duke had taken from him. “I was—er—hoping you had some scheme on when you asked for this.”

“We have,” De Richleau smiled. “Don’t worry, Simon. I quite understand how you’re placed. You get Rex out of it and I...”

“To hell with that!” Rex cut in. “I’m in this thing with you.”

“Thanks, Rex, but we can take care of ourselves now.”

“You dead certain?” Rex insisted.

“Yes. I’ve got a scheme. And actually it will help us if you go with Simon.”

“Right, then. Look, Simon, I’ve gotten two folks I want to bring along. Will that be O.K.?”

“Depends who they are.”

“One’s a lovely. Doña Favorita. You met her, I’m told, in the Palace Hotel. The other’s a nice little kid. We pulled him out of the swimming-baths.”

“Got to take you to prison, you know.”

“Sure, but they’ll stand a better chance there than they would when the bunch here’s hauled into the street.”

“Um. All right. Be quick, though. Don’t like the sound of things outside. Sooner we get off the better.”

“That applies to us too,” said the Duke. “Many thanks for the pick, Simon. Take care of Rex and yourself. Come on, Richard.”

After hurried good-byes they parted, Rex dashing off into the back of the house to collect Doña Favorita and Alonso while De Richleau and Richard hurried upstairs.

“Where’re you going? What’s the idea?” they were asked by many of the refugees who eyed the pickaxe curiously. The Duke ignored these

questions. He had no wish to raise false hopes of escape in the hearts of these unfortunate people and he did not pause until he reached one of the two small rooms on the third floor at the back of the house which were usually frequented by the Mondragon-Villablanca circle.

Having returned from his visit to the front windows the Marquis was there now with two of his friends.

“Gentlemen!” said De Richleau swiftly. “My friend and I are about to attempt an escape. It distresses me immeasurably to have to tell you there is little hope of our being able to take you with us. But our case is somewhat different from your own. You stand some chance of surviving if you go quietly when the mob breaks in. We stand no chance at all. We are on a list of people to be shot immediately they are caught. Will you, very generously, give us your assistance to get away if we can?”

“Willingly! Most certainly!” the three Spaniards replied at once and Mondragon-Villablanca asked, “What do you intend to do?”

The Duke slammed the door shut and swung his pick a foot or two. “Hack a hole in this wall. If we can make an opening and get through in time we shall be safe. The British Commercial Attaché’s offices are next door.”

The lean old Marquis nodded. “And, of course, they will not allow us to go through because we are not British.”

“I very much fear it may prove so.”

“No matter! How can we help?”

“By keeping other people out of the room. If what we’re doing once gets round we’ll be besieged here by terrified people hoping to escape the same way. That would impede our work and we’ve little enough time as it is.”

“Right, then! Go ahead and good luck to you. Don Joaquim and I will take post outside the door while Don Leopoldo watches from one of the front windows and reports how things are going from time to time. The back-entrance has been blocked up with furniture now so it is just a question as to how long the *Guardias* can keep them out in front.”

“May God reward you and have you in His keeping, gentlemen,” replied the Duke solemnly as the three Spaniards hurried from the room.

“Who did that message to Simon come from really?” Richard asked. “You didn’t send it, did you?”

“No, no. Lucretia-José’s been our Guardian Angel this time,” smiled the Duke. “She must have heard of the trouble here and being unable to aid us herself, decided to get Simon busy. Her making him bring a pick was a stroke of genius.”

“Bless her,” said Richard seizing the pick and setting-to on the wall with a will, but it was ten minutes before they succeeded in getting the first brick out. After that things went easier. The Duke took a turn with the pick but had to surrender it again to Richard after a few moments. Although the palm of his hand was healed his two-months-old wound still hurt him when he exercised it violently.

Each of Don Leopoldo’s reports became more alarming. The soldiers had gone and the crowd was howling again. The *Guardias* were almost in tears begging the people not to dishonour them by making them surrender the building. Almost every window in the front of the house had been smashed. The mob had torn down some scaffolding farther up the street and were bringing it to use as a battering ram against the door. As these bulletins were passed back by Mondragon-Villablanca Richard worked with desperate fury. The sweat was pouring from him.

The wall was two bricks thick and he had only managed to make a hole about a foot square when a voice called from the other side in Spanish.

“Stop this! You can’t come through here.”

Can’t I?” roared Richard. “You damn’ well see if I can’t!” and with a mighty swipe he dislodged three more bricks.

“This is British property,” called the voice angrily. “We cannot allow any but British subjects in this building.”

“We are British!” shouted the Duke. “Don’t stand there arguing— whoever you are. Pull some of those loose bricks away.”

Now that the hole was a fair size the work progressed much more rapidly and the several people on the far side of the wall were helping by kicking away bricks which protruded round its jagged edge.

“Good enough,” said De Richleau after a moment, and stooping down he thrust his head through a cloud of dust in the opening. The other room looked as though it were little used. Piles of old letter-files were stacked against the opposite wall and the four men who stood there had obviously been brought to the place by the violent knocking of the pick.

“Got your passports?” asked the man who appeared to be in charge.

“Yes. My British passport is stitched up in the sole of my boot; my friend’s carrying his in his pocket. We’ll show them in a minute. But there are three Spaniards here. I beg you to let them come in with us.”

“Impossible!” said the man. “As it is the *Chargé d’Affaires* may go off the deep end about this.”

“Why?”

“Well, your coming in through the wall.”

“By God, he’d better not!” snapped the Duke furiously. “I’ll pay for the wall, but this is a matter of life and death. One word of incivility from your *Chargé d’Affaires* and I’ll go direct to the Prime Minister about it.”

“All right, all right,” protested the man, considerably taken aback. “I only said he *might* kick up a fuss. He evacuated all his refugees weeks ago and he doesn’t want any more. He’s enough trouble on his hands as it is.”

“Never mind that. What about these Spaniards—three men—surely you can hide them somewhere?”

“No. It simply can’t be done. We’d all get the sack. The Chief would be livid. He even dreams Neutrality in his sleep, I think. Those are his orders from home and he carries them out dead to the letter.”

“I’ll chance it and take them in at the flat,” said a quiet voice. De Richleau looked up from the hole. A slim, fair young man had spoken.

“You’re nuts, Arthur,” said the other. “You’re always doing crazy things like this and that flat of yours must be crammed with half the nobility of Spain already. The Chief would have a fit if he knew what was going on there.”

“The Reds may shoot me one day, but he can’t,” shrugged the fair man. “If I lose my job what’s that matter compared to saving people’s lives?” Glancing down at De Richleau he added, “Bring your friends along.”

The Duke needed no second bidding. Telling Richard to go through the hole he ran to the door and called in Mondragon-Villablanca, Don Joaquim and Don Leopoldo, who had just arrived to say the *Guardias* had at last given way and the leaders of the mob were already in the hall. Overwhelming De Richleau with thanks they scrambled into the British building.

Directly he had got through Richard recognized the fair young man as the same who had advised him to take Doña Favorita to the Finnish

Legation. "Why, it's Arthur Talbot!" he cried as they shook hands. "This is the second time you've helped us out."

It could only be a matter of moments now before the Reds were upstairs and entering the remoter rooms of the Finnish Legation, so the escapers and their new hosts set to work piling up a great stack of letter-files over the hole in the wall so that anyone seeing it from the other side might imagine it had been made weeks before.

Arthur Talbot explained that he had been taken on among others as additional staff for the Embassy during the troubles and was now in charge of a building round the corner in the *Fernando el Santo* on the far side of the *Comité de Transporte*. It was known as the British Embassy Annexe and he had taken over the top floor as his own residence.

The escapers were led up to an attic to wait until night since the only way for them to reach Talbot's flat, apart from going round by the street, was to walk along the top of a high wall which could be seen in the day from the back windows of the Transport building.

One of the other men brought them up some cold food and some bottles of beer during the evening, with the good news that there had been no massacre in the Finnish Legation. A company of Communists had arrived on the scene, who, with their usual adherence to discipline, had obeyed their officers' orders to march all the refugees off to prison.

Planes came over and dropped some bombs, Franco's artillery was shelling the University City, and in the distance the muted mutter of machine-gun fire could be faintly heard. At one o'clock in the morning Arthur Talbot came for his protégés, led them down to a lower floor, and opened a window which overlooked a courtyard at the back of the Transport building. Enclosing one side of the courtyard was a very solid red brick wall nearly a foot-and-a-half wide but thirty feet in height, and to slip from it would have meant either death or serious injury. Their perilous journey then began.

De Richleau, with his hatred of heights, felt sick and wretched, but Richard went in front of him and Don Joaquim, who was a fine muscular young man, behind. Talbot led the way and after an anxious five minutes they arrived opposite the flat roof of a laundry which was behind the British Embassy Annexe. It was a seven-foot jump down on to it and from

there they had only to walk across a short iron footbridge, which spanned another courtyard, to the pantry of Talbot's flat.

The flat would have accommodated a good-sized family. It had a very big hall, two reception rooms, six bedrooms, and two bathrooms; moreover, it was beautifully furnished and contained some admirable works of art.

"What delightful quarters you have here," the Duke remarked as their host poured drinks for his five new guests.

"Yes, nice, aren't they?" the fair young man replied. "The place really belongs to an old Marquesa. She's still here, of course, and I'll introduce you to her to-morrow. I happened to call on her just after she'd been warned the Reds were coming to get her so I commandeered the place and plastered Union Jacks all over it. The people over the road gave me an awful wiggling at the time but they're rather glad to have it as an Annexe now. It gives them a lot of additional storage on the lower floors and extra garages as well."

Talbot had rearranged the sleeping quarters of seven other Spaniards whom he was protecting under the guise of servants in his flat, in order to provide some accommodation for the five new-comers and, although they had to do with makeshift beds they all turned in with more cheerfulness than they had for many weeks past.

In the morning plans were discussed. Talbot told them that in order to be able to give asylum to others he always endeavoured to move his guests on as soon as it could be managed. He had already had several dozen refugees through his hands and practice had taught him a great deal about fooling the Reds.

The Chilean Ambassador, who was the doyen of the Diplomatic Corps in Madrid, had arranged with the Government for a special train to convey large numbers of the refugees from the various Embassies and Legations to the frontier in September but, having agreed to that, the Government would do no more. However, it was only a few of the greater Democratic countries' Embassies which were maintaining such a strict neutrality that they gave the appearance of being pro-Red. The others, particularly most of the South American Embassies and Legations, were doing every mortal thing they could to help, and certain of the members of their staffs could be persuaded not to examine particulars of applications for passports too closely when it was a question of saving lives.

Richard and Duke were amazed as they listened to this slight, short, fair fellow while he spoke with such quiet modesty of the splendid rescue work he was doing. He seemed little more than a boy; yet, behind his lazy, rather heavy-lidded eyes there were evidently wits as sharp as needles and his slender frame concealed the heart of a lion. It made them very proud to know that at least one Englishman on the staff of their Embassy was living up to the great tradition of Britain in championing the defenceless.

He had many amusing as well as tragic stories to tell and, amongst them, related how he had once been in a café, in the early days of the Revolution, when it was raided by Anarchists, they asked him for his papers and, unfortunately, he had left them at home. As, owing to his upbringing, he spoke Spanish like a native they refused to believe he was an Englishman.

Smiling slightly he turned to Richard and asked, "What would you have done if one of them had suddenly come forward to you and said, 'All right, then! If you're an Englishman recite to me the first act of *Hamlet*'?"

"Lord knows!" laughed Richard. "I couldn't even quote the opening lines. Did you manage it?"

"No. Instead I gave him the bawdy poem Rochester slipped into King Charles II's pocket, and the limerick about the 'Mate of the Lugger' as a makeweight. After that it turned out quite a jolly evening. Some of these Anarchists would not be at all bad fellows if only they hadn't this unpleasant complex about what they term 'learning to kill without passion for the eventual betterment of mankind.'"

The five ex-refugees from the Finnish Legation were introduced to Talbot's other guests and allotted various official posts on the domestic staff of the flat. De Richleau offered himself as assistant cook, then, getting Talbot aside for a private conversation, he asked if it were safe to use the telephone.

Talbot shook his head. "Better not risk it. The Reds have had their eye on me for weeks. They'd raid this place under the hour if it ceased to be part of the B.E. The line's always being tapped. But what's the trouble? D'you want to get in touch with somebody? I'll take a message if you like."

"That's good of you. But are you sure you won't be followed?"

"Yes. The best heads in the old *Seguridad* have all gone into the basket. Most of them were Monarchists, like the *Guardia Civile*. The new crowd, who're mostly self-appointed are a poor lot of fish. One oaf who held me

up a few weeks ago actually asked me to hold his pistol so that he could use both hands to search me.”

De Richleau disliked the idea of disclosing even a portion of Lucretia-José's secret to anyone but he knew there was nothing else for it and, since he had to do so, he had already made up his mind that it could not be in safer keeping than with Arthur Talbot.

He told the young man that he and Richard had come to Spain to do a certain little job for the Nationalists and they believed their part in it was finished. If this were so both of them would be exceedingly grateful for any help which would enable them to get back to England but, before leaving, he must see a certain person to assure himself that the job was satisfactorily completed.

Talbot had heard of the 'Golden Spaniard' and, while being greatly intrigued to hear that she was in secret communication with Monarchist sympathizers, realized at once how immensely important it was that her connection with them should not leak out. It was decided that a verbal message to her would be less risky than committing anything to paper and that Talbot should just tell her where the Duke was and that he was very anxious to see her. In order to convince her that it was not a trap, Talbot was given by the Duke his London address, the date she had lunched with him and the Christian names of her father and mother; none of which things revealed her true identity, and all of which could have been known to few people except her and himself.

After the *siesta* Talbot, first taking special precautions to throw any possible shadows off his track, set off to *Rios Rosas*. while the Duke spent one of the most enjoyable afternoons he had had for a long time with the old lady who owned the flat, examining her art treasures; among them were two Murillos, a Goya, and a Rubéns.

It was eight o'clock before Talbot got back, as Lucretia-José had been out when he arrived at her flat and he had had to watch the place for a long time before she had put in an appearance.

They had agreed that it was much too risky for her to be seen visiting the British Embassy Annexe but that De Richleau would not be running any very grave risk if he left the flat way of the garage for an hour at night, provided he was equipped with proper papers. Lucretia provided these in the form of documents signed by members of the *Junta-de-Defensa* and it

was arranged that she should be at a small café in a street near the *Fernando el Santo* between nine and ten that evening.

Although winter was now approaching the fashion of going about hatless, which had come in with the Revolution, was still followed by a large number of *Madriileños* and for this expedition De Richleau decided to adopt it. During the fourteen weeks he had been confined in the Model Prison and the Finnish Legation his hair had grown sufficiently for the black dye favoured by Hypolite Dubois to have passed out of it and he was now grey again; a state in which very few people had seen him between his coming to Spain and his capture. To change his appearance further, they equipped him with a uniform jacket, breeches and leggings once worn by the Marquesa's chauffeur.

The Duke had been confined for ninety-four days; at five minutes to nine on the evening of 7th November he stepped once more, a free but hunted man, into the streets of Madrid.

Chapter Twenty-six – De Richleau Speaks of Other Things than War

Madrid is 6,000 feet above sea-level and, once its summer heats are past, it suffers an extreme change of climate. The chill winds of winter were already driving people indoors early in the evenings and few pedestrians passed De Richleau as he put his best food forward. Comparatively little damage had been done in this quarter of the city by artillery and aerial bombardment but the streets had a woefully unkempt appearance and were permanently darkened now on account of air raids. In the distance the heavy crump of shells falling on the banks of the Mazanares could be heard as Franco's gunners strove to break down the desperate last stand of the Reds.

The café was almost empty but Lucretia was already there, seated alone at a corner table, when the Duke arrived. They greeted each other casually; only the quick brightening of their eyes showed how delighted they were to see each other again.

"Can we talk freely here?" he asked in a low voice.

She nodded. "The proprietor and waiter are both with us. They'll see that none of the tables near is occupied. You've had a terrible time, I'm afraid, and it's all my fault for bringing you out here."

"The last three months have hardly been amusing," he smiled, "and once or twice we've really thought our goose was cooked—but we're still alive and kicking. By the by, many thanks for the pickaxe."

"I knew you'd guess how to use it, and stirring up Simon with a fake message was the only way to help I could think of. When I heard about the shootings after the mutiny at the prison, though, I was nearly frantic. You see, I was on a conference at Valencia when it happened."

As usual she was chain-smoking and De Richleau held a match to a cigarette she had just taken from a fresh packet as he remarked, "Yes, I got your note but we'd undertaken not to communicate with anyone outside, and a bargain is a bargain. Anyway, 'all's well that ends well.' We're reasonably safe now and our young friend at the Annexe thinks he can get us out of the country in a week or two. I only wanted to make certain that

by this time you've been able to get in touch with Franco's people and arrange for the removal of the gold."

Her mouth drew into a hard line. "No. I got a message through immediately Valmojado was taken—it's no longer there."

"What!"

She nodded. "I can't think what's happened but somebody tampered with all those kitchen utensils after you were arrested."

"Simon may have found..."

"No. He traced the boxes filled with concrete we sent to Barcelona but since then he seems to have been completely stumped. The Reds haven't got it. I'm certain of that."

"Then who the devil has? It took us three weeks to salt it and if you cut out the time occupied on the painting it would take at least ten days to remove the gold linings from all those thousands of pots and pans. Then there's the question of shifting it—the immense weight."

Lucretia shrugged. "Well, it's gone. The pots and pans are still there but their gold linings have been removed. Roughly two months elapsed between your arrest and the town being taken. Somebody must have found out what you were up to and, after you were caught, got to work on it."

"The devil! But who? There were only a limited number of people who could have tumbled to our game and I'd stake anything on old Jacinto doing his damndest to protect our interests. Is he still alive, d'you know?"

"That's one of the troubles. My lines of communication go mostly via neutral countries to Burgos. They can't give me any detailed information about a little place like Valmojado. The Reds massacred a lot of people there just before it was taken and our people carried out the usual reprisals the night they entered it. That's all I know."

"As the place was in Red hands until quite recently, it looks to me as if some private gang have got hold of the bullion and are endeavouring to keep it hidden until the war's over. They may have buried it there or, more probably, as they would not want to lose their hold on it, brought it back to Madrid when the Nationalists began to get dangerously near Valmojado."

"In any case the key to the mystery must lie there."

"True. Therefore Richard and I had better get ourselves evacuated with Talbot's help as quickly as we can and return to Spain, landing in

Nationalist territory.”

“You’ve done so much,” Lucretia sighed. “I hardly like to ask you to do that.”

De Richleau smiled and placed his hand over hers. “There’s no question of your asking, my dear. Having taken this job on neither Richard nor I could go home happily leaving it uncompleted.”

“Well, at least you’ll be in no danger behind the Nationalist lines.”

“Yes, and for that reason I think I’ll send Richard. He’s the legal owner of the factory so he has every right to make enquiries. Moreover, he can speak Spanish quite fluently now so he’ll have no difficulty in carrying out a full investigation. I shall stay on here at the Annexe until he can give me a line, via you, to go upon.”

“But why? You’ve risked your life enough and I shan’t be happy until you’re out of Red territory. Besides, what can you do here?”

“Nothing, for the moment, but if I once leave Government Spain I might have considerable difficulty in returning to it. As I’ve said, my own belief is that the gold has been brought back to Madrid, but that couldn’t have been done without leaving plenty of traces. Richard can pick them up in Valmojado and if they do lead to Madrid I shall still be here on the spot ready to enter the game again.”

“That would mean your exposing yourself to fresh dangers.”

“Not necessarily. Richard has to be got out of Spain and come back. Then we must give him a few days for his investigation. By the time we hear from him it’s quite on the cards that Madrid will have fallen.”

“I hope you’re right. But say the gold is here, wouldn’t whoever’s got it be likely to shift it again before the city’s taken?”

“Possibly. But as you’ve pointed out, two months elapsed between our arrest and the Nationalists arriving in Valmojado —plenty of time for the thieves to have brought it back here bit by bit. To move it at short notice would be much more difficult. If they’ve got it *cached* here it’s almost certain they’d not move it again but stay with it. Anyhow, I shall remain in Madrid until we can get some line to go on, whether Franco succeeds in taking the city or not. It looks as if he’s going to, though, any day now.”

“It did look like it up till yesterday but I’m very much afraid now that Madrid will not fall, anyhow, for the next few weeks.”

“Why? He’s right at its gates. They’re fighting on the banks of the Manzanares as we sit here.”

“I know, but his effort has almost spent itself. He *would* break through to-morrow or the next day if the two forces were left to fight it out, because the Reds are even more exhausted than our men, but I fear he won’t be able to.”

“What’s to prevent him?”

“The International Brigade is on its way up from the coast by train. Poles, French, Germans, English, Americans, Hungarians, and goodness knows who else. About sixteen thousand of them and all red-hot Communists. An advance party of their officers got in at midday and were taken for a tour round the trenches this afternoon. The *Junta-de-Defensa* are holding a sort of ‘Welcome to Madrid’ party for them to-night.”

De Richleau smiled. “The old Palace Hotel must have been the scene of some strange sights since the coming of the Revolution.”

“It has, but the party’s not there. The Palace was converted months ago into a hospital and refuge for orphans. One wing of it is now the residence of His Excellency the Soviet Ambassador. This show is to be held in the Prado Art Gallery because that’s one of the places Franco never bombs. I’m one of the bevy of bloodstained beauties invited to entertain our dear foreign Comrades.”

“God! I don’t envy you your job.”

“It’ll be all right. Cristoval will be there and plenty of other men I know.”

“What damnable luck that these International Troublemakers should be arriving on the scene just in time to rob Franco of his victory.”

Lucretia nodded. “Yes. They’ll only get themselves killed, of course, because we’re bound to win in the end. But their presence will delay a final decision, and in the meantime the lives of many thousands more Spaniards will be sacrificed on both sides. That’s the real tragedy.”

“Couldn’t you and your friends bring about a rising of Nationalist sympathizers in Madrid to help Franco take the city before the International Brigade can be put in the line?”

“We intended to do so but orders have come through against it. The secret Fifth Column can only wait now for fresh instructions. At the moment my most harassing worry is a personal matter. “

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“You are a Catholic, aren’t you?” she asked suddenly.

“I was baptised a Catholic as an infant but it’s a great many years since I was a practising one.”

“Don’t you believe in it at all, then?”

“I believe that like all religions it contains certain elements of the truth and that others have been obscured by its dogmas.”

“Do you believe in heaven and hell?”

“I believe that we make our own.”

“What, here?”

“Not necessarily.”

“You do believe in an after life, then?”

“Not in the sense of Last Judgments or Allah’s Paradise full of houris, or the Valhalla of the Vikings,” smiled De Richleau.

She frowned. “I don’t understand you at all.”

“I’ll try to explain. Some people consider me something of a mystic. That is only because I have spent much time studying most of the great religions and philosophies which have influenced mankind as far back as our very limited knowledge carries us. They divide themselves into two kinds. Those which teach survival and those which do not.

“There’s plenty of evidence to show that each human being is animated by something which continues to function after the physical body is dead. If a person refuses to accept that, there’s nothing more to be done about it. It is no good arguing. They are just in a very low state of development and will learn in time.

“The teachings which preach survival are divided into three kinds. The most primitive are those in which the worshippers bow down to something they can *see*; trees, wooden idols, Priest Kings whom they regard as living personifications of their God. The next stages are those in which people bow down to something which they cannot see; an *invisible but personal* God, such as the Jehovah of the Jews, the Allah of the Mohammedans, and the Father and Son of the Christian Trinity. The third and highest types are obviously the philosophies like Taoism and the purer Buddhism, which teach that we are not puppets jigging to a strange tune played by some invisible superman but that each of us carries within ourselves a spark of that divine fire which animates creation.

“Now what do the wise men through the ages offer us by way of a future? Christianity and Mohammedanism, which are both offshoots of Judaism, say that we have one life and one life only. Upon that we shall be judged and either lifted to the heights or damned eternally. If there is a God He must be a perfect one and, therefore, just. Is it just that some should be born for their one and only trial physically deformed, in the direst poverty, or even mentally deficient as compared to others like you and I who have been given all this world’s advantages?”

“Perhaps greater things are expected of us because we have these advantages,” Lucretia-José broke in.

“They are,” agreed the Duke. “But that is not the teaching of these religions. Crippled or healthy, poor or rich, idiot or intellectual, they promise salvation to all who follow the same set of rules. That is manifestly unfair to the more heavily handicapped.”

“And what have the philosophers to offer?”

“Most of them postulate that we go from here to take up life afresh on some higher plane.”

“Is that what you believe?”

“Yes, and no. That the most advanced among us should do so is entirely reasonable, but what would be the sense of sending the spirit of a man-eating savage to a higher plane when he is still ten thousand years behind the most enlightened type of human living here already?”

“Surely you don’t believe in reincarnation?”

“I do. It is the only belief which is entirely logical and utterly just. ‘As ye sow so shall ye reap.’ That is the great truth which lies at the core of all religions and all philosophies which preach survival. Examine the teachings of Christ or Moses, Gautama Buddha or Láo-tsze, of the Ancient Egyptians, or the Aztecs or the Redskins, and you will find it so. It is the one thing common to them all in their original purity. Life is not of to-day or to-morrow, but eternal.

“This is a school and in it we are all learning. The lessons to be learnt are courage, compassion, and wisdom. You and I have had countless incarnations. We have been black and yellow and white and brown. We have been cripples and blind, royal and humble, male and female, beautiful and plain. We have had happy lives and ones that seemed accursed. In each we have learned something. Many times we have slipped

back and as in each life we have to learn many things afresh we shall slip back again. But as the aeons of time pass we are steadily advancing. You and I have climbed a long way already to have reached our present state. The sort of deal we get in our next incarnation depends on how we pass the tests in this one.”

“It sounds a long and painful business.”

“There are holidays in this great school of ours and they are longer than the terms. I and many others know enough of our past lives to tell you that we reincarnate about every two to three hundred years. Between incarnations we are with those dear friends who are making the journey with us, some of whom we meet here in each of our lives on earth. These periods of rest refresh us for each new ordeal we have to go through. We may also renew our spiritual strength each time we sleep once we have learnt consciously to retain our memories of the places to which our spirit travels while we slumber.”

“But what is the object of this extraordinary pilgrimage? Where does one arrive at its finish?”

“That, it is not given to any man to know. The beginning and end are beyond the power of the human intellect to comprehend; just as it cannot conceive eternity or grip the fact that if the universe is contained in some vast invisible ball there must be something outside that and again something outside that something, and so on *indefinitely*. We can only be certain that the spirit animating each individual is slowly but surely gaining in power and beauty.”

“What must one do to advance farther?”

“Practise courage and compassion and strive after wisdom. There are also two things which you must not do—commit suicide or surrender your personality by allowing your physical body to be used as a medium. We have all done both, we may again, but such a Karma takes a long time to pay off. Suicides are earthbound and remain going through the same horror of those last few moments, action for action, again and again, until some spirit that owes them something releases them. Mediums spend their next, and sometimes several, incarnations as imbeciles. Having surrendered their individuality voluntarily they are punished by having it taken from them against their wish.”

“That is logical, I suppose.”

“Far more so than the barbarous idea that an unjust God deliberately foists the sins of a father on to his physical children, and then gives those blameless children only one chance. The true interpretation of the saying is that in each incarnation we are creating the child who is to be our next incarnation, and if we give ourselves over deliberately to evil in this, it will be reckoned against us even to our third and fourth incarnation to come. In other words, it may take us that amount of time to make up the ground we have lost.”

“But we know that certain diseases are hereditary. That is a proven fact.”

“Of course it is, my dear; and that is all part of the great plan. If you commit excesses and abuse your body this time you will not be given such a good one when you return to earth again. If you are due to learn fortitude through suffering you will be born the child of diseased parents. If as a parent you have been cruel to your children or allowed them to suffer through neglect, you’ll pay for it later by being given deformed or ailing children that will wring your mother’s heart with constant pain.”

“That sounds logical too. But there are so many standards of conduct. The canons of a woman like myself are so utterly different from those of, say, a Persian woman in a harem or a negress living in the bushveld. If one is right the others must surely be wrong.”

“Not at all. The fact that customs vary up and down the world does not matter in the least. Provided each lives as her conscience tells her, each is living rightly for the purpose of her present incarnation.

“I am a Catholic.”

“Yes.”

“I am in love with a man. He wants to marry me. But that is impossible.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s a Red.”

“You mean that he is an anti-clerical and would not agree to a religious ceremony whereas you, in accordance with the teachings of your faith, would not consider you were married at all if you only went through a civil one?”

“That is a point, but I’m sure it could be overcome. I know the hiding-places of at least a dozen priests who are still living here in Madrid and I could easily get one of them to marry us. As far as Cristoval... It is Cristoval, you know.”

"I guessed as much."

"As far as Cristoval is concerned I've sounded him very carefully. He is a priest-hater but like so many men of his kind his anti-clericalism is the result of a conviction that the religious orders have exploited and enslaved the masses, but he admits that for some people a religion is a necessity. He's so terribly in love with me I'm quite sure he'd agree to a secret religious ceremony if I wished it."

"But you're afraid that if you asked him to do so he would suspect that you are a reactionary."

"No, it's not that. The beliefs instilled in childhood die hard. At least two-thirds of the Reds are still Catholics at heart. Again and again I hear from the other side of Militiamen caught in the act of butchering priests who beg for another priest to hear their confession and give them absolution before they are led out to execution. Call it superstition if you will, but Cristoval and the other leaders know that it's still there deep down in most of us, and he would look on my wish to be married by a priest only as something of that kind."

"The real obstacle then..."

"Is that I don't feel I could go through such a ceremony without telling him the truth. If he knew the part I have been playing he would probably shoot me and then himself. In any case there could not possibly be an hour's happiness for either of us once he knew what I am."

"A bad break, my dear. I'm sorry."

She smiled a little ruefully. "I can, of course, do the other thing, but then I should be falling into mortal sin. He's shown a marvellous restraint, yet, for all his outward forbearance, he has been pressing me subconsciously for weeks. He adores me. I adore him. I can't bear to see him suffer and our jobs make it impossible for us to get away from each other. The strain is just breaking me up. We can't go on like this any longer. I've got to decide one way or another. "

"You're asking for my advice?"

"Yes. There's no one else I can turn to. Tell me what to do."

"I can't. None of us can ever decide such things for each other. All I can do is to give you a few points to think about. Marriage is a contract and if it's to be an honourable one both parties must come to it with clean hands. 'To have and to hold...' You know the rest."

Lucretia nodded. "That's just what I feel."

"The other thing," De Richleau went on slowly, "has not the same significance. Some great spirits have even lived a life as courtesans. They have been born to it and paid off a Karma in the more unpleasant aspects of that trade. Yet such relationships must not be entered into deliberately for lust or gain. It may be that you owe something to this man. You might have a child by him which, as things are, could prove a serious penalty and not one to be risked lightly. The prohibition of the Church is purely arbitrary but a wise ordinance to discourage general licence. If you do it out of self-indulgence you'll have to pay for it later on. If you can do it out of a conviction that he needs you more than you need him, then you are the stronger and it will be credited to you.

"Only the voice which speaks within yourself can give you the answer. That voice is neither of the body, nor of the mentality which has been built up by your environment, nor of the brain with which you have learned to reason, nor of that higher, but, not highest, property, the soul. It is of the indestructible spirit that has been *you* from the beginning of your journey and will remain *you* till the end of time. That voice is always right."

"Thank you." Lucretia-José pushed back her chair. "I shall never forget this evening. How strange, that we should talk of these things here, at such an hour, in this dreary, terror-stricken city, when we are both so occupied with war and plotting."

He smiled. "No. It is not really strange. Those of us who *know* do not go out trying to convert people. We only speak of such things when it seems that somebody has been sent to us in search of knowledge. It was doubtless because you needed—not guidance, but a reawakening to the essential truths you have always known within your inner self, that you were sent to me to-night. Run along now, or you'll be late for your party."

"I'm late already, but I'm tremendously grateful to you."

A few moments later they parted. The Duke returned without accident to his very comfortable prison while Lucretia hurried the quarter-of-a-mile to the Café Roma, where she was to meet Cristoval. He was not there so she sat down at a table and ordered herself another coffee.

He turned up after she had been sitting there about ten minutes, and with a muttered apology, sat down beside her.

“You’re very late, darling,” she said. “We were to have met here at ten and it’s nearly half-past already. You’re looking very glum, too. Is anything the matter?”

He looked up and she saw that his eyes were immensely troubled as he answered, “Yes. I happened to be passing a café up by the *Fernando el Santa* and I saw you sitting there with our old friend Hypolite Dubois. When you both left I followed him and he went to ground in a garage attached to the British Embassy Annexe. He looks a bit older now he’s no longer dyeing his hair but I recognized his profile immediately.”

Suddenly he gripped her wrist. “What the hell were *you* doing exchanging confidences with the Duke de Richleau?”

Chapter Twenty-seven – The Cat Jumps out of the Bag

Lucretia-José's heart almost stopped beating. That Cristoval, of all people, should have spotted her with the Duke was a terrifying thought. His having followed the Duke afterwards showed that his suspicions had been thoroughly aroused. It was obvious that he had put two and two together and made exactly four of it. His dark eyes stared into hers, accusing her of the blackest treachery.

"Come on," he snapped. "What were you up to with that Monarchist plotter?"

For an instant she had been really scared, her mind paralysed by confused flashes of the dire calamity which seemed about to overtake them all as a result of his discovery. It was the harsh, utterly foreign note in his voice that pulled her together. With the illogicality of a woman she was no longer concerned with the fact that he had found her out; much less that his indignation was perfectly justified. She was furious with him for daring to use such a tone to her; livid with him for the implied insult in challenging her good faith.

"How dare you?" she gritted out between clenched teeth. "How dare you! Let go of my wrist this instant."

If she had struck him Cristoval could not have been more surprised. "I—I'm sorry," he stammered, releasing her quickly. "But I've got to know the truth about this."

"Oh, you've *got* to, eh?" she sneered. "And who gave you the right to question me about my actions?"

"I don't need to answer that."

Lucretia's face was white and her eyes as hard as agate; she pressed home her attack. "You owe me an explanation and I mean to have it. How dare you follow me about and spy upon my movements?"

"I didn't," Cristoval glowered. "I just happened to be passing and I saw the two of you sitting there."

Suddenly she realized that her one advantage was their personal relationship and began consciously to mislead him as a matter of dire necessity.

“You did,” she insisted. “You spied on us and when we parted you lurked about like some dirty little sneak-thief until you could follow him, instead of coming straight up to me as any decent man would have done. I suppose this is one more manifestation of your insane jealousy.”

“I only wanted to see where he went to, and I’m not jealous—at least, not of him.”

“Of whom, then?”

“Oh, I don’t know—all sorts of people.”

“There! It was jealousy! You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“It was not!” Cristoval declared angrily.

“Oh, yes, it was! Heaven knows I give you little enough cause to be jealous but you don’t trust me an inch.”

“I do trust you. I’ve told you so scores of times.”

“Yes, and each time it’s been after you’ve made me thoroughly miserable by catechizing me as to how long I’ve spent with this man and what I said to some other. If you trusted me you would never have acted as you did just now.”

“But this was different,” Cristoval protested. “It was a political matter. This Duke is an enemy of the Government—and a darned dangerous one, too.”

“Either you trust me or you don’t. Which is it?”

“Oh, all right, then. I trust you.”

“Absolutely?”

“Yes—absolutely.”

“That’s better,” Lucretia conceded. She was silent for a moment and went on more calmly, “Now you’re behaving reasonably I’ll tell you about it. Some of the F.A.I. people are anxious to get hold of De Richleau, and as I knew him when we all thought he was Hypolite Dubois I was given the job of luring him out of his bolt-hole. I succeeded, too, by sending him a rather cryptic message implying that I was in communication with the other side and asking him to meet me at that café. Did you see the two plain-clothes men on each corner of the street?”

“No. There were a few people about but I didn’t notice them particularly.”

“Well, next time you attempt to play the sleuth you should keep your eyes open. They were there to arrest the Duke directly I gave the signal.”

“Why didn’t you give it, then?”

“Because, stupid, he came alone instead of bringing his friend Richard Eaton with him as I told him to, and we want to bag them both.”

“I should have thought a bird in the hand...”

“Nonsense, my dear. We know where he is and he can’t do any harm there. His safe return this evening will have given him confidence, and next time he’ll bring his friend with him. Then we’ll get the two of them.”

“I wish you’d told me all this at first,” Cristoval grumbled.

“I would have if you hadn’t jumped to conclusions and been positively insulting with your absurd and unjust suspicions. Now promise me, darling, that you really won’t treat me to any more of these awful, jealous scenes.”

He smiled and took her hand. “I’m sorry, sweet—am I forgiven?”

“Yes,” she smiled back. “I’m much too fond of you ever to be angry with you for long.”

“I know I’m jealous,” he said after a moment, “but I just can’t help it. You don’t know what hell it is to see you every day but to have to leave you every night. You say you love me, but you’re often out with other men, and you’re always close as an oyster about where you’ve been and what you’re doing. What proof have I that it really is me you care for?”

“My word, darling. I love you, and I swear to you that I’ve never said that to any other man.”

“Then why in the world won’t you marry me?”

“I’ve told you again and again that I don’t think people should marry with things as they are. After the war perhaps...”

“Oh, yes, I know,” he said miserably. “But don’t you see that’s getting farther off, rather than nearer? When you said that two months ago it looked as if we might be married by this time. I was reasonable. I said I’d wait. But look what’s happened since. Owing to the Russians refusing to supply arms except through the *Partido Comunista* we lost a lot of ground. The Catalans came to our rescue. Thank God they did; but whoever would have dreamed three months ago that the Catalans would be coming to the assistance of their age-old enemies, the Madrileños? They stopped the Generals breaking through the Guadarramas. Right! The Germans promptly countered that by sending planes which enabled the Rebels to push up to the city from the south. They’re on top at the moment again but it won’t last. The International Brigade will be in the line

to-morrow and giving Franco a pretty pain in the neck. What'll happen next? God knows! We'll have the *Bersaglieri*, the *Chasseurs Alpains*, the British Grenadiers and the Swiss Navy all out here soon, fighting on one side or the other. Can't you see that the struggle may drift on for ages? And all the time I'm wanting you like hell?"

"I know, my sweet, I know," Lucretia said softly. "I feel as bad about it as you do sometimes; but we can't discuss it now. We're terribly late as it is and the orders are that we should put in an appearance at this reception."

"D'you want to make a night of it?"

"No. As soon as I've shown myself and had a word with a few people I shall be quite ready to go."

Cristoval stood up. "Right, then. We'll break away early and I'll see you home."

"Thank you, darling."

They walked down to the *Prado* through the darkened and almost deserted streets. Every few minutes the crump of shells came to them from the south-west, but central Madrid was quiet; the majority of its inhabitants lurking unseen behind shuttered windows, waiting in nerve-racked suspense for the blast of the sirens to announce the next air raid.

In the biggest *salle* of the famous Art Gallery the miseries of the outer world had been temporarily forgotten. The party had not yet really got going but an air of subdued gaiety was perceptible among the gathering already assembled. Parties were all too rare in Madrid these days and the Socialist leaders, with their wives and girl-friends, were glad enough of an excuse to forget their worries for a time in welcoming the new 'Saviours of the Republic.'

The Goyas were no longer on the walls. Like most of the other famous masterpieces that the Gallery normally contained they had been removed to the vaults of the Bank of Madrid by the principal trustee, the Duke of Alba, just before the outbreak; but many lesser pictures of considerable interest and value still adorned the long suites of galleries.

An attempt had been made to decorate the rooms used for the reception with the flags of all the nations represented in the International Brigade. These were so many that some countries' flags could not be found, and others had provided the Reception Committee with decidedly ticklish problems. Did one, or did one not display the German standard?

Yes, but an old one that had not got the Nazi swastika emblazoned on it since there were a good many anti-Hitler refugees in the Brigade. How about the Italian flag? No, definitely not, although there were a number of anti-Mussolini refugees in the Brigade too. Any deficiencies were made up by a plentiful supply of Catalan and Basque national colours and Soviet flags bearing the hammer, sickle and stars.

The buffet tables were loaded down with a fine assortment of drinks for which the cellars of many private houses had been raided, but the edibles were not up to the same standard. Madrid was no place for epicures in these days.

The advance guard of the officers of the Brigade, which was being entertained, were a queer, mixed lot. Most of them differed from their men in that they hardly knew one political creed from another, but had hurried to Spain from all quarters of the globe purely because they loved being in a scrap; these owed their appointments mainly to the fact that they were experienced soldiers of fortune with long records as professional fighters behind them. A number had joined only because they knew that in a civil war sweeping over a civilized country there was certain to be plenty of loot to be had; jewels, money, and church vessels of gold and silver which could be buried in a safe place until they could be collected when the war was over. Others were there from a pure, flaming conviction in the righteousness of the Spanish Government's cause. Whatever their motives, they were a hard-bitten crowd who obviously meant business.

Cristoval and Lucretia had not been there ten minutes before they ran straight into Simon and Rex. Lucretia would have prevented the meeting if she could but she had no chance.

Simon with his kindly smile was as sleek and amiable as ever; Rex was in great spirits. After his four months in Spain he spoke colloquial, but not grammatical, Spanish quite fluently now. He addressed them cheerfully:

"Did you folks hear this party was thrown to welcome the International Brigade? If you did, just don't you believe it. The party's all for me. A little farewell 'do' because I'm hitting the trail for home to-morrow."

Grinning, Simon explained the situation jerkily. "He's a ticket-of-leave man, really. *Junta-de-Defensa* just won't believe he didn't help De Richleau and Richard Eaton escape. Time of that shooting at the *Bellas Artes*,

remember? They've ordered his deportation but they let him out on parole to-night as a special favour to me."

"I saw your friend De Richleau only this evening," Cristoval said at once.

"Where?" enquired Simon, his heavy eyelids drooping.

"At a little café off the *Fernando el Santo*. He's taken refuge with some of the British Embassy people apparently. His hair's grey now and he's lost that curious birthmark across his face but I should have known that iron profile of his anywhere. He's a dangerous man and he ought to be locked up, although I wouldn't like anything worse to happen to him after that good turn he did me when he was at Valmojado."

The cat was out of the bag. Lucretia bit the inner edge of her lip but she could do nothing as Simon asked curiously, "Valmojado? When was that? What was he doing there?"

Tense and anxious she waited for the answer, but before Cristoval could speak again there occurred a totally unexpected but exceedingly unwelcome diversion. A thick-set, heavy man near by swung round clutching a bumper of champagne in his hand. It was Lieutenant, now evidently from his rank badges Colonel, Mudra.

"Well, damn me!" he exclaimed, staring at Lucretia. "If it isn't the Golden Spaniard! I heard someone say 'Valmojado' and I thought of you at once. Remember our meeting there when you were settling matters for that Englishman at his factory?"

"I remember your trying..." Lucretia began icily, but Simon broke in:

"Englishman? Factory, eh? D'you remember his name? Was it Richard Eaton? Had he an interpreter with him? A Frenchman named Dubois?"

"That's right," nodded Mudra. "They were running some sort of aluminium plant. The workers wanted to take it over and the girl friend here..." he broke off abruptly as Cristoval thrust his way forward.

With his jaw sticking out and his eyes sparkling angrily Cristoval snapped, "The less said about that business in Valmojado the better for you, Comrade."

"Ho, indeed!" sneered Mudra, and ignoring Cristoval he turned to Lucretia. "So you've still got your little Comrade Secretary on the *tapis*, eh? Pity, as I was going to offer you a berth down in Malaga."

Before she could reply he went on in half-earnest gallantry, "Now all these bright boys have turned up to defend Madrid yours truly's being

given a rest. Cushy billet in the sunshine. I'm sailing day after to-morrow from Valencia. Care to come along?"

"The answer is No!" cried Cristoval furiously.

"What's it got to do with you?" Mudra asked with studied insolence. "You her husband?"

"No, I'm not," Cristoval rapped out. "But I've got enough..."

"Please!" Lucretia intervened, catching his arm. "Please! Let's dance."

For a second Cristoval hesitated, then, fuming with anger, he allowed himself to be led away just as Simon said to Mudra, "This Englishman and Frenchman. You sure they were operating an aluminium plant at Valmojado when you were there?"

"Yes," Mudra nodded. "The Frenchman—an old cock with a birthmark all over his face—did all the talking, but he was only an interpreter. The Englishman owned the place. They had a Union Jack run up on a flagstaff there."

"When was this?"

"Towards the end of July. Let's see, I marched my column out of Madrid on the 27th, so it'd have been on the 28th."

"Very interesting," said Simon. "Very interesting indeed."

"Why?" asked Mudra.

"Oh, nothing. Just to me, I mean. Helps me in my job."

"What is your job?"

"Finance Office. Checking up the movements of dangerous foreigners is part of it at times."

"You're a sort of 'tec, then?"

"Well, in a way," Simon admitted.

Mudra shook his big square head. "I'd hate that sort of thing. Always did dislike office work. Give me a bit of fighting and a spirited girl with a bottle of wine at the end of it. That's my mark."

"Very nice," said Simon politely. "Very nice, I'm sure."

"And a little aristocrat-killing to wind up with," added Mudra. "The priests never did me any harm and I don't mind the Fascists; but the nobility must be wiped out, man, woman and child. It's the caste system that's been the curse of Spain."

"What's that about Fascists?" asked a man near by, and Mudra turned away to answer him.

Simon took Rex by the arm and nodded towards a quiet corner. "Come over here a moment," he said. "Want to talk to you."

"I'm your prisoner," Rex laughed. "What's the big idea?"

When they were out of earshot Simon stooped his head suddenly and chuckled into his hand. "This is great, Rex," he tittered. "Although they're kicking you out, you're still for the Government, aren't you?"

"Sure. Who wouldn't be after two months in the Finnish Legation?"

"Grand! Well, I'll tell you. I'd like you to do another little job for us if you will."

"How can I when I'm being thrown out on my ear?"

"Simple. Return to Spain as soon as you can but through an insurgent port, and proceed to Valmojado."

"For what?"

"I take it you'd like to score off our friends so we can call it evens about their locking us up in that cellar?"

"I certainly would so long as no harm's coming to them personally through anything I do."

"Then it's easy. They've gone to earth in the British Commercial Attaché's office next door to the Finnish place. You saw me hand them the pick that got them through the wall, and Cristoval's evidently checked up that they're still there. They're safe as houses now provided they don't start popping out. But I'm on to it now where they *cached* the gold."

"You don't say!"

"Um! Didn't you hear what that murderous-looking Colonel said? End of July they were running an aluminium plant in Valmojado. Must have bought it in order to conceal the goods there. No other possible reason for them to buy a place like that. Probably ran the stuff out of Madrid hidden in a big consignment of other metal. Don't know what happened then. They may have buried it somewhere or smelted it down; may have disguised it by turning it into girders and painting them over. Anyhow I'm dead certain it's still there."

"Why? I don't see that. The Insurgents took Valmojado round about the 22nd of last month. They've been sitting pretty there for over a fortnight now. The Duke would sure have gotten a message through telling Franco's people where he'd parked the stuff and asking them to clear it."

“Ner,” Simon shook his head. “You said yourself that you all honoured your undertaking not to communicate with anybody while you were in the Finnish Legation. Note to me yesterday was different. Case of emergency, and anyhow the chap who ran the place had dishonoured his own contract by doing a bunk.”

Rex pulled thoughtfully on his cigarette. “I’ll say you’re right about that, but the Duke’s been loose thirty-odd hours now and he’s not the sort of guy to let the grass grow under his feet.”

“Now I’ll tell you! He was bottled up for over three months. Madrid’s changed no end in that time. We’re taking the sting out of scores of these Fifth Column people and most of those still at large have had to change their addresses. May be days before the Duke can re-establish his communications. He daren’t go out except at night and from now on I’ll have the British Commercial Office isolated by the police. If he puts a toe out I’ll have him shooed back again. Telephone can constantly be tapped and we’ll search every soul that leaves the building. That’ll prevent his getting any message through and, honestly, I don’t think he can possibly have done so yet.”

“O.K. Spill the beans some more. Let’s hear what part you want me to play in all this.”

Simon nodded his head up and down like a china Mandarin. “Want you to go to Valmojado. Must be some Government supporters among the factory-workers there. Get hold of them and find out how the Duke and Richard spent the time during their stay. Couldn’t have handled all that gold without someone suspecting something. Try to locate it. Insurgents won’t hold Valmojado for ever. With the International Brigade we’ll be back there soon. Then you can turn it over to me—understand?”

“Yes, I get the idea,” Rex conceded slowly. “But I don’t see the Insurgents there giving me the ‘Huge Hallo!’ Why should they? The odds are they’ll think it pretty fishy if a strange *Americano* suddenly arrives out of the blue and starts poking around.”

“Can fix that all right. Passports of all sorts in our possession. We’ll fake a British one with your photo and signature as William Eaton.”

“You’ll what!”

Simon smiled broadly and continued his nodding. “Duke was clever enough to secure what protection he could for the place by establishing

British ownership. Couldn't buy it himself because he was posing as a Frenchman. Made Richard buy it instead. That's as clear as daylight. Now you turn up as William Eaton, Richard's cousin and partner, and claim the factory as your property. Franco's sore with Britain because half the cargo boats in the Mediterranean are making a packet running his blockade under the Red Ensign—but he's no quarrel with any foreign capitalist who's investing in Spain. You'll be welcomed at Valmojado. Make any enquiries you like. No questions asked."

"I'd never get away with it," Rex said with decision. "I haven't got an English accent."

"Say you've spent most of your life in Canada."

"To hell with that! Canadians have a sort of English accent too."

"All right. Tell them your mother came from the States and that you've got relations there that you visit every year. Will you play?"

Rex thought for a moment and grinned. "Yes. I'll play. I'd get one hell of a big kick out of beating the Duke by a short head in the Coralles stakes."

They discussed the plan in greater detail for some time to the tuneful clatter of castanets, as a beautiful Spanish girl was now entertaining the bulk of the company by dancing a *Fandango*.

She was loudly applauded and received two encores, after which general dancing started again. The drinks were flowing freely and the crowd was warming up. Lucretia danced with two men she knew and an amusing Frenchman of the Brigade who soon showed signs that he would have liked to keep her with him indefinitely, but Cristoval carried her off and they decided that they had stayed at the reception long enough.

Neither had brought a car as petrol was now strictly rationed, even for Party Executives, and they saved it whenever they could for special jaunts, but in the *Prado* they picked up one of the old horse cabs and Cristoval told the man to drive to Lucretia's apartment in *Rios Rosas*.

It was almost pitch dark and decidedly smelly inside the old vehicle, but no sooner were they in it than his arms were round her and his fierce kisses on her lips.

That was no new experience for either of them. These passionate embraces had been going on whenever opportunity offered during the last three months. During August and September they had spent every evening they could snatch from their duties, picnicking in the country a few miles

outside Madrid. There had been a few glorious days, too, when they were both delegates to a conference in Valencia, far from the war, with their evenings free to bathe and lounge upon the seashore in a little bay some distance from the town.

In the last few weeks such opportunities to abandon themselves to their passion had been more difficult to come by. For one thing, the advance of the Insurgent Army had meant a much greater pressure of work for those concerned in organizing the defence of the capital. For another, the time for picnicking was past owing to the chill winds of approaching winter. Neither of them had any relations in Madrid who might have entertained them in their houses and discreetly left them alone for a little, while still exercising a formal chaperonage.

There were hotels where they could have secured a private room, his lodging and her flat; but although the Revolution had brought with it a certain amount of immorality, custom dies hard. Normally the Spaniard has a great respect for any woman of a type that he would marry, and the standard of morality among the women of all classes is an extremely high one. Anglo-Saxon couples enjoy far greater liberty because they do not inevitably regard love as bound up with an immediate display of passion, but a Spanish girl knows that she could not remain mistress of her emotions if, without fear of interruption, she were alone for any length of time in a room with a man she loved.

Now the nights were colder Cristoval and Lucretia had been reduced to driving out to a quiet spot in a car and sitting in it clasped in each other's arms. It was to appease their hunger for each other, as well as they could, in this way that they saved as much as possible of their rationed petrol.

Half way to *Rios Rosas* Lucretia forced Cristoval away from her and sat up. "No, no more," she said firmly.

"But why?" he cried. "Why?"

"No, please!" she pleaded as he sought to draw her to him afresh.

"But, darling! We'll be there in a moment," he expostulated miserably, now thoroughly worked up.

She shook her head in the darkness. "No. We've quite a way to go yet."

Cristoval peered out of the window. "We haven't. We'll be there in another couple of minutes."

"I thought you wanted to talk to me about marriage."

"I do. But—darling! D'you mean you've changed your mind?"

"No. I'm afraid not."

"Oh, hell! Why drag it up now then, and rob me of the little bliss I get?"

"You poor sweet. I'm afraid I've been very cruel to you these last three months."

He passed a hand over his hot forehead. "I don't say that. I'm crazy about you, but you're not crazy about me. That's all there is to it."

"But I *am* crazy about you."

"Then why not do something about it? I didn't mean to mention it, but look at that chap to-night. That Colonel fellow. You heard him ask me when I butted in: 'What's it to do with you? Are you her husband?' And what could I say? Why not give me the right to protect you from such people?"

"Is that the only thing that troubles you?"

"You know it's not!" Cristoval broke out desperately. "Naturally it makes my blood boil to see you exposed to that sort of thing, but I don't try to deceive myself about the root of the matter. I want you. Want you as I've never wanted anything in my life before. And life is slipping from us. Can't you see that? It's not as if we stand the same chance of growing old as ordinary people. Every morning now when I wake up I break into a cold sweat at the thought that you may have been blown to bits by one of these accursed bombs. When the air raids come I lie in bed praying—yes, praying—anti-Catholic as I am, that God will forgive me my sins and spare us both so that I may live to see you at least once more the following day."

"Oh, darling, darling. I do just the same."

He turned at that cry wrung from her very heart and gripped her hands. "Then why deny yourself to me when our time together may be so short? The Insurgents have fought their way right into the suburbs. From now on there'll be bombardments day and night as well as air raids. We'll fight them off but the loss of life will be simply terrible. One or both of us may be dead this time next week. At least while there's life still in us let's... Oh, hell!"

The cab had stopped with a jolt and the old-fashioned driver, scrambling down, flung the door open.

Cristoval gave the man a black look and stepping on to the pavement helped Lucretia-José out.

On two or three similar occasions recently when he had brought her home late at night he had been so overwrought that he had frankly begged her to let him come up to her flat, and Spaniards when they get that far have the buttons off their foils.

They do not mutter conventional phrases about wanting a drink or one more cigarette.

Each time he had pressed her Lucretia's answer had been a clear and definite refusal. He had had to be content with a last, lingering kiss under the dark archway by the entrance to the flats. To-night he was about to tell the cabman to wait a few minutes, when he saw her thrust some money she was already holding into the man's hand.

With his heart hammering wildly Cristoval followed her across the pavement. When he reached her she was fishing for her key and he saw that her hands were trembling. Lucretia-José did not often tremble, and she was not trembling now with fear. She turned to look at him and her face was very close to his. Her eyes seemed enormous and they were moist and shining; a little smile hovered on her slightly parted lips.

A solitary shell crumpled somewhere in a far part of the city. Lucretia looked away from him and unlocked the door. They did not exchange a single word but she reached out for his hand and drew him gently inside.

Chapter Twenty-eight – The Treasure Hunt Begins

Rex arrived in Valmojado three days later. He had been deported with special courtesies and despatch via Valencia to Marseilles. There he had bought a small, fast plane and flown straight back to Spain.

The necessity for speed in this affair was one which Simon had now no need to impress upon him. When they had talked the matter over in more detail they had both seen that it was not enough merely to find out where the gold had been concealed and sit on it in the hope that in the course of the next few weeks the International Brigade might retake Valmojado for the Government. There was the Duke to be reckoned with.

Both Simon and Rex knew that in cunning De Richleau was the father and grandfather of all the foxes there ever were in the world. Now he was a free agent again Simon might succeed in isolating him for a time, but only for a time. Even as a virtual prisoner and with every possible cordon drawn round him to prevent his getting into communication with the Monarchists, it was certain that his subtle brain would sooner or later evolve a scheme to defeat the police blockade.

In consequence Rex's task was not only to discover where the gold had been secreted but, with the aid of any Government sympathizers he could find, to shift it to a new hiding-place.

Had they known that the Duke had himself lost trace of the gold they might have been considerably easier in their minds but, as they saw the situation, it was now a race between Rex finding and removing the bullion to a place where it could be concealed, for several weeks if need be, until the International Brigade had driven the Insurgents back; and the Duke getting a message through to let the Monarchists know where it was *cached* at the moment.

It was good flying weather and in his flight over Spain Rex surveyed several of the endless and far-flung fronts of war. He passed over Red Barcelona which, apparently, lay sleeping in the wintry sun, but he noted the silent hulks out in the harbour which were said to be crammed with thousands of middle-class hostages. Turning inland he flew low over the small town of Huesca where, from the occasional puffs of smoke, it was clear that the little Nationalist garrison was still holding out. Their story, he

knew, was one of even greater courage than that of the defenders of the Alcazar. A brave man himself, he admired their bravery although they were on the other side and, diving suddenly to within fifty feet of the towers of the old fortress, he threw over a packet of English and American papers, bought in Marseilles, which contained accounts of Franco's recent victories outside Madrid.

There were no 'archies' at Huesca. A few rifle-shots were fired, he never knew by which side, at his neutral but trespassing plane, and he flew on to Saragossa. There, anti-aircraft guns came into action against him and both sides probably thought him a private adherent of the enemy but their shooting was extremely poor. A couple of Nationalist planes zoomed up to chase him off but he was as much at home in the air as a Pacific Islander in the water. Laughing from sheer joy he plunged a thousand feet down to meet them. Assuming he had a machine-gun they swerved and circled, giving him best owing to his superior height. He flipped up again and flew on.

It would have been easy for him to have flown over peaceful country all the way. As it was, great, sparsely-populated areas showed no trace whatever of any line separating Nationalist from Government territory, but Rex always had an itch to see places so he followed the straggling, often broken, battle line right down the river Jalon, through the mountain corridor near Medinaceli and so to the high tableland on which Madrid is situated. Leaving the Guadarramas on his right he passed behind the Government lines and flew south by east over the northern suburbs of the capital. From his high altitude he could see no traces of any damage that it had so far suffered or, somewhat to his surprise, any sign of fighting on the banks of the Manzanares. He then realized that it was half-past one, right in the middle of the *siesta*, and that, so strongly is the custom of the midday rest engrained in the Spanish people, both sides had tacitly agreed from the very beginning of hostilities that the war should be called off each day during the *siesta* hours.

One railway ran south-west from Madrid and another almost due south. Valmorado was on neither but lay, with two or three other small towns, in the angle between them, so, after a glance at his map, Rex had no difficulty in picking up his destination.

Coming down to a thousand feet he circled over the town, saw the solitary factory chimney on its western edge, and near it something he was far from expecting; a row of hangars. Evidently Franco's air staff had felt that the flat fields west of Valmojado would make a good forward air-base from which to bomb Madrid and their decision to establish one there had doubtless been influenced by the fact that the aluminium plant would prove invaluable for minor repairs.

An airfield being ready to hand solved the problem of landing but, as Rex did so, half a dozen angry men ran out towards him from a hut. His arrival had disturbed their *siesta* and they were not at all pleased to see him. This was a military landing-ground, they said, and he had no right to have come down there. Who was he? Where had he come from? What was he doing, cruising about the battle-zone in a neutral plane?

Rex gave them the Fascist salute and his big, friendly smile. In voluble but ungrammatical Spanish he apologized for waking them up and asked them to take him to their Commanding Officer at once.

This, it appeared, was impossible, as Colonel Salvador de Lopez Escandalera could not be woken from his sleep, and they had no intention of bringing the wrath of the officer of the day down on their heads by rousing him either.

After Rex had offered cigarettes relations became more friendly and it was decided that there could be no objection to his sitting outside the guard hut until the officers were about again.

Some of the men went back to their interrupted nap but two remained with Rex chatting about the war and its progress. Both were sublimely confident that their side would be victorious, it was only a matter of time, they said, before they slit the throat of every blasted Communist in the country. Franco's Moors were actually in the southern outskirts of Madrid fighting for the passage of the Manzanares; they would have been in the city itself by now if the International Brigade had not held them up, but that was only a temporary check.

As they talked Rex had a good look round. There were seven hangars, including two very big ones, all obviously quite recently erected, since builders' materials littered the place in all directions, and several more hangars were in course of construction further along the line. A number of

wooden hutments had also been run up to house the personnel of the air unit.

A little after three, doors began to slam and the peace of the place was broken by snatches of song as the airmen and mechanics started to emerge and set about their business. Rex was led to another hut where a young, smooth-faced officer questioned him courteously. His story was that his cousin and partner, Richard Eaton, had bought the factory just before the outbreak and had since disappeared. At the time Rex, or William Eaton as he now presented himself, had been in America, where he handled all their business and spent a good part of each year. Richard was believed to be in hiding from the Reds somewhere in Madrid but they could get no certain news of him. William had now arrived to try to trace his cousin's movements and to ascertain what was happening to their property. He handed over his British passport in the name of William Eaton and the two letters purporting to have been written by Richard which the skilful Simon had faked up for him.

The young officer was non-committal and, remarking that the matter should have *prompt* investigation, sent him back to wait in the guard room for nearly four hours, at the end of which time he was taken to another hut and led before the Commandant of the air base.

Colonel Salvador de Lopez Escandalera was a fine old gentleman with an enormous white moustache and a pair of shrewd black eyes. To assist him in his enquiry he had the young officer whom Rex had already interviewed, his adjutant and a civilian; a thin, sharp-nosed man with the narrowest head Rex had ever seen, who was referred to as Don Baltazar.

Rex repeated his story all over again but evidently it had already been gone into as the Adjutant was helpful. He said that when the factory had been taken over, a fortnight before, the advance party had reported it to him as flying the British flag, and enquiries that afternoon had established the fact that its absent owner's name was Eaton. Rex's British passport was in order and there was nothing against him.

The Colonel said that as the aluminium plant was now being used for war purposes it would be quite impossible to return it to its owners, and if he wished for compensation he must take the matter up with the proper authorities at Burgos.

Rex replied that he quite understood the situation and was perfectly willing to leave the question of compensation until later. He would, however, like to inspect the plant thoroughly in order to facilitate his claim, and receive permission to make enquiries among the workmen as to his cousin's last known movements.

These requests were freely granted and the friendly adjutant, Captain Ramon de Leon, took Rex into the mess for a drink. The gaunt Don Baltazar joined them a few moments later. He did not drink but he talked a great deal, principally about the iniquities of the enemy, and Rex gained the impression that he had something to do with the Nationalist Intelligence and Press service. With his high, narrow, bald skull and thin, beaky nose he had the appearance of a human vulture and he seemed greatly disappointed that Rex, having flown direct from Marseilles, could give him no accounts of Red atrocities witnessed *en route* in Barcelona or Valencia.

The question arising as to where Rex was going to be accommodated for the night, he suggested that perhaps there was somewhere he could doss down in the factory. De Leon said they were using the offices for their own clerical staff but he believed that on taking over, all the factory papers had been removed to two rooms upstairs and locked up there. Perhaps a shake-down could be arranged for Rex in one of them.

A visit to the room concerned revealed the camp beds Richard and the Duke had slept on, now half buried under heaps of ledgers and letter-files. An orderly was sent for to tidy up and De Leon, who had taken an immediate liking to Rex, invited him to dinner.

The mess consisted of about twenty Spaniards and six German pilots. If Rex had been able to reveal his own name it would have been known to many of them for he had broken several records and was something of a celebrity in the flying world, but the fact that he was a good fellow and obviously an aviator of some experience was quite sufficient to ensure him a warm welcome from this brotherhood of the air, and he spent the jolliest evening with them that he had had for a very long time.

Having watched a couple of planes set off to bomb Madrid he went to his new quarters over the factory office to turn in, and discovered the four suitcases left by Richard and the Duke. There was nothing in them which gave any clue to the place in which the gold was hidden, but he found both the deeds by which Arturo Gomara had assigned the factory to Richard

Eaton, and the balance of those magnificent Hoyos which De Richleau had imported into Spain. Feeling that he had made an admirable beginning for his investigation Rex turned in and slept the sleep of the just.

Next morning De Leon gave orders to a sergeant that Rex was to be allowed access to all parts of the factory and rendered every assistance in his enquiries about his cousin. The sergeant handed him over at once to the factory foreman, a wiry, bright-eyed young fellow named Matias Falcon, and the two of them spent the rest of the forenoon making a thorough inspection of the whole property.

Falcon spoke freely of Richard and his French interpreter, Hypolite Dubois. He gave, with fair precision, the dates they had been in Valmojado, as far as he was aware, but said nothing of the Syndicalist Committee which had taken over the factory and of which he had been the instigator. As far as Rex could judge by tactful probing, Falcon was not a member of any union but in sympathy with the Fascists. He closed up like an oyster whenever Rex started to talk politics and would only say that naturally all the remaining workers in the factory were good Nationalists, anxious for a speedy victory over the Reds. During the inspection Rex saw nothing whatever to give him any hint where the treasure might be concealed, but he was not unduly depressed as he had not expected to walk straight into it.

He had lunch at the inn, which was now running again under new management. As Valmojado was on one of Franco's lines of advance, troops of all kinds were continually passing through it. Guns, Umbers, ambulances, staff cars, motor-cycle messengers, supply columns, soldiers on horse and foot, regulars in Spanish Army uniforms, Carlists in their scarlet berets and Falangists in their jaunty forage-caps all went to make up the cavalcades moving to and from the twenty-mile-distant battle-front. Rex saw his first Moors pass in a fleet of lorries. They were big, sinewy chaps, olive-skinned but, to his surprise, little darker than the Spaniards.

The inn was crowded almost entirely with men of the Nationalist Army but after lunch Rex got into conversation with a group of locals and learned of the vicissitudes through which Valmojado had passed during the Civil War. After the first Red massacres it had quietened down until mid-October when the Government troops had fallen back on it. This had been followed by three days' shelling and a further slaughter of civilians before

the Reds abandoned the town. The Nationalists had retaliated by machine-gunning over a hundred and fifty Government sympathizers who had been foolish enough to remain in Valmojado until its capture.

Rex led the conversation to the factory. Apparently it had been running under a Committee for some months. Its manager, Señor Coello, and the office staff had been butchered in the last Red Terror, but not by their own workers. The majority of these, as far as was known, had refrained from taking up arms for either side.

After the *siesta* Rex wandered round the factory casually questioning many of the hands. He found that now it was being used for war purposes most of them were new men brought up from the cities of the south to fill gaps in its personnel caused by the Revolution. The old hands confirmed and amplified the accounts he had collected already, but they were extremely reticent on the subject of politics. Several of them, however, mentioned the old foreman, Jacinto Vincente. He had virtually run the place, they said, but he was an invalid now, having had his left foot taken off by a shell splinter when the Nationalists were bombarding the town before they took it.

Rex decided at once that Jacinto would probably be able to tell him more of his friends' activities while in Valmojado than anyone else left alive there, and went to visit the ex-foreman that evening.

It was three weeks since Jacinto had been wounded but he was still laid up and suffering severely from cramp which seemed to afflict his left foot although this had been amputated. Propped up in bed with his gold rings still in his ears, his fine moustache which rivalled that of Colonel Salvador de Lopez Escandalera and his tasselled woollen nightcap perched at a rakish angle on his head, the old chap looked more like a pirate than ever.

When his wife told him that a Señor Eaton had come to see him he almost bounced out of bed for joy, but his face dropped comically when Rex's huge frame bulked in the low doorway of the room.

Rex told his story well and he never knew how near he was during the next few moments to learning the truth about the gold; but he made two errors. First, he spoke as if Richard and himself really did own a big factory in England; secondly, he admitted to Jacinto's pressing that he had good reasons for believing Richard and Hypolite Dubois to be still alive.

The old man knew nothing about the private lives of Richard and Dubois but he was quite certain they were not factory owners. Their ignorance of simple technicalities on their arrival at Valmojado had clearly shown him that. In consequence he knew Rex was lying on one point at least and, therefore, was not exactly what he represented himself to be. Jacinto might still have spoken had he been assured that Richard and Dubois were dead, since, having seen Rex's passport and heard him speak with such obviously intimate knowledge of them both, he was persuaded that Rex was some relative of Richard's; but as they were still alive and Rex had brought no written instructions from either of them, Jacinto decided it was his duty to take no chances with their secret.

He was polite and talkative but Rex could get nothing out of him that he did not know already. Questioned about various men at the factory and their political sympathies, Jacinto would only say that they were all good fellows but simple workmen who did not concern themselves much with politics. Asked about Matias Falcon, he said that the young man who had taken over his job was a keen worker, efficient, and a good choice. Rex had a feeling that such an intelligent-looking old chap must be able to recall some episode which would give him a line, but after an hour's chat he had to retire no wiser than he had been before.

It took Rex three days' solid work to get any further. During that time he became staunch friends with a number of the officers in the Air Force. He took his own machine up and stunted with it in such a daring fashion that his audience was filled with admiration and delight. More, when Captain de Leon needed a plane to carry an urgent despatch to Burgos and his own fighters were all occupied, Rex lent his for the purpose.

After the first few days he had no valid excuse for staying on at Valmojado but he said that, although he had not been able to obtain any useful information about his cousin Richard, since the Nationalist forces were certain soon to take Madrid, he might as well remain at Valmojado till they did, and his new friends in the mess agreed with him.

Only Don Baltazar appeared to continue suspicious of him. The lean, cadaverous Intelligence Officer was always popping up unexpectedly to Rex's embarrassment when he was having quiet little chats with the factory hands. It seemed that Don Baltazar could not get it out of his head that he had met Rex somewhere before and he had a quite unnecessary and

extremely unnerving habit of saying at least once a day, "What did you say your name was? William Eaton? No, that really doesn't convey anything to me."

Rex had a great many of those quiet little chats with the factory hands. He had not the Duke's flair for seizing on essentials swiftly, or Simon's subtle reasoning power, or Richard's occasional flashes of inspiration, but he was an extremely persistent person, and on the evening of his fourth day at Valmojado he had pieced together a remarkably accurate picture of all the events which had taken place at the factory since mid-July and the people principally concerned in them, with the one exception of the operations carried out by Jacinto's secret squad.

He was on quite friendly terms with Matias Falcon and on that fifth evening of his inquiry he invited the young foreman to come up and knock off a bottle of wine with him in his room.

Matias, not suspecting anything unusual, readily accepted, but he became uneasy directly he saw there was no bottle waiting to be consumed and that Rex, having gently closed the door, was leaning his broad back up against it.

"Now, my lad," said Rex, breaking into the strange jargon he used as Spanish, "you've no need to be scared. No one's going to hurt you as long as you tell the truth, but the truth it's going to be. You're an Anarchist, aren't you?"

Within a second Matias had his knife out and had flung it.

Rex was expecting that because, by this time, he knew something of the habits of angry Spaniards. He just side-stepped and the knife stuck quivering in the door.

"Naughty!" he said grinning. "Naughty Matias. Uncle'll have to smack you if you start any more of those tricks, and this uncle smacks mighty hard."

Matias only glowered as Rex went on. "You don't have to be scared of me. I'm on your side though I've got no means of proving it. You'll have to take my word for that. You're an Anarchist and I know it. Never mind how. In just four minutes from now I'm taking you out of here by the scruff of your neck to have you shot, unless you come clean."

The young Spaniard's face was a study in indecision but eventually he muttered angrily, "What d'you want? Who are you?"

“I’m on your side,” repeated Rex gently, “and I’m here to get the low-down on certain things that have been happening in this dump since mid-July. You and some other ginks took the place over round about the end of that month and you were the chief mover. How you’ve managed to save your neck since the Nationalists crashed Valmojado I haven’t an idea and I’m just not interested. But you’re going to tell me what Eaton and Dubois were up to here, and anything cock-eyed that old foreman Jacinto Vincente’s done since. Come on, now! What d’you know?”

“You swear you will not betray me?” Matias asked melodramatically.

“Oh, shucks, no!” Rex shrugged. “If I had a yen to have you bumped I’ve quite enough on you already. Get busy.”

Matias could throw no light on the proceedings of Richard and the Duke but he began to talk, so, leaving his post at the door, Rex produced, not one, but two bottles of wine from under his bed and they remained together for the best part of an hour.

The upshot of the conference was that on the following day Rex was introduced by Matias to three old friends the Syndicalist had collected and two mechanics from the air base; both Communists who were only serving with the Nationalists because their unit had gone over to the Generals at the beginning and who would have been shot had they let their real sympathies be known.

With this little group of stalwarts to assist him Rex hoped for good results, but he was beginning to get seriously worried. The International Brigade had now been in the line for nine days. With great gallantry and fanatical determination they had fulfilled their boast that Franco’s Legionaries should not pass, but it was obvious now that they could do no more than hold them on the banks of the Manzanares. Rex realized that if he remained where he was until they swept victoriously southward to Valmojado, with Simon hard on their heels, he might have to wait all winter or perhaps for ever. A week or two in Valmojado, he felt, was all very well but there were limits. He was decidedly tired of the Spanish War and wanted to get home.

His own aeroplane had not returned from Burgos and he began to think it never would. The Insurgents needed every plane they could lay their hands on, and from Burgos it had been sent on somewhere else. Captain de Leon appeared genuinely distressed about its non-return and promised

adequate compensation if it were delayed indefinitely, but Rex was not seriously worried by the loss of his plane. He had an idea as to how he could fade gracefully out from Valmojado, and Spain, when he wished.

He continued to display a most friendly interest in the activities of the Insurgent airmen and was *persona grata* now with most of the officers. When their machines gave trouble he was often on hand with sound suggestions and practical help. His extraordinary capacity for consuming enormous quantities of strong liquor without turning a hair endeared him to the more riotous among them and particularly to the Germans, who were all hard drinkers.

By 24th November he would have been exactly a fortnight in Valmojado so he decided that on that day he would clear out; but on the afternoon of 22nd November he received an unexpected shock.

He had lunched as usual at the inn and, feeling no desire to sleep through the *siesta* hours, was sitting at a table in the window, quietly enjoying some Spanish brandy, when a two-seater car drew up and Richard got out.

Richard was equally surprised to see Rex. His face went quite blank for a moment, then he entered the inn with an amused smile.

"Well, well, well," he said, walking over to the solitary figure in the dining-room. "Who'd have thought I'd find my old friend Rex Mackintosh Van Ryn sitting all ready to offer me a glass of brandy in Valmojado!"

"My name's Eaton in these parts," grinned Rex, recovering himself quickly. "As for brandy—welcome! Get a glass and help yourself."

"Eaton!" repeated Richard. "God, what cheek!"

"Yep, Eaton. An' don't you forget it. The front part's William but I'm Bill to you. We're long-lost cousins. That's the way it is."

"Is it, indeed?" Not a soul was about and, seeing no other glass, Richard took Rex's, refilled it and sat down. "Can you give me any adequate reason why I shouldn't run you in?"

"Yeah, plenty. The same sort as you and the Duke gave Simon and me when we played spillikins in the *Palacio Coralles*. If you wise up the people here that I'm not your ever-loving cousin Bill who has come all the way to Spain to look for you and protect our interests at the aluminium joint we own between us, they'll have me shot."

“So we own the factory between us now, do we? That’s a good one. I suppose you’ve got some bee in your bonnet that the gold’s here and you’ve been poking round to try to find it.”

“No, boy, no. I wouldn’t think a thing like that. I’m just here teaching the Nationalists how to make clam-chowder without any clams.”

“You know it’s darned lucky for you I ran into you here and learned about this cousin business before I’d seen anyone else.”

“Sure. Good break for me it happened that way. You’re looking mighty fit, Richard. Have they installed a sunbathing apparatus in the British Commercial Attaché’s office?”

“British Commercial...” Richard suddenly laughed. “But we weren’t there for more than eight hours after Simon hoiked you out of the Finnish Legation. We got away to fresh quarters the same night.”

Rex laughed too. “That explains your getting here. Poor old Simon. He’s had half the bulls in Madrid squatting round the Commercial Office this last fortnight for the sole purpose of keeping you and the Duke fenced in there.”

“So as to ensure you a free hand here in the character of Cousin William, eh?”

“That’s the idea. We figured you might get a message through for someone to collect the goods but not that you’d turn up yourself.”

“Actually I’ve been on a very pleasant trip to Madeira. Had two days there, caught a boat back to Gib., and motored up.”

“Sounds grand. But why Madeira?”

“The only way friends could get me out was on a South-American-bound ship. It nearly took me there as a matter of fact and, in one way, I wish to God it had. I’m sick to death of this darned Spanish business.”

“So am I. Fed to the teeth. There’re a lot of rotten bums on both sides but some mighty good chaps as well. The factory’s been turned into an air base and some of the pilots there are grand guys. I wouldn’t like to see them scuppered any more than the best of the Government lads in Madrid. I don’t give a cuss which side wins now as long as it gives the other a fair deal.”

“That’s just how I feel.”

“Then why not quit? I’ve done all I can here and I’m thinking of calling it a day. Being a big-hearted guy I’ll maybe fix it so you can come along if you

want.”

“Thanks, but I’ve got a job to do first.”

“Handing over the great old treasure trove,” Rex laughed. “Well, I wish you joy of that.”

“It’s not quite as simple as it sounds,” Richard confessed. “I see no reason why I shouldn’t tell you since, if you did get on to where it is, you couldn’t shift it now you’re in enemy territory. The stuff was here, but somebody pinched it while we were bottled up in Madrid.”

Rex’s eyebrows shot up. “You don’t say!”

“Yes. It’s gone from where we left it and may have only been transferred to a new hiding-place or may have been carted off from Valmojado altogether. That’s what I’m here to find out.”

“In that case—I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you two days to have a look around. If you haven’t hit on it by that time the odds are you won’t hit on it at all. If a third party’s muscled in on the deal and made off with it you won’t get yourself any place staying put here. We’d best make a break for it together and quit Spain for good and all.”

“It’s certainly worth thinking about,” Richard agreed non-committally. “Anyhow, I must have a good look round first, and I might as well make a start now.”

They drove in Richard’s car down to the Air Force mess, the run giving them just sufficient time to tidy up the loose ends of Rex’s story about his being William Eaton, and the details of Richard’s unexpected arrival in Valmojado. He was to stick to the truth as far as possible and say that he had been a refugee in the Finnish Legation since leaving Valmojado but on getting away from Spain had returned via Gibraltar to see what had happened to the factory.

Rex produced the big surprise of his ‘cousin’s’ safety and arrival with convincing hilarity. There was much congratulating and handshaking, and drinks all round. Richard was questioned eagerly about the state of Madrid when he had succeeded in getting away from it, and was able to give eye-witness accounts. To Don Baltazar’s delight he was also able to provide much first-hand material about Red atrocities. Coming from a neutral the bald-headed Intelligence Officer considered these especially valuable, and although Richard was an anti-Red, he did not attempt to gild the lily. His

own memories were enough to make him feel faint and sick, but the ghoulish Don Baltazar eagerly gobbled them all up.

It was decided that Richard should share his old quarters above the offices with Rex. He was delighted to find his things still there, and having unpacked the new bag he had brought with him, he excused himself to Rex and set about his investigation.

The first man he questioned in the factory yard told him what had happened to Jacinto so he went at once to see the old foreman.

Jacinto wrung his hand again and again. In the same breath almost he was speaking of the visit he had received from William Eaton and inquiring if their good friend 'Dubois' were safe.

"'Dubois' is well and sends you his heartiest greetings," Richard replied. "As for William Eaton, he is my cousin but he's not in on our secret. I hope you didn't tell him anything."

"No, *Señor*," Jacinto shook his head. "Praise be to God, I did not. When he spoke of you his voice had the ring of genuine affection but—well, I decided to tell him nothing."

"Good for you. I was most terribly sorry to hear you had been wounded."

"Yes. It was hard luck and the foot pains me, but the doctor hopes to have me about on crutches at the end of next week."

"It's rotten to have lost a foot but thank God it's not worse. Now, what's been going on here? Dubois and I learned that the gold had disappeared. We've been worrying ourselves stiff about it."

"That was unnecessary, *Señor*. I had to move it but it is still safely hidden."

"What! *You* moved it? By Jove, that's grand. Where is it now, then?"

Jacinto smiled. "A fortnight after you disappeared a man came from Madrid. He was some sort of Commissar of Supplies for the Red Army. He made me assemble our Committee and went through the stock book with us. We had saucepans, kettles, frying-pans, many things which would be useful to his men. He made a note of all and told us that as soon as he could get lorries he would come out and collect them."

"But a Monarchist agent informed us that all the stock is still here."

"It is, *Señor*. The man never came back with his lorries. He may have been killed or been busy with other work. The Reds are like that—silly

people who make much fuss but have no sense of order. We set to at once, removed the gold from the kitchen gear and re-smelted it in secret.”

“That must have been the hell of a job.”

“It needed less time than our original labour. Eight nights and a week-end. We were half-dead when it was done but I was in constant fear that the Commissar of Supplies would turn up again.”

“What did you do with the gold, —bury it?”

“We moulded it into bricks—nearly nine hundred of them,” Jacinto winked, “and then we built a hen-house.”

“A hen-house!” repeated Richard.

“Yes, *Señor*. The gold was too heavy for us to move it any distance so we knocked a hole in the factory wall just alongside the furnace, passed it out brick by brick and built our hen-house against the back of the factory on that piece of waste-land where no one ever goes. We painted each brick, then sloshed mud over it. When the place was stocked with chickens it looked much like any other hereabouts. You will see.”

“That was a marvellous idea! Absolutely marvellous. What has happened to Carlos, Basilio and the other two? I’ve only been here a few hours but I haven’t seen any of them about.”

“All four of them have joined the *Requites*, *Señor*. Their work here was done. Directly the Nationalists got within twenty miles of Valmojado they went off to slip through the Red lines and fight for Spain—as it is right they should do.”

Richard nodded, and began to undo his waistcoat. “Well, good luck to them all. Here’s the cash for the last days’ wages which we never had a chance to pay you, and the bonus which was promised on completion of the work. Will you take care of the others’ shares and tell them from Dubois and me that no money can ever measure our gratitude to you all.”

“It was for Spain, *Señor*,” said the old man with simple dignity. “We would have done it gladly without payment but it was a joy to work with two such *Caballeros* as yourselves; and this money, it is a graciousness of yours which will always be remembered by us as making the difference between a well-filled pot and a thin stew.”

“I’ll come again,” said Richard, “and tell you all about our adventures in Madrid. But I must be off now and have a look at this hen-house of yours. I’ll be back to-morrow.”

“Mil gracias, Señor. I expect the airmen have stolen all the chickens but you cannot miss the little building. It is behind the furnace house and attached to it.”

With light heart and brisk step Richard marched down the road. He was enormously elated by the thought that his mission had terminated with such unexpected speed and success. He had visualized long interrogations of the factory hands, the disappointments of false trails, and a gruelling search, ending perhaps in the unearthing of a piece of information which would necessitate De Richleau plunging again into fresh dangers in Madrid. Now, all he had to do was to hand the gold over to the Commandant at the air base for safe transmission to Burgos, and notify the Duke that all was well.

Within a week they would all be out of this sad and bloody land for good. The explanation of the removal of the gold was so simple, now he knew it, he wondered that some such thing had not occurred to either of them. He thought of Rex's wasted fortnight at Valmojado and chuckled. Poor old Rex, how could he possibly have hoped to find the treasure, arriving as a stranger and knowing no one in the place?

By that time Richard had reached the back of the furnace house. He saw a square space fenced in with wire netting. Inside it the grass had been partially scratched away. He saw a place about three feet up in the factory wall where a hole had evidently been recently made and bricked up again. He saw a pointed roof of boards and tarred felting lying upside down where it had been cast aside. He saw birds' feathers and droppings in a barren patch about eight feet by four near by; but the golden hen-house was no longer there.

Chapter Twenty-nine – Armistice for Two

Richard rested his hands on the edge of the three-foot-high wire netting and stared over it at the empty enclosure. His whole body went a little limp for a moment. He was desperately tired of the horror and misery that racked Spain. Apart from risking his life he had known continuous discomfort and uncertainty during the four months from early July onwards.

His recent trip to Madeira had only served to strengthen his craving for the blessed peace that still lay outside Spanish frontiers. He had not told Rex, but a wireless message to Marie-Lou in the yacht, which had remained based on Bordeaux, had brought her down to Madeira to meet him in it. For the few days before she landed him again at Gibraltar he had known Paradise again in her dear company. Only a few moments ago he had thought that within a few hours he would be free to return South and rejoin her permanently. Now, he was up against it once again.

He climbed over the wire netting and examined the shallow, three-sided trench which clearly marked the place where the golden hen-house had been built against the factory wall. There was no indication at all to show whether the erection had been demolished within the last few days or a month ago.

Naturally, his first thought was that Rex had been there before him. If so, the gold could not be far away. It would only be a matter of systematic search to find it. Richard's original intention had been to go straight to the Nationalist authorities in Valmojado, tell them the reason for his presence there and secure their assistance. With their help he could have grilled every workman in the factory until the truth was forthcoming. Those thousands of pots and pans could not possibly have been lightened without someone there being aware of it. The same procedure would be equally certain to provide him with information about the removal of the hen-house, but he could not adopt that method now. If Rex had pulled the place down and buried the gold bricks he must have had assistance to do so. Any mention of the gold to the Nationalists would set on foot an enquiry which would almost inevitably end in costing Rex his life. Even inquiries among the workmen would have to be carried out with the

greatest discretion or suspicions would be aroused which would bring Rex into danger. Whatever happened Rex must be shielded.

But, Richard began to wonder, had Rex removed the gold or was it someone else? Rex's attitude did not suggest that he had been successful in his treasure-hunt and he was quite obviously fed-up with the whole business. Would he have talked of kicking the dust of Spain off his heels in two days' time if he had managed to secrete the Coralles millions in some new hiding-place? Surely he would have remained there until he received fresh instructions from Simon and they could engineer some attempt to get the stuff out of Nationalist territory.

Richard noticed that there was a jagged rent in the concrete of the furnace house coping; that a heap of tumbled bricks showed where a corner of another of the factory buildings had been blown in; that half one of the store-sheds was now a pile of débris and, last but not least, that there was another jagged rent in the discarded board roof of the hen-house. Valmojado had been shelled by artillery, he knew, for some days before it had been taken. Jacinto had had his foot blown off by a stray shell two days before the place had been finally evacuated. Perhaps a shell had hit the hen-house. If that had happened it was quite certain that the paint and mud which had disguised the golden bricks would have been blasted away from many of them, revealing their true colour. The factory had been held by a company of Militiamen. No sooner had one seen the gold than the whole lot would have been scrambling to secure a portion of this unexpected prize. The more Richard considered this new theory the more probable he thought it and he saw that if it were correct the Coralles fortune and all traces of it had been dispersed for good. He might kick his heels in Valmojado until Doomsday without result.

He spent the next hour making a very careful examination of the ground for a hundred yards around. He knew, none better, the immense labour of carting that mass of bullion any distance and, at the end of an hour, he was quite convinced that the gold had not been buried within that radius of the henhouse during the last fortnight; no place in the rough grass showed that turfs of it had been cut away and replaced, and the bare ground was firm and smooth, showing not the least sign of disturbance.

Very thoughtfully he strolled back through the workshops. At the entrance of one he saw Rex talking to a man he recognized as a friend of

Matias Falcon's, and a mechanic in Air Force uniform. A few moments later he came upon Falcon himself and had a word with him. The Syndicalist was extremely nervous in spite of Richard's friendly attitude and protested that he had changed his views; he was a strong Nationalist now. Richard thought it a little queer that Matias had escaped being shot, but he made no comment.

That night, in celebration of Richard's safe return from the clutches of the Reds, he and Rex were invited to dine in the Air Force Mess. Richard was not an airman of Rex's standing but he had flown his own plane for the last ten years, so he knew quite enough of flying technicalities to understand the airmen's jargon. They fêted the two cousins with genuine Spanish hospitality and it proved a merry evening.

Towards its close Rex declared that since his cousin had turned up safe and sound there was nothing to detain him longer in Valmojado, but they had all been so good to him that he would really like to strike a blow for the Nationalist cause before he left Spain.

Richard was extremely interested in this strange announcement, but to his intense annoyance Don Baltazar button-holed him at the moment for more stories of Red atrocities. In consequence, he was unable to hear Rex's further discussion with Ramon de Leon and two German officers.

When they were back in their billet and getting undressed for the night Richard asked, "What's all this about your turning Nationalist and wanting to perform heroics in their cause? I thought you were fed up with the war."

"So I am," grinned Rex, "but I've got a big idea about how to quit this dorp with speed and comfort. You be on the air-field at a quarter to nine to-morrow and I'll give you the low-down on it. Found the golden hoard yet?"

"No," Richard confessed.

"And you never will, old son. I'm hitting the trail for home day after to-morrow. You'd better chuck this wild-goose chase and come along too."

"Tempter," smiled Richard. "I'd love to, but it can't be done—at least, not till I feel I can quit with a clear conscience."

Before eight next morning he was closeted with Jacinto, who listened with fury and amazement to the news of the complete disappearance of his hen-house. He reproached himself bitterly for allowing all four members of his old secret squad to go off to the war directly they had a

chance to join the approaching army of the Nationalists. Had they remained until the town was taken they would have kept an eye upon the place after he was wounded but, since that occurred, there had been no one in the secret left to watch it.

The old Carlist could offer no new theory and was inclined to accept Richard's—that the place had been blown down and pillaged piecemeal. The factory had certainly been shelled but there had been no hand-to-hand fighting there. The company of Militia which had occupied it for a week had retired when the Nationalists were still a mile off which further supported the idea that they might have been loaded down with gold and had had a special reason for not wishing to risk themselves in fresh fighting.

Richard enquired how it was that Matias and several of his Syndicalist friends had managed to save their skins and were still working in the factory.

"We made a pact, *Señor*," Jacinto smiled. "Matias and his friends, myself and a few of the other older men. They stood by us and gave us their protection, swearing we were all good fellows and pro-Government, when the Reds were at their killing before falling back on Madrid. In return we stood by them and swore they were all pro-Nationalist when the Nationalists arrived and their execution squads were purging the town."

"That was a darned sensible thing to do."

"Had we not done so there would have been few of the old hands alive at the factory now. During the many weeks since the Committee was formed we all worked well together on such work as there was to do; although that was little enough owing to lack of raw material. We disagreed in some ways but we had no wish to kill each other and the arrangement saved us all. Matias is a good worker and they have made him foreman now."

"So I hear, and he should do well provided he keeps a still tongue in his head." Richard stood up. "I must be off now. I've got a date at the air-field."

Ten minutes later he joined Rex, who was pacing up and down before the row of hangars, and asked at once, "Well, what's the 'big feller' been hatching? If the idea's in proportion to your size in suits, it ought to be pretty hot."

"It sure is," said Rex. "It's a wow and then some. Like to give a guess?"

“From the way you’re eyeing those hangars I should say the criminal instinct you term your brain had conceived the idea of stealing one of General Franco’s planes.”

“Say now!” Rex protested in a hurt voice. “You’ve got me all wrong, Richard. I wouldn’t do a thing like that.”

“Huh! Wouldn’t you? I seem to remember an occasion when you pinched a perfectly good war-plane off the Soviet Government.”

“Well, that was different. We had to get away from the Bolshies somehow and they were such darn poor hosts—not like these folk at all.”

“True enough, and these people aren’t after our blood anyhow. Is there any reason why you shouldn’t wait till I’ve satisfied myself the gold’s not here, and leave with me by car?”

“Yep. Out of loyalty to the Duke you may decide to stick around here for a fortnight, just as I’ve stuck around for a fortnight on Simon’s account.”

“You’re right there. I may have to confess failure but I won’t do that before I can honestly say I’ve exhausted every line of investigation I could think of.”

“O.K. An’ I’m not waiting till you have. I’ve done all I can do already. That old carrion-crow, Don Baltazar’s, seen my picture in a newssheet some time and if he remembers where, it might prove mighty awkward. What’s more, each day I stick on here there’s a chance someone who’s escaped from Madrid may turn up and recognize me as having played along with the Government boys there. Then it’s me for the firing-squad. That wouldn’t be so pretty. I’m fed up with the war and I’m lighting out of here to-morrow. You can come with me or not as you like.”

“Well, if you’re not going to pinch a plane and you won’t wait to come with me by car, how are you going? You might be able to cadge a lift here and there, but this is central Spain and to reach any of the frontiers means the hell of a long walk.”

“To the cheers of the assembled thousands I’m sailing straight out of here in the Lord Mayor’s coach.”

“What the devil are you talking about?”

“That’s my name for her, but the Jerries all call her ‘The Flying Sow’—take your choice.”

“Then you are going to pinch a plane.”

“I’m not, I keep telling you. I’m going to be given it free, gratis and for nothing with a whole lot of bombs thrown in. At least, I’m going to be loaned it for the laudable purpose of blasting the guts out of the women and children of Madrid.”

“So that’s the idea. D’you really think they’ll let you take one of their planes up?”

“Sure. They saw me stunting in my own before they borrowed it—and lost it. They know I could make rings round any of them as a pilot. When I put it up to them in the mess last night they gave me the ‘big hand’ and suggested I took the Flying Sow up for a trial spin this forenoon.”

“Damn clever scheme, I admit. Actually, of course, you simply mean to hop over to Government territory in it?”

“Not on your life. When I go up in that flying omnibus to-morrow I’m saying good-bye to Spain for a long, long, time.”

“You really mean to quit, then?”

“I certainly do.”

“But, Rex, this is stealing a plane every bit as much as if you laid out a couple of sentries to get it. The only difference is you’ve thought up a darn smart way to avoid trouble at the start. I’m with the Nationalists, remember, and honestly I don’t see how I can stand by and watch you make off with one of Franco’s planes.”

“Don’t you, sweetheart? And how are you going to stop me? By shooting the works that I’m Red Rex of Bolshiville? I can’t see you doing it.”

“No,” Richard admitted. “You’ve got me there.”

“There she is!” Rex pointed to a huge machine that was being towed out of a hangar by a motor tractor. “That’s the Lord Mayor’s coach I’m going home in.”

“What! That thing?” Richard stared in amazement. The mighty four-engined German monoplane had a wing-span of over two hundred feet and was larger than any air-liner he had ever seen.

After a second he burst out, “Now, Rex, play fair. That Flying Fortress must have cost thousands. The Nationalists will have to pay for all these machines in the long run, and in the meantime they’ve got their war to fight. It’s a lousy trick to go and bilk them out of their prize bomber. Take a plane if you like, they owe you one anyhow for losing yours, but take one that’s a reasonable size and didn’t cost the earth.”

Rex grinned down from his superior height. "Talk sense," he said kindly. "I'm treating these folks on the level. Mind, as I'm pro-Government I'd be justified in stinging them for the best bus they've got. But they've been mighty decent to me so I'm not going to. There're two of these Flying Sows and they're a drug in the market. There'll be a lot of happy Huns here when they tumble to it that at least one of their white elephants isn't coming back."

"I don't get you. It looks brand new and a beautiful thing. It's got simply lovely lines."

"Sure, it has; but that's the only good thing about it."

"Why? The Germans are first-class designers."

"They certainly are, and it isn't the designers' fault. Quite a lot of countries went all wrong in just the same way. They only thought of bigger and better bombs, so they built a few of these grandfather planes to carry them. The thing they left out of their calculations was the enormously increased speed of the modern fighter. That thing there can cruise at a hundred and sixty miles an hour carrying a load of twelve tons, but what the hell's the good of that when a chaser plane can do getting on for four hundred?"

"I see. They haven't turned out a practical proposition for war purposes, then?"

"Not now chasers can climb so fast. Even if they don't get off the earth before the bombs drop they can be making rings round one of these sky whales inside fifteen minutes. That's why all these guys here are so scared of their Flying Sows. They took this one up once just before I arrived here and a couple of fast Russians got up from Madrid after her. They had the fright of their lives and would never've lived to sink another lager if some of their fighters hadn't been on hand to tackle the Bolshies. She's not been out of the hangar since and they just hate the sight of her."

"The German Air Staff must know the type's a failure."

"Sure. That bunch is wise to most things in air fighting."

"Then why the devil should they have sent these Flying Sows to Spain?"

"You poor fish!" Rex winked cheerfully. "Use that head of yours to do some thinking. The Nazis want the Nationalists to win, don't they? Then they've got to encourage 'em and lend half a hand here and there. But d'you think the German General Staff are such mutts as to give a free

exhibition of their newest and most deadly weapons for the benefit of all the International Observers that are sitting around watching this war? Is it likely?"

"No," Richard agreed. "It certainly is not. The situation is then, that you're taking a virtually useless plane. But why ever did you pick on such a big one?"

"Because I had the sense to see they wouldn't stand for me taking any other. They've plenty of use for the smaller stuff themselves whereas these Flying Sows are nobody's babies. They want to be able to say they've used one but none of them want to risk their own necks in it. That I'm a competent pilot they haven't a doubt, so when I volunteer to do their dirty work they just think I'm either a mad *Americano* or one big hero."

Richard laughed. "It looks to me as if they're right. You'll be in a hell of a mess if some of those Russian chasers get after you."

"I'm risking that. But I should worry. I mean to lighten her up a lot by unshipping every scrap of surplus gear and not taking any crew. She'll be a brute to handle if I do meet trouble but the other side'll have to send up real crack men to get me."

"You couldn't pilot that thing and bomb Madrid all on your own."

"I'm not going to bomb Madrid."

"No, but they'll expect you to take a bomber."

"Sure. That's where you come in."

"Thank you. *No!*" said Richard decisively. "I've still got a job of work to do here."

"Then I'll take a volunteer from among the men."

"And have him force you to turn back at the point of a gun directly he finds you don't mean to bomb Madrid at all?"

"Plenty of lads here who're pro-Government on the q.t. and would give their eyes for a lift out of this dorp."

"So that's the game."

"Yep."

The Flying Sow had been out in the open for some minutes with a dozen mechanics busy about her. As Rex turned to walk over to the big plane, he added, "Those guys in the mess last night thought I was only a bit tight and bragging. They had grins on them like Cheshire cats when they tackled me about it this morning, but I soon smoothed their faces out when I told

them I'd take her out for a trial as soon as they could get her ready. Like to come up for a flip?"

"I'll try any drink once," said Richard.

The monster plane was not loaded with bombs but its full crew was in attendance. All six of the German pilots and a number of the Spaniards were present to watch the ascent. There was a lot of good-humoured chaff when Rex and Richard climbed into the huge machine.

Another three-quarters of an hour passed before her mechanics declared the plane ready and a German officer, named Fritz von Auerbach, took off with her, Rex sitting beside him. She was a two-decker and Richard roamed from one deck to the other exploring at his leisure. At three thousand feet Rex took over the controls and it was soon plain to the German that he was perfectly capable of handling her. He put her through her paces but attempted no monkey tricks and very sensibly did not attempt to fly anywhere near the battle-line, keeping well to the south of Valmojado.

After twenty-five minutes he brought her back to her base and persuaded Von Auerbach to let him make the landing. It was a very tricky business with such a weighty machine but he accomplished it most creditably. Ramon de Leon, who had accompanied them, declared himself quite satisfied that Rex could make the short hop to Madrid and back without any trouble at all and it was agreed that he should be allowed to do so on the following day.

Fast pursuit by the enemy would be the only danger but a very definite one, and Rex set about enumerating the gear he wanted unshipped to give the plane greater speed, while Richard went off on his own concerns.

He did not rest during the *siesta* and took only twenty minutes off for lunch. Apart from that short interval he spent his entire time between half-past ten and six o'clock in making an exhaustive examination of the factory and the land about it. This painstaking survey convinced him that the gold was certainly not concealed anywhere in the factory buildings or buried near by.

He then went to have another look at the Flying Sow, which had been run back into its hangar. It was amazing to think that one man could control this giant of the skies and guide it with a touch of the hand when it was thousands of feet up in the air, but Richard knew that, apart from

taking off and landing, the actual flying of such a monster in decent weather presented even less difficulty than driving a car along a road. There was the question of navigation, but both he and Rex were well qualified in that and once a course was set her gyroscopes would keep her steadier than any human hand could do. That was one of the big advantages she had over a small plane; she was equipped with every conceivable safety device and scientific instrument to ensure that once up she would practically fly herself.

A German sergeant-mechanic took Richard to see the long rows of huge bombs lying in racks at the back of the hangar. Richard had heard that bombs up to 500 lb. in weight apiece were being manufactured in some countries but these were approximately 560 lb. each. No squad of men could possibly have lifted one, but from the time of their manufacture they were hardly touched by hand. They were loaded into lorries, ships or railway trucks by crane, and at their destination were transferred by chain pulleys to hand trolleys specially made for the purpose. The trolleys, in due course, could be run under the bomber where other chain pulleys lifted the bombs into position ready for flight. As Richard looked at the huge projectiles a shudder ran down his spine. A single one of them was capable of fanning down a whole row of houses, and the Sergeant said that the Flying Sow could carry forty-eight.

As he turned away the friendly Sergeant offered to take him inside the plane again, and they went up to her flight control room. The Sergeant pointed with pride to her dashboard, which had over twenty dials and switches on it; 'rev' counter, boost pressure, airspeed indicator, altimeter, artificial horizon, oil pressure, petrol pressure, change-over switches, rate of climb indicator, clock, stop-watch, emergency boost, thermometer, light switches, ignition switches, and the rest. A little confusing to a novice but Rex was no novice. Inside, the machine had already been gutted of most of its non-essential fittings and its four machine-guns had also been unshipped. Rex knew what he was up to.

After dinner that evening when the two friends were alone, Richard said casually, "D'you remember that suggestion you made when we were arguing politics in the *Palacio Coralles*— that Simon and the Duke, and you and I should pair; and leave the Spaniards to fight it out?"

"Yep. You and I were willing, but the others wouldn't play."

“That’s so; we felt we couldn’t let them down. Well, it seems to me the situation’s altered now. Both of us have done all we can and you’re determined to clear out. I’ve made up my mind I’m game to pair with you.”

“Oh, Boy!” Rex clapped Richard on the shoulder with his leg-of-mutton hand. “That’s the best thing I’ve heard in a whale of a while. We’ll both be homeward bound to-morrow.”

“Not to-morrow, old chap. The next day, if you don’t mind.”

“Why the delay? Surely you’re not still fretting yourself about that lousy gold. You could hunt the factory for a month of Sundays but you wouldn’t find it. The darn stuff just isn’t there.”

Richard nodded. “That’s the way I feel and I’m not going to waste any more time looking for it. But I’ve two good reasons for not wanting to leave until the day after to-morrow. Firstly, when the Flying Sow goes up she’ll be carrying bombs, won’t she?”

“Yes. That’s my big excuse for taking her out.”

“Then you’ve got to drop those bombs somewhere. You can’t risk landing her with twelve tons of explosive under her bottom.”

Rex grinned. “I’d hate to have to try.”

“Exactly, and if I’m to be your bomber I’ve got to have a few hours’ instruction with somebody who understands those precision bombing sights. It’s not necessary that I should be trained to a high degree of accuracy because we shall unload our eggs in open country. But I’m not going to risk killing civilians, or Nationalists, or Reds, and that big stuff would blow down every ordinary house within a quarter of a mile of where it fell. I must know enough about the job to ensure getting rid of it without endangering life.”

“That’s sound enough. What’s your other reason?”

“Where d’you intend to make for?”

“Marseilles.”

“Direct flight?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t intend coming down anywhere *en route*?”

“No. Why should I?”

“Your word on that.”

“You have it.”

“D’you realize you’ll be passing over Government territory practically the whole way? Think of the risk if some of those Russian chasers get up after us. We’ll be carrying Nationalist markings, remember.”

“That’s so, but we’ll be flying pretty high.”

“I think I’ve got a better scheme.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“I didn’t tell you before but Marie-Lou picked me up at Madeira and brought me over to Gib. in the yacht.”

“I guessed as much,” smiled Rex. “She’s been hanging about off the north coast of Spain ever since July, hasn’t she? You can’t hide a yacht that has to pick up post and supplies twice a week. Simon and I got on to it months ago that she was based on Bordeaux. She’s been sitting in the harbour saving oil there for a long time past.”

“Well, at the moment she’s in Gib. If we can get a wireless to her to-night she can bring the yacht round to a *rendezvous* we’ll give her off the south coast, to-morrow. She’ll be there for certain next day. Instead of flying north-east, we’ll head south, that’s all; but the distance is less and we’ll be flying over Nationalist territory a good part of the time. It’ll be quicker and safer. D’you agree?”

“No. The scheme sounds fine and there’s nothing I’d love better than to dine with Marie-Lou on the yacht two nights from this. But it just isn’t possible. The south coast is one wiggle-waggle of rocks and mountains. You couldn’t land a Flying Flea on it let alone the Flying Sow.”

“We’ll come down on the water and the yacht will pick us up.”

“You’re nuts, man. She’s a land plane, not an amphibian.”

“I don’t care. If you bring her down in France she’ll be interned. She’s as good as lost to the Nationalists already. What’s it matter if we go the whole hog and smash her up?”

“Talk sense. She’s got no floats. You can’t go landing on the water with a thing like the Flying Sow. She’d sink.”

“Let her sink. We’ll swim until the yacht’s launch picks us up. As long as you can bring her down to the water without breaking our necks that’s all that matters.”

“If the sea’s not too rough I figure I could do that. But why ask me to do such a crazy thing when there’re lots of other places where we could land without any risk at all?”

“Because, dear fool, at any neutral airport we’re bound to have trouble with the authorities. It will get in the papers and God knows what. I have the strongest possible objection to being labelled as a Red who stole one of General Franco’s planes.”

“So that’s the trouble. Well, I’m sorry, but if you’re playing ball with me you’ll just have to take a chance on that. I’m not making any water landings in the Flying Sow.”

“Oh, yes, you are.”

“Oh, no, I’m not.”

Richard smiled. “Now I’ve made up my mind to quit, it suits me to clear straight out of this place with you; but there’s one thing you’ve got into that big head of yours. I hate to tell you so but you’re going to take your orders from me.”

“Go on, little Caesar, go on,” said Rex a trifle ominously. “Thinking of threatening me with a shooting party?”

“No, but I could easily arrange one for some other people.”

“Just what d’you mean?”

“You know the foreman here, Matias Falcon. You probably know one or two friends of his as well. When I first set eyes on them they were a nice little bunch of Anarchists. I’ve only got to say the word to Don Baltazar and he’d have the whole lot shot.”

“D’you realize that might bring me into it?”

“Oh, no. I’d take care of that. You’re only my innocent little cousin Willie. You weren’t here in July when all these birds were Reds. If you’ve been a trifle indiscreet in palling up to them since, that’s not your fault. How could you know what they used to be? If they mention you when they’re questioned I’ll say they’re telling a pack of lies just to try to gain time by involving you; nasty Red lies, Rex, old scout. Don Baltazar will simply lap that up. Matias and his gang are going to face a firing-squad unless you agree to do as I request.”

“But, Richard, you wouldn’t do an awful thing like that! I’m acquainted with these guys you mention and it’s true they’re pro-Government on the q.t. But they’re decent fellows and they’ve never done you any harm.”

“Haven’t they! That’s all you know.” Richard was bluffing now but his eyes were just as hard as if he were prepared to shoot the men himself. “I never did like Anarchists. This little crowd played merry hell when the Duke

and I were here. On account of their trying to seize the factory I damn nearly got killed myself. Why should I wink at it because they've done a turn-coat act? I've got no interest whatever in protecting them. They're going to die to-morrow morning, Rex, unless you're prepared to buy their lives by doing as I wish."

"I wouldn't have thought it of you, Richard."

"Think what you like. The choice lies with you."

"O.K., then," Rex shrugged. "I'll land at sea if you insist. It doesn't cut all that ice with me as long as I get out."

Richard heaved a mental sigh of relief and smiled again now he was certain that Rex did not mean to call his bluff. "To-morrow, then, I'll get the Germans to give me a little bombing instruction," he said. "But we've got to get this radio off to Marie-Lou to-night."

"I don't like it. They'll smell a rat if you go radioing to her to be ready to meet us some place when we're only supposed to be flying to Madrid and back."

"D'you think I'm fool enough to send a bald cable like that after having worked so long under the Big White Chief? The message will be in cipher."

"I doubt if they'll let you send it, then."

"Oh, yes, they will. The Duke made it up on our way out from England. It's very simple. Very neat." Richard took out a piece of paper and a pencil. "This is how it works. For our purpose the coast of Spain is divided into sixteen sections. A girl's Christian name indicates each. Betty for Barcelona, Alice for Alicante, and so on. That's all there is to learn. We first write MARY which being interpreted out of the ancient Sanscrit means 'Malaga sector.'"

"Go on," said Rex, his good temper quite recovered. "This is interesting."

"We then look at the cape nearest the spot to which we want the yacht to go. In our case it's Cala Burras. We use the first three letters of that, add a few more and make up a surname out of it; Burns, Burnett, Burton, BURNAND. That will do. You see it's got a D on the end. If the name ends with any letter in the first half of the alphabet the yacht goes to the bay on the right of the point, if it ends with a letter in the second half then the yacht goes to a bay on the left. Now we'll add the address: S. Y. GOLDEN GULL, GIBRALTAR and— MANY HAPPY RETURNS, which means 'lie off,' whereas 'Good luck' would mean 'send a boat into. Next we put FOR

WEDNESDAY TWENTY-FIFTH which states the date we want the yacht there, and giving the day guards against a transmission error of the date. Now 'love' means morning, 'best love' evening, and 'kisses' night. What time are you proposing to make this flight?"

"Madrid to Malaga's four-hundred-odd miles but we've got to make a show of going up to Madrid first so that's another twenty-five, and we'll have to go out of our course a bit on account of the mountains in the South. Call it five hundred. Three and a half hours should be ample. We'll tell the folks here that we think there'll be more chance of hitting our objective in a daylight raid. Say we start right after the *siesta* I'll get a drop in wind by the time we're there and the evening light to land by."

"BEST LOVE is what we want, then, and since they know my proper name here, the signature will be RICHARD. If anyone wants any information about the addressee, Mary Burnand is my married sister and her birthday is on November the twenty-fifth."

"That certainly is swell," Rex agreed. "But why've you picked on this particular spot?"

"Only because I happen to know it. Some friends of mine had a little villa there one winter and I motored out from Gib. to spend a few nights with them. It was a lovely place; deep sea bathing straight off the rocks any hour you liked one side of the headland and a long, sweeping bay with golden sands where I dug castles for their children on the other. No town nearer than Malaga, about fifteen miles away, and as deserted a piece of shore as you could hope to find, although I expect there are plenty of other bays along that coast which would suit us just as well."

"Is it in the hands of the Insurgents?"

"No, the Reds. They still hold the coast for about forty miles each side of Malaga but there's no depth in that pocket of theirs except inland from Malaga itself. The Nationalists are up in the mountains only about five miles from the bay in which we're going to land, but there's no fighting going on there now. Franco needs every man he can get for his Madrid offensive so he can't spare the troops to mop that pocket up. The line's held on each side only by pickets every few miles, so I was told when I was motoring up from Gib., and there's been no traffic on the coast road since Malaga was isolated. We can't possibly run into any trouble there."

"Fine. Let's get the radio off, then."

They went down to the wireless hut near the airfield and the operator said that he would send it for them with pleasure if Don Baltazar saw it first and raised no objection. The bald-headed, vulture-like Spaniard was in the mess. He understood English and seeing the message was only one of simple birthday greetings, gave his consent to its being despatched.

Rex told De Leon that he meant to put off his flight for a day so that Richard could get a few hours' bombing instruction and the adjutant agreed that was an excellent plan. On the following morning Richard put in three hours with the sergeant-mechanic and in the afternoon Rex went up for several short flights with Von Auerbach in the Flying Sow to practise landings. Richard accompanied them and, lying flat on the lower deck with the sergeant beside him, tried out the theory he had learnt in the morning by picking up objectives from the air.

In the evening Richard went to say good-bye to Jacinto, taking with him the deeds of ownership of the factory which he had found still in his suitcase on his return to Valmojado. He had endorsed them making the place over lock, stock and barrel to the old Carlist who had proved such a staunch friend. As he explained, when he handed them over, they were of little value at the moment but the day must come when Spain would be at peace again, and he hoped that the new owner would live as many years to enjoy the profits of the plant as he had laboured for nights there in secret.

Jacinto was deeply touched by the gift, but his joy in it was a little marred by the thought that in spite of his arduous work and scheming he had failed to protect the gold after all. Nevertheless, Richard succeeded in cheering him up before he left, and went off with the old pirate's blessings for a safe trip on the morrow.

After dinner Richard sought out the sergeant-mechanic and made him a handsome present for the bombing instruction. He then went to the hangar again and put in another couple of hours' hard work testing and adjusting the complicated bomb-dropping mechanism of the Flying Sow. When he had done he was confident that he thoroughly understood the principles of the thing and would be able to drop the bombs without any risk to people on the ground.

Next morning was spent in final preparations which mainly consisted of loading the bombs, petrol and oil, and making last-minute tests of the instruments. Rex superintended everything himself and Richard stood by

taking in all details of the arrangements. The great 560-lb. bombs were run out one by one on the trolleys and hoisted by the chain gear into position.

Although she was capable of carrying forty-eight, Rex would take only forty, preferring to lighten the machine still further by cutting down her load. The Germans urged him to take her full cargo and less petrol, as he was going only to Madrid and back which was a very short flight, but, as his secret intention was to go very much farther, he pointed out that he might quite probably be chased and intended to run no risks of having to make a forced landing miles away from anywhere through running out of fuel. Eventually they gave way to him and when all was completed the two friends adjourned with their hosts to the mess.

It was only then disclosed that a number of Spaniards and Germans were to accompany them in six fighting planes; a piece of news which they heard with mixed sensations. The fighters would certainly serve to protect them from any Government machines which might get up, but just what would happen when the Flying Sow failed to bomb Madrid and turned South to her real destination was a matter upon which Rex and Richard did not care to speculate. The die was cast and there could be little profit in visualizing the Nationalist aviators, furious at having been tricked, endeavouring to force them down and ultimately using machine-guns for that purpose.

After the *siesta* the entire personnel of the air base and factory assembled on the airfield to witness the start of this unusual venture by the two foreign volunteers. Most of the Spanish and German airmen considered them mad but showed great admiration for their gallantry. Even stripped of all her surplus gear and carrying two tons of bombs less than her maximum capacity, the Flying Sow could not do a greater speed than two hundred miles an hour. The Nationalists had developed an extremely healthy respect for the high-powered Russian planes and their reckless pilots, so privately they did not consider that there was much chance of the Flying Sow getting back to her base unless they could occupy the whole of the enemy squadron which was certain to go up and attack her.

The Flying Sow's objective was the Atocha station. If she could unload even half the great cargo of explosives on and round the station it was expected the attack would completely wipe it out, and that would prove a

really serious blow to the Government as all their supplies from Valencia and Eastern Spain arrived there.

Rex told Ramon de Leon and the German pilot, Fritz von Auerbach, who was to command the accompanying planes, that he intended to climb very high, well up above the first layer of wintry clouds, and fly east for forty miles; he would then sweep right round to the north-east of the city in a wide circle, turn out there so that he would be facing Valmojado again, swoop to plant his bombs and race straight for home. They both approved this plan as excellent air tactics.

Colonel Salvador de Lopez Escandalera shook the two volunteers warmly by the hand and dozens of other people crowded round to wish them luck before they climbed into the big plane. Richard lay down at full length in his station at the bombing apparatus on the lower deck. Rex leant over and said:

“You’re dead certain you’ve got the hang of those controls?”

“Yes,” Richard smiled up. “What the devil d’you think I was doing all day yesterday and half last night—learning to knit?”

“Fine, only we’ve got enough explosives under us now to sink a battleship and I don’t want any mistakes.”

“You needn’t worry. I’ll get rid of it in the mountains when we’re flying south.”

“Oh, no, you won’t. I want to get rid of this ten tons of hell we’re carrying just as soon as I can. We’re going to be chased, if not by the Ruskies, by these kind friends of ours. There’s going to be a whole lot of angry men floating about in the air this afternoon. I need every ounce of speed I can get if we’re to come out of this jam alive.”

“You shall have it. Just let me know through the voice pipe when you want me to let the stuff go.”

“I will, but don’t you do it a moment before I say the word. You can only see below you here whereas I’ll be able to see all round, and I’d like to try to lose our little collection of nurses before we drop our eggs in some open spot. Another thing, it’s mighty important you should let them go in proper order, otherwise the sudden release of weight at one end may upset the plane.”

“What *do* you think I was learning from that sergeant?”

“All right, all right. Never mind him. I’m flying this machine and you’re listening to me now. You’re to turn over all the odd-numbered levers before you touch the evens. Tail first, head next, tail again, head again, and just as soon as you can pick a suitable spot after I’ve given you the O.K. All odd numbers first, remember, and snap ’em out one after the other as quick as you know how.”

“My dear chap, that’s just what the sergeant taught me. My only concern now is to know if we’re coming alive out of this or not. For God’s sake get on with your own job. The sooner we start the better.”

Rex gave him an affectionate pat on the shoulder. “Well, here’s luck to us both,” he said and turned away to climb the ladder to the upper deck.

“Yes, good luck to both of us,” he heard Richard call after him, and settling himself in the pilot’s seat he adjusted the earphones of the wireless over his head. Four minutes later they were off.

Chapter Thirty – The Break for Home

The airfield seemed to be snatched away from below them. The figures on it were waving and their mouths were open, but Richard could not hear the cheering. One of the six fighter planes had had trouble in taking off; it ran a couple of hundred yards and stopped. The factory buildings, hangars and huts shrank away; the individuals in the crowd merged into a mass. Rex had turned east over Valmojado; the town looked like a set of child's bricks from their rapidly increasing height.

Richard thought of the many dreary days and exciting moments he had spent there. He wondered if he would ever see the little town again. He felt that he must certainly pay it a visit just to renew his acquaintance with those scenes of his adventures when the Spanish War was over. But would he live to see the end of it? Would he live out that afternoon? That was what mattered. If he could come safely through the next three hours his days of danger in Spain would be over. He would be with Marie-Lou tonight and know the heavenly prospect of sailing with her for home.

The toy town was well behind their tail now. He could no longer distinguish human figures on the road to Aranjuez. They must be up to about 3,000 feet. A wisp of mist floated below them like a trail of smoke. It obscured a good portion of the patchwork quilt of fields. Next minute the earth had disappeared. They were in the clouds.

They continued to climb. Richard swallowed hard to clear his ears and they popped a little. Five minutes later the plane came out above the cloud layer. It spread below them like a polar landscape of humped and broken snow with low mountain ranges in the distance. Although Richard had flown a great deal he had never lost the joy of that sudden break from the gloomy greyness of a winter's day into the brilliant summer sun that shines, irrespective of seasons, above the heavy blankets of grey cloud.

A huge, black bird with rigid wings was gliding at the same swift speed just below them. As they mounted higher it rapidly decreased in size and into the field of view came five much smaller black birds clustered round it like fledglings flying with a parent. All six were the dense black shadows cast by the flight of planes on the white clouds below. A few more

moments and they were only a cluster of dots soon lost in the billowing undulations of the lifeless cloudscape.

They soared on, higher and higher, until the clouds were only a smooth sheet of opaque greyness thousands of feet beneath them. Richard stood up to look through the porthole; he could see four of the other planes and knew that the fifth must be flying with them, slightly higher, at an angle from which he could not glimpse it. His head felt very light and he judged they must be up to 15,000 feet. They were still climbing, but after a few moments his head felt easier and he knew that Rex must have released some oxygen.

The great plane banked, turned northward, entered the rarified cloud layer, passed through it and came out in the upper air 20,000 feet above the earth. The heating apparatus of the plane kept it at a reasonable temperature although it was considerably colder. Outside Richard knew that it must be freezing; snow and ice were forming on the windows. The fighters that were accompanying them were a mixed bag as the Nationalists were using any types they could get hold of, and one of them, an old Spanish Regular Air Force machine, dropped out of sight unable to make the climb, but Richard had located the one he had not been able to see before. It was flying far out on their left, so they still had four protector-jailors in their company.

He wondered anxiously just how unpleasant the men in those planes would make themselves if Rex failed to shake them all off before he made his break for the South. The Germans would certainly attempt to force the Flying Sow down and, since they dreaded her as a future danger to themselves, would probably be extremely glad of an excuse to smash her up altogether once they realized that her volunteer crew was endeavouring to double-cross them.

Rex banked again, sooner than Richard expected; evidently they were not going as far north as Rex had said he intended to. Up in the control-room Rex chuckled to himself as the voice of Fritz von Auerbach came to him through the headphones. "Off your course. Adjust to N.N.W. for further ten miles before turning."

"Don't worry," Rex said into the curved mouthpiece strapped on to his chest. "I know what I'm up to," and he kept the plane headed N.W.

For some little time they held that course and Richard suspected that they were making for the Guadarrama mountains. Suddenly they began to come down again, through the thin upper layer of cloud, through the thousands of feet of bright clear space, down, down, down towards the limitless, snow-like cloud-fields that cloaked the earth from sight.

Von Auerbach was now worried. "What's wrong?" he kept asking Rex. "What's wrong? Keep her up! Stop diving! *Donnerweter*, stop diving!" but Rex ignored him and continued to plunge downward.

Immediately they started to descend Richard had resumed his post by the bombing apparatus. The clouds seemed to be rushing up to meet them; the black bird shadows appeared again, growing swiftly larger. Suddenly he saw an uneven ridge of white in the greyness ahead. For a second he thought it was a separate cloudbank, but with a tightening of the heart he realized that it was the jagged snowclad peaks of the Guadarramas, and that Rex seemed to be diving straight at them.

"Stop diving! You'll crash! You'll crash!" bawled von Auerbach, and two Spaniards chipped in ordering and imploring Rex to stop, turn, ascend, so that his earphones became a din of conflicting voices. With his left hand he switched off the wireless.

The accompanying planes split their formation before they reached the cloud level, two zooming upward and the others swerving sharply to the right and left. Rex chuckled as he plunged downward into it. He was taking a big risk. The main peaks were still two miles or more distant, but many lesser ones were concealed in the sea of cloud and nothing could save the Flying Sow if she hit one.

He had to penetrate the cloud far enough to be able to turn without being seen from above. The second he had done so he flattened out, banked steeply and brought the plane right round in a full half-circle until she was headed south-east, dead towards Madrid. Richard stared down through the bombing sights holding his breath and knowing they might crash into a hidden peak at any second. Just as the turn was completed the grey mist parted for a moment and through the gap he glimpsed black rock partially covered with snow only two hundred feet beneath him. A minute passed that seemed an hour and they were three miles farther from the mountains; that danger, at least, was over.

For ten minutes they flew on blind through the cloud bank, then Rex dived again. With his amazing air-sense he had judged it marvellously; as they shot out of the mist Madrid lay clear below them. In a flash the plane was back in the clouds again. It turned north-east and Rex's shout came clearly through the voice pipe: "Ready, Richard. On the next dip let 'em go."

As they came clear of the clouds once more Richard saw they had passed Madrid and were diving straight for its three-mile-distant village suburb Hortaleza. They were on the far side of the city from the line of battle and immediately below them lay a criss-cross pattern of ploughed fields. Without waiting a second he jammed down the bomb releases; tail-head, tail-head, just as Rex had told him. As he watched, the great bombs streaked away behind them. In the almost sound-proof plane it was impossible to hear them detonate, but as each one hit the earth he saw the flash and a balloon of smoke appear. The bursts seemed very small for such huge projectiles, but with no previous experience of bombing from three thousand feet it was impossible to judge them.

He had only let ten go when Rex's voice came again, "Now, now! Damn you! What the hell are you waiting for?"

"I'm at it, man," Richard yelled back, and with frantic haste he turned over the remaining ten odd-numbered levers so as to clear half the bombs before they reached the village.

An anti-aircraft gun opened from below. Richard's first knowledge of it was when he saw a series of white, feathery puffballs suddenly appear a few hundred yards under and behind their tail. Rex zoomed up into the clouds again and the remainder of the bursts were hidden. He flattened out, banked steeply, set a course due south and switched over to 'George,' the gyroscopic control. Next moment he came storming down the ladder to Richard.

"What the hell's the game? Why didn't you let those blasted bombs go when I gave the word? D'you want to get us both killed? We may be now I've got to circle round Madrid and come down again."

Richard smiled up at him. "What's wrong, old boy? Does it matter where you pitch the bally things as long as it's not on people? I thought you'd unload them in the Guadarramas. Why bother about doing it near Madrid?"

“It’s not that, you chump!” Rex roared. “We can’t let ’em go without seeing where they go to and I wanted to climb now—get clear away while the going’s good.”

“Climb, then, if you want to. I got rid of all I could.” Richard pointed to the levers. “Half of them have gone, anyway.”

Rex stared down in surprise and a slow smile lit his face as he saw that all the odd-numbered levers were turned over. “You did drop ’em, then. Good for you. I’m sorry, but I thought you’d mucked it.”

“What about the rest?”

“Don’t want to come down again now the ‘archies’ have opened,” Rex frowned. “Besides, one of those planes may spot us.”

“We can’t let them go blind. How about waiting till we reach the sea?”

“That’s it. Fine! With half the load gone I reckon I’ll be able to manage.” With a quick nod Rex shot up the ladder to the control-room again.

Richard smiled and lit himself a cigarette. If they could keep clear of their friends and foes the danger was over now.

The plane tilted again and soared up through the grey wreaths of mist. Rex’s call came down the voice-pipe. “Come up here and do observer.”

Mounting to the cockpit, Richard settled himself beside Rex and stared out through the impenetrable murk. As they flashed into daylight both of them glanced swiftly round. Some miles to the west a plane was moving above the cloud-banks. It was Fritz von Auerbach and he turned in their direction the second he saw them.

Rex put her nose down, altered course to south-east and they raced through the clouds again. Ten minutes later he shot earthwards to see where they were. Richard grabbed his arm. The German had turned and come down too, apparently guessing their direction. Owing to his superior speed he had passed them, but his observer spotted the Flying Sow directly she plunged out of the clouds and von Auerbach flipped round to meet her. He was a little below them and away to their right front.

Suddenly there was a rapid *rat-tat-tat* on the opposite side of the plane. Richard leapt from his seat and dashed half-way down the ladder. A line of holes showed in the framework, curving up from the lower deck to the aftermost porthole. The hammering came again and a spray of bullets smacked through the ports.

Turning, Richard ran back to the cockpit. He stared anxiously towards the east and saw the plane from which the bullets had come; it was a Russian chaser.

Rex seized the emergency boost to give the helpless Flying Sow her last ounce of speed. At the second Richard caught sight of the Russian he swerved south a little. It seemed as if the three planes were about to rush together in one terrific crash but next moment Rex zoomed upward while the Russian continued dead ahead.

Richard gave a whoop of joy. "He's seen von Auerbach. Thank God old Fritz was after us."

Von Auerbach had seen the Russian too. The pro-Nationalist and pro-Government fighters were hurtling towards each other, decreasing their distance by 600 miles an hour. Both planes suddenly streaked skywards in a flashing curve, each airman seeking to gain height over his enemy. The Flying Sow lifted sharply again and disappeared in the friendly clouds, leaving the Communist and the Nazi to fight it out.

Rex turned south once more. When next they came down to check their position he managed to identify the provincial town of Valdepenas some distance to the right. Nearly half their journey to the sea was accomplished. Soon afterwards they entered the mountainous country of the Sierra Morena. It was very bumpy and tricky flying but, with the aid of the map, Rex safely negotiated the passes. At half-past five they sighted Granada, and the domes of its famous Moorish Palace, the Alhambra, which dominated the wide plain, were just discernible in the failing light of the winter afternoon. The town had been in the hands of the Nationalists for months and, as the Flying Sow was carrying Nationalist markings, there was no fear of other Russian fighters coming up to chase her.

Granada was only thirty-five miles from the sea but the huge jagged heights of the Sierra Nevada bulked to the east of the city and spurs of the range ran to its south, cutting it off from the coast. Rex banked and turned west following the valley of the Genii. Farther on, the river curved south to empty itself in the sea at Malaga. Leaving it ten miles inland, Rex passed north of the Sierra de Mijas for about half its length, found a pass and headed through it for the sea.

The mountain chain ran parallel with the coast and about six miles from it, forming the north-western front of the Government-held Malaga

pocket, but the entire sector was dormant and no signs could be seen of the widely scattered pickets which composed the opposing forces.

Richard identified the bay he had chosen as their destination, although owing to their lateness, occasioned by the necessity of throwing off their escort, visibility was rapidly decreasing. When they had passed the mountains he could just make out an old monastery which, perched upon a high cliff about a mile inland, dominated the coast road for a considerable distance in both directions.

The setting sun was now behind the mountains and for a few anxious moments they scanned the dusk-obscured sea; then, almost simultaneously, they sighted the *Golden Gull* lying quietly outside the bay just at the three-mile limit. Her single, squat funnel and low, graceful lines identified her beyond question. Rex was heading straight for her when Richard said, "The rest of the bombs! They may go off if we hit the water before we've unloaded them."

Rex shrugged. "Let 'em down in the sea. Any place'll do."

"No," said Richard. "There's not a soul about here and having taken the trouble to learn a bit about bombing I'd like to see just how good a bomber I am. Run me round the curve of the bay about thirty feet out from the present tide-line. It would be fun to see if they fall just where I think they're going to."

"O.K.," Rex agreed. "Have it your own way." As they circled and came back over the villa on the headland where Richard had stayed a few nights with friends years before, he dived down to the lower deck and flung himself flat beside the bombing sights.

The Flying Sow rushed towards the beach and sailed gracefully along it only about four hundred feet above the water. One after another Richard flung the rest of the release levers over. The bombs streamed out under her tail and he saw them plunging down into the sea, a line of splashes in the twilight parallel with the sand and no more than fifty feet out from the edge of the water.

There was no smoke this time, nor the huge fountains of water one might have expected. As the bombs disappeared each of them sent up a kind of frothy bulge in the sea which broke the fine of wavelets, but the Flying Sow behaved most strangely. From the moment the first bomb left her she bounced jerkily up as though released by a series of springs.

Rex swore. Down below Richard slammed over lever after lever until the last of the second batch of twenty bombs was gone and the plane zoomed up over the opposite headland.

Turning out to sea, Rex began to call the *Golden Gull* on his wireless. He had not dared to do so before in case his signals should be picked up by Nationalist or Government air bases. Again and again he sent out: "S.O.S.—Lower boat—S.O.S.—Lower boat," as he circled round the yacht.

Marie-Lou had been keeping a sharp look-out beside her captain on the bridge. She had seen the great plane appear over the mountains, a black silhouette against the glow of the sunset, but having expected Richard to come off in a small boat she hardly dared to hope that such an air monster could possibly have been secured by him for his escape from Spain. The wireless operator's assistant ran from the radio-room waving the first message. All the crew knew why the yacht was waiting there and the man's face told her his good tidings. Captain Sanderson smiled at her and signalled the coxwain, standing by ready on the deck below to pipe a boat away. Within two minutes it was in the water; manned by twice the number of eager hands that were needed, but the smiling captain let them go.

The Mediterranean was blue-green and gentle in the violet light. Rex brought the Flying Sow down on to it a mile astern of the yacht and a little to her leeward side. Richard had opened the sliding hatch of the emergency exit above the control chamber and stood on the ladder, half in half out of it, the rushing wind tearing past as though it would strip his clothes from his body.

Rex switched off the engines and the great plane raced silently just above the wave crests, losing speed quickly, pancaked on to the sea, lurched to starboard and right over till her wing-tip caught the water. Suddenly she swung right round in a half-circle, her starboard wing half-submerged, her port wing cocked high up into the air at an angle of forty-five degrees. She settled then to a gentle roll, but she was floating and it was clear that they would not be called upon to swim for it.

The motor-launch was racing to them and as it drew alongside there came a chorus of dear, familiar English voices. "Evening, sir! It's good to see you again. The whole crew's been like cats on hot bricks since we got your wireless. Had a concert last night to try to cheer up Madam but she's

difficult to cheer with you away. Evening, Mr. Rex. You're looking fit, sir. You been having a slap at these blasted Bolshies too? Bet you knocked a few of their silly heads together. Teach 'em sense and that's what they want. Step careful, sir. Give me your hand. That's the way."

Scrambling down from the roof of the plane they slid into the launch, gaily returning the cheerful greetings it was so damnably good to hear. Rex had sailed many times in the yacht and was a great favourite with her crew.

As he sat down in the sternsheets it suddenly struck him that these bronzed seamen were the very equivalents of the men whose rights he and Simon had been striving to protect in the Spanish struggle. Yet these fellows naturally assumed he was heart and soul with the Nationalists and referred to the Spanish Government as 'blasted Bolshies.' That was mighty funny; but then Spain was not England.

The yacht's gangway had been lowered. Marie-Lou stood at its top. She was a little pale and there were deep shadows under her violet eyes. The months of anxiety through which she had passed had told upon her, and the few days she had recently spent with Richard had done little to ease the strain; but to him, as he took her in his arms, she looked even more divinely beautiful than on that first night they had spent together, six years before, in Vienna.

After a moment she turned to Rex. "What a lovely surprise," she said as she stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. "I had no idea you were coming too."

"Well, somebody had to bring him back to you," he grinned. "But apart from that I wouldn't swear to it I'm altogether welcome."

"What nonsense, Rex dear. You know you're always welcome wherever we are and whatever you do. Your usual cabin is being got ready for you. Run down to it now and clean yourself up. I've ordered tankards of Pimm's No. 1 to be ready for us up in the deck lounge in ten minutes."

"You're a Princess with a real Royal memory when it comes to my favourite drinks," he laughed. "I'll be with you."

The second his broad back had disappeared down the companion-way she seized Richard's hands and he felt her nails dig into his flesh. "Richard!" she said in a low, anxious voice as her huge eyes stared up into his. "Tell me it's finished. This is really the end, isn't it? You haven't got to go back?"

"No—we're through," he smiled, trembling with excitement. "We're through, darling. I've got the gold out. The whole darned issue. Close on

ten tons of it. You must have seen me let go those bombs. That was it, and they're all there in the shallow water of the bay. We've only got to fish 'em up again."

"Oh, Richard," she leant against him. "How simply marvellous."

"Yes, it was pretty good. The best *coup* I've ever pulled off except taking you into Russia as my wife."

"And to think you persuaded Rex to help you."

He chuckled. "That's the cream of it. He thinks we unloaded the gold outside Madrid. I fooled him beautifully; but not a word to him till we've got the goods safely on board. Isn't it simply gorgeous? Poor old Rex. Just to think he flew the stuff out for me himself and he doesn't even know it!"

That was the only mistake Richard made. Rex did know, and at that moment he was angrily thinking out the quickest possible way of getting his own back.

Chapter Thirty-one – Plot and Counter Plot

While Rex enjoyed his pint of Pimm's out of a silver tankard with Richard and Marie-Lou he did not give the faintest indication of his inward annoyance. He appeared to be in his usual buoyant spirits and declared again and again how delighted he was to have the wretched Spanish business behind him, but all the time he was saying to himself, "So you think you've made a monkey out of me, Richard my lad, do you? But it's not going to work out like that. You just wait and see."

They decided not to change for dinner as Rex had no clothes on board except those he stood up in and he was much too large for Richard's spare dinner-jacket to fit him. Instead it was agreed that they should dine comfortably in dressing-gowns, and Richard lent his guest a gorgeous silken garment for the purpose. Returning to his cabin, Rex then proceeded to revel in the luxury of a hot bath. As he lay relaxed, soaking in the soft, carnation-scented water, he recalled with some bitterness all the hectic work he had put in for nothing during the last fortnight at Valmojado.

From the moment Matias Falcon had told him of Jacinto's rather unusual procedure in erecting a hen-house for his own use on the factory property, Rex had felt a sudden excitement. Within ten minutes of Falcon leaving him he had scraped the mud and paint off a tiny portion of one of the bricks and was chuckling with glee. All that night he had racked his brains for a way of dealing with the gold, now he had found it, but without result. It was his meeting the following day with the two Communist air mechanics among Matias's friends which first gave him the germ of his big idea. That evening he had worked out his plan with a skill and care which even the Duke could not have bettered. He remembered how elated he had felt, after discussing it with Matias and the others the following day, to hear them agree that it was perfectly practicable and a sheer stroke of genius.

As foreman, Matias could secure access to the factory at night, just as Jacinto had been able to before he was wounded; the mechanics, too, could come and go at any hour, without being suspected, from the hangar of the Flying Sow which backed on to the factory property.

The first operation had been to make some casts of the real bombs, and as the huge projectiles could be moved quite easily on their wheeled

trolleys this had not proved difficult. The next step had been to smelt the gold down once more and recast it in the moulds made from the bombs. Twenty golden bombs had resulted, the last of which had to have a few pounds of alloy added to make up its size. So far so good, but the golden bombs weighed nearly twice as much as real 560-lb. bombs of steel filled with T.N.T., and twenty bombs were not enough to take up in a plane which carried a normal load of forty-eight. Yet Rex could not add real bombs to make up his quota because, had he done so, the total load would have considerably exceeded the lifting power of the Flying Sow.

Matias had got over that difficulty by casting twenty hollow aluminium bombs of the same size but weighing next to nothing. The whole of the forty fake bombs had been painted over in the right colours so that no one could possibly tell them on sight from the real thing and, since the Communist mechanics had been shrewd enough to know that the fuses were the one thing an *Offitzer* or *Unter-Offitzer* would be certain to examine before the bombs were loaded on to the plane, real fuses had been inserted in their heads. They had used the fuses from the live bombs, hidden these in one of the lock-up sheds of which Matias had the key, and replaced them in the hangar with the skilfully modelled duplicates.

It had taken one night to make the moulds, four more and a whole Sunday to cast the golden bombs, and another couple of nights for the aluminium ones. During factory hours the fake bombs had been screened by a mass of straw-filled crates which Matias and his friends piled up against the wall where they rested after each secret session, but the paint had still been drying on them when Richard had put in his unexpected appearance.

Rex sat up in his bath and swore. Damn Richard! How the hell had he tumbled to what was going on? They had exercised such extraordinary caution before making each move. Their lives had depended on it and Rex was prepared to swear that none of his squad had squealed on him.

After a moment he guessed the answer. The night of Richard's arrival had been the critical one on which they had transferred the fuses, removed the real bombs from the hangar and substituted the duds. Having levered the real bombs from their trolleys into a double row on the floor of the lock-up shed, they had piled stacks of cooking utensils on top of them so that they were entirely concealed from view. Next day Richard had

made his inspection. In his very thorough search he must have found the forty bombs concealed under the heaps of pots and pans and wondered what the devil they were doing there. That was it, undoubtedly. It was on the night after that he had announced himself satisfied that the gold was not in the factory and his decision to abandon the search because he was so keen to get home.

The scented water splashed out on to the blue tiles as Rex angrily flopped backwards in the bath again. What an idiot he had been to underrate Richard as an opponent. Was it likely he would be prepared calmly to chuck his hand in and abandon the Duke? Of course not! No more than he, Rex, would have let down old Simon by clearing off without even letting him know he had failed to find any trace of the gold. He was sick of the Spanish war. Damned sick of it. It was such a horrible business with its continual slaughter of women and children by both sides. But he had overdone that angle with Richard. He saw that now. That, and the disclosures of how he intended to make his break for home, coming on top of Richard's discovery of the bombs in the shed, had given the game away completely. But how had Richard managed to trick him when they were actually in the plane?

Reaching out a dripping hand, Rex pulled a towel from the chromium-plated hot rail, dried his fingers, took a cigarette from a box on the bathside table and lit it. He knew those bombs had been loaded on to the plane in their right order. He had superintended the hoisting of each into position himself and each had a tiny mark on its tail which indicated to him whether it was made of gold or aluminium, so that there could be no possibility of a mistake. Each had gone into its proper place, gold and aluminium bombs alternately so as to distribute the weight evenly, gold bombs on the bomb releases that had odd numbers and aluminium bombs on the ones that had even numbers.

The whole scheme was to have been so simple once Rex was in the air. He had not anticipated that matters would be complicated by Spanish and German fighters being sent up to accompany him but that, now, was by the way. Twenty bombs were as many as could possibly be unloaded in one dive and he had never intended to risk more than one dive near Madrid. He had only to drop his golden eggs within a few miles of the city and later notify Simon what he had done; they were much too heavy for anyone

who found them to run off with in the meantime. The empty aluminium shells didn't matter. They could have been dumped anywhere once he was safe from pursuit.

He stubbed out his cigarette and lit another as he thought what a chump he had been ever to play along with Richard. If only he had stuck to his original plan of offering Matias or one of the Communist mechanics the chance of coming as his bomber, all would have been well.

But how *had* Richard pulled a fast one on him? When the first lot of eggs had been dropped outside Madrid he hadn't felt them go and he had rushed down to the lower deck thinking Richard had muffed the job and that he'd have to do his dive all over again. Yet the bombs had gone, and Richard was sitting there grinning. With his own eyes Rex had seen that all the *odd*-numbered bomb releases had been properly turned over.

Never having done any bombing before he had had no standard by which to judge the reaction of a plane to the loosing of a dead load. It had seemed surprising that it was imperceptible, but he had assumed that speed counteracted it and had returned to his pilot's seat reassured that he had pulled off a most remarkable exploit. Only when they had reached the coast and the plane bounded up almost uncontrollably as the second batch of bombs was released, had he been hit by the infuriating truth. For a second he had thought of trying to swerve out to sea, but had checked the impulse on realizing that if he did so the bulk of the gold might be lost irretrievably.

The more he thought of it the more certain he became that only one explanation was possible. Richard had spent a full day learning all about the bombing apparatus from the sergeant-mechanic, and on that last evening in Valmojado had gone off again to examine the gear on his own. He had changed every bombing lead on the plane, a longish but by no means difficult job. By tapping all the bombs in the hangar the day before with a piece of metal he could easily have discovered that some were solid and others hollow. He knew that gold bombs would weigh heavier than ordinary ones and he had guessed the rest.

A screwdriver and an uninterrupted spell alone with the machine, probably secured through the goodwill of the sergeant in charge, were the only things necessary for him to change over the wires, one by one, leading

from the odd-numbered levers to the even-numbered release gear and *vice versa*.

Rex was quite right; that was just what Richard had done.

And now, thought Rex, what about it? Normally we'd be sailing for home, but the yacht's not moving at the moment. Richard's got to get his treasure on board and that won't prove so easy. Underwater as they are and probably half-buried in the sand, these eleven-hundred-pound bombs will take some lifting. He can't take his yacht in and use his winches to haul them out because it's much too shallow here. One could wade out half a mile in this bay and, of course, that's why clever Master Richard chose it. He'll have to get help from somewhere, and he'll almost certainly appeal to the old fox in Madrid. They'll fix it between them for some of Franco's Fifth Column guys on shore to come along with lighters, pick up the gold, and run it into an Insurgent port. We'll probably hang about off the bay till the job is done, then collect the Duke from some quiet spot and sail for England's green and pleasant land. That's the scheme, I'll bet a million.

Now! As long as we're in the yacht outside the three-mile limit we'll be as safe as a cutie in a candy store. Any funny business by the representatives of the legally-elected Spanish Government, and a long, low, grey ship will come streaking up from nowhere at fifty miles an hour. A quiet, polite sort of guy in the best brand of gent's natty navy-blue suiting and a little gold braid will come ashore and hold the whole Spanish Government up at the end of a walking-stick. He'll say he just hates to be a spoil-sport by stopping any fun and games that may be in progress, but the instructions of His Britannic Majesty's Government are, etc. etc., Richard'll then be handed back his hat, requested to send in a bill of any damage done to his yacht, and the Spanish Government'll retire with its tail between its legs.

What about inside the three-mile limit? I doubt the yacht being able to get much nearer than two miles in, anyhow, and Richard won't go ashore again. Why should he? Besides, if he were mutt enough to try, I'll be on board to stop him.

Right, then! Since that's the way it is, no harm's coming to my ever-loving cousin of Valmojado or that angelic little devil Marie-Lou if I tip off Simon that his folk can come right along and pick up enough dough to buy an entire Tank Corps off the Russians. If the Government guys and the

Duke's Fascist toughs just happen to pick on the same day and clash on the foreshore—who cares? Not this child. We'll be sitting pretty out here in the yacht, and—Oh, Boy! What a kick I'm going to get out of having the last laugh on my old friend Richard after all.

The sum total of his reflections cheered Rex up enormously. He was just beginning to realize, too, that for him this Spanish adventure was really over. He would dine to-night off the best the Mediterranean had to offer, with two of the most charming people in the world, and afterwards sleep between cool, linen sheets untroubled by any thought of dangers or difficulties to be encountered on the morrow.

He stepped out of the bath and began to dry himself with a thick, warm, blue towel that Richard's valet had placed all ready for him. Suddenly he stopped rubbing, drew the folds of the huge towel about him, and sat down on the edge of the bath. A worrying thought had struck him. Say the Duke decided to come down from Madrid to take a hand in picking up the gold and Simon's people arrived on the scene when he was at it. That would not be so hot. In fact, it simply must not be allowed to happen. Any people on the Nationalist side in such an encounter would certainly be killed or captured and executed. Rex would cheerfully have lost all the gold in Christendom and publicly worn a dunce's hat as well rather than be the means of placing one of those friends of his in such danger. The Spanish Government would just have to continue to want for tanks or planes if the price of them were to be any risk to the Duke.

He saw at once that, before he took any action he must be quite certain that, having tackled the really difficult end, his friends meant to leave the ostensibly easy finish of the business to the people who had originally drawn them into it.

How was he going to do that? The answer soon came to him. It was quite certain that Richard would do nothing until he had consulted Marie-Lou. He had unshakable faith in the rightness of her judgment and never made a move without her if it were at all possible to secure her opinion. Now, while they were bathing and changing, he would be telling her about the Flying Sow's flight from Valmojado and every detail of his recent stay there. Rex could visualize them indulging in that childish mirth which took possession of them both at times. He had seen them sit opposite each other positively rocking with laughter for minutes on end and utterly

unable to control themselves, owing to some small thing which they both considered funny. Doubtless they were rolling about on their beds at the moment simply crying with glee at the thought of his discomfiture. They would not have time before dinner to get down to serious business but before they went to sleep that night they would talk.

To tap in on them was going to be a delicate business because Rex would have felt himself utterly shamed if he had overheard anything which no desire to get even with Richard in the present business could justify his overhearing; and to-night was quite obviously a night of reunion between these two gloriously vital lovers. The bedroom of their suite was next to his stateroom. There was an easy way by which he could listen in to the conference he was certain they would hold. The snag was judging the right time to listen.

Rex had known Richard before Richard knew Marie-Lou. He had spent numerous hectic nights-out in Richard's company with some highly desirable couples of young women. He remembered Richard's form perfectly. At a certain stage in the proceedings Richard, like many other men in similar circumstances, developed hunger and thirst. In his bedroom at home, at Cardinal's Folly, Rex knew that he always kept a tin of biscuits: Petits Beurre, Digestives and Bourbons, of the last of which, like his gluttonous little wife, he was extremely fond.

On those now distant nights out-on-the-tiles Richard, in addition to food, had always had a bottle of champagne sent up in an ice bucket to his room. Rex had heard him declare often that even an indifferent wine tasted good, and that a fair one was nectar, at such times. The leopard does not change his spots, and Rex had no reason to suppose that Richard had changed his customs. At a certain hour which could be calculated with reasonable accuracy from the time of his going to bed, Richard would get up, munch biscuits, and walk about the room with a glass of champagne in his hand entirely oblivious of the fact that our mentors tell us this world is a vale of tears.

On the contrary, it was just at such times that the fundamental simplicity which constituted a part of Richard's attraction came out. He would wander up and down wondering what on earth the heavenly creature propped up against the pillows could possibly see in him, and with the mental comment that this world was just as perfect as it could be,

positively revel in the sensation of having been lifted to the gods for this little hour which transcended all earthly cares.

Rex donned the heavy silk dressing-gown with its abundantly tasselled sash and sat down to wait for the dinner-gong. In due course it sounded but he did not move because he was immersed in a Peter Cheyney thriller and, anyhow, he wanted to give Richard and Marie-Lou five minutes' clear start.

When he was reasonably certain they had gone along to the dining-room he laid down the Peter Cheyney with considerable reluctance, picked up his pocket-knife from a near-by table, and bored a small hole through the partition wall of the cabin which would not be noticeable to the steward's eye, owing to the dark patch he chose for it in the *toile de jouy* covering. He then went smilingly up to dinner and offered apologies, which his ugly, attractive face made appear quite genuine, to Marie-Lou for his tardiness.

The dinner was admirable but none of the three manifested any desire to remain long in the lounge after coffee and liqueurs had been served. Richard remarked that it had been a longish day; Marie-Lou commented that an early bed was good for the complexion, and Rex said he knew them well enough to tell the truth; he was just dying to hit the hay.

Richard paid Rex the compliment of accompanying him to his cabin, but it was the purely formal visit of a good host to see that his guest has fruit, drinks, biscuits, reading-matter, all ready to hand lest he should chance to wake in the night.

As soon as he had gone Rex grabbed the Peter Cheyney. He was enthralled by the seductive powers of Mr. Cheyney's 'dames,' who had 'everything it takes and more' and the extraordinarily tough methods of that phenomenally fast worker; the attractive, intelligent and muscular 'G.man,' Lemmy Caution. It was much the swiftest thing Rex had read for a long time and he was extremely glad that Lemmy was not after him. Had he been, Rex felt he would have needed the Duke plus Simon to help him out, with Richard and Marie-Lou thrown in as a makeweight. At that point he remembered that it was long past the time he had allocated to Richard and Marie-Lou for any gambols they might have in mind, heartily damned Mr. Cheyney with a reservation that he would get back to him as soon as he could, and quickly putting down the book applied his outsize ear to the hole he had bored in the partition wall.

The result was disappointing. He could not hear very clearly, but Marie-Lou appeared to be talking about a reconstruction of the pond-garden which she was planning for Cardinal's Folly, while Richard's contribution consisted of a series of interested "Yes, darlings" and "Of course, my sweet, how right you ares."

The ice rattled against the sides of the champagne bucket. Richard evidently had not yet finished his bottle and was still on his feet, which was a good sign. For ten minutes they talked obscurely about matters which Rex could not get the sense of, occasionally going off into peals of stupid laughter.

It seemed that Richard was teasing Marie-Lou about something but Rex could not be sure. They were often apparently crazy when they were together, and only De Richleau was capable of entering with them absolutely fully into that queer, happy madness. Rex considered the Duke to be saner than most people, but that subtle old fox, now lurking in Madrid, who could be so hellishly dangerous when let loose among people he disliked, would behave like a wicked schoolboy at times when he was with these two.

Rex was inclined to think he had missed the boat and was about to throw his hand in for the night when he clearly heard Richard say, "Of course she'll collect the gold herself—certain to. After all, it belongs to her and she probably wants to have her say in how they spend it. She's grand. You'd love her. She..."

The rest of the sentence was lost but Rex caught another bit. "Lucretia-José Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles. What a name to roll round one's tongue, eh?"

Marie-Lou appeared a little peeved at this as she said promptly, "Personally, I think Marie Antoinette Helené Françoise Aphrodite Louise, Princesse de Catzenane Blanquefort de Schulemoff, somewhat better."

Rex could almost see Richard's eyes go round, then wrinkle at the corners. There came a short mutter succeeded by delighted squeals of laughter in the brief intervals of which Marie-Lou's voice penetrated to him. "Shut up! Stop it, Richard. Do be different, darling! You'll wake Rex next door. Stop it! All right, I give in but do be quiet about it. Oh, my sweet, *my sweet.*"

With a sigh Rex withdrew his ear from the hole and lit a cigarette. Not daring to return to Mr. Cheyney for fear of becoming engrossed again, he sat about for a bit doing nothing, but thinking hard.

When he returned to his post a low-voiced, earnest conversation was in progress. He could only catch snatches of it but the pieces he heard interested him exceedingly.

“Malaga harbour... four of them... Oh! One will be enough... Your Condesa friend... any number of Fifth Column people lurking all over Government Spain... derelict ... but a dredger’s no good. Flat barges with cranes on them, I said, silly... no work being done in the harbour now there’s ... Why should they... not for a night anyway... by a tug, of course. If your Condesa can get men for one she can get men for the other... in the harbour this morning... three hours and a half... I’d buoy them first... before Rex is up—just to make certain. That’s why I decided to remain lying off the bay to-night... Gib—no, no—Valencia... get it through much quicker that way... Well, to-day’s Wednesday. Talbot should receive it through the Embassy and pass ... contact the Condesa... Malaga by Tuesday... enough for her to complete her preparations... not enough. Well, Saturday, then.... Must be definite about it.... Write what we like but he’s limited to what he can say in a code cable... because, light of my life, a letter from us will reach him *in* the Embassy whereas one from him to us might be opened before delivery... I don’t agree... if he did... whole scheme for him to say yes or no... You’re right. Sunday would be better. Fewer people about in the harbour... clear eleven days. He’ll let us know that... no point in his risking his neck down here... but if he did that he might find himself shipped off to South America... Arthur Talbot could arrange it for him... I don’t think so... easy enough at night in a quiet sector... once he’s through the lines... Lisbon perhaps or up to Coruna. No trouble about taking him off from either on our way home... Yes... oh, no... You’re right there.. got to get rid of him somehow... Plenty of ships sailing from Valencia... But he wouldn’t have to. We could send him across to one by the launch... I know... some plausible excuse so as not to appear inhospitable... Well, I’m sorry too, naturally... not till the gold is actually on board... back here on Friday night... Oh, that’s simple. A cork float about a foot under water... with lights on to them... Quite... getting rid of old Rex is the only snag I see... No, I’m afraid he’ll be pretty sore... I daren’t... must put him off at

Valencia before we return to tackle the job of buoying the bombs... not our job... surely he will... that's entirely the Condesa's affair...."

The conversation changed and Rex gathered that his friends were settling down for the night, but he had learnt all he wanted to know. The Condesa was to collect the gold and the Duke would not come down to Malaga. He was to be smuggled through some quiet sector of the battle-line, probably north of Madrid, with the aid of someone named Arthur Talbot, and would make his way to an Insurgent or neutral port where they could pick him up without trouble or subterfuge. Rex sat down to the writing-table in his cabin and commenced a long letter to Simon.

An hour sped by while he told Simon of events at Valmojado, how Richard had tricked him and what he had ascertained of Richard's future plans. Feeling that the letter would be more likely to receive priority if it were addressed to a well-known Socialist leader, he wrote on the envelope in Spanish: *'Urgent and important. To Señor Cristoval Ventura, U.G.T. Headquarters, Madrid. To be handed to the Señor Simon Aron for his immediate attention.'*

Making his clothes up into a bundle wrapped in a towel, he slipped very quietly out of his cabin and stole up on deck. The yacht was at anchor and the after part of the vessel was screened from the watch on the bridge by her deckhouses. Keeping to the shadows he tiptoed with naked feet to her stern, gently lowered one end of a thick hawser that was lying there into the water and peered over the rail at the faint blackness which was the only indication of the night-hidden shore. Rex knew there was no risk of the yacht moving because he had heard Richard say that he intended to go off very early in the morning to see exactly where the golden bombs had fallen before sailing for Valencia to post a letter to the Duke. Stripping off his dressing-gown Rex hid it in a locker, tied his bundle firmly on the top of his head, climbed over the stern rail and slid gently down the rope into the sea.

He then performed one of those feats which only his great strength and endurance made possible. Swimming four miles in to the shore, he dried and dressed himself. Next, he ran most of the five miles along the coast road at a steady trot until he reached the nearest village, slipped his letter into the post-box of the police station there, and walking and running alternately, covered the five miles back. On the shore he undressed again,

strapped his clothes on his head and swam off to the yacht. The whole journey of eighteen miles was completed in four and a quarter hours. Before six o'clock he was back in his cabin and nobody on board had the faintest idea he had ever left it.

It was half-past seven before Richard reluctantly made his appearance, cursing the fact that the necessity of assuring himself the bombs could be recovered without difficulty prevented his remaining in bed until ten; but the satisfaction he derived from the trip was worth it. Half an hour in the launch was sufficient for him to locate all twenty bombs. They lay about fifty yards from each other in a regular line which was quite easy to follow as it ran parallel with the curve of the shore. Most of them were half-buried in the sand; the tail of one was within two feet of the surface; the deepest was only about seven feet down. Providing the proper tackle could be secured, it would be easy enough to haul them up.

While returning to the yacht he saw that contrary to his expectations the Flying Sow had not entirely disappeared. The bay was so shallow that although she had sunk nearly three miles out, about three feet of her tail was still visible above the water. She had evidently gone down nose first and the weight of her great engines was holding her firm on the bottom. Directly he was on board again he told his Captain to make for Valencia with all speed.

Rex woke about eleven and immediately noticed that the *Golden Gull* was in motion. A glance from his port assured him, as he expected, that they were heading east; he could see the coast and the yacht was steadily cleaving the water with all the power of her engines. He smiled to himself at the recollection of his good night's work, rang for a late breakfast and settled down to finish the hair-raising thriller by the remarkable Mr. Cheyney.

Unless she was going to swim, Marie-Lou never put in an appearance before lunch; and as Richard spent the morning with her, Rex did not see either of them until the meal. He thought she was looking radiant and ten years younger than when he had come aboard the previous evening. She was always an admirable hostess but she showed such solicitude for Rex's welfare on the present occasion that he was secretly much amused; knowing her extreme amiability to be partly inspired by some sort of proposition she and Richard meant to put to him.

When coffee and Kummel had been served the stewards withdrew and Marie-Lou proceeded, with sugared words, to spin her silken web.

“Rex, darling,” she opened up, “I suppose you know where we’re making for?”

He shrugged. “I haven’t given it a thought. Marseilles, maybe?”

“No, Valencia. Richard’s got to send a letter from there to Madrid telling Grey-Eyes that the gold isn’t at Valmojado and that we’re going home.”

“Fine. That just suits me because I’ve got to do the very same thing to Simon.”

“But after that,” Marie-Lou went on, “you’ll naturally be wanting to get back to London or across to New York as quickly as you can.”

“I’ll certainly be glad to be quit of this business for good and all.”

“Exactly. That’s just what’s worrying us. Richard and I have been discussing it all the morning; trying to think out the most pleasant arrangement we can make for you.”

“For me?” Rex echoed with well-assumed surprise. “But I’m so happy here with you two I wouldn’t call God my uncle. There’s not a thing need cause you to bat an eyelid about me.”

“That’s lovely,” cooed Marie-Lou. “It’s simply heavenly having you with us. But the trouble is that we can’t take you back to England because we shall be cruising in Spanish waters for some time to come.”

“Well, that’s O.K. by me. When I said I wanted to get home I only meant to be finished with all the fighting. What could be nicer at this time of year than a little cruising in the Mediterranean?”

“But, Rex darling, it will be so dull for you just alone with us two like this.”

“Dull?” he exclaimed. “Not on your life! There’s nothing in the world I’d like better than a real restful time same as we three have so often had in the *Golden Gull*. But just a minute. Having been parted for so long you and Richard want to be alone together. You don’t want me sticking around. I’ll be in the way. Now why ever didn’t you say so straight off? Of course I’ll quit the ship wherever you like to land me.”

It was Marie-Lou’s big chance but she could not possibly take it, and Rex knew too that he had put his apparently innocent desire to remain on board in such a way that she could not get rid of him on those lines.

“Oh, Rex,” she laughed, “what nonsense! It was only you we were thinking of. We’d planned to arrange a passage to Marseilles for you in one of the ships leaving Valencia. That could have been done without your having to land at the port. But if you want to stay we’d simply love to have you.”

“Of course,” Richard chimed in. “But it’s impossible to say how long we’ll have to hang about here. You see, a friend of mine in Madrid got me out through Government territory but I had to chance going all the way to South America. The Duke won’t want to risk anything like that so he’ll probably leave Madrid in disguise and we’ll have to cruise about till we know where to pick him up.”

“You reckon he’ll chuck his hand in now, then?” Rex asked.

“Yes. I think he’ll realize there’s no point in his staying any longer in Madrid.”

“When’ll we make Valencia?”

“Early to-morrow morning all being well.”

“That’s fine. Maybe when Simon knows what’s happened he’ll consider quitting too.”

“I doubt it, since the hunt for the Coralles fortune was only a big side-line in the work he’s doing. Still, when you write, tell him from me that he’s welcome to a trip home in the yacht if he’s sick of the business and wants to clear out.”

“O.K. But better still, write him a line yourself. You can enclose it in mine.”

There seemed no more to be said, and they spent a pleasant afternoon running up the coast towards Cartagena.

On the Friday morning they were lying off Valencia harbour when Rex brought a fat letter to Richard. The envelope was still open and he said, “here’s my report to Simon. You can push your invitation in it. And er...” he paused, feigning embarrassment.

“Well?” asked Richard.

Rex looked at his feet uncomfortably. “I’ve got a bit of a confession to make. Mind you, I’m not ashamed of what I’ve done but I hope you won’t take it too badly.”

“What the deuce are you talking about?”

“You just read what I’ve written to Simon,” Rex grinned suddenly. “I’d rather you learnt about it that way because I don’t want to do any crowing act. I’ll be seeing you, and I guess your sense of humour’ll prevent you wanting to kick me too hard in the pants when you’ve thought it over.”

Richard guessed what was in the letter but he looked completely mystified and smiled only when Rex had turned away. Running down to Marie-Lou in her cabin Richard spread the letter out and read it to her. It was a detailed account of Rex’s stay at Valmojado; how he had found the golden henhouse, converted the gold into bombs, foiled the Nationalists into letting him get away with the Flying Sow, and tricked Richard into dropping the golden bombs just north-east of Madrid near Hortaleza.

For half an hour they laughed themselves nearly sick over the document and were both quite red in the face when they came on deck again to face the grinning Rex.

Richard played his part very skilfully; a blend of annoyance at having been so completely fooled, admiration for the extremely clever way in which the job had been done, and resignation at losing the gold after all. Marie-Lou helped by insisting that Rex should give them fuller details of his marvellous *coup* and so distracted his attention somewhat from Richard in the very tricky role he had to play.

“Of course,” said Richard after a while, “you realize I’m entitled to consider the game still on? You’re a prisoner on board this yacht and by letting me see this letter you’ve spilled the beans a bit too soon. There’s nothing to stop me refusing to send it.”

“Nothing at all,” agreed Rex amiably. “But that won’t help you any. Those bombs fell in Government territory and plenty of folks will have been out to take a look at ’em. Why was it that in all twenty the fuses went off but the bombs failed to explode? The Government bomb experts will naturally want to know that. Half Madrid will be talking about those golden eggs by this time and they’ll be safe some place by now. My letter only tells Simon how the job was done.”

“Yes, I’m afraid you’re right,” Richard admitted sadly. “I’d better add a paragraph to my letter to the Duke about it. There’s no sense in his staying any longer in Madrid now. God, how I’ve been done! You old devil, I’d like to... Still, I must say it was a darn fine bit of work.”

He went off to add the paragraph but it was only to confirm that poor old Rex really believed he had got away with his scheme and had not the faintest suspicion that the gold was really lying a few feet under the water some fifteen miles west of Malaga.

Captain Sanderson took both letters ashore. Rex's was despatched via the ordinary post to Simon in Madrid and Richard's under cover to Arthur Talbot, via the British Consulate. As soon as the Captain was aboard again the *Golden Gull* turned southwest and headed down the coast once more.

Richard appeared to nurse an injured pride throughout the short wait off Malaga but he cheered up remarkably quickly once they had left the port behind. At dinner he was so gay that Rex felt certain the next act in the farce they were playing for each other's benefit was due to start. He opened the ball at the end of the meal himself by saying, "I'd like to hand it to you, Richard, for taking your defeat so gamely."

"That's nice of you, old chap, but there's a reason for it," said Richard, suddenly becoming quite grave. "Have you ever been put in irons?"

"Have I what?" laughed Rex.

"Put in irons. You know—those things they shackle mutinous sailors with. I don't really know if we've got any on board but I think we can rake up a pair of handcuffs."

"What in heck are you talking about?" Rex appeared extremely puzzled but he knew exactly what was coming.

"Just this. It's a shocking abuse of hospitality but we did our best to persuade you to leave the yacht at Valencia. I couldn't tell you about it until you'd sent off your letter to Simon and we were safe out of port, but since you elected to remain with us I'm faced with a rather tricky situation. I'm now compelled to ask you either to give me your word that you'll not attempt to leave this yacht or communicate with anyone outside its personnel until I say you may, or to take steps which will ensure your being unable to do so."

"Is this some sort of loony game?" Rex asked. "If so, you might let me in on how we play."

"Poor Rex," said Marie-Lou. "Naturally you don't understand, but I'm afraid the time has come when we've got to break it to you. It's frightfully hard luck, I know, but your lovely scheme didn't quite come off. Richard

knew about it all the time. He dropped the dud bombs outside Madrid and the gold ones in the bay where..."

"What!" shouted Rex, springing up from the table.

Marie-Lou rose too and reached up a small hand to Rex's shoulder. "Darling, we're both so sorry but do try and take it calmly. Have a little more brandy; it's very good brandy, I believe."

"But how the hell...?"

Richard began to describe the part he had played as modestly as he could while Rex sank slowly into his chair and listened, his face depicting alternate anger and amazement.

"So you see the situation," Richard ended. "I can't have you letting Simon know what's really happened, so I've got to ask you to make this choice."

"It was clever," said Rex. "I'll admit that and I don't quite know what to do. Will you give me till to-morrow morning to think it over?"

"Certainly, old chap, providing you promise not to make any move whatever in the meantime. No trying to bribe my wireless operator, swimming ashore, or anything of that kind."

Rex only asked for time because he felt it would look more in character if he made some pretence of contemplating coming into the game again. Actually he had no need to as he had already done all there was to do. He gave his parole for the night, did his turn of displaying mild sulks for the rest of the evening and, in the morning, came forward with a frank acknowledgement that, Richard having bested him, he would take no further action to try to prevent his collecting the gold.

Richard and Marie-Lou were delighted at being spared the unpleasant necessity of locking him up and, the yacht having reached the bay by midday on Saturday, all three of them went off in the launch that afternoon to have a look at the bombs.

During Richard's brief early morning trip two days before he had been very fully occupied, so neither he nor Rex had had an opportunity to study the bay in daylight. The sandy shore stretched in an unbroken curve for about four miles. Two hundred yards inland it was broken by black boulders, then came the road which they could not see from their position on the water. Immediately beyond it rose the foothills of the Sierra Mijas, brown, barren and desolate. It was an inhospitable coast but it had its own

grandeur. In all the long stretch of sand, rocks, dark cliffs and frowning mountains only two buildings were visible; the villa on the headland where Richard had stayed years before now, apparently, untenanted; and the old monastery on its crag a little inland near the middle of the bay.

They noted with some concern that the flag of Government Spain floated over the monastery and that two wagons with half a dozen men were crawling up the winding, fourth-class road which passed out of sight to its left. The greater part of the front of the rambling old building consisted of a long wall, from which it was a sheer drop of five hundred feet to the rocks below, and over its top the upper halves of two tiny figures showed. Richard focused his binoculars on them and declared that they were Militiamen with rifles. Evidently the place had been taken over by the military as a guard post to cover the coast road and the track which led up into the mountains towards the enemy lines.

They speculated as to what the men in the monastery could have seen of the Flying Sow's strange landing three nights before and decided that it could have been little if anything at all. Up on their crag they were a good four miles distant from the wreck and, fortunately, she had come down when it was nearly dark. They must have seen her come over and swoop along the bay but probably thought she had flown off again as, except for a small piece of her tail the knife edge of which was turned towards them, she had been under water before morning.

The presence of the Militiamen in the monastery made Richard decide that it would be best for the yacht not to remain off the bay permanently, and that it would be wisest to buoy the bombs about sunset because the sun rose over the bay, lighting the whole scene within a few moments of its getting up, whereas it set behind the mountains which would give them over an hour of sufficient but obscured light.

They measured the exact depth of each bomb with a lead line and marked them, with their respective depths, on a rough chart. By the time they had done the wind was getting up and it was clear they were in for a bit of a blow; so realizing that no more could be done for the present, as soon as they were back on board Richard ordered the ship to sea.

That night Richard spoke to his Captain and explained what he wanted done. Captain Sanderson gave instructions to the bo'sun and some of the men were set to work on splicing wire hawsers of varying lengths, while

others cut a cork bathing float into twenty equal portions. Each hawser had a large loop at one end to take the hook of a crane and a small loop at the other to which was attached a length of chain for hitching round the fish-tails of the bombs.

On Sunday it was black and stormy; Monday was still dull but the sea was calmer and the sky had cleared a little. As the hawsers were now ready, Richard decided to run back to the bay. That evening they had their first swimming-party. The water was much colder than they expected at the southern end of the Mediterranean, but with four of his men who were good swimmers and Rex, who volunteered to help, Richard succeeded in attaching hawsers to eight of the bombs. They put to sea again until the following evening when they returned and fixed up the remaining twelve. Each hawser now had a lump of cork attached to it which floated about a foot under water, thereby making it easy to locate the bombs even in indifferent light.

The monastery was some way from the shore and only its blank wall directly overlooked the scene of their operations. Nobody came down from it to inquire what was going on and the greater part of the job was carried out in twilight. If anyone up there noticed them at all it was almost certainly assumed that the party from the yacht were only mad English whose harmless insanity impelled them to go swimming during the first days of December. Rex gladly gave his help. Somebody had to prepare the bombs for Simon to salvage, and it struck him as supremely funny to be on hand while Richard was puffing, blowing and shivering at the work.

On the Tuesday night as they put to sea once more, not to return now until the fateful following Sunday when Richard had planned for Lucretia-José to collect her gold, Rex was wondering just when Simon would appear on the scene. His second letter, written purely to bluff Richard and posted in Valencia the previous Friday, would have reach Simon, he thought, on Saturday night or at the latest on Monday. By that time the matter of the dud bombs dropped near Hortaleza would be five-days-old news, although Simon could not have known before that Rex had any hand in dropping them or that they were in fact the Corrales millions. His first letter containing the real story of the flight would, he knew, have to go from Malaga by sea to Valencia and so on to Madrid, but that would have got there most probably on Monday too. Simon would need two days to get

down to Malaga and, say, another day to make his arrangements there. The chances were that Simon would be chuckling over those hawsers Richard had so carefully prepared for him and salvaging the bullion by Thursday.

Richard had been making some calculations on much the same lines about the Duke. He reckoned that De Richleau would have receive his letter via Arthur Talbot on the Saturday night and contacted Lucretia-José on Sunday or anyhow by Monday. That would give her a clear six days to get down to Malaga and make plans with secret Nationalist sympathizers there, as suggested, to recover the gold and load it on to the yacht on the coming Sunday night. Then 'Ho!' for England, home and beauty.

Actually Rex proved wrong in his calculations and Richard right. De Richleau got his letter on Saturday and arranged, through Arthur Talbot, a meeting with Lucretia-José on the Sunday evening. It was as well that he did because she was preparing to leave the grim and tragic capital.

Franco's Legionaries had forced their way into the University City which was no great distance from *Rios Rosas*. On two occasions the block of apartments in which she lived had been shelled, and Cristoval had repeatedly urged her to quit Madrid for Valencia. As the Government had now been established there for close on three weeks she would normally have moved there already, since the seat of Government would naturally offer her the best opportunities for continuing her secret work; but there was enough to occupy her in Madrid and she could not bear the thought of tearing herself away from Cristoval. Now, however, that everything was being centralized in Valencia he had been ordered to move there himself on the coming Wednesday, and Lucretia had made arrangements with the F.A.I. for her permanent transfer so that she could go with him.

Immensely relieved at the discovery of the lost gold and delighted beyond measure at the success of Richard's brilliant operation, the Duke and Lucretia discussed the next move. They decided that Richard's plan was perfectly feasible and that the coming week would be ample time in which to prepare for it, but that Lucretia ought to leave for Malaga without delay in order to contact one of the secret Monarchist groups there as soon as possible.

The same night she told Cristoval that she would be leaving Madrid next morning because she had been detailed for a temporary job in Alicante but

that she hoped to be through with it quite shortly and would join him in Valencia without fail the following week.

He was greatly relieved to think that she would be out of danger sooner than he had hoped, but none the less loath to part with her even for a few days. It was a bare three weeks since that night she had led him up to her flat, and during that time, in spite of the hell of blood and misery that stained Madrid's streets, the wretched rations and the incessant fighting, they had been sitting on the top of the world.

Lucretia would almost certainly have given way to him in any case, owing to her compassion for him and the strength of their mutual feelings, but their supreme joy in each other would inevitably have been marred by the reactions natural to her strict upbringing if she had not had that talk with the Duke first. As it was she had no regrets, not a thing wherewith to reproach her short, handsome lover or herself; but had given of her love again and again in fearless ecstasy.

She realized only too well that she was living in a fool's Paradise, and that unless death touched them with his silver wing while Cristoval was still in ignorance of her true identity, the day must come when the invisible threads that bound them to each other would be severed beyond repair; yet, knowing that, whatever price she might have to pay in the future, the memory of his radiant face during those glorious hours could never be taken from her, she was content. When he saw her off from the station on the Monday morning no chill foreboding warned either of the terrible fate that was now so soon to overtake them both.

Rex's two letters were delayed because Simon had already followed his friends in the Finance Office to Valencia. The one Rex had written solely for Richard's benefit was redirected from Madrid and reached Simon on the Tuesday, while the one containing the real news did not get to him until two days later. Cristoval, care of whom it was addressed, received it in Madrid on the Monday morning, but as he was leaving for Valencia himself on the Wednesday he decided it would be nearly as quick, and safer, to take this apparently important document with him and deliver it personally.

On the Thursday morning he telephoned Simon asking him to call at the U.G.T. Headquarters in Valencia, and Simon did so. A private office had not

yet been fixed up for Cristoval so he was temporarily sharing that of his Chief, Señor Sanchez Balasco, whom Simon knew.

Simon opened his letter immediately it was handed to him and sat down to read it there and then. He read it through twice very carefully and a slow smile spread over his face. Putting it in his pocket he announced quietly:

“If you’d like 500 new fighting planes I can buy them for you now.”

“The Señor Aron is pleased to jest,” remarked the grey-haired Balasco with a thin smile, and Cristoval laughed.

“Ner,” said Simon. “Got the Coralles fortune at last. You’ll owe it to Rex Van Ryn. He’s done a magnificent job of work.”

The two Spaniards had both come slowly to their feet. “You mean it?” gasped Cristoval. “You really mean it?”

Simon nodded and Sanchez Balasco smashed his fist down on his desk with a triumphant cry: “*Por Dios!* Five hundred planes would win us the war!”

“Where is it?” asked Cristoval, his eyes shining. “When can we get it?”

“Stuff’s lying in shallow water about fifteen miles west of Malaga. Today’s Thursday. We can start salvaging it on Saturday morning or if you like to cable someone in Malaga they could get on with it this afternoon.”

Leaving Richard out of the story, Simon went on to recount how Rex had got away with the gold but he had to disclose the enemy’s plans for picking it up themselves. “It seems,” he said, “that the Condesa who owned the bullion before the law of confiscation against non-claimants made it Government property, is hiding in Malaga—or going there. Scheme is she’s to get in touch with Nationalist sympathizers on the spot. They’ll beg, borrow or steal a tug from the harbour when things are quiet on Sunday evening, collect one of those flat barges with a crane on it for harbour work and tow it along the coast. Gold bombs will be buoyed all ready. Only thing they have to do is to pick them up and load them on a private yacht that’ll be hanging about off the bay. Now we know what’s happening, we’ll clear it twenty-four hours before they get there and when they do they’ll find it gone.”

“No,” said Cristoval swiftly. “I can improve on that. These Fifth Column swine are constantly stabbing us in the back. The more of them we can eliminate the better. The Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles is the last

surviving member of a die-hard Royalist family. It'd be grand to get her in the bag. She's a thief now, attempting to steal Government property. Let's leave the bait there until the Sunday, arrange an ambush and pinch the whole gang at their work red-handed."

"Just as you like," Simon shrugged. "Only thing is the yacht that's to take the stuff off is British-owned and Rex Van Ryn's in it with some other friends of mine. Can't agree to any sort of interference with anyone in that yacht."

Señor Sanchez Balasco nodded slowly. "We have far too great an appreciation of your work for Spain, *Señor Aron*, to dream of incommoding your friends in this yacht provided they stay on board her. But the gold we must have and no mistakes. This matter is of the first importance. Both of you go, please, to Malaga by the first boat leaving to-day. You, Cristoval, I make responsible. Take with you as many men as you want; reliable ones that you already know. Lay your trap for Sunday night. When they come to pick up the gold arrest the Condesa with all her associates. Try them formally for conspiracy against the Government and have them shot."

Chapter Thirty-two – Dark Stars in the Ascendant

Lucretia arrived in Malaga on the morning of Wednesday December the 2nd and Cristoval on the evening of Friday the 4th. Malaga is a small town and as they both put up at the Hotel Colon there was every chance of their running into each other on the Saturday or Sunday.

He would have been surprised to see her there but, as her work with the F.A.I. often covered a quite different sphere from his with the U.G.T., she would have had no difficulty whatever in providing a plausible excuse for her presence in the sunny southern city. He, on the other hand, had no reason to conceal his activities from her and, elated as he was at the prospect of the wonderful haul he was about to make, would undoubtedly have told of the trap he was planning, which would have enabled her to avert the threatened catastrophe.

As it was, an evil Fate decreed that they should not meet. She had already been out in a speed-boat with two of General Franco's secret agents on the Thursday to verify the fact that the golden bombs were lying ready buoyed for collection in the bay, and during the succeeding days she was rarely in the hotel except to sleep owing to the careful arrangements she had to make with numerous other secret Nationalist supporters.

Cristoval had brought with him from Valencia twenty picked shock-fighters from the old civilian army of the U.G.T., all men whom he had known for months, and as his lieutenant, the black-bearded Gustavo Sandoval, a friend of many years. On the Saturday morning Simon, Cristoval and Sandoval also went out to the bay and laughed a great deal when they found that Richard had made such admirable preparations for hauling the gold out of the sand and sea. Returning to Malaga, they went to the office of Colonel Eusebio Picón, the Military Governor of the city; and held a conference with him as to how best to arrange their ambush.

Colonel Picón was a large solid man, an officer of the old regular army who had remained loyal to the Government at the outbreak of hostilities. He was not a very brilliant person but a conscientious soldier, and the knowledge he had acquired during many years as a regular had secured him this post in which he controlled many more active, but less knowledgeable, Militia leaders.

On the wall of Colonel Picón's office there hung a large map showing the whole of the Malaga pocket and, on it, they examined the bay with a view to arranging their ambush.

After a short discussion the Commander of the Government's Naval Forces in Malaga was called in, and the scheme for trapping the Nationalists at their secret work on the Sunday night was completed. Cristoval and Simon spent the afternoon with the Naval man who introduced them to a Lieutenant Rodriguez commanding the destroyer *Libertad*. They dined on board, and before leaving Simon invited the lieutenant to lunch with him the following day. Directly they got back to their hotel he and Cristoval went straight to bed as they knew that they would probably get no sleep at all on the Sunday night.

Next morning Simon felt far from well. He thought he had caught a nasty chill and would not have got up at all if he had not had Rodriguez lunching with him. Cristoval went off to lunch with Colonel Picón while Simon entertained Lieutenant Rodriguez. He felt certain that Richard and Marie-Lou would be lying off the bay in the *Golden Gull* that evening ready to take the gold on board, and his one concern was that the yacht should not be interfered with in any circumstances. Rodriguez had already received instructions from his superiors to that effect, so he was able to set Simon's mind at rest and their meeting was entirely satisfactory.

Lucretia had spent most of her morning out in the harbour in a tug that already had a number of her Nationalist friends on board. On returning to lunch alone at the Hotel Colon she saw Simon with his new Naval acquaintance. She wondered vaguely what he was doing in Malaga but, seeing he was busy, only gave him a smiling nod as she passed to her table.

Had she spoken to him he would not have mentioned the work that had brought him there, but he would certainly have told her that Cristoval was staying in the hotel and likely to be back after the *siesta*, which would have ensured her meeting her lover that afternoon; but the dark stars were still in the ascendant. Simon finished his lunch before she did and was feeling very ill. Convinced now that he had been poisoned by some fish he had eaten the day before, the moment he had got rid of Rodriguez he went straight up to his room and sent for a doctor, who confirmed his own idea and despatched him to bed until further orders.

Normally he would have felt himself under an obligation to accompany Cristoval on the expedition planned for that night, but he knew there would be fighting and Simon hated fighting, so the fact that he was genuinely ill gave him an admirable excuse to back out of it. He was quite content to wait until the great prize was brought into Malaga harbour before viewing it again, and wrote a chit for Cristoval saying that he was *hors de combat*.

On receiving it Cristoval came up to express his sympathy and understanding, but by that time Simon was sweating profusely and a little muzzy in the head so he forgot to mention that he had seen Lucretia-José who was now in her own room, all her preparations completed, resting behind drawn blinds for the night's work which lay before her.

There was another way in which catastrophe could have been averted, but the stars in their courses carrying death in their combination were against the major participants in the clash which was approaching.

On leaving the bay on Tuesday night Richard had ordered the yacht to Algiers where she arrived late on the Wednesday. For two days she lay there while her charming owners and their guest disported themselves with much merriment and pleasure, revelling in the civilized amenities of the peaceful North-African city.

She sailed again on the Saturday and by Sunday afternoon was lying off Malaga harbour. Captain Saunders went ashore and returned with a telegram, to pick up which was the sole reason for her call at the port. It had been lying there for three days and read:

Marie Burgoyne S Y Golden Gull Malaga Good Luck for Sunday Sixth Best Love Greyeyes.

It told Richard, as he had hoped, that his plan had been accepted and was being acted upon; moreover, it contained a delightful surprise but he said nothing of that to either Marie-Lou or Rex as he wished to keep it for them. Thus he also played into the hands of Fate by leaving Rex to assume that the plan would be carried out exactly as it had stood originally.

During their stay in Algiers twenty further large cork floats had been prepared and painted over with phosphorus; it being Richard's idea to go into the bay just before sundown and attach these to the hawsers so that they floated on the surface. The light given out by the phosphorus after dark would not be strong enough to be visible from the coast road or the

monastery but quite sufficient for Lucretia and her friends to locate the floats at whatever hour they arrived on their salvaging expedition.

At a little after five the yacht anchored off the bay and her launch was ordered out. Richard told Rex what he was about to do and asked if he would like to come with him.

“Sure,” replied Rex, much tickled by the thought of how furious Richard would be when he found that the bombs were no longer there. “A little exercise fixing those floats’ll give me a nice appetite for dinner.”

Half an hour later he was not quite so pleased with himself. The bombs were still there and Richard was busy fixing the first float with the aid of a seaman, while the mechanic tinkered with the launch’s engine and, at her helm, the puzzled Rex kept her steady.

At first he thought that his private letter to Simon must have gone astray or that something had prevented its delivery. Since its despatch he had given his word to Richard that he would take no action to prevent the Condesa collecting her fortune, so it was useless for him to consider ways in which he might yet put a spoke in her wheel. Instead, he began to resign himself to the fact that the last laugh was against him after all. He let the others work while he sat at the controls of the launch smoking and taking in the scene.

In the evening light the hard contours of the brownish foothills of the Sierra Mijas were softened but even then the barren landscape brought home to him the endless and pitiful struggles of the peasants who tried to wring a living out of this parched and hungry soil. The sea was calm and the only sound that broke the evening stillness was the lazy sucking of the water under the counters of the boat as she rocked on the long, gentle swell.

The job was half done when another thought struck Rex. He had put his letter in the post box of the village police station. The police would certainly have forwarded a packet marked ‘Urgent’ and addressed care of an important U.G.T. leader. Unless it had been destroyed by an accident of war it must have reached Simon in eleven days. What if Simon had deliberately left the bombs there with the idea of trapping the Condesa and her friends when they came to get them?

Rex had already taken into account the possibility of the two parties arriving on the scene simultaneously by accident and, for that reason, had

gone to considerable trouble to assure himself that the Duke would not be involved in the business. That was all that mattered to Rex; the Condesa, whom as far as he knew he had never met, was no concern of his. He decided that if Simon had planned a trap, so much the better. They would have the last laugh. He would let Richard complete his work with the phosphorescent floats and, once they were back on the yacht, see to it that he did not leave it any more.

Richard had not dared to start his job too early for fear of attracting the attention of the troops in the monastery. The colour faded from the mountains until only a denser blackness showed their outline against the darkening sky. In the failing light the hawsers became increasingly difficult to find and they had to search for the last half-dozen with the aid of their torches. Two hours sped past and by the time the work was completed full night had come. There was no moon as yet but the stars twinkled overhead with the brightness of sparks against a sooty chimney, and the phosphorus on the nearest floats lit them dully so that they appeared like a row of big jelly-fish gently undulating in the wavelets.

“There,” said Richard, as he knotted the thick twine which attached the float to the last hawser in the line. “That’s that. All we have to do now is to sit tight until the salvage squad turns up.”

“What!” exclaimed Rex cheerfully, “And miss our dinner? Not for this child. We’re late as it is. We’re going back on board right now and we’ll watch the show from there. Time enough to give them the “big hallo!” when they bring their first load to the yacht.”

Richard laughed. “We’re not having dinner to-night, old chap, but supper when the party’s over, and it’ll be some celebration too, believe you me. You won’t lose anything by waiting.”

“Now, listen!” Rex said firmly. “I’ve a mighty good reason for wanting to get back in the yacht just as soon as maybe.”

“If you think the Nationalists who’re due here any time now may be sore about your having made off with the Flying Sow, you needn’t worry. Lucretia José will soon fix that.”

“You mean the Condesa woman, but I’m not interested in...”

“I bet you will be when you see her,” Richard interrupted with a grin. “She’s a marvel! Brave as a lioness and lovely as a sylph. You must have met her some time with Simon, already, but of course you wouldn’t know

that because she's the most brilliant Secret Agent the Nationalists have got. I can let you in to the big secret now. She's no other than the famous Golden Spaniard. There! What d'you think of that?"

"Hell's bells!" Rex exclaimed. "That certainly is one whopping big surprise. Of course I know her. Met her lots of times."

This was a complication he could not possibly have foreseen and he was thinking quickly: She'll be caught red-handed if Simon does turn up. They'll shoot her too, for certain. That's darned hard. What pluck she's got to have played a double game all this time. I wish to goodness I could pull her out of it. To try means risking Richard being pinched, though. I daren't do that. After all, it's her own funeral if she's caught. I hope to God she's not, but my job is to take care of Richard. Aloud he said:

"Look here, Richard, old scout. My reason for wanting to beat it to the yacht instanter has nix to do with the Flying Sow. I'm darned sorry to disappoint you but I guess the time has come when I must put you wise to what really..."

What's that?" Richard cut in. "Look! Over there." He pointed through the darkness to the east where the headland was faintly discernable.

Rex gave a swift glance over his shoulder and saw two black shapes just off the headland. Without a word he switched on the launch's motor and thrust over her little steering wheel. She suddenly shot forward, heading out to sea.

"What the hell are you up to?" protested Richard. "We must stay here until they join us."

Rex only shook his head and the launch sped on.

"Are you crazy?" Richard cried, stumbling towards the controls in an endeavour to switch off the power.

"I certainly am not, my lad. This is where you and I get right out, back to the yacht."

"But we can't do that. Don't you understand? It's our part to guide them in." As Richard spoke he glanced quickly again towards the eastern end of the bay. The outline of a tug was now perceptible and behind it that of a flat barge with a bulky structure amidships. He made another attempt to grab the wheel.

With one large hand Rex pushed him away. "As I was saying a moment back, when you butted in, the time has come for me to put you wise to the

fact that you've lost out on this deal. You were smart, Richard. Mighty smart, but I guess I've gone one better."

"What the hell do you mean?" Richard asked with sudden anxiety.

"Just this. You made a monkey of me all right changing over those bombing leads in the Flying Sow, but I tumbled to it just as soon as you started in to drop the real goods along the shore here. I swam off that night and sent a chit to Simon, giving him the lowdown on what you'd done. Why he hasn't collected the bombs yet is more than I can say, but I've just had a very nasty sort of hunch about it."

"Good God! You don't mean that you let Simon know my whole plan? Dammit! You couldn't have. I never gave you any details until after we left Valencia."

"I got the details all right," Rex grinned in the darkness. "All's fair in love and war. I know your habits, Richard, just as well as I know my own. I gave you plenty of time for any little private conversation that night we got out with the gold; but I listened-in to you and Marie-Lou plotting it all out later on. How the Condesa who originally owned the goods was to come down and collect, after having pinched one of the crane-barges Marie-Lou had seen in Malaga harbour that morning, and how we'd take the stuff on board—then run round to the Atlantic coast to pick up the Duke when all bar the shouting was over."

"You bloody fool!" Richard grabbed Rex by the collar. "You think you've been damn clever and now I'll tell *you* something. Your cleverness will probably cost the lot of us our lives."

"What the...?" Rex began but Richard stormed on:

"If you've tipped Simon off, half the Malaga Militia is probably waiting for us on that shore."

"Steady on... steady on!" Rex pulled himself from Richard's grip and peered anxiously towards the two men in the bows who had turned to look at them now that their voices were raised above the humming of the engine. "Naturally you're sore about losing the gold but try and take it like a sportsman. I'm darned sorry about the Condesa, now I know who she is, but I don't give two hoots about these other Fascists who're coming to pick the stuff up. What's it matter if Simon's people do bag a few of them?"

"You lunatic!" Richard had seen his mechanic and the seaman staring at them too and his voice sank, but it was still filled with passionate anger.

“How could you have even thought of double-crossing me just to appease your stupid vanity without knowing the risks involved? If you’d only said you’d found me out I’d have given you best and let you get away with the gold rather than this should happen.”

“What in heck’s bitten you?” Rex was puzzled now. “With all the blood that’s been spilt in this game, do you mean to tell me that you’d have let a few lives interfere between you and the treasure? I don’t darn well believe it. You wanted that gold and whatever it cost, you meant to get it.”

“God’s death, man! It’s not the gold I’m worrying about but Lucretia and the Duke!”

“But—but...!” Rex stammered. “I thought we were to pick the Duke up from Lisbon or Coruna.”

“*You thought!* Just because you heard us speculating on what he *might* do. How the blazes could we *know* where he’d head for until we got his telegram agreeing to adopt my plan? I picked it up in Malaga this afternoon. He’d decided to see the job through with Lucretia. I was keeping it as a surprise for you and Marie-Lou that we’re to pick him up here to-night.”

“Like hell we are!” Rex gasped. “I’m sorry, Richard. God! I’m sorry but I didn’t know.”

As he spoke he turned to stare out over the dark waters. The launch was already two miles from the shore. A little behind him now on his left he could just make out the black hulks of the tender and the barge which had entered the eastern end of the bay. “I suppose,” he said, “he’ll be on one of those things?” and he quickly flung the wheel about.

“Stop!” Richard grabbed his arm. “Don’t turn her. Now there’s a chance of trouble I won’t have my men in it. We’ll put them aboard first—then run back.”

Rex reversed the wheel obediently. “Maybe things aren’t so bad. Perhaps Simon never got my letter. I was figuring that when he did he’d get ahead of you and have the gold up while we were sitting in Algiers. I was mighty surprised to find those bombs still there to-night. With any luck my own plan’s gone west and they’ll get through after all.”

“When did you get this letter off?” Richard asked.

Rex told him of his midnight expedition and they both agreed that apart from the consignment of mail in which it was having been blown up, there

was really no reason why the letter should have gone astray.

"I don't like it," Richard said. "If Simon believes the Duke's safe out of it he'll almost certainly have arranged some trap to catch the others."

Five minutes later they were alongside the *Golden Gull*. Richard knew how worried Marie-Lou would be if she heard what had happened, so he decided not to tell her; but he was anxious that if there were any trouble in the bay she should keep out of it. He told his mechanic and the other man to go aboard with a message that Rex and he had to go back and might be away some little time. She was not to worry, and on no account was she to leave the yacht or bring her nearer in.

The two men had guessed that something had gone wrong and both volunteered to remain. Richard thanked them warmly, but assured them that he and Rex would be able to manage the matter they had to attend to on their own.

The second the men were out of the launch Rex turned her nose towards the shore. After a few moments he picked up the tug and crane-barge, stationary now, right in the middle of the bay. As they drew nearer a faint hail came over the water. De Richleau and Lucretia-José, standing in the bows of the tender, could see the outline of the yacht and her riding lights. On spotting the launch which was racing from it they knew it must contain their friends.

As Richard returned the hail he had a moment's awful uncertainty. It occurred to him that these might be Simon's people come out to pick up the gold, but the next second his fears were stilled as the Duke's voice came clearly to him.

"Ahoy! there, Richard. Well done, my friend. Well done!"

As Rex brought the launch round, Richard grabbed the low gunwale of the tug and swung himself on board. "There's been an awful mix-up," he gasped. "The Reds may be here any minute!"

"But Richard..." the Duke began and Lucretia-José gave a sharp cry of disappointment. Richard cut them short:

"No time to explain. Rex found me out. Gave our game away to Simon. We daren't stay and risk them catching us here. Get your tug going and we'll pick you all up out at sea."

"One moment," De Richleau said curtly. "There's no need to panic. Where's Rex?"

“Here,” Rex cried. He had made the launch fast and came clambering over the side. “I’m that sick I could shoot myself. I hadn’t got the faintest notion you’d be along. I...”

The Duke waved aside his protestations with an impatient hand. “I know! I know! Don’t waste time. Tell me as quickly as you possibly can what happened.” Before Rex had a chance to speak he turned to a tall man who was standing behind Lucretia.

“Best run out to sea, *Comandante*. If it’s possible, we’ll return later. Now, Rex?”

As the tender went about Rex poured out his story; Richard helping him out with a few swift interjections.

“I see,” said De Richleau, when they had done. “It’s damnably unfortunate but quite understandable. However, you don’t *know* if Simon got this letter, so there’s still a chance that he’s quite unaware of our present operations.”

Richard shook his head. “I’d hate to gamble on that. Of course, like Rex, I didn’t think for a moment you’d turn up here, until I got your wire. How did you manage it?”

“In the character of a Russian military expert. I speak Russian fluently, as you know. Our good friend Talbot procured me a change of clothes and Lucretia provided the necessary papers. For the last three days I’ve been living in the crane-barge we’re towing behind us now.” He turned to Lucretia.

“Condesa, you know Richard; but I don’t think you’ve met my old friend, Rex Van Ryn. Allow me to present him.”

Lucretia nodded. She was positively trembling with rage at the thought that Rex had wrecked all her carefully laid plans at the very last moment like this, but she endeavoured to control her anger for the sake of the others, and said coldly, “Mr. Van Ryn and I have met before in happier circumstances.”

An awkward situation was averted by the return of the *Comandante* whom De Richleau introduced as Bemal de Monteleone, a Royalist naval officer, who had been on leave in Malaga when the Civil War started and in hiding there ever since.

The five of them held a brief conference as to whether they dared attempt to pick up the gold that night. Rex was of the opinion that if there

had been an ambush on the shore they would already have been fired at and, in his anxiety to make amends for having brought them all into possible danger, expressed his willingness to help them if they decided to risk turning back. His offer did much to overcome Lucretia's hostility to him but she was adamant in her determination that the job must be put off until they had managed to ascertain whether Rex's letter had reached Simon or not. She would not have them gamble their lives unless they were reasonably certain the coast was clear.

As they were talking, the tender had chugged its way about a mile and a half out to sea, but, while they were still arguing, a warning cry went up from the man just above them on the low bridge:

"A ship! A ship's coming round the headland!"

They all peered into the darkness to the east. The front half of a low hull with a lighted line of ports was just rounding the point. As the ship's funnels appeared, sparks and a red glow showed at their tips, against the sky.

The Nationalist ex-naval officer rapped out a sharp order and ran up to the tender's bridge. Her nose swung away to starboard and her engines developed a more rapid beat.

Comandante Bernal de Monteleone had a pair of night glasses glued to his eyes. He swore softly and called down to the others:

"It's the *Libertad*—Government destroyer—I'm afraid we're cornered."

His words were confirmed in no uncertain manner. A bright flash appeared on the foredeck of the warship. A dull boom sounded and a second later, as the echo rumbled back from the hills, a great column of water spurted up a hundred yards ahead of the tug's bows.

"The launch!" cried Richard. "She's much smaller and faster. We'll all pile into her and run for it to the yacht." But even as he spoke he realized the futility of his suggestion. The destroyer was steaming right into the middle of the bay. It was half a mile nearer inshore than the yacht and would cut them off from it before they could possibly get through.

"Too late for us to do that," muttered De Richleau. The gun flashed again and a second report shattered the silence of the night.

This time the column of water sent up by the shell was only fifty feet from their port bow.

"Demonios" De Monteleone exclaimed. "They've got a gunner who knows his business." Swinging round, he bawled to the quartermaster, "Hard astarboard and head her for the beach."

Relieved of the weight of the barge she was towing the tender slewed right round, her speed almost doubled, as she raced shorewards. Great clouds of black smoke now billowed from her funnel, temporarily obscuring her from her attacker.

The destroyer's next two shells fell far astern in the white wash of the tug, but as the second of them detonated a shaft of light suddenly cleft the darkness a hundred yards to their right. Now that they could no longer see their target on account of the smoke-screen, the men on the warship's foredeck had turned on a searchlight.

With a violent jerk the tug took the weight of the barge again. Had the barge been fully loaded the hawser would have snapped, but she had nothing on board except the crane. The tug slowed down a little and Richard shouted, "Let the barge loose! Cut her loose! We'll never make it with her weight behind us."

"No, no!" Lucretia shouted back through the din. "Alvarez and Velasco are there. We can't abandon them."

The long finger of light from the warship's foredeck swept backwards and forwards through the murk. A shell came screaming over the tender and burst a hundred yards ahead of her.

"They've bracketed us now," muttered the Duke. "We'd best take to the launch and try to slip round the coast while they pound this tub to bits."

"How many are you?" asked Richard as the gun boomed again.

A water-spout shot up fifty yards to port and, caught in the rays of the searchlight, cascaded back into the sea like a great, silvery fountain.

"Bemal de Monteleone has a crew of six, two on the barge, ourselves four—that's thirteen," said De Richleau swiftly.

"Right! We'll manage somehow."

De Monteleone grabbed the tug's wheel from his quartermaster and swung it over so that she headed towards the place where the last shell had burst. A spit of sand below the water-line ran out from the shore there. The tug hit it, lifted a little and came to rest. The next shell dropped behind her.

The Duke had already jumped into the launch and was at her controls. The others came piling in. One man slipped and tumbled overboard. While they were hauling him out of the water, De Monteleone and his quartermaster shot down the ladder from the tug's bridge and flung themselves on to the forepart of the launch.

"All clear!" sang out the *Comandante*, freeing the launch's painter with a jerk, and De Richleau turned her head towards the barge. The tow-rope had slackened and disappeared below the water; the barge was coming up to them out of the darkness under its own momentum.

The roar of the gun came again. The second they heard it a huge column of water spurted up, rocking the launch violently and half-drowning its occupants.

Wet and gasping they sorted themselves out as she streaked towards the barge. Within a minute they were alongside it. De Richleau did not attempt to stop. The two Nationalists were standing ready on the barge's afterdeck. They sprang headlong into the crowded launch as it sped by.

The tug had run aground about a quarter of a mile from the shore. The searchlight cleft the smoky murk and was now focused dead on it. The crew of the destroyer were trying to make out if they had wrecked their victim or if the Nationalists had beached her deliberately. The beam of light swept rapidly along the water and came suddenly to rest on the abandoned barge, only twenty yards from the fugitives.

De Richleau would have preferred to head west, as the shore was steeper there and would have given them more cover but having to pick up the two men on the barge had necessitated his turning east. He dared not run closer in for fear of stranding the launch, but as she rushed through the water he kept glancing behind him with a worried eye upon the searchlight. It switched back to the tug, held it in a glare as bright as daylight for half a minute, flickered a moment round it, and streaked west along the tideline.

In trepidation he saw it stop and sweep back the other way. The tug was lit up for an instant—then the barge. Before they had covered another fifty yards it was full on them. For a fraction of time they were caught in its blinding rays. As they shot out of it De Richleau swung over the helm in a last frantic attempt to dodge it by running out to sea.

It picked them up again within ten seconds. The gun boomed. Ahead of them another column of water fountained and hissed as it fell back into the sea. The underwater shell-burst threw the head of the launch violently over to port. Its occupants staggered and clutched at each other for support. De Richleau realized that all hope of escape by sea was futile. Their only chance now was to land and scatter on the shore. He threw his helm hard over and raced towards it.

There was a soft scrape, a sharp jolt that threw them all off their balance. The devilish searchlight was still full on them as they flung themselves over the launch's side into the shallow water.

Rex had snatched up Lucretia. She was no more than a featherweight in his mighty arms. He had been the first to leap from the launch and with huge strides he waded through the shallow water. Richard was beside him and they were the first to reach dry land. The searchlight behind them now lit the foreshore so that even its scattered pebbles threw long shadows across the sand.

Dripping and gasping, the little crowd of thirteen fugitives collected and automatically turned east. The searchlight followed them as they ran across the soft sand to the nearest cluster of rocks below the coast road that offered shelter. The destroyer had ceased fire.

De Richleau glanced anxiously behind him. At first it had seemed that Simon's plan was to sink the enemies of the Government in the bay. Yet surely he would not have neglected to have the shore guarded. Next second the Duke's unspoken question was answered. There came a flash in the darkness ahead beyond the searchlight's ray. A solitary rifle cracked among the rocks for which they were making. A bullet whistled overhead.

The whole group halted, turned and rushed back the other way. They covered a quarter of a mile with the searchlight still playing on them. The foreshore was blank and empty. There was another group of rocks ahead. When they were within fifty yards of it a spitting light stabbed the blackness and the sudden, explosive bark of a machine-gun shattered the stillness. This time a stream of bullets whipped the air above them.

The machine-gun ceased fire as suddenly as it had opened and a sharp voice cried, "Halt! Those were warning shots. Put your hands up! One movement to escape or fight and it will be the death of all of you." They had been skilfully driven right into the arms of the main ambush.

Miserable and dejected they obeyed, raising their hands slowly above their heads as they stood in a huddled group still panting from their exertions.

A crowd of black forms emerged from the dark shadow of the rocks. Others appeared to the left and right. Within a few moments it seemed that the foreshore was alive with soldiers and militiamen.

Their leader came forward and his short, wiry form immediately caught Lucretia's eye. Her heart seemed to leap into her throat, and as he stepped into the beam of the searchlight she saw that her intuition had not deceived her. Cristoval could not see her clearly because she was half-hidden in the crowd and he was partly facing the searchlight, but for her its brilliance threw up his every feature.

Halting ten yards from his captives, he cried in a loud voice, "I arrest you all in the name of the Government. Where is the Condesa de Cordoba y Coralles?"

Pale, mentally shattered, utterly miserable, but with her beautiful head held high, Lucretia stepped forward.

"I am the Condesa," she said clearly.

At the sound of her voice Cristoval's hands clenched spasmodically. Peering forward, a look of horrified amazement on his face, he was stricken with the full truth of the appalling blow that Fate had dealt him.

Chapter Thirty-three – One Must Die

It—*Por Dios*, yes! It's José Levida!" Gustavo Sandoval's voice cut into the pregnant silence. "Who'd ever have thought of this! The famous 'Golden Spaniard' turns out to be the Royalist Condesa. *Demonios*, what a surprise!"

Many of the other Militiamen had also known Lucretia in her role of Anarchist and they were all agog with excitement at this most unexpected revelation of her true identity.

Cristoval bit his lip as he fought to recover his composure. Turning abruptly away to hide his haggard face, he muttered curtly to Sandoval, "Have them searched. Get their arms."

While the thirteen wretched prisoners were frisked by the Militiamen, Richard, his hands still held above his head, turned to cast a forlorn glance out to sea. The illuminated line of ports and the long black hull of the destroyer still showed, now apparently at anchor, in the middle of the bay. Beyond it, a little to the left and a mile further out he could see the riding lights of the *Golden Gull*. There lay peace and safety. Here, imprisonment and death. All day he had been looking forward so tremendously to this evening; the final act of triumph in his long Spanish adventure, and now, through Rex's ill-calculated counter-plotting, he and his beloved Marie-Lou were to be parted again, most probably for ever.

As soon as the captives had been stripped of their arms the Militiamen formed them into a rough column. The destroyer switched off its searchlight and some of Cristoval's men produced torches.

During the disarming of the captives he had stood aside; too numbed by shock and acute distress to speak, but as they were about to be led away across the beach to the road, he turned to the bearded Sandoval and said, "I'll take charge of the Condesa myself. She's a very valuable hostage and needs guarding with special care."

"Thought they were all to be shot?" said Sandoval gruffly.

Cristoval shrugged. "My orders are that they're all to be given a formal drum-head court-martial and shot first thing to-morrow, but I want to speak to her alone now."

“All right. Have it your own way,” growled Sandoval. In a lower voice, that no one but Cristoval could hear, he added, “For God’s sake be careful, man. Remember you’re responsible for her. If you let her try to escape I’ll have to shoot her myself.”

At that moment the Duke called across to Cristoval, “Is Simon Aron anywhere here or is he out there in the destroyer?”

“No,” Cristoval called back harshly. “He’s in bed ill, in Malaga. And a good thing too. I’m not sending for him, either. You foreign conspirators are as guilty as the rest. More guilty. None of the others would be here at all if it weren’t for your dirty plotting.”

The ambush had consisted of about fifty men; Cristoval’s party which he had brought from Valencia and a half-platoon of troops loaned from the force at the monastery to assist them in covering the whole long beach so that pickets could drive the Nationalists into its centre wherever they were forced ashore.

A Militia sergeant had already fallen in his half-platoon and was marching them off. The prisoners followed, surrounded by Cristoval’s old guard of Militiamen, all of whom were armed with rifles. Among themselves they were still muttering excitedly, not at the success of their venture but at the amazing fact that the Condesa they had been sent to catch should have turned out to be the famous ‘Golden Spaniard.’

Many of them, including Gustavo Sandoval, were well aware of Cristoval’s passion for her. They were strongly sympathetic towards their leader and distressed for him that he should find himself in such a terrible situation, but curiosity as to what would be the outcome of this dramatic encounter was their chief preoccupation.

As the column crossed the coast road and entered the shaly track which rose steeply upward, curving in hair-pin bends towards the monastery, Cristoval took Lucretia’s arm and pulled her roughly from among the bunch of prisoners.

“I want a word with you before we go any farther,” he snapped.

She stood quiet and passive, regarding him quite steadily but with a look of tragic sorrow in her eyes, as the remainder of the column moved on ahead, leaving them alone there.

At the first turn of the road several men looked back. In the faint starlight they could see the two figures standing tense and silent twenty

feet below them. Sandoval, who was bringing up the rear of the column, halted. He knew quite well the agony of mind which must now be clouding his friend's judgment, and was desperately anxious that he should not make a fool of himself. "Come on, Cristoval!" he called sharply. "If you want to talk to her—well, talk! But keep in touch with the column."

"Don't worry, Gustavo," Cristoval shouted back; but as Sandoval remained there, waiting, he moved on still holding Lucretia by the arm.

When they were within fifteen paces of Sandoval he turned to follow the column as he had no wish to overhear what his friend had to say to the girl in this painful last interview.

For some moments Lucretia and Cristoval trudged slowly up the steep track, side by side, without speaking. At last Cristoval said, "How long has this been going on?"

"Five years," she replied tonelessly.

"And you've been living a double life all that time; betraying our secrets to the enemy?"

"Yes."

"Even—even since you've known me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my dear! How could you?" The cry was wrung from his heart.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "Not sorry that I've done the work I have. I'm proud of that. I was born a Royalist. I've lived as a Royalist and I shall die a Royalist. If I'd been a man I could have fought for my cause, but as I'm a woman I've served my King in the best way that was open to me. But I'm sorry about you—about us..." Her voice trailed off into a husky whisper.

"You *have* loved me, then?" Cristoval murmured. "Since I saw you there on the beach I've doubted that. I—I thought I'd been just one more pawn in your game."

She turned shining eyes towards him. "How could you doubt after... after all we've been to each other?"

"I know," he moaned. "I know! This thing is so terrible that I can hardly realize it yet."

"You know now why I wouldn't marry you," she said simply. "My work *had* to go on, but I could never have married you with that between us."

"You realize what'll happen now you're caught?" He swallowed quickly. "There'll be a trial, of course, but..."

“Oh, my dear!” she laid her free hand quickly on his arm. “There’s no need to go on. I feel frightful about all these poor friends of mine who are going to die because they tried to save my wretched money. But for myself there’s no defence now that I’ve been found out. I’ve lived in the shadow of death for years. All these long, weary months that I’ve played the part of the ‘Golden Spaniard’ discovery was always lurking round the corner. I’ve been lucky, really. I’ve had a long run and I’ve done a great deal for my cause. Above all, God spared me long enough to have you. I’m not afraid to die.”

“But I can’t stand it!” he burst out. “To think of you dead and cold is something too horrible to visualize.”

She nodded. “Yes. Yours is the harder part. Their bullets will free me very quickly, but you have to live on. I’m selfish enough to be glad that it is not the other way.”

After a moment she went on slowly, “Richard Eaton has a wife. She’s out there now in the yacht, waiting and wondering if he’ll return. She, too, will be alone from to-morrow—just like you. Unless you can find some way to spare him out of pity for her.”

“It’s these damned interfering foreigners who’ve brought this on us,” Cristoval burst out furiously.

“That is not true. It was I who begged them to give me their help.”

“I don’t care. They’ve all been doing their best to stab the Government in the back and in the process they’ve been responsible for the deaths of a score of our people. I’ve no pity to waste on them.”

“Then you can have none for me.”

“I haven’t—for the Royalist Condesa who has played the part of a traitor and a spy. But I can’t think of *you* like that.”

They had dropped behind a little as they were talking and Sandoval was some thirty paces ahead of them again. The stars now only showed in patches as scudding clouds obscured three quarters of the sky.

A silence fell, but Cristoval broke it after they had trudged another fifty yards. Torn between rage and misery, he was almost crying as he said, “You’re the only woman I’ve ever really loved.”

She covered her eyes and tried to keep her voice steady. “Thank you—my darling. Our time together was very wonderful; more wonderful than I ever thought anything could be. But oh, so tragically short. And you must

steel yourself to forget it now. Take me on, please, to mingle with the others. I—I can't bear being alone with you like this any more."

"No," he said suddenly. "I've earned a life and more than a life by all the work I've done. I can't claim it because they'd never give me such an implacable enemy as you, but I can take it—and I mean to. When we reach the next bend you will turn and run. I shall shoot after you—over your head. The others may shoot too. You'll have to risk that, but I shall be in their way and they're almost certain to miss you in the darkness."

"But, Cristoval! They'll hold you responsible. Now they know the truth about me they'd never let you get away with it."

"I'm in command here. They take their orders from me. There may be a little trouble about my having let you escape when I get back to Valencia, but my record's too fine for them to do anything to me. It'll only be a nine days' wonder and they won't even be able to prove that I let you go deliberately."

She hesitated only for a moment. Cristoval *was* a big man in his Party. It was unthinkable that any serious action would be taken against him.

"Here comes your chance," he murmured, as they came opposite a rocky hairpin bend behind which the rest of the column had disappeared into the blackness above. "Quick! Take it."

Cristoval felt the swift pressure of her hand on his arm and next second she was gone, swift, light-footed, down the steep slope. He drew his gun, released the safety-catch and waited until he had counted ten. The clinking of the stones beneath her feet was drowned in the rising wind and the tramp of the column higher up the road. She was only a rapidly decreasing flicker of greyness when he fired into the unrelieved blackness of the crags above her head.

A chorus of shouts came from the upper road. Cristoval fired again and again until the last sign of Lucretia's retreating figure had entirely disappeared among the shadows. Sandoval came pounding down the road, cursing lustily.

"You fool!" he yelled, firing to the right of Cristoval as he ran. "You utter fool! I was afraid of this. You let her go on purpose."

"Shut up!" shouted Cristoval. He kept up his fire until he had emptied his automatic and their words were almost drowned by the rapid crack of the shots echoing again and again from the black rocks all round them.

Half a dozen Militiamen came pelting down the road. With them Cristoval and Sandoval began to run, leaping and sliding along the uneven track. They had not reached the nearest lower bend when a piercing scream, a hundred feet above their heads, caused them to check their headlong descent. A burst of shouting and a single rifle shot followed.

For a moment they stood there undecided whether to continue their chase after the escaped Condesa or go to the assistance of their comrades farther up the hill.

The shouting died almost at once and Cristoval signed to one of his men. "You go, Alejandro. Find out what's happened up there. Return quickly and report to me." With the rest he ran on again until, two bends lower down, Sandoval called on them to halt and listen.

In the ensuing silence not the faintest patter of flying feet was audible, and Cristoval's heart lightened immeasurably as he guessed that Lucretia was now crouching, hidden, in one of the dozens of gullies which flanked the roadside. They might hunt among the rocks all night and still not find her.

"She was a friend of yours, wasn't she?" said one of the Militiamen suspiciously. "Did you let her go, Comrade?"

"Of course not," Cristoval snapped. "Lots of us liked her when we thought she was an Anarchist, but you ought to know me better than to suggest that I'd free a Nationalist spy."

"Well, she's got clean away," said another Militiaman. "It's no good standing here. Let's get going and catch up with the others."

"What about putting a few men on the beach?" suggested the first, but Sandoval deliberately vetoed the proposal.

He knew the truth but he was very fond of Cristoval. As his friend had let the girl go and would have to take the blame for her escape in any case, whether she were recaptured or not, he wanted to leave him the comfort of knowing that his rash action had not been useless.

"Not worth it," he said abruptly. "She couldn't launch that tug or the motor-boat on her own and there's nothing else to take her off. Besides, there're miles of deserted coast along here where she could hide in some cave or peasant's hovel until she has the chance to get through the lines to her friends on the other side of the mountains. Come on! We've got to climb this blasted hill again."

Running footsteps sounded from farther up the road and Alejandro came racing down to them. "Attempted escape," he panted out. "Hearing your shots the big *Americano* tried to make a break for it. The great swine gave Tomas a push that sent him over the precipice; but Alfonso knocked him senseless with the barrel of his gun before the others had a chance to give trouble."

"Hell!" exclaimed Cristoval. "Where's Tomas? Have they found him?"

"Yes. He fell only twelve feet; on to a ledge below. But he went down head-first and broke his neck."

There was an angry outcry from the listening group and they all turned to retrace their steps. Under cover of the darkness Cristoval pressed Sandoval's hand in silent gratitude for his assistance in rendering certain Lucretia's escape.

Lucretia was hidden behind a pile of rocks no more than twenty feet from the place where they had been talking. In the stillness of the dark, deserted coast she had heard every word of their conversation and knew that she was now safe. She gave them a good quarter of an hour to climb the hill, then, creeping from her hiding-place, completed the rest of her journey down to the shore. With anxious eyes she scanned it for some sign of life but the road wound away in the starlight on either hand and the silence of the beach was only broken by the monotonous lapping of the waves.

During the time Lucretia had been in hiding the destroyer had left the bay; her work completed, she was now on her way back to harbour. In the distance the riding lights of the yacht still showed, and down near the beach the tug and barge lay motionless, about fifty feet out, where they had been abandoned.

Lucretia's one thought was to get to Malaga. Fifteen miles lay between her and the town. Now that it was cut off from the rest of Government Spain no traffic passed along the coast road, so she could not hope for a lift. Every moment was precious and it would take her over four hours to walk there. Four hours of anguished, desperate plodding—but it had to be done. Bracing herself to the effort she left the track and turned east along the road.

She had nearly reached the eastern headland behind which the road disappeared into a rocky gorge when, turning to cast a last look at the bay

where she had been overtaken by such grievous misfortune, she suddenly noticed a black splotch on the water about two hundred yards from the tug.

Halting, she stared at it for a moment until she saw that it was a small boat slowly moving from west to east as someone lazily plied the oars. Leaving the road she scrambled over the rocks and ran across the yielding sand to the water's edge.

She did not dare to hail the boat for fear guards should have been set to watch the beach from the track up to the Monastery, so she waded out into the shallow water, determined to swim for it.

By the time she was up to her thighs and a hundred yards out the people in the rowing boat caught sight of her. There came a shout in bad Spanish. "Hullo, there! Who are you? What was that firing? Can you tell us?"

Lucretia's heart leapt with relief and excitement. That foreign voice could only come from somebody off Richard Eaton's yacht. "Be quiet," she called back softly. "Come in and pick me up—quickly!"

The boat turned and a few rapid strokes of the oars brought it to her. Three men were in it and a small woman who sat at the tiller in the stern. As Lucretia was helped aboard, the woman bombarded her with anxious questions. Lucretia guessed immediately that she must be Richard's wife, and in semi-coherent gasps began to pour out the story of their surprise and capture.

Marie-Lou no sooner realized that it was Lucretia-José than she ordered the boat back to the *Golden Gull*. By the time they reached the yacht she knew every detail of the disaster which had arisen from Rex's and Richard's desire to get the better of one another.

Steam was already up to carry the adventurers home after their triumph; instead, the *Golden Gull* now raced at full speed towards Malaga. That Lucretia had seen Simon lurching that day in the town was the only straw the two women had left to clutch at. If they failed to find him there was no one else to whom they could turn; but, if he were staying at the Hotel Colon, where Lucretia had seen him, they could at least count on his bringing all his influence to bear in a last-minute effort to save his three friends.

Marie-Lou could speak no Spanish, and a knowledge of the language was absolutely essential for making enquiries about Simon when minutes that

spelt life or death might be lost if there were the least delay. On the other hand, although Lucretia was willing to go ashore, for her to do so now was to risk immediate arrest, as it was virtually certain that the escape of 'The Golden Spaniard' together with her identity as the Condesa would have been telephoned from the monastery in order that the police and military patrols might keep a sharp look-out for her.

Desperate with anxiety, Marie-Lou called in Captain Sanderson and asked for his advice and help. The grey-haired captain proved a rock of comfort and good sense. None of the crew, he said, could speak enough Spanish to be of much assistance, as only one other man besides the chief steward knew Spanish at all, and both these could do no more than give greetings and make purchases. However, he was certain that he could easily secure the loan of a passport from one of the men for the Condesa to make a trip ashore and he himself would undertake to disguise her, beyond reasonable possibility of recognition, as a sailor.

During the last half-hour of the run to Malaga the transformation of Lucretia-José was effected. Her face and hands were stained to a deep mahogany by Marie-Lou, while the Captain provided a pair of trousers with enormous bell-bottoms which entirely hid her small feet, a blue woollen jumper with the yacht's name across it in red letters, and a striped blue and white stocking-cap, bought by one of the men on a trip ashore, which could be pulled right over her golden hair.

Marie-Lou was just completing the difficult business of straightening Lucretia's figure with padding and bandages when the Captain came down again with an oilskin cape and sou'wester. "It's not actually raining yet," he said, "but it looks as if we might have a spatter in the next hour or two; anyhow sufficient to justify the lady wearing these."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried Marie-Lou. "The sou'wester will be much better than the woollen cap because it shades her face more. How soon shall we be in, Captain Sanderson?"

"Another five minutes and about two to get out a boat. I'll report the second we're ready to take you off."

"No, no. We'll be up there," Marie-Lou said quickly and, by the time the boat splashed into the water, the two girls were standing on the bottom of the gangway.

Captain Sanderson politely, but firmly, over-ruled Marie-Lou and insisted on accompanying them ashore. It was still before eleven and they passed the night staff at the passport office without difficulty. Immediately they were outside the dock gates Lucretia went straight across the road to an *estanco* and rang up the Hotel Colon.

“Yes,” said the hotel operator, to Lucretia’s immense relief, “*Señor Aron* is staying in the hotel.” But it was five minutes before she got through to Simon and when she did, he was by no means pleased to be disturbed.

He was feeling sick and wretched and from lunch-time onwards had been tossing uncomfortably in bed with a slight temperature. Directly he heard that Marie-Lou wished to see him urgently, however, his manner changed. He agreed to dress at once and come down as quickly as he could to the *Café Las Palmas* on the waterfront to meet them.

Malaga had known the grip of the Terror, and under the iron rule of its Revolutionary Council all night-life in it had been dead for months. No taxis were available any more, and at this hour the streets down by the docks were empty except for occasional sailors returning to their ships. In a corner of the dimly-lit café they waited with as much patience as they could muster, over three coffees.

Just as half-past eleven was striking, Simon’s slim stooping figure, muffled in an overcoat, appeared. He wasted no time in polite greetings as, with Marie-Lou arriving at such a moment, he had already guessed that Richard’s safety must be involved and that there had been some blunder in the ambush that Cristoval had laid. Within three minutes he was in full possession of the facts.

“This is a muddle,” he smiled, directly Marie-Lou had done. His eyes flickered uneasily but his tone gave no hint of the acute anxiety he was really feeling. “Best thing for you is to stay here while I go to the Military Headquarters and find out what’s happened. Don’t worry too much. Sorting out muddles is my speciality. Expect we’ll fix everything all right.”

Extracting what comfort they could from his calm assurance, they ordered some brandy to warm them up and settled down to wait again.

Simon was away for very nearly an hour. When he at last returned he still appeared quite unruffled although he looked distinctly ill, and immediately on sitting down swallowed a couple of aspirins.

Seeking to keep the agony of impatience she was feeling out of her voice, Marie-Lou asked, after a moment, “Well, Simon dear. What have you found out?”

“Now I’ll tell you,” he said, taking her hand in his and patting it gently. “No need to worry. None at all. Colonel Picón—Military Governor here—had gone home. Got most of the story from his Chief-of-Staff, but thought we’d best phone the place where they’ve been taken, to get details. That’s what took so long.”

He nodded quickly. “Um. All three of them caught. None wounded. Rex has been very naughty. Tried to get away and pushed one of the guards over a cliff—chap broke his neck. Pity, that. Still, can’t be helped. They knocked Rex out but he came round again within ten minutes. Whole lot were taken to that monastery overlooking the bay. It’s a military post now. H.Q. for the north-western sector of the defence here. They’ve been tried, of course, and sentenced. Foregone conclusion. To be shot—usual hour—but that doesn’t mean a thing.”

“Oh, Simon! You don’t *mean* that. You’re only trying to break it to me gently.”

“Ner, honestly.” Simon’s eyes flickered again but he went on calmly, “Only half-past twelve. Lots of time before dawn.”

“You can get them reprieved, or something?”

“Going to see the Military Governor about it the moment I leave you.”

“Oh bless you, darling!”

“Did—did you hear anything about Cristoval?” Lucretia enquired anxiously.

Simon turned to look at her and began to rub his forefinger up and down his arc of nose. “That’s another muddle. ’Fraid it’s a bit outside my sphere, though. Lies between you and him.”

“Why?” she asked quickly.

“Trouble is you’ll be front-page news to-morrow. *Anarchist Leader Turns Out To Be Titled Nationalist Spy*. You know the sort of thing. Big story. They rang up from the monastery at once. It’s all over the town already. Awkward, very awkward for Cristoval. Lot of people know he was your—er—boy-friend. Pity you were in his charge when you escaped.”

“They haven’t done anything to him, have they?”

“Ner. Just put him under arrest, that’s all.”

“Arrest!”

“Um. Seems the man who’s commanding the north-western sector from the monastery cut up rough when he heard who you were and that you’d got away. Got a bit of a grudge against Cristoval, I think. At least, that’s the rumour. They say he couldn’t say anything bad enough about him over the phone. Declared he’d let you go on purpose and wanted to have him shot out of hand.”

“Shot!” echoed Lucretia aghast.

“No need to worry. Chap was most unreasonable.

“They are safe, aren’t they?” pleaded Marie-Lou. Naturally Colonel Picón wouldn’t hear of it. Still, he agreed that Cristoval should be placed under close arrest.”

Lucretia’s eyes were wide and scared as she cried, “But they won’t harm him, will they? His record’s so good! They couldn’t possibly do anything serious to him just because he let me escape.”

“He’s safe enough—for the moment.” Simon moistened his lips and went on slowly. “He’s a big shot, of course; but unfortunately you’re an even bigger one. Idea is to hold him as hostage, in your place. They know the two of you are—well, pretty friendly, and they’re counting on that to bring you in. Dirty trick, but there it is. It’s to be broadcast to-morrow that if you don’t give yourself up within seven days he’s to be shot instead.”

“Oh, God!” moaned Lucretia.

Marie-Lou put an arm round her shoulders and said imploringly, “Simon, darling, is there really nothing you can do?”

He shook his head. “If they’d condemned him we could appeal to Valencia. But they haven’t. Only holding him as bait. Very fond of Cristoval—but don’t see how I can help at all.”

“Yes. I see that,” Lucretia agreed. “Cristoval is my responsibility. But the others? Rex Van Ryn got them into this ghastly mess on your account. You’ll be responsible for them?”

Simon stood up. “Going to see Picón at his private house now.”

“Shall we wait here,” asked Marie-Lou anxiously, “or in the yacht?”

“Moment I’ve seen Picón I shall go out there by car. You’d best take the yacht back to the entrance of the bay. Don’t want any more muddles, so keep well outside the three-mile limit. As the launch was beached I can bring them straight off in that.” Simon smiled kindly into Marie-Lou’s

miserable face and added, "Now, off you go! Remember my speciality is muddles, and split a bottle between you to keep you going directly you get on board."

"Oh, bless you, Simon!" She went up on tiptoe to kiss him on the forehead. "When it comes to holding hands in trouble I think you're the best one of them all."

Outside the café they parted, Simon hurrying off to the house of the Military Governor while Captain Sanderson, who had sat silent during the conference, escorted the two girls back to the yacht. By half-past one the *Golden Gull* was once more at the entrance of the bay.

During the return run, Marie-Lou and Lucretia followed Simon's advice about having a glass of wine to keep up their strength, but they did not follow it about remaining outside the three-mile limit. A long and earnest talk they had had resulted in Captain Sanderson's bringing the yacht as close inshore as he dared and lowering a boat to take the two girls to the beach.

As Lucretia stepped out on to the sand, Marie-Lou caught her hand and cried, "Are you sure—are you really sure there's no other way?"

Suddenly putting her arms round the little Princess, Lucretia kissed her and replied, "You admitted yourself that you'd do just the same." Then she turned and ran up the beach, disappearing into the shadows.

It was two o'clock in the morning when Lucretia reached the monastery and a sleepy sentry turned out the Sergeant of the Guard. At first he flatly refused to disturb his Commanding Officer at such an hour for the tanned young sailor in oilskins, but she insisted that he would find himself in trouble if he did not, as her business was personal and urgent.

He left her for a few minutes. On his return he led her up a broad stone stairway, flung open a door and motioned for her to pass inside. She found herself in a bedroom facing Colonel Mudra, who was sitting up in bed.

"You're going to get it in the neck, *hombre*, if your message isn't urgent, for waking me up like this," he said gruffly. "Come on! Let's have it."

"I am the Condesa Cordoba y Coralles," she said quietly.

"What! 'The Golden Spaniard'!" he jerked upright. "By God, so you are. I recognize you now."

"You're holding Cristoval Ventura as a prisoner here, aren't you?"

He nodded and smiled. "That's right. We've got your little Comrade Secretary boy-friend cooling his heels in the lock-up down below. I bet you didn't know who'd pinched him, though, or you wouldn't have come walking in on me like this."

"I did," she replied calmly. "It's been my business for a long time now to know which officer is commanding in every Government sector. I would have preferred to deal with someone else, but if you'd been the devil himself it would not have prevented my coming to see you about Cristoval."

"Not very flattering, are you?" he grinned. "But never mind. Seeing the reason of your visit, we'll soon get more matey. Specially as I've always had a soft spot for you. Come and sit down on the bed here, girlie, and tell me all about it."

Chapter Thirty-four – Simon Aron goes to War

Simon had spoken optimistically enough to Marie-Lou. He had the kindest heart in the world and it had distressed him immeasurably to see her looking so utterly wretched. He had felt that the least he could do was to send her away comforted and confident in his ability to put everything right for her. Nothing whatever could have been gained by allowing her to pass a night of torturing anxiety. By morning or earlier he would have to face her whichever way things went; if it were with his three friends, as he hoped from the very bottom of his heart it might be, all would be well; but if not, it would be time enough then to break the terrible news to her.

As he hurried along the waterfront he was swiftly assessing his friends' chances of life. He felt that there was a good chance of his being able to save Rex. That Rex had been captured with the Nationalist sympathizers was a sheer accident, and that he should have killed a man in endeavouring to escape was appalling luck but, even so, the Government owed him an immense debt for having got the Condesa's huge fortune out of Nationalist hands for them.

De Richleau and Richard were another matter. Both had been conspiring against the Government for many months. Both had killed a number of Government supporters. Both were escaped prisoners who had already been condemned to death and both had been caught again to-night, red-handed, in an attempt to steal bullion which, under the new law, was Government property. In addition, their situation was rendered even more hopeless by the fact that orders had been issued for the execution of all Nationalists caught in this night's secret work.

Had they been captured in Valencia, he would have felt reasonably confident of securing their release on condition that they refrained absolutely from any future interference in Spanish affairs. His many friends in high places would, almost certainly, have seen to it that a supreme authority granted his request; but he was in Malaga, where he knew no one, apart from the few officials he had met during his brief stay, and to them the name of Simon Aron meant nothing.

Worse, the prisoners had been captured at about nine o'clock. It was getting on for one already. They had been formally tried immediately they

had reached the monastery and actually sentenced to death. It was even possible that they were already dead. The execution might take place at any hour, as firing-squads did not always wait till dawn.

At that thought he began to run. His fever had mounted. His usually clear head was heavy and dull. Before he covered fifty yards perspiration was streaming down his face. He had already secured the address of Colonel Eusebio Picón's house when he had visited the offices of the military command, but he feared the Colonel would have gone to bed. When he reached it he saw with relief that there were still lights in a first-floor room of the tall building.

Panting and gasping, Simon demanded an immediate interview with the Military Governor. The sentry passed him on to a drowsy orderly who was sitting in the hall. The orderly returned a few moments later to say that the Colonel was just getting into bed and could not see him that night. Simon insisted that the matter would brook no delay and, with the protesting orderly beside him, walked straight upstairs. On the landing the man begged him to wait for one moment and went in to speak to the Colonel again. When he came back he was smiling. With an abrupt nod Simon pushed past him into a book-lined room which seemed part library, part office; it was obvious that the Colonel carried on a good portion of his work there.

Simon was still mopping the perspiration from his face when the Colonel, clad in a purple silk dressing-gown and smelling strongly of scent, came stumping in from his bedroom next door. Hardly waiting for him to sit down at his desk, Simon plunged into the matter that had brought him.

"Yes," the Colonel cut him short. "I've already heard that we've bagged the Nationalist agents, except for the Condesa whom that fool Ventura allowed to get away. Mudra rang up to tell me. What about it?"

"Three friends of mine among them. I want an order for their release," said Simon urgently.

"On what grounds?" snapped the Colonel, who was obviously in an ill temper at being kept from his bed.

"Two of them are Englishmen and one's an American. Don't want more trouble with neutral countries—do we?"

Picón grunted. "That's not my business. Orders have been issued for their execution and you're only wasting my time."

“I’m not. You’ve got to listen to me. Your orders only apply to the Spanish Nationalists. Had a promise of immunity before I left Valencia for everyone on that yacht. These three, Richard Eaton, Rex Van Ryn, and the Duke de Richleau should have been on the yacht. Only got themselves mixed up in this business by mistake.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the Colonel. “All three of them have been wanted by the Government for months. I’ve got their dossiers here. Cristoval Ventura left them with me yesterday, and a more dangerous set of blackguards it would be hard to find. Now we’ve caught them we’re going to out them—quick—before they can do us any more damage.”

“Now I’ll tell you.” Simon wriggled his thin neck. “There’ll be hell to pay if you kill these people. Between them they’re mixed up with half the big-wigs in Washington and Whitehall. Shooting them’ll do the Government cause more damage than the loss of all that gold. You’d be mad not to let them go.”

“Well, I’m not going to.” Picón shrugged.

“But, hang it all! One of them, Rex Van Ryn, has been fighting on our side till now.”

“Till now!” The Colonel caught him up with acid sarcasm. “That shows just how far we can trust our foreign *friends*— doesn’t it? We’ve got far too many foreigners interfering in this war. Perhaps the execution of these three may induce some of the others to clear out.”

“Thanks!” snapped Simon. “Perhaps you consider me an interfering foreigner, too?”

“If you want to know the truth, *Señor Aron*—I *do*. You’ve done good work for the Finance Office, I believe; but it’s international interference that’s bleeding Spain to death. If we could be rid of the lot of you we’d be through with this ghastly business, one way or another, inside a month.”

“Perhaps,” Simon agreed. “But that’s not the question at the moment. These three men are lifelong friends of mine.”

“Then you’ve got some very queer friends.” Picón opened a drawer in his desk and took a sheet of paper from it. “Now, look here. These are a few notes my secretary made from their dossiers. The two Englishmen came to Spain early in July. The first thing they did was to knock a caretaker on the head and falsely imprison him for the best part of a month. According to a

report that came in later they were mixed up in a church-burning about the time of the outbreak and..."

"When they saved me from being murdered by the mob," Simon interrupted.

"I don't know anything about that. They deliberately killed several members of the crowd and the affair resulted in the deaths of about forty others, mostly innocent bystanders. Shortly afterwards they secured the release of two important hostages, the Catholic Deputy, Don Palacio Alverado and the daughter of a traitor General, Doña Favorita de los Passos-Inclán. You were mixed up in that apparently.

"In August they were arrested and later involved in the mutiny at the Model Prison. As they were about to be executed the American comes on the scene. Nineteen of our Militiamen were killed in the ensuing affray, and these three beauties escaped, taking with them four other condemned men: Colonel Julio Castrillo, the Conde Gonzalo d'Almagro, Don Jiménez d'Olwer, Don Domingo Cambó, and a boy, Alonso Haga.

"Early in November they broke out of the Finnish Legation, where they had taken refuge, and the check-up afterwards showed that they got three more enemies of the Government—the Marquis de Mondragon-Villablanca, Don Leopoldo Romanones and Don Joaquim de Bermejo y Santos—away with them. Then, to finish up with, the American goes and throws some poor devil of a Militiaman over a cliff this very night.

"What a record!" Colonel Picón banged the desk in front of him and went on angrily, "There's enough against these men to hang half a battalion, and you have the infernal nerve to ask me to release them."

Simon nodded. "They've killed a lot of our people and rescued a lot of others, but that doesn't affect the fact that it would be bad policy on your part to..."

"Bad policy be damned!"

"Well, will you postpone the execution till I can get in touch with Valencia? I'm sure they don't know..."

"*They do know.* I cabled them full particulars directly I heard from Mudra, with the names of all the prisoners taken. There's the reply." Picón flicked a flimsy telegraph form across the desk. "It only came in ten minutes before you got here."

Simon picked up the form and read:

Execute all prisoners taken in Corrales affair institute rigorous search for escaped Condesa detain Ventura as hostage on lines suggested.

He put it down, hunched his narrow shoulders, and peered at the strong face of the man opposite. There was no trace of softness or mercy in it and he knew that Colonel Picón had the reputation of being unbribeable.

For a further five minutes they argued and wrangled. Simon reasoned and pleaded but the Malaga military command had suffered a great deal from the activities of Nationalist *saboteurs* behind their lines. Now that Picón had caught a bunch of them, and had the full weight of Valencia behind him, he was adamant to all appeals for mercy.

Suddenly Simon found that the palms of his hands were wet, and he was filled with unutterable horror at the thought that had come to him. He loathed violence of any kind; even the frequent sight of the dead and dying in this terrible internecine war had failed to harden him. He still felt sick in the pit of his stomach every time he saw the torn flesh of wounded men but, although he had not the least idea of how he was going to do it, he knew with the utmost certainty that he was going to kill Colonel Picón.

For Simon, that meant a premature ending to his work in Spain. The sacrifice of any further chance to help what he believed to be the best elements of the Spanish people in the fight they were waging to maintain their freedom. He must betray those who had faith in him and who had stood shoulder to shoulder to him in the belief that it was better to face death than to bow the knee before the false, man-made gods men call Dictators. Not only must he leave empty his own key-position behind the pitifully thin battle-line, but by a treacherous murder he must take one of their valued leaders from them. Yet he knew that there was no alternative. He had brought Rex into this himself. All his life long he would see Rex's great heart riddled with bullets. Then Richard, who'd been dragged in by the Duke. Dear, gay Richard. If he died it was as good as killing Marie-Lou too. And that charming, cynical old ruffian, De Richleau, who, he knew, in spite of their differences, still loved him as a son. No, every ideal must go overboard and Colonel Picón must die unless he gave way.

Simon made one last effort. "Listen," he pleaded jerkily.

"The Spanish Government—owes me something. I've done a lot for them, you know. Will you hold things up for twenty-four hours—until I can reach Valencia and talk to the people there myself?"

“I will not raise a finger to help you save these blackguards,” Picón said firmly, and with those words he signed his death warrant.

Standing up, Simon produced a letter from his pocket. “This is from Rex Van Ryn,” he said. “Like you to see it before you finally say no. It’s the one in which he gave information to the Government now worth *one hundred and fifty million pesetas* in hard cash.”

Throwing the letter on the desk he moved round to the Colonel’s side, adding, “If your English isn’t too good I’d better translate it for you.”

Picón picked up the letter and glanced at it impatiently. Near his elbow there lay a fifteen-inch shell splinter which he was using as a paper-weight. Simon’s right hand rested on the end of it as he pointed over the Colonel’s shoulder with his left.

De Richleau himself could not have delivered a swifter blow. The long piece of jagged steel flew up and descended on Picón’s head with a horrid crunching sound. He slumped forward on his desk without even a moan.

Simon had struck to kill. He dared not risk an orderly’s finding Picón still alive and bringing him round. They would know who had killed him when they found the body, but that was a different matter. Only the Colonel himself could tell them *why* he had been attacked and the place for which his attacker was likely to be heading.

With shuddering repugnance Simon lifted the still head, and nerved himself to look sideways into the distorted face. The eyes were wide and staring. Colonel Eusebio Picón was unquestionably dead.

The sweet, sickly smell of the strong perfume favoured by the dead man was strong in Simon’s nostrils. With a gulp of nausea he let the head fall back on the desk. Suddenly he became conscious of the awful silence which had succeeded their heated argument. The house was utterly quiet with the dead stillness of the midnight hours. The orderly was probably dozing again down in the hall, but even there he might notice the abrupt cessation of the murmuring voices in the room above. If he had cause to pay a visit to the landing he would certainly become suspicious of the unnatural silence, knowing that Simon was still closeted with the Colonel. In a jerky, hesitant whisper at first, then more loudly, Simon began to talk; repeating all over again the arguments he had used without success for the freeing of his friends.

For the next ten minutes he worked with frantic speed; continuing as he did so the grim and useless farce of reasoning with the dead body sprawled across the desk. Locking the door, he secured the Colonel's keys, ransacked the safe until he found the official forms and rubber stamps he wanted, typed out an order for Rex, Richard, the Duke and Cristoval to be turned over to him, and another to the Military Headquarters garage to supply him with a car for his own personal use. He then blacked one side of a piece of paper with a pencil, placed over its clean side a document with Picón's signature on it which he found in the safe, and under the blackened side, in turn, the two forms he had typed, traced signatures on each and carefully inked them in.

His hands were shaking now and his eyes were bloodshot, but there was still much to be done. Applying the rubber stamps to his two forged orders, he put the form-book and the rubber stamps back in the safe, relocked it and returned the keys to Picón's pocket. He then nerved himself for the most horrible business of all. Gripping the dead man by the collar of his dressing-gown he pulled him out of his chair and, still going on with his macabre monologue in a slightly louder tone, dragged the body as quietly as he could across the floor into the bedroom.

Pulling down the sheets, Simon got the dead man into a sitting position and, with a heave which required every ounce of his strength, hoisted him up on to the bed. Averting his glance from the staring accusation of the protruding eyeballs in the heavy red face, he rolled the body over on its side, pulled the sheets right up until only the hair was showing, switched out the light and tiptoed back into the library.

After a last look round to see that nothing there could give him away at a casual glance, he walked to the door, opened it and, thanking the Colonel for granting him the interview, wished him good night.

Except for Simon's voice the silence remained unbroken, and no one was in sight. Keeping a careful eye on the staircase, he reached back into the room again, knocked up the light switch, removed the key from inside the door, locked it on the outside and slipped the key into his pocket. Rousing the orderly whom he found nodding in his chair downstairs, he told him that the Colonel had now gone to bed and was not to be disturbed except on any matter of the greatest urgency which could not possibly wait until morning.

The man let him out into the street and, after pausing a moment to take another couple of aspirins, he hurried off towards Command Headquarters, his bird-like head thrust forward between his narrow shoulders.

On the production of his forged order at the Headquarters garage, no difficulty was made about providing him with a car. He said that he did not require a chauffeur as he meant to drive himself and there would be no room in the car for the man when he had picked up the party he had been ordered to collect. In five minutes he was out of the town and driving at full speed along the coast road to the west. It had begun to spit with rain and the moon, which would normally have been visible in its first quarter, was hidden by clouds.

On his twenty-minutes drive out to the bay he did not pass a single vehicle, which was just as well, seeing that he was now so shaken with fever that he could hardly keep the car on the road; and his wretched state was very nearly the cause of his complete undoing. Turning up the track to the monastery he skidded and, unable to control the car, ran off the road. Fortunately the car was running uphill at the time and there was no ditch on the inner side of the track where it skidded. For an awful moment it rocked and bounced over some small boulders, then came to rest with a loud crash against the cliff-face.

Shaken but unhurt, Simon climbed out to try to assess the damage. Both his headlamps had gone and he had no torch, but he could feel the water trickling from the smashed radiator, and the off fore wheel appeared to be jammed between two rocks. His only course was to abandon it. Stumbling and running he accomplished the mile climb to the monastery.

Actually, in spite of his accident, he had made considerably better time than the yacht, and arrived just one hour after Lucretia-José; but he lost a precious ten minutes severing the telephone wires which connected the monastery with Malaga before answering the challenge of the sentry at the gate.

The sergeant of the guard said that the Commanding Officer could not see him. He mumbled excuses about Colonel Mudra being ill, and added, "The Colonel blasted hell out of me when I went up half an hour ago to report a suicide."

“Ill or well, he’s going to see me,” Simon snapped, and impatiently waved the order with its Headquarters stamp in front of him. As the man turned away saying that he would see what he could do, Simon followed him straight up the broad flight of old stone steps and thrust his way past him into Mudra’s bedroom.

It was quite true that Mudra was ill or, at least, suffering severely and he presented a far from pretty spectacle. As Simon entered, the Colonel was sitting up in bed with blood all over his hands and face and staining the sheets pulled up about him. His left eye was obscured by a blood-stained bandage, and with a bowl of water beside him, he was endeavouring to staunch the flow of blood from a horrible wound which had half severed his chin.

Simon took no notice of his condition but demanded at once: “Where’re your three foreign prisoners?”

“Who’re you?” Mudra shouted angrily, “and what the devil do you mean by barging into my room like this?”

“My name’s Aron. I’m attached to the Finance Minister’s office in Valencia,” Simon said hastily. “We met in Madrid last month. Reception for the International Brigade; but you may not remember that.”

Mudra groaned and hoisted himself up among his blood-spattered pillows. “Yes, I remember. You were chasing these foreigners then, weren’t you? Well, what the hell d’you want with me?”

“Orders from Headquarters.” Simon waved the form which he still held in his hand. “Where are they?”

“In the lock-up. Where do you expect them to be?”

Simon heaved a sigh of relief. He had arrived in time. His friends had not yet been executed. He said more quietly, “Got an order here for four of your prisoners to be handed over to me.”

Mudra snatched the order and scanned it with his one sound eye. “What’s that fool Picón mean by this?” he bellowed in his aggressive barrack-square manner. “Why put off the shooting of these swine now we’ve got them?”

“Because they’re more useful to us alive than dead,” Simon replied evenly.

“You going to take them into Malaga?” Mudra winced as another spasm of pain caught him.

"That's my business."

"All right, smartie, but you'd best keep a civil tongue between your teeth when you talk to me. Brought an escort?"

"No."

"Well, *I* can't spare you one. I'm under strength as it is. Those pansy warriors in Malaga expect me to hold this place with half a company, and the rest of the battalion's spread out over a ten-mile front. We'd be in a fine pickle if the Rebels made a break-through one night. What're you going to do about it?"

"Take them without an escort."

"What! You're crazy. These toughs would eat a little chap like you."

"They'll come like lambs when I've told them what they're wanted for."

Mudra's heavy face took on a cunning look. "I believe there's something fishy about all this," he said suddenly. "I'm going to phone Malaga."

"Go ahead," Simon managed to reply quite calmly although actually his heart had begun to pound like a sledge-hammer. If Mudra, finding the line dead, sent men out to trace the break and they discovered it within a hundred yards of the monastery, he might be suspected of having cut it and Mudra would arrest him pending further enquiries. By the morning at latest he would be wanted all over Government Spain for the murder of Colonel Picón.

With a groan, Mudra picked up the receiver from his bedside-table, frowned and slammed it back again. "That's the fourth time our line's been broken this week. What with scores of dirty traitors living behind our front, and engineers who are fit for nothing, how can we be expected to win the ruddy war? Well, you'll have to wait until morning."

Simon tapped the paper with his forefinger. "This is an order. It's stamped 'URGENT.' If you refuse to carry it out you'll have to answer for it to the Military Governor in person."

"Oh, hell!" The wounded man put a hand up to the bandage over his eye from under which the blood was seeping. "What's the hurry? If you're on the level you can quite well wait until I get a confirmation of the order."

"*I can't wait,*" Simon insisted. "These people are wanted urgently for questioning. I've got a car down on the coast road and I can have them back in Malaga in twenty minutes."

“But they’ll escape! They’ll murder you before you’re half-way down the hill.”

Simon shook his head jerkily. “Know what I’m doing. We’re holding Richard Eaton’s wife as a hostage and they’d do anything to prevent harm coming to her. Besides, I can offer them their lives if they come quietly whereas, if they try to escape, they’ll only be hunted out by search parties and shot within the next few days.”

Mudra closed his sound eye and moaned again. He was evidently suffering intense pain and too racked by it to prolong the argument.

“Oh, all right,” he grumbled sullenly. “Have it your own way. I can’t hand over Cristoval Ventura, though.”

“Why not?”

“Because he’s dead.”

“What!” exclaimed Simon aghast. “But you had no orders to shoot him.”

“I didn’t shoot him. We were only holding him as a hostage because he let that woman of his escape. The crazy fool shot himself.”

“But why?” insisted Simon. “Why?”

“She turned up again here an hour ago—gave herself up so that he should be released—the hellcat! I took her gun off her but the little vixen had a three-inch stiletto in her hair, and look what’s she’s done to me! The chances are I’ll lose the sight of my left eye.”

“But when she gave herself up, why wasn’t Cristoval freed?” Simon asked hurriedly.

Mudra closed his sound eye and let his aching head fall back against the top of the bed. “He was freed but he was nuts on her, of course. We all knew that. I suppose he felt he couldn’t live without her. Anyhow, they came to tell me that he’d shot himself about twenty minutes before you turned up.”

“She still here?” asked Simon.

“You bet she is, and she’s not going to get away again.”

Simon was thinking fast. First, of poor Cristoval whom he had grown to like enormously. What a tragedy that he should have committed suicide on account of this girl; but there was no measuring what love could do to a man if it got him badly, and Cristoval had been crazy about his ‘Golden Spaniard.’ Then, of her. She’d tried to save her lover and Mudra had got fresh with her. Then she’d sailed into him with her knife. Serve him damn

well right. Of course, in her role as 'The Golden Spaniard' she had probably done the Government cause immense damage, but that was no longer Simon's affair. She was a friend of Richard's and the Duke's and a remarkably brave woman. Simon had a great admiration for bravery although he would never have believed anyone who had suggested that he was a very brave man himself. In for a penny, in for a pound, he thought. I doubt if I can do it but I'll try to save her.

With an upward jerk of his head he said, "This woman... the Condesa... she's in the same party as the others. Probably be able to give us even more important information if we can only make her talk. As Ventura's dead, I'll take her instead."

"Oh, no! You ruddy well won't!" thundered Mudra, his sound eye flashing open. "That order says nothing about her, and I'm having the dirty, double-crossing little slut shot first thing in the morning."

Simon nodded. He did not dare to plead for Lucretia's release. He had not got the ghost of a case, and knew it. To do so would only have been to risk Mudra's changing his mind about the others.

"All right. If you feel that way about it," he muttered diplomatically.

"Yes, I damn well do!" The wounded man angrily struck a handbell beside his bed, and added, "Now! Take the other three and get to hell out of here."

When the Sergeant appeared Mudra gave him the formal order to release Rex, Richard and the Duke; then with a sob of pain he turned wearily over on to his blood-soaked pillow.

Ten minutes later Simon had signed receipts for his three prisoners, and the four friends were breathing in the fresh night air outside the monastery gates. They were at last united again and free; but Simon's heart was heavy as he thought of Cristoval's useless suicide and the death that the coming dawn would bring to the beautiful spy whom he had known and liked as 'The Golden Spaniard.'

Chapter Thirty-five – Who Goes Home?

As they walked away from the monastery, the thought of Cristoval's death and Lucretia's coming execution brought the memory of Colonel Picón, lying murdered back there in Malaga flashing into Simon's mind again. He began to tremble violently and felt he was going to be physically sick. Dimly he realized that his friends were thanking him for having saved them, and questioning him as to how he had known about their plight.

Pulling himself together, he got out his aspirin-bottle, swallowed two more tablets in the faint hope of getting his temperature down, and told them what he knew of the few crowded hours that had passed since their capture. Curiously, as it seemed to him, even Rex, who had been on the side of the Government, seemed to think the killing of Colonel Picón rather a fine performance. Simon's mind became a trifle easier when the others pointed out to him that, with thousands of people dying every day, it could make little difference to the outcome of the war if one Colonel met his death on a battlefield or in his office.

When Simon came to the part Lucretia had played and her present whereabouts, there was general consternation. They had been walking slowly down the track that wound towards the bay. De Richleau stopped dead.

"You... you mean Lucretia's in the hands of that devil up there?"

Simon nodded. "Fraid so. Mudra got more than he bargained for when he tried to be funny with her. She stuck a dagger in his eye—but anyhow they'd have shot her. Did my best to get her out, but I couldn't risk the three of you being scuppered." He was going on to tell them of his conversation with Mudra, but the Duke cut him short.

"I'm going back," he said curtly, and turned to stride off up the hill.

"Hi!" Rex stretched out a long arm and caught him by the elbow. "You can't go chucking your life away like that!"

"I've got to go back," insisted the Duke wildly. "Do you think I'd leave Lucretia to be shot without lifting a hand to try to save her?"

"All right, all right!" Rex tried to soothe him. "I got her into this so I'm game to come too, but just wait a moment."

De Richleau shook his head. "No, no! I—she's my—my responsibility. You three are out of it now. It'll comfort me a lot to know that you're all safe on the yacht."

"The thought of you getting yourself killed won't comfort *us*, though," said Richard quickly. "I'd rather risk my neck again with you and Rex. But for God's sake let's make some sort of plan before we go butting into that hornets' nest."

"The devil of it is we haven't even got a gun between us, unless Simon's got one," Rex muttered anxiously.

"Ner." Simon shivered. "Never carry a gun. Not so fond of firearms as some of you people."

They stood silent for a moment. De Richleau, that master-spinner of plots, found that his brain had gone absolutely numb. Richard racked his wits in vain, and the exasperated Rex suddenly exclaimed, "It's a hopeless proposition to go in unarmed. We wouldn't stand an earthly!"

"I've got it!" cried Richard. "The yacht. There're plenty of arms on board if only we can get to her."

Moving swiftly to a gap in the rocks, they looked out across the dark waters of the bay. Far away in the distance the lights of the yacht could be seen but nearer, below, only about fifty yards out from the shore, there were also lights, and these were slowly moving as though they were those of a night party out spearing fish.

"Harbour people from Malaga. Evidently started on the gold already," Simon commented. "Spaniards usually take a month to answer a letter, but I threatened them yesterday with every penalty Valencia could impose if there were any delay about this business. Wish to God I hadn't now. Try going down if you like. They're certain to question us, but I've got a Government pass on me. Satisfy them with that, providing they haven't heard about—about Picón."

"Yes, all four of us are hunted men now," the Duke agreed soberly.

"I wonder how long they've been there," Richard said. "If an orderly went to rouse Picón with a message soon after you left, half Malaga knows you did him in by now. These birds would have heard the glad tidings if they've only just arrived, and if you show your face you'll be for the high jump."

Simon shook his head. "That's unlikely. They must have left before or very soon after I did. Point is, though, what can we four do, even with guns, against Mudra's troops? He's got half a company up there and Cristoval's Militiamen as well. Getting on for a hundred and fifty all told."

"See here," Rex angrily kicked away a stone. "In my view, the yacht's out of it anyway. There's no disguising the fact we're foreigners and my height gives me away. Those guys will sure have heard the whole story of how we were pinched earlier on this evening. They'll hold us for questioning for certain. Then where'll we be?"

"You're right, Rex," Richard sighed, "and I'm game to try anything once, but even with arms I doubt if the four of us could force our way into the place, let alone get Lucretia out."

"I'm not leaving here without her," the Duke declared.

"Sure," Rex agreed, "and I'm in on any game you can think up to free her."

"Besides," said Richard, "there's Bernal de Monteleone and the others. They risked their necks for us. Now we're free it's impossible just to chuck our hands in and abandon them all like this."

De Richleau moistened his lips. "That's true, and apart from any question of what we *ought* to do I—well, Richard may have guessed it but you others wouldn't know. Lucretia's more precious to me than I can say. I—I love her."

Richard nodded. "I thought so, and that means we've *got* to get her out. How to set about it with any chance of success is the question."

For a moment they stood there in silent dejection. It was still drizzling and very cold. The night was black and cheerless. Their hearts were as heavy as the thick clouds that now loomed overhead.

Simon had been thinking: 'I'm in this with the rest of them now. I've killed a man to get them out, yet they want to risk their necks again to save this Nationalist spy, and the Duke's gone nuts about her. I was trying to trick Mudra into releasing her myself half an hour ago. I've betrayed all my friends on the other side already. What will happen if I tell the Duke how to do this job? The whole front here may cave in. Well, these are the only people I really care about. I may as well go the whole hog now I've burnt my boats. God! This is awful. But it's the only way to save these three from chucking their lives away.'

He gulped hard, and said, "Only one thing we *can* do. Nationalist line's barely an hour's march beyond the monastery. I'll take you through the Government pickets if you've got enough pull to..."

"God bless you, Simon!" De Richleau burst out. "Oh, God bless you! We could get arms there and troops to help us."

"How'll we find our way through these damn mountains, though?" Rex objected.

"Can't miss it if we stick to the cart-track," Simon rejoined glumly. "Studied the map of this bit of coast yesterday in Malaga. For miles along it there's only the one road leading inland. That's what makes it so easy to defend."

"How did you get here, Simon?" asked the Duke quickly.

"Car. But I smashed the damn thing up at the bottom of the hill unfortunately. She'd take hours to repair."

"What about time?" demanded Richard. "We'll have our work cut out to make it—won't we?"

Simon peered at the luminous dial of his watch. "It's twenty to four. Sunrise about 6.30 down here at this time of the year. We've got just under three hours to get there, make our arrangements and get back. Got to palaver with the pickets on both fronts, too."

"Hell! We'll never do it," groaned Rex.

"We've *got* to," declared the Duke. He was now his own man again; as resolute, as self-confident and determined as ever. The sands of Lucretia's life were due to run out in one hundred and seventy minutes. Without the loss of a further second they set off at a brisk walk up the hill.

It was heavy going with the stones slithering about under their feet but beyond the monastery the slope was easier where it entered the mountain pass. The black shadows of the rocks on either hand engulfed them, but within half an hour of their start the rain had ceased and a fitful light came at intervals through the rifts in the clouds. No sound broke the silence of the night except their laboured breathing and the echoes of their footfalls.

After forty minutes' hard trudging they came to a small village. Every house was in darkness, and the only sign of military occupation was a dump of ammunition boxes on the roadside which they could just make out in the faint starlight.

“The main detachment’s stationed here, I expect,” said the Duke softly. “Thank God they’re all sleeping their heads off. The outpost picket can’t be far off now.”

Five minutes later they came upon it. The road twisted suddenly, flattened out, and ran on through a narrow gorge with beetling crags on either side.

They were brought up short by a sharp challenge.

Simon produced his special Government pass, but the sentry queried it and called his corporal who was crouching over a glowing brazier in a small lean-to built against the rock at the side of the road.

The corporal made a pretence of examining the pass but, as he held it upside down, they knew he could not read. He called a third man; the only other occupant of the shelter. The last comer seemed to think that the pass was all in order, but wanted to know what they meant to do in no-man’s-land.

Simon said they were Russian engineers sent from Malaga to make an inspection of the road ahead and assess its possibilities for an advance that was being planned. To support this statement the Duke began talking in Russian to Rex, who could not understand him but made appropriate grimaces.

The three men seemed satisfied, and De Richleau’s brain was ticking over again. Reverting to Spanish, he said conversationally to the picket, “Responsible job, this, with only three of you to guard the road if it were attacked.”

The corporal shrugged. “The blighters opposite haven’t fired a shot for weeks. There’s nothing doing in this sector and both sides are starved of ammunition. We command a mile of road from here with our machine-gun, and at the sound of a shot the boys in the village would soon come tumbling out.”

That was just the thing that De Richleau had in mind. He noted with a sudden brightening of his eye that both the corporal and his friend who could read had left their rifles in the shelter; only the sentry was fully armed.

Without a second’s warning the Duke’s fist shot out and caught the sentry a vicious blow on the side of the jaw. As the man fell De Richleau

tore his rifle from his grasp and whirling it aloft struck him over the head with its butt.

The corporal's hand flew to the automatic at his belt. Rex was just a fraction quicker and dropped him like a log with one smash of his mighty fist. The third man turned to run but Richard tripped him and, in less than five minutes, all three members of the picket lay bound, gagged and relieved of their arms, which consisted of three rifles and three automatics.

"Good work," muttered the Duke. "What luck that there were only three of them. If I hadn't taken a chance by hitting the sentry they'd have alarmed the village on our return with the Nationalists, and we would have had to fight our way through it coming back."

"Sure," Rex nodded. "If you hadn't socked him he had it coming to him from me. Any shooting up here would rouse out Mudra's bunch at the monastery, and if that happened our whole scheme 'ud be washed up."

Up in the pass it was intensely cold. They were not far below the snow line and in the light from the lean-to they could see each other's breaths like little puffs of steam in the frosty air.

Richard was staring at Simon. He was leaning up against the wall of rock, pale and ghastly in the moonlight. He had said nothing of his illness, and the haste of their forced march had prevented any of the others noticing his wretched state till now.

"What's wrong, old chap?" Richard asked quickly. "You look all-in."

"Fish poisoning," whispered Simon. "In bed with a temperature when Marie-Lou's message reached me. Feeling like hell."

"Of course," De Richleau said with quick sympathy. "Cristoval told us you were ill. You'd better stay here. We'll pick you up on our way back. You can keep an eye on these fellows. In the meantime look round their shack—they're almost certain to have some brandy or spirits of sorts. You'll be out of the cold in the shack and the rest will revive you a bit for our march back."

Simon nodded. "That'll be best. Having got you to the picket, I can't help you on the other side."

The road sloped downwards now and, leaving Simon, they set off at a steady trot. Another mile and they were challenged by the Nationalist outpost. Here the Duke tackled the N.C.O. and demanded to be taken to his officer immediately.

The man was slow-witted but obviously overawed by the Duke's imperious bearing. He said he could not leave his post, but sent one of his men with them to another village which lay only ten minutes farther along the road. When they reached it eighty-five minutes, exactly half the time-limit upon which Lucretia's life hung, had gone.

Once arrived at the cottage where the officer was billeted, De Richleau thrust the man aside and pushed his way in. On being roused from his sleep, the young Fascist captain was first indignant, then astonished, and finally extremely interested in what his midnight visitor had to say.

"The thing's absurdly easy," urged the Duke. "We've already laid out the Red picket up the road for you. Their main detachment is asleep in the village, and if you bring a couple of ladders with you it will be child's play to get in over the east wall of the monastery before Mudra's men are about.

"Think of it, man! The Condesa is related to half the Grandees in Spain. If you can save her from these murderers General Franco will make you a colonel. On my faith as a nobleman, I'll see to it that he does."

The captain had already begun to dress himself, but he paused suddenly when reaching for a boot. "What guarantee have I got that this is not a clever plot to lead me into an ambush?"

"God's Death! Since when have I looked like a Bolshevik?" stormed the Duke. "But if you want proof of my identity here it is."

He seized the Captain's jack-knife from a near-by table and slit open the sole of his boot. From it he extracted the two pages of his passport which held his photograph and description, both stamped by the British Foreign Office.

"That's good enough," agreed the Captain, "but don't you see that the moment we open fire at the monastery, the force in the village will tumble out and cut me off?"

"How many men can you muster?" asked the Duke.

"About fifty. The rest of my company's spread out in detachments along the mountains."

"Where's your main body?"

"In Olollda, over an hour's march away."

"Have they got any mechanical transport?"

"Yes, a certain number of lorries."

"Are you on the telephone to them?"

“Yes.”

“Right, then. Except for the first mile the road to the monastery is all downhill. It took us about seventy minutes, not counting delays, to get here. If we trot on the downward slope we ought to do it in fifty on the way back, —we must—but we can’t do it under. If you telephone your battalion headquarters at once, they can get reinforcements out here in ample time to be ready to surprise the village and hold the pass immediately they hear us attack the monastery.”

“That’s sound,” agreed the Captain. He was thinking now of the magnificent opportunity offered him to secure the pass, which would enable the Nationalists to cut off another small chunk of the Malaga sector, rather than of a simple raid to rescue prisoners. His enthusiasm had just been really fired when another snag struck him.

“But what if they telephone for reinforcements from the monastery?” he asked. “I may get cut off there.”

“It’s they who are cut off,” Richard interjected. “Our friend who’s guarding the picket severed their line himself.”

“In that case, I’m your man!” cried the Captain, flinging open the cottage door and shouting an order to rouse his men.

It took twenty minutes to get the men together and make the necessary arrangements over the telephone with battalion headquarters. The rescue party was a motley crowd clad in all sorts of garments, topcoats, leather jerkins, sheepskin jackets, forage caps, berets, breeches, trousers and army uniforms. There were a few regulars among them but most of the men were volunteers who had joined the Nationalist Army from the mountain villages of the district and, once they set off they made good going.

Yet as they passed the Government picket they had only thirty-five minutes to go, and De Richleau’s heart was sinking. The three men still lay trussed and gagged in the lean-to at the roadside. Simon had just taken the last of his aspirins. His head seemed to be alternatively swelling and contracting, but his hour’s rest had considerably revived him and he fell in beside them.

Breaking step, they tiptoed through the village where the platoon which constituted the main guard of the pass was still sleeping, but the crowing of a cock warned them that dawn was near.

Once past the village they began to run. Sweating and stumbling, they raced on down the steep, winding track. As they came round a bend in the road which, in daylight, would have given a marvellous view to the east over the sea, they saw that the stars were paling in the sky and that, almost imperceptibly, it was lightening to a paler sapphire.

For Simon this new effort undid all the good that his rest had done. His teeth were chattering while he ran as though he had a fit of ague. The poison in him had had no proper antidote for hours, and the fever from it had permeated his whole system. Rex had him by the arm, supporting him as they plunged forward down slope after slope. De Richleau, with Richard beside him, was a hundred yards ahead of the main body, desperately anxious now that the last moments of their time were so relentlessly running out, and terrified that their hope of rescuing Lucretia might fail for the lack of a bare five minutes.

At last the black bulk of the monastery came in sight, silhouetted against the paling sky. Sweating and panting they pressed on; the Captain put on a spurt, the rest of his men surged after him and they caught up the Duke, but the leaders of the rescue party were still a quarter of a mile from the monastery when a bugle-call shattered the morning silence with the *reveille*.

“Halt!” cried the Captain pulling up. “It’s no good. We’re too late.”

“To hell with that!” snapped the Duke. “We’re too late to surprise them, but not too late to attack.”

Seizing the end of one of the scaling-ladders, he dragged it forward with the men who were carrying it. His friends flung themselves upon it as well, and together they plunged on towards the monastery. For a second the Captain hesitated; then, with a wave to his men, he followed.

The stars had gone, the sky was grey and streaky. On the eastern horizon it was barred with black and orange, but none of them had a thought for the beauties of the coming sunrise. Leaving the road which ran west of the monastery down to the shore they passed inland of its main block on the north and slipped round the corner to its east wall. While the ladders were being put up De Richleau held a hurried, whispered consultation with the Captain, who agreed to let him give the signal for a general attack by firing the first shot, and passed the order on to his men.

Clutching the rifle he had taken from the sentry, the Duke was the first to reach the top of the first ladder. Hardly knowing what he did, but spurred on by a last effort of will, Simon stumbled after him. They slipped over the low parapet on to the stone-flagged pathway which ran, like a battlement, round the outer side of the broad courtyard wall, and crouched there protected from view by a second, inner parapet only a few feet from its top. Rex followed and Richard was beside them the next moment. The Captain and his men were already pouring over the wall from the second ladder, spreading out along it, and mounting their machine-guns.

Cautiously raising their heads they peered over the inner parapet. Fifteen feet below them, in the great square courtyard, figures were moving. A big arched doorway in the main building at its northern end was open, and a group of men were dragging the prisoners from it.

The grey light was still too dim for them to see distinctly, but one sagging form caught Simon's eye. It was a short figure, dressed in a sailor's oilskin cape and wide bell-bottomed trousers that hid the feet. Simon gripped the Duke's arm and pointed. "There she is... there! Dressed as a sailor—as she was last night."

Where the rescue party crouched behind the inner parapet of the east wall, they were almost concealed from the Militiamen below, and no one had yet heard the sounds of their stealthy approach. De Richleau was frantic to get into action, but he knew that he must give time for the whole of their force to get into position if their surprise attack were to achieve its maximum result. A swift glance to his rear and along the rampart showed him that nearly all the men were up now. With iron will he forced himself to start counting, determined to reach fifty before he fired.

All ten of the prisoners taken with them the night before had been dragged out and driven up against the blank south wall of the courtyard. They had all been blindfolded but their hands were not bound. Some stood proud and fearless ready to face death; others knelt, or crouched whimpering in terror. The Militiamen were lining up to fire a dozen yards away; busy loading their rifles. The Duke raised his rifle and, resting it on the parapet, aimed carefully. "Fifty!" he said aloud.

His rifle cracked. The N.C.O. in charge of the firing-squad screamed and fell. There was a thunderous burst of fire from the others on the rampart followed by the staccato note of the Nationalists' machine-guns. Two-

thirds of the Militiamen were killed outright and fell where they stood. The remainder, wounded and panic-stricken, attempted to stagger to the shelter of the doorway through which they had come, but were mown down.

The little group of prisoners was instantly galvanized into action. Almost with one motion their hands leaped up to tear the handkerchiefs from their eyes. For a moment there was wild confusion. At the first shot other Militiamen inside the building had grabbed up their rifles. A score of them were now pouring out of the doorway, firing at the first target that offered as they came. Three prisoners fell hit, and a Nationalist machine-gunner dropped sideways over his gun.

De Richleau's eyes were rivetted on the little figure in the sou'wester and oilskin cape. Midway along the southern wall a flight of steps led from the courtyard up to its top. At their foot the group of prisoners were now milling as the Militiamen's bullets spattered about them. Some had gained the lower steps and were scrambling up them.

"There she goes!" cried the Duke, springing up in his excitement. "There! Up the steps!"

Richard, Rex and Simon were all staring, their hearts in their mouths, in the same direction. If the prisoners struggling up the steps could reach the top of the wall and gain the shelter of its inner parapet, they would be safe from the hail of bullets.

"Go on!" shouted Richard. "Go on, Lucretia!"

"She's done it! She's done it!" yelled the Duke.

"Fling yourself flat!" As Rex's stentorian bellow sounded, there was an instant's lull in the din; then a single rifle cracked from an upper window of the main building.

"Oh, God, she's hit!" groaned Simon.

"Hell! And she's gone over—over the wall!" In a frenzy Rex turned and emptied the remaining contents of his magazine-rifle at the window from which the shot had come. Some of its glass tinkled down into the courtyard but the marksman remained unhit. Rex's anger had played havoc with his aim and Mudra's head, still swathed in blood-soaked bandages, showed for a second just beyond the open shutter. With his one sound eye he was leering down in triumph on the south wall where the remaining prisoners had taken refuge, and was raising his rifle to fire again.

Almost before Simon had spoken, De Richleau had begun to run. His three friends pelted after him along the rampart of the wall, and round its south-eastern corner to the group of prisoners crouching behind the parapet near the top of the steps.

Three men were uninjured, a fourth lay dead with a bullet through his head, a fifth clasped a shattered ankle and Bernal de Monteleone lay dying, a bullet through his lung, coughing blood.

He could not speak but as De Richleau came charging up he pointed feebly to the outer parapet of the wall. Another of Mudra's bullets hit the stone coping and ricocheted away with a loud whine, but the Nationalists turned a machine-gun on him and he was compelled to abandon his post of vantage.

The south wall overlooked the whole bay and was built upon a precipice which dropped sheer to the rocks five hundred feet below. Half-crazed with anguish De Richleau thrust his head over the parapet, dreading the sight he felt certain he would see. He shut his eyes for a second, then forced himself to look. There, far below him, lay a single twisted body in an oilskin cape. The sou'wester had fallen a few feet away, and the newly risen sun which heralded another day of agony for bleeding Spain glinted on the golden hair of Lucretia-José de Cordoba y Coralles.

Richard, leaning over by his side, saw the same tragic sight and a lump came into his throat. Lucretia gone—and her lover —and the gold. Oh, God, he thought, what a curse that gold has been. But for that they might still be alive, and the rest of us may yet lose our lives through our attempts to cheat each other of it.

Rex seized Richard and the Duke each by a shoulder and hauled them back. "Take cover, you lunatics!" he yelled. "They'll pot you here."

His action saved them. A score of men were throwing open the monastery windows, and next moment a hail of bullets spattered round the now exposed position on the southern wall. The Duke and the rest flung themselves flat, taking what cover they could from the inner parapet of the rampart.

Simon came staggering up and flopped down beside them; his face was ashen grey. "I can't fight any more," he gasped. "My head's on fire with this fever... I can hardly see...."

The Nationalists had pulled up their ladders from the far side of the east wall and were thrusting them over into the courtyard. Under the terrific fire of their machine-guns, the Militiamen had either died or retreated into the monastery. Waving his men on, the Fascist captain sprang down one of the ladders and his men came sliding after him. No sooner had they reached the lower level than they began to fire direct into the windows of the main building. Suddenly its great doorway was black with men again. The Reds came surging out to counter-attack, and a dozen hand-to-hand combats were in progress. The crash of shots and the rattle of machine-guns echoed back from the hills like the roar of an inferno.

Rex had crawled the few feet to the opening in the inner parapet where the steps came up to the rampart, and turned to shout above the shattering din. "Come on, boys! We must do our share!"

As he plunged downwards, his friends and the three unwounded Nationalists scrambled after him and hurled themselves into the fray.

De Richleau saw nothing of the fight. Afterwards he thought that he had downed two men with his empty rifle and shot another with his automatic. He struck and fired with the perfect timing that scores of combats had made instinctive in him, but his brain was almost unconscious of the fierce struggle that was in progress. He was saying to himself over and over again: "She was so young to die—so young to die."

Vaguely he knew that the Nationalists were getting the worst of it and were being driven back to their ladders against the eastern wall. In spite of their initial advantage the odds, which had started at nearly three to one, were too heavy for them, and the Reds had now manned nearly every window of the main building. He knew too that his own party was cut off and hemmed in to the south-western corner of the courtyard, but all power of leadership had gone from him. He could only groan and look helplessly about him, fighting meanwhile like an automaton.

It was Richard who took command in this emergency. "Can't stay here," he gasped. "They're too many for us. We've got to get out while the going's good. Rex! That doorway behind you. Smash it in. I'll cover you."

Two of the escaped Nationalists were still with them. Both had seized rifles from dead men and were fighting gamely. Richard's little party formed a ring round Rex while he battered with the butt of his rifle at a low door of the one-story building that formed the west side of the courtyard.

Glancing up for a second out of bloodshot eyes Richard glimpsed Mudra doing deadly execution with a machine-gun. Ten minutes before Simon had thought that he had reached the limit of endurance, but he was still fighting with all his ebbing strength.

The Nationalists were back on the eastern wall and hauling up their ladders. Three of their machine-guns were sending a murderous hail of lead into the packed mass of the Reds. The great doorway of the main building was choked now with a pile of dead and dying Militiamen. The whole courtyard was a scene of indescribable carnage.

Suddenly Rex let out a shout. "We're through! We're through! Come on, all of you!"

Turning, they dived through the door, one half of which now sagged upon its hinges. It led into a cloister which formed a continuation of the southern wall, and the five survivors of Richard's party dashed headlong down it. A dozen Reds came charging after them.

As De Richleau, who was bringing up the rear, entered the long, dim cloister, a bullet whistled by his ear. He turned and fired, dropping the first Militiaman with a shot from his pistol, and fled on. Wild shots echoed from the arched roof, one tore the sole from Simon's boot and another grazed De Richleau's arm. He turned again to reply with his automatic as one of the Nationalist agents fell at his side, shot through the neck. Richard had turned too and was emptying the magazine of his automatic over De Richleau's shoulder.

Suddenly they came to the end of the cloister and another door. Rex had it open and they streamed through it past him into full daylight. As he held it he wrenched out the big key, and hurling himself after them, slammed it behind him. Thrusting the key back on the outside, he locked it, just as their leading pursuers came crashing at its inner side.

Before them lay the road; to the left it wound down into the bay, to the right up into the mountains. Instinctively Richard turned left. Standing as near in as the shallow water of the bay permitted, he could now see the yacht. There lay safety if they could only reach her.

"This way! This way!" cried the remaining ex-prisoner who was with them, and he pelted off to the right.

Some of the Nationalists were already visible farther up the road. They had abandoned the eastern wall and had come round the north side of the

building. The Captain was blowing his whistle furiously in order to rally his men for an orderly retreat. From all directions they were dashing towards him, singly and in little groups.

Now that the firing in the monastery had died down they could hear the distant strife of another encounter. Up in the mountains the main body of the Nationalists was attacking the village, and there they would have the superiority of numbers.

As the ex-prisoner dashed up the road, Rex gave a wave to the Fascist Captain; and knowing that his party's safe retreat was secured by the Nationalists who now held the pass, the four friends began to run down towards the bay. The tug and crane barge were still lying there apparently deserted. If the beach was unguarded, as it appeared to be, the way for an escape by sea lay open.

Simon swerved and nearly fell. Richard caught him by the arm as they ran. In a bound Rex was beside them and seized Simon's other arm. He threw a last look over his shoulder and saw that the Nationalists had rallied round their officer.

They were falling back in good order, firing as they went. Next moment they were lost to view. The four friends negotiated the first two bends of the road in safety, but after that it was exposed to the fire of the Reds above.

The Militiamen Rex had locked in the cloister opened fire from between its arches, and the bullets clicked on the loose shale of the mountain track as they fled. Panting, sweating, they rushed from side to side taking advantage of every bit of cover they could get while they plunged and slithered down the steep slope.

Fusillade after fusillade of shots came from above, and before they were half-way down a machine-gun was brought into play against them. At each bend it sprayed the track with lead, tearing up the earth and sending loose stones flying.

For another five minutes they lurched on, ducking and diving. Rex winced as a rifle-bullet tore through his jacket, but he continued to urge the others to still greater efforts. Simon fell, but they dragged him to his feet and lugged him forward. Darting from side to side, slipping and slithering as the shots zipped on the rocks about them, they plunged helter-skelter towards the bay.

At last they reached the coast road and De Richleau gasped out, "Lucretia!" but Rex's hand thrust him on, across the road, towards the beach. Rex's great strength had kept him fresher than the rest, and he had already seen the launch which was rocking twenty yards out from the shore. It was evident that some of the yacht's crew had refloated it during the night, as he could see Marie-Lou standing up, waving wildly to them, in its stern.

As they crossed the sand bullets sprayed the shore, but the fugitives were a distant target now and their only danger was being hit by a stray. With feverish haste they plunged into the water; willing hands grabbed at them as soon as they were waist-deep and hauled them into the launch. All four collapsed in a heap on its bottom boards, utterly exhausted.

The boat turned and sped out to sea. The tearing fight for breath still racked their lungs. They were hardly conscious until they reached the *Golden Gull*, and still gasping from their race for life as they staggered up her gangway. Sweat and blood were caked upon them. Every muscle in their bodies ached.

With faltering steps Rex and De Richleau supported Simon towards the deck lounge. Richard paused to grasp his Captain's hand. "I—can't thank you enough for all you've done," he panted. "Thank the men too—will you? I'll thank them myself to-night. There'll be a big bonus for them all—when we reach England."

Captain Sanderson smiled. "That's nice of you, sir. It's been an anxious time. I needn't say how glad every one of us is to see you all safe on board, and to be leaving Spanish waters. Shall I order the ship to sea?"

"Please," Richard nodded, and, mopping the sweat from his face, turned to look for Marie-Lou.

She was speaking to the chief steward. "Hot bottles and hot blankets—lots of them. And coffee laced with brandy to the deck lounge as quickly as you can." Richard put his arm round her shoulders and they followed the others aft.

Rex was gloomily helping himself to a drink. The Duke was slumped in a chair, oblivious of all about him, staring with unseeing eyes towards the coast they were leaving. Simon lay at full length upon a sofa.

Marie-Lou bent over him and laid a hand tenderly upon his aching head. "I—I knew it wasn't going to be as easy as you made out last night," she

said with a little catch in her voice, “but you’ve brought all my big children back to me. Oh, Simon, you’re the bravest of them all.”

He grinned feebly. “Nonsense. My speciality—sorting out muddles.”

“I know. But you’re very ill, my dear. It’s bed for you at once.”

“Um. My job’s finished. Can stay in bed a long time now.”

“Anyhow,” remarked Richard glumly, “we’ve been through months of hell for nothing. With Rex’s help you beat us in the end. Your people have got the gold.”

Simon hoisted himself up a little and looked at Marie-Lou. “Someone working in the bay last night. We saw them. But the crane-barge and tender were still lying abandoned there just now. If it was Government men using them, why weren’t they towed back to Malaga when the work was completed?”

Marie-Lou nodded. “You’re quite right, Simon. Immediately I’d landed Lucretia I brought off the engineers and most of the crew. Once we got the crane working, it only took...”

Richard sprang towards her. “You don’t mean you’ve got it?”

“Yes. It’s all safe on board. We got the last bomb up half an hour before the fighting started. You don’t know how glad I was to have something to occupy my mind.”

“You *wonderful, wonderful, darling!*” Richard seized her in his arms and hugged her to him.

Simon spoke with sudden bitterness. “Thought as much. You’ll be able to buy Woolwich Arsenal for the Rebels now.”

When Marie-Lou could free herself from Richard’s embrace, she said softly, “No, Simon. It’s to be devoted to the people who’ve been rendered homeless by the war, irrespective of their political creed, in memory of Cristoval.”

Rex looked up quickly. “So you’ve heard already? Poor devil. His committing suicide couldn’t help Lucretia any, though, and our rescue party arrived too late by a matter of minutes.”

Marie-Lou’s violet eyes grew as round as marbles. “But— but, I thought you knew,” she stammered. “He didn’t commit suicide. He gave his life for her.”

“You’re wrong there. That’s why we’re all so darned miserable. We saw that tough, Mudra, shoot her down ourselves.”

“No, Rex, no!”

De Richleau roused himself and sighed. “As she was shot she fell over the precipice. I saw her body afterwards. There was no mistaking her lovely golden hair.”

“He fooled you too, then,” Marie-Lou cried excitedly. “Cristoval’s own men adored him. They reported to Mudra that he’d committed suicide while he was busy rigging Lucretia out in a fresh disguise.”

“Disguise?” echoed Richard, light dawning in his mind.

“Yes. She didn’t know then that he meant to take her place. A man called Sandoval smuggled her out of the monastery just before dawn and she was passing the foot of the cliff when Cristoval’s body came hurtling down within fifty yards of her. They were much of a height and to change her appearance he’d cut off her hair. It was the sight of her own hair, made up as a rough wig, and the oilskins on the body that told her what he’d done.”

“Holy snakes!” Rex cried. “She’s safe, then?”

“She’s down in my cabin, utterly prostrated by Cristoval’s death.”

Then a strange thing happened. In the ensuing silence, broken only by the hum of the yacht’s engines as she turned towards the Straits of Gibraltar and home, there came a fierce rasping sob. De Richleau, the iron man, had suddenly broken down. With a gasp that was half a moan he stood up, lurched towards the companion-way and staggered down it.

His friends stared after him in amazement, and Richard exclaimed, “Well, I’m damned! For weeks past I’ve known he was in love with her, but I’d no idea he’d got it as badly as all that.”

Marie-Lou reached up and put her arms round his neck. “You dear, stupid darling. Haven’t you realized it yet? I think I guessed from the very beginning, and when I saw her grey eyes last night I knew. Lucretia-José is his daughter.”

Albergo Cappuccini,
Amalfi,
Italy.

8 St. John’s Wood Park,
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England.

the end

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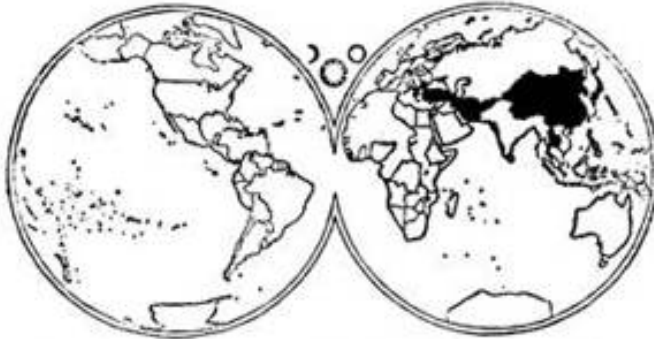
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