



*A Complete Novelette of the Spanish
Civil War*

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*Juan Jimenez, Protégé of Cordovas,
Zooms His Caproni Over the
Defenders of Spain!*

CHAPTER I
Preening for Flight

JUAN JIMENEZ was born of peasant stock. He could still remember his childhood and the pinch of hunger in his belly. He could still remember the odor of sweat that came from the body of his father at the end of day. He could still remember the sweat-blackened shirt clinging to the muscle contours of his father's stooped back and heavy chest, and the gnarled, twisted fingers of his calloused hands, and the vacuous expression of his toil-sodden face.

Until he was ten, Juan Jimenez believed that all mothers had eyes which seemed eaten by fatigue and dulled with the hopelessness of staggering labor in the fields and in the home. He thought it quite natural that ten members of a family should lie down to sleep together on the hard mud floor of a one-roomed house, the hardness of the earth broken by a tick stuffed with chaff. He thought it

quite natural that there was never quite enough to eat, and that he must work from sunup to sundown over rocky, hilly land to coax meager existence from a soil long since spent of its energy to create life.

He thought it quite natural that Don Jaime de Cordova y Badajoz should come riding over the hill on his white horse, with his saddle heavily plated with silver and his bridle and bit set with sparkling stones. He thought it natural also that Don Jaime should dispense the justice of the land—should sit out in the open field, behind his great table, with two uniformed soldiers behind him, and should merely have to speak, for the lash to fall on a naked back, or the heavy doors of the jail to close upon an offender.

Don Jaime was omnipresent and omnipotent. One could not offend Don Jaime, nor shirk *his* service. The lash was there, coiled, ready to hiss, and the naked blades of sabers ready to leap from the sheaths to uphold the power of the Law.

UNTIL he was ten, Juan Jimenez knelt in the dust of the roadside—the crooked, dusty, rocky track that led over the hills to Badajoz—when Don Jaime came riding over his fields. Knelt, as did all others of the land over which Don Jaime was patron and which he held from the King himself. The dust curled up from under the hoofs of Don Jaime's horse, and from under the feet of the horses of his escort and settled upon the head and wet face of the little boy in the road.

When Juan was ten the miracle occurred. Don Jaime came riding over the hill into the little village of mud huts. Sitting his horse proudly. An Arabian stallion which fretted and minced and spurned the earth with his feet and seemed to strike fire with his hoofs. A thoroughbred who carried his head high and pointed his delicate, small ears, and champed at the bit with his pink mouth.

He came galloping into the mean street. A girl child, an infant, screamed for some reason, rose up out of the street, fled, almost under the hoofs of the Arabian. And the hoarse, startled, reared violently, lunged sideward. The proud figure of Don Jaime slipped perilously from the saddle, fell with one foot trapped in the heavy, metal-covered stirrup. The stallion lashed out with sharp, fast hitting heels, and galloped crazily through the streets, with Don Jaime bumping against the earth, his fine uniform dragging in the dust.

There was a yell of alarm from the escort and a clatter of hoofs, but Juan Jimenez was quicker than the rest. At the first leap of that white horse he had thrown his body forward. His hands had seized the horse's mane. His young legs drove his body up from the ground, and he came down astride the neck of the Arabian. He clutched the heavy curb bit, dragged back with all his strength.

And magically the white horse came to a stop, stood trembling, with rolling eyes. Stood, and the escort threw itself from saddles and helped Don Jaime extricate himself from the stirrup. For a long moment Don Jaime stood there, his face white, his head bleeding a little, staring at the stallion and at the boy who sat astride of his neck, gripping the reins, holding the horse in check.

Then Don Jaime walked forward slowly and looked up at Juan. "What is your name, boy?" he asked.

"Juan Jimenez, Excellency. I am the son of Jose Jimenez who is your tenant."

"Where did you learn to ride?"

"I did not learn, Excellency."

Don Jaime made a face for the benefit of an officer of his escort. "He did not learn!" he repeated.

The officer laughed. He was relieved that Don Jaime should take this so well. "All these little monkeys are born riders, Excellency," he told Don Jaime.

"He has a straight back and a strong body and a quick eye," remarked Don Jaime. He looked up at Juan again. "How did you think to do that?" he demanded.

"I did not think, Excellency. I—just—did it—because Your Excellency was being hurt."

"You know you saved the life of your patron?" Don Jaime asked, almost fiercely. "What kind of a reward do you think you should have for such a service?"

Juan looked at the great man. "I did not act for reward, Excellency. Such a small thing—"

Don Jaime's face blackened for an instant. "So, you think it a small thing to save the life of a Cordova?" he asked.

"No, Excellency, that is a great thing, but my part was so small. A Cordova would have saved himself without my aid."

Don Jaime stared. Then he laughed. "By heaven—that does not sound like the utterance of a peasant! That was spoken like a diplomat. This boy has possibilities! What do you want to be, boy?" he asked.

Juan's eyes glittered for an instant, looked at the uniform of Don Jaime and his officer, then he lifted his head.

"I would like to be a soldier—an officer," he said firmly.

"Can you read?" asked Don Jaime.

Juan Jimenez stared. "Read?" he faltered. "No, Excellency."

"You must read and write and count to be an officer."

"Yes, Excellency." There was a sudden collapse in the young voice. The knowledge of the impossible. That all things were always impossible.

"An officer, eh?" said Don Jaime ruminatively. "He would make a good officer—to think and act so rapidly. Yes—a good officer. Send me your father, boy," he said suddenly.

Juan Jimenez watched his father push forward through the knot of villagers about Don Jaime. "I am the father, Excellency," he said humbly.

"You have a good son there," praised Don Jaime. "A fine son."

"I have five more sons—and two daughters," explained the father nervously.

"**Y**OU will send me this son—to Badajoz—at once," commanded the Don. "He wants to be an officer. He shall be an officer—you hear what I say?"

The father took a deep breath. His mouth opened for an instant, but it closed again. Finally he said: "Yes, Excellency."

The patron turned to his steward. "See that Jose Jimenez is relieved of the necessity of paying taxes for three years. Give him one hundred pesetas in gold. This because his son saved the life of a Cordova."

And Juan Jimenez saw his father's knees sag until he was kneeling in the dust with his hard, toil-coarsened hands clasped in ecstasy, his face working, with wonder on it.

"A million thanks, Excellency. A million prayers for the health and life of Your Excellency. A million blessings upon the head and house of Your Excellency—"

Don Jaime lifted the boy down from the stallion.

"You heard?" he asked. "You will come to Badajoz tomorrow to begin being an officer."

Juan Jimenez' heart was thumping. "I hear, Excellency," he said.

Don Jaime mounted the quieted white stallion. In the doorway of the hut, Juan Jimenez' mother held her son in her arms and wept over him, and called upon God to witness the miracle of such a son.

And the next morning, with the sun, Juan Jimenez went over the hill, along the road, toward Badajoz and the house of Cordova.

CHAPTER II

Skies Stained Scarlet

CAPTAIN JUAN JIMENEZ stood on the heights at Pamplona beside his tri-motored Caproni bomber. With the dawn, men had been loading the belly of the bomber with iron eggs. The great ship bulked hugely and dwarfed the men. A sergeant-mechanic in the cockpit started the motors one after the other. They coughed and spat or gushed blue smoke and flame before they settled into a steady, rhythmic beat.

Captain Jimenez was studying a map of the French-Spanish border around Irun. His flight commander, General Molo, placed his finger on the map.

"You understand, Jimenez?" he asked tersely. "The whole section between Irun-Behobia-Biriatou must be cleared. You must give special attention to the enemy machine-gun concentrations which are resisting troop advances. The main fighting centers about La Puntza hill on which the government troops are making a last stand. Comb the territory carefully, fly low, look for resistance, bomb it out of existence. La Puntza is the last town standing between us and Irun and we must have Irun tomorrow."

Jimenez nodded and took the map in his hands. "I understand, Excellency," he said alertly. "I shall do everything possible."

The general put a hand on his shoulder. "I know you will, lad," he told him with a paternal pat. "You will take your three machines again—and again—until we have won. Good luck, my son."

And Captain Jimenez climbed up to his high perch in the forward cockpit of the Caproni. Behind him his gunners were in their seats, helmeted and goggled, guns unslung. The bomber was in his tiny booth, fussing with his sights. The motor ticked over. Further downfield stood two other Capronis readied for flight.

Jimenez moved the controls, tested his motors. After a moment he lifted his hand in the signal, and poured the throttle to the powerful monoplane. It roared forward, skimmed over the earth, grew lighter, lifted its tremendous bulk, lunged upward into space.

Juan Jimenez sat there, his hands handling the controls delicately. Except his helmet and goggles, he wore no flying equipment. His uniform was the uniform of the Spanish Foreign Legion. His face was black with the North African sun. His little black mustache was trim and crisp, his fierce black eyes looked over the horizon of the world. His mouth was hard and firm.

Many things had happened to Juan Jimenez since the day of the miracle. There had been the great house of Cordova, and the new clothes, and the interest of Don Jaime in the career and progress of his protégé. And there were times when Don Jaime had looked at this straight-backed, fiery-eyed lad with a soft light in his proud old eyes, for Don Jaime had no son of his own.

But Don Jaime had a daughter and her face was soft and dusky. Her body was like the white statues surrounding the fountain, and her voice was like the deep note of a bell. Don Jaime frowned at first when the two children played and laughed together, for it was not good that a daughter of the house of Cordova should be so intimate with the son of a serf-peasant. But when Juan Jimenez had blossomed into the appearance and mannerisms and speech of a gentleman, Don Jaime did not scowl. Instead he wondered what kind of children would be born to this daughter from a strong husband, like this boy, Juan.

The officers of Don Jaime's staff instructed Juan as a soldier. He wore his uniform and he carried his sword and he commanded Don Jaime's soldiers under the watchful eyes of the officers.

And when he was fifteen he went to military school, and spent four years—hard, grinding, toil-filled years. Then he graduated as an officer, and wore the uniform of his regiment. He came home after that schooling. His father and mother stared at him as he dismounted. And it seemed that his mother was on the verge of bowing her head. His brothers and sisters stood in silence and stared dumbly.

Somehow Juan Jimenez felt that he had come back to a place peopled with ghosts—had come back to the living dead. The house seemed more wretched, more mean, than ever. And Juan Jimenez heard the envying whispers of the villagers and they burned within him. He saw the bare feet and the lined, parched faces, and the red-rimmed eyes, and he saw how the shoulders of even the young women sagged, and how their bodies were old when they were yet young, and heard how the babies cried, and saw the faces of the men—the men who had never been over the hill—and who did not know that a world existed beyond Badajoz. Ragged, almost naked, clinging desperately to barren, worn-out land, hacking at it with poor tools, burning with the sun, shivering with the chill.

He looked at his own hands, soft, white, shapely. This mud hut seemed like a dream. He thought of Isabella de Cordova y Badajoz, her proud beauty, her sweet, trembling kiss. He had blushed even while his heart surged within him. Now he blushed, too; his loneliness was like a sickness deep in his heart.

And a voice whispered within him. "These are your people. These hills, these stony ridges—they

are yours. This sun which beats down on their heads is the same sun which shines on your uniform. You are born of their toil."

Then he rode back over the hill toward Badajoz with a strange unrest, a strange hunger and that strange pain in his heart. And it seemed that wraithlike invisible hands were trying to pull him down from the white horse—drag him back to the earth.

Then Juan Jimenez fixed his eyes on the heavens, and again went back to school. After a year he became an *aviadore*, a military pilot, with wings on his tunic. He flew. He drove planes into the far heights and looked down on the world, and sometimes he smiled as he flew, wondering what that mother and father would do and say if they could see him.

WHEN King Alfonso fled from his throne, Jimenez was in Africa, fighting against the wild tribes which were in constant revolt against Spain. He heard rumblings of "the people." Government by the people. No more kings. No more dons. No more grandees. The land was to belong to the peasants.

In Africa there was no such talk about government. The Army was in Africa. The fierce, bustling Legion. And the Legion was recruited to greater and greater strength and greater and greater quantities of war material were dumped down in Spanish African ports and stored carefully.

The Moors were uniformed and trained, given new knives and new rifles and shoes. The Moors, for five centuries the blood foes of the Spaniards. Deadly, vicious fighters.

And Lieutenant Jimenez became Captain Jimenez and wore decorations on his tunic. His fellow officers said of him, enviously, half in admiration:

"He will be a major before he is thirty, that one, and a colonel before he is forty. And he will certainly be a general."

Then the Foreign Legion started to move. The Capronis were landed on the African sands, twenty or more of them, and for days, Juan Jimenez and his fellow pilots shuttled back and forth across the sea, the ships laden with soldiers—the Foreign Legion and the Moors.

Trip after trip, putting the Foreign Legion ashore in Spain. Grim eyes, heavy-handed troops, merciless because the country in which they fought

knew no mercy to victor or vanquished. Hardened to the sight of death and suffering because they had lived day by day with death, disease and destruction. Men who killed the wounded as a matter of course because it was more humane to kill them than to permit them to die, festering under a hot sun, when no medical or surgical attention was possible.

GUNS, tanks, artillery, moving across the sea, expertly, rapidly—to Spain.

To fight against Spaniards. To fight against peasants and workers, those who dared to defy authority by right of birth.

Madrid, with the Capronis flying overhead, and the bombs crashing in the streets, and the fronts of whole houses blown to a shambles by the low flying, racing bombers. With blood spattering the paving stones and spurting into the air. With crowds of people cowering, running to cover—Spanish people. Day after day, night after night, dropping bombs on Madrid.

While on the ground, the Legion marched over Spain. And the Moors, grinning, those wicked knives unsheathed and those naked bayonets gleaming, stormed into village after village.

There were times when Juan Jimenez closed his eyes, and was sick. How the Moors loved those mass executions—lining fifty or a hundred people in a long line, and killing them all with one burst of machine-gun fire, laughing as they killed. Spaniards dying—at the hands of Spaniards. A war of extermination on both sides. When a position was taken, no defender remained alive.

Day after day, long lines of prisoners marching in the dust of the roads, herded along by the grinning Moors. Men, ragged, dull eyes, drooling at the mouth. Some of them dying as they marched, from shocking wounds which no one had time to bind. Women carrying infants, children, whimpering, clinging to the sodden skirts of mothers. All of them—going over a hill—and then the sound of machine-guns, and screams, and the smell of blood in the air.

All because they loved the land. All because they clung fiercely to the land. All because they would not give up the land. That poor, exhausted, barren soil of Spain.

Leathery-faced, bleary-eyed peasants, plodding with blank faces, knowing they were going to death, and going grimly, silently and stolidly. With

Spaniards standing by, faces inflamed with hate and rage, and giving the orders which killed these peasants by the hundreds.

Sometimes Juan Jimenez closed his eyes after a sharp breath. A face—so like his father's face it made him stare. A body like the worn, twisted body of his mother as he had last seen her—going along the road, eyes straight ahead.

And a shudder shook him, and he turned away sick. Why couldn't they see as he saw—as Don Jaime had taught him to see? Why did they let themselves be mowed down like cattle, like dumb mindless cattle?

Along the roads, bodies—the dead—everywhere. Young men, dead, sprawled out in the grass, looking with dead eyes up at the sun, the blood still running from their wounds.

And more and more marching columns, going to the machine-guns. Until the whole land seemed filled with the sick-sweet smell of decaying bodies and festering blood.

A thousand feet over Irun, Captain Juan Jimenez looked down on the heights of La Puntza. There was a thin, ragged series of rifle pits on the top of the hill. The summit was wreathed by the flashing of exploding shells and drifting smoke. Crews crouched about machine-guns, and the gun spat and chattered at moving bodies going doggedly up the hill, rushing from rock to rock, bodies, with the sun glinting from steel helmets, men of the Legion, fearless, pushing on over the bodies of their dead, charging up into the face of those searing, deadly blasts from machine-gun muzzles.

On top of the hill a ragged army of workers—Loyalists. White shirts, ragged trousers, bare feet, clutching rifles, crouching down in the pits, with a withering rifle fire crashing out of the trenches. Women with them, understanding the great need of defense, firing beside the men.

And the shells from the batteries on the plane below bursting wickedly among them, catching them up, breaking them to bits, smashing them to quivering masses of bloody pulp. Shell bursts, racing along that line of entrenchment like a grass fire, scorching, burning, blasting. The dead tumbled about, arms flung out, mouths open.

For days this had been going on. The battle for Irun and the sea. Reckless, insane killing. No mercy on the top of that hill, no mercy on its flanks. Irun a blasted, ruined heap of wreckage,

burning so fiercely that the glare of the flames could be seen from twenty miles away at night.

In the streets, gaunt-faced men and women, chained to the front of buildings like captured animals. They were the Rebel prisoners the Loyalists had threatened to chain in the line of artillery fire if the attack on Irun was not abandoned. Five or six hundred of them. Some half buried under fallen façades.

All of them Spaniards, being killed by Spaniards.

THE three Capronis droned in over the defenses on the top of La Puntza. The white-shirted fighters on the top of the hill shook fists and rifles in impotent rage. They fired at the bombers. Machine-guns were uplifted, made a foolish attempt to blast down the Capronis.

Three bombs fell out of the belly of Captain Jimenez' ship. He watched them drop, slanting. There was a smear of flame from the top of the hill. Rock lifted a hundred feet in the air. The hilltop shook and shuddered with the violence of the explosion. Bodies whirled around crazily like scraps of paper in the wind.

Other bombs fell on top of the hill. The whole area was riven, broken, pulverized. Out of the hell, ragged men and women, with streaming hair and screaming voices, fled the destruction which murdered them. Fled down the hillside toward Irun.

The shining helmets of the Legion were dotting the hillside, going up with a rush, yelling, and the bayonets were at work among the defenders. They were like tigers. They fell among the shock-sodden defenders. The blades of the bayonets no longer glinted, but they were dulled with the red of Spanish blood. The remnant of the attacking battalion of the Legion stood and cheered, and then went on with the business of death.

From Irun the Loyalist guns opened on La Puntza. New shell concussions rocked the heights. Death struck among the victors. A ragged line of irregular troops swept up the hill.

Fear, panic swept through the town. The way to France was choked with refugees, swarming, carting impossible bits of personal property.

The Rebel guns opened on the road, blew great chunks out of that long line of slowly moving people.

The three Capronis came in over the town. The bombs fell. The houses were seized with

convulsions. The men and women, chained in the streets were blown to bits. That was war, one could not hazard the victory for a few hostages.

Bombs in the road—blasting great craters in space which had a moment before been choked with fear-maddened people.

ONE of the Capronis suddenly staggered, weaved about in space. There was a gash in its right wing. The wreckage of its right wing motor hung down grotesquely, seemed suspended on a string. It went down in ugly circles. The gunners were standing up in seats, staring over the side of the ship.

Suddenly one of them jumped. His parachute opened a hundred feet below the ship. He floated about.

And on the ground, the milling people forgot to run, forgot to be afraid. They circled around under that falling parachute, they chased it back and forth, their faces turned upward like a white blur. Trotted this way and that with the vagaries of the wind which moved the chute. Their arms were outstretched, hands like claws.

The gunner drew his pistol. He fired down at the faces under him. Then he touched earth—and the mob was upon him, hiding him from sight—working with hands and feet and teeth. Crushed and stamped and ripped at the body of that gunner. Tore the chute to shreds.

The big Caproni smeared into the earth, broke its back. The second machine-gunner did not jump. He stayed in his cockpit, held in by his belt. The fuselage of the ship slanted at a crazy angle. The mob charged the ship. He stood up in his seat, brought his gun to bear, fired, coldly, implacably, mowed them down, killed three and four at a time with the same bullet in that crazy press of human bodies.

Then the mob swept over the ship, rent it with their hands—and the pilot, the bomber and the machine-gunner disappeared in the swirl of hate and blood-lust.

The ship was reduced to splinters.

And Captain Jimenez turned his head away, a leaden weight of sickness in his belly. Spaniards rending Spaniards.

"That was a splendid piece of bombing," a voice seemed to be whispering. "Just the lift we needed to clear La Puntza. Tonight our men will be in Irun—and then—we will teach them to chain men

in the streets like dogs! Heaven help anyone the Legion finds in Irun this night. All day the Legion had been walking over the bodies of its own dead. The Legion will not leave a stone standing in the city—nor a Red alive.”

Then another voice cried out within him. “But Irun is *Spanish!* The Legion is Spanish. The people we are killing and who are killing us—are Spanish.”

Then he was down on the ground, legs dead and belly sick. His major was standing beside him, applauding what he had done, laughing jovially. “Tomorrow we leave this hell hole,” the major said. “We go to Badajoz—to another hell hole. They are fierce there—”

The word smashed upon Juan Jimenez’ brain like a shrapnel shell.

“Badajoz?” he asked strangely.

“Surely! Ah, I forgot. You are from Badajoz. A nest of traitors. The most stubborn, bloody-handed, murdering blackguards in the whole of Spain. We must crush them—wipe them out!”

CHAPTER III

End of Flight

THERE is was. The House of Cordova, like the bones of a cow that had died of starvation and been burned. Blackened embers, and a nasty hole in the ground. Down there somewhere was a bloodstain against the wall where the peasants of Badajoz had executed Don Jaime de Cordova y Badajoz.

There were the hills over which Juan Jimenez had trudged the miles between his father’s mud hut and Great House. Those rolling, rocky, plow-scarred hillsides, in ruins, without even the meager crops of yesterday. With the smoke rolling up from a dozen villages and with the bodies of the unburied dead lying in the streets.

The Capronis soared overhead, dropped the deadly bombs and the mud huts flew into spurts of dust. Along the road there were rifle pits, and craters formed by exploding shells. The bombs were raining down and the scream and blare of airplane engines filled the heights.

Gushing, flaming death, falling on the crooked backs of the peasants. Death which killed them in droves, and against which they could not fight.

The steel-helmeted troops, charging fiercely stormed into position after position. Stormed

through the streets of that little village in which Juan Jimenez had been born. Rifles spat defiance, even as the bombs fell and blew the defenders into oblivion.

Smoke drifted and rolled, and the moving wall of flame consumed the village and behind the fire came the steel helmets of the Rebel troops. And the peasants fought from behind breastworks formed by piling up the bodies of their neighbors and children. The bodies of their own dead, and struck, and struck, and struggled until they were cut down, or pierced with bayonets.

All day the prisoners marched toward Badajoz. The dust in the road was churned by their bare feet. The sweat ran down their naked backs. They marched with vacant eyes and grey faces. Up the hill, down the hill, over the next hill.

Juan Jimenez in his new major’s uniform and his new decoration stood on the top of a little hill and stared. For La Puntza, Juan Jimenez had been decorated. For the reduction of the Loyalist lines north of Badajoz he had been made major.

Those dead eyes looking at him—eyes of the prisoners marching by. Now and then a man or a woman in that line turned face and spat at him. Now and then a wild-eyed, sobbing young girl would scream out curses at him.

All day long he stood there and watched them herded by like cattle. Once Juan Jimenez had stopped a Moorish non-com and had said: “Where are you taking these people?”

And the Moor had stared almost insolently, and he had answered: “To the bullring, Excellency—where else?”

“Bullring?” asked Major Jimenez.

“Ay—*La Plaza del Toros*,” grinned the Moor. “And it will take many monkeys to sand it after this day’s spectacle. Look at them!”

And he ran back to catch up with his fellows, leaving Juan Jimenez to stand and stare.

And then, somewhere in the dust which came up from the column, a voice cried: “Juan! Juan!”

An insane face broke from the grey of the procession and he felt iron hard hands around his neck and a fever burned, parched mouth was kissing him.

And he looked down at the face of his mother.

Her hair, like coiled snakes, fell in wild disorder over her head and shoulders, down upon her half naked body. There was dried, matted blood on her dress and her hands were burned from holding a

rifle. And she kissed him, and crooned over him in a cracked, broken voice.

"Juan—Juan. My baby!"

And then, as if for the first time, she saw his uniform, and hate and rage filled her eyes and she pushed him away with the flat of her hands, recoiled from him.

THEN he saw his father. Dragging feet, bowed head, making furrows in the dust, as if great weights were attached to his feet. Face too dead to be alive. Set in deep lines. A cruel gash across the flesh of his chest.

And Juan Jimenez in his major's uniform walked along the line with the procession of prisoners, and he heard hoarse voices cursing him.

And the dust got into his nostrils and strangled him, and he marched up and down the hills.

"But why do you fight like this?" he demanded of his father. "What is there to dying that is so holy? What is this thing you fight for? Don't you know—you are fighting against Spain—your own land?"

And the old man's eyes glinted for a moment behind the grey mask of the dust, and he said: "You could not understand. We fight for the land. We are Spain. Our sweat, our blood, our bodies, are Spain. We toil—it is right that we live for our toil, that we own the land. It is ours. It was given to us. We will never give it back. There will be no Spain without us."

Juan fell silent, groping to understand. But all he had been taught so painfully, by Don Jaime, was a wall which his groping mind could not pierce.

And the father said, dully, like a whisper: "Go back—you have nothing to do with us. You are a soldier—you are a 'gentleman.' You are a friend of the Foreign Legion criminals, of the Moors! You cannot feel the people and the land. The boots on your feet have drained the land out of your blood!"

"Faster! Faster!" barked the Moors. Here and there they prodded a stumbling figure with the bayonet.

They came over the last hill. Into Badajoz.

"Where are my brothers?" asked Juan Jimenez.

The croaking voice of the mother sounded. Her face was expressionless. "Dead," she said. "All dead—fighting. Go look at them, Juan. They are lying in the field in back of the house where the rifle pits were dug—where the bombs were dropped."

"And the girls—Dolores and Inez?"

"Dead. There is no difference between girls and boys now. They are the same—they die the same—they hate the same—they kill the same. You will find them—lying in the same place."

There was a little shuddering sigh from the head of the column. Below at the foot of the hill, surrounded by its trees, rose the whitewashed wall of the bullring of Badajoz.

In other days during the fiesta, the bulls came by this road, the black, sharp-horned fighting bulls, with glossy coats beautifully groomed. Going down the little hill to the bullring, to make a holiday for the people of Badajoz.

And now the long line, shuffling in the dust, stood and looked down at the bullring, and a strange animal-like cry, almost like the lowing of the bulls broke from the men.

The Moors, the only men in uniform, moved along the line, prodded bodies with bayonets and rifle butts, grinned, forced the column to move. Until the head of the column went into the bullring. The hundreds of them. Until Juan Jimenez said goodbye to his parents, under the main arch of entrance, and saw them driven into the space.

An hour passed and he was in the field tent, standing stiff, white-faced.

General Molo said: "Major Jimenez, I cannot understand your interest in these people. It is dangerous, frankly. It does not become an officer of field rank to show such interest in a mob of ruffians and cutthroats."

Juan Jimenez' voice sounded in his ears as if it spoke from a great distance. "Perhaps, Excellency, it is because the two in whom I am most interested are my father and mother!"

General Molo stared. "Your father—and—" he said slowly. His face was suddenly dark. "Soldiers have no fathers and mothers at a time like this, Major Jimenez. Bloodlines have been wiped out. This is civil war—brother against brother if necessary—to the last man, to the bitter end."

"Because we have guns and money and can kill—are we saving Spain—by murdering Spaniards?" Juan asked dully.

Molo's face was suddenly black with anger. "You are overwrought, lad," he said, with a forced kindness.

"So—" said Jimenez hesitantly.

"I ordered a full investigation, Major," nodded the general. "What I learned—is better spared. It is

a blessing that the sons and daughters of your family died fighting. Beyond question, they were the leaders here. They were the core of the whole resistance in this countryside. Your sister—the one called Inez—was the infamous ‘Red Flame.’ She fought and led more fiercely than any of the men. I am sorry—it has all been established—by the prisoners themselves. They are proud of your sisters and your brothers—proud of the part they had in murder and bloodshed. It grieves me that the father and mother of a brave officer, a comrade-in-arms must die, but there can be no exceptions—no favors.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Juan Jimenez in the same dull voice.

He saluted, turned like a soldier, marched out of the room. The general’s face twitched as he watched him go. Then he went back to work on the papers on his desk.

AND Juan Jimenez walked down the hill, to Badajoz, and came to the barbed wire before the bullring. The Moor sentry saluted and looked at him curiously as he passed.

Inside, three or four hundred people crouched miserably in the dust, red-eyed, starving, dying of thirst. Here and there one of them lay on the ground—dead. Juan Jimenez searched for his father and mother until he found them.

They were gathered together by the side of the ring. They sat on the ground, side by side. Their dead eyes were staring at the tiers of seats and at the machine-guns which were set up on those banks of seats—muzzles pointing toward the arena.

And Juan’s voice said: “I am here.”

Suddenly there was a hunger in his heart. A hunger for that earthen floor and those rocky, rolling hills which were watered by the sweat of all the Jimenez who had labored over them. There was a hunger to feel the sun on his naked back.

And a voice said in his brain: “Why do you wear that fine coat? You are a part of the land. You were born to it. *These* are your people. *This* is your place! Can you walk out of here, and leave them—look on them and fight down the cry of the blood in your veins?”

And he stood staring at the seamed, pitted faces of his parents.

With a great sob ripping at his throat, he turned and fled. Ran, like a mad, tormented thing, until once more he stood outside the bullring, and his

heart beat like the tumult of a gun within his chest, and the sweat of agony slid down his pale, dust-caked face.

And a hand touched his arm, and a voice said to him: “Juan—Juan Jimenez—you are here!”

And he whirled and his mouth fell open and he stared into the face of Isabella de Cordova y Badajoz.

Her face was soiled with grime, but her eyes were soft and wet with tears of gladness. She looked at his uniform and swallowed a lump in her throat. Her voice, like the deep note of a bell gone husky, said his name over and over again.

Silently he gathered her in his arms and crushed his mouth against her lips, and she closed her eyes and clung to him.

“You!” he marveled. “They told me—you had died—with your father!”

Her eyes flashed fire then, and bold defiance. “No. I fled from them—hid in the cellar—with the dogs, Juan! You hear—with the dogs—in terror—like an animal—while they hunted me—”

All the fierce pride of her flamed out in that moment, and he was touched with a deep pity that she had been so humbled. Her face was ravaged and torment was indelibly burned into the dark of her eyes.

She shuddered and buried her face against his breast, and her body trembled and shook with her sobs. “But you came, Juan—the Legion came—and saved me—and now—” Her eyes roved to the huddled, broken mob, crouched in the hot, dry sand of the arena. “And now—” she said, again. The spark of revenge lit her face with a flickering flame.

“Hush, Isabella,” he said in a voice that cracked. “They are my people—are you forgetting that?”

She shook her head. “No, Juan. They are your people no longer. You have come too far to retrace your steps. See, you are a major now, an officer—glory lies ahead of you—you have become my father’s son—everything he hoped and prayed that you would be. You can never stand by their side again, Juan—never in this world!”

AND with those words—words that his mind, his ambition, his intellect, told him were sane and true—a deep knell of isolation tolled within him.

“Never stand by their side—never in this world—”

The words sounded in his head, again and over again. A chorus of voices took up the strain, sent it hurtling back and forth in his brain, vibrant and repetitious as a long-living echo.

There was a little moan from inside the building. People stirred, stared, up toward the seats. The machine-gun crews were crouching, white teeth showing through grin-split lips.

A young girl in the middle of the throng leaped upon the barricade, ripped a great swatch of tattered cloth from her dress, swung it over her head like a banner and like a flag of battle. Her mouth opened wide, she screamed:

"Viva Espana! Viva el libertad!" A cry of defiance, of unconquerable determination and courage.

And within Juan Jimenez the tormenting echo answered: "Never—never in this world."

Juan seemed to wake from a dream—a dream that had begun on a morning when he was ten years old and a fierce proud gentleman on an Arab steed had looked down at him and promised him great things. The dream was fashioned of those great things, unfolding with wraithlike magnificence, clothing him with glory—a false glory that fit him ill, that wore thin like worthless cloth and fell from him now, leaving him naked. Juan Jimenez, the son of a peasant and the grandson of a peasant.

THE dream had passed—and Isabella was part of that dream. Gently he disengaged himself from her arms and slowly, like one who is learning to walk anew, he marched toward the entrance of the ring.

"Juan—where are you going?" Isabella's voice cried after him.

He did not look back, but she ran to him and seized his arm, his sleeve, his hand, pressing it feverishly to her heart.

"Juan—answer me—where are you going?"

He looked down at her, almost pityingly. She would never understand—never in this world. "To them," he said. "To be with them—by their side—in their midst—now."

Her eyes stared at him as if he were mad. "You would leave me—leave this"—her fingers flicked

the chevrons on his sleeve—"leave everything—for what? For nothing—for less than nothing?"

"Yes," he said. His jaw set stubbornly. "I see what is right. I see what must be."

"You are a fool, Juan Jimenez—a fool!" Her voice was shrill—the bell had cracked. Dark hair tumbled over her glaring eyes. Red lips parted in a sneer. "Peasant—clod—fool!" she shrieked.

Wearily, patiently, Juan pushed her away from him, sustained by the conviction within him. The end of doubting had come. The uncertainty was finished. The knowledge of what he was filled his heart, and steadied him.

The huddled people were standing now. He pressed through them, groping quickly toward his mother and father for there was so little time. Then he found them, standing, hand in hand, their eyes looking at him dully. For they could not understand, either. Over and over they shouted in cracked, hoarse, splintery voices:

"Viva Espana! Viva el libertad!"

And suddenly Juan Jimenez heard his own voice screaming with them—felt the muscles of his throat grow taut with the force of that anguished scream.

There was the sudden chattering of a machine-gun, and then a dozen machine-guns, and people on the floor of that arena quivered and shook as they stood and screamed, slumped to the ground, still screaming.

The girl who waved her skirt like a battle flag slumped and fell, and the machine-guns chattered on and on while blood spattered the barricade walls, and the little mounds of dead and dying piled up.

Something struck Juan Jimenez through the belt of his major's uniform, and ripped through his stomach, and then a quick succession of sharp pains stabbed through his body and he felt his legs buckling under him. A queer, rioting glory filled him.

The last thing he saw was the face of a grinning Moor squinting over the sight of a machine-gun. The last thing he heard was the echoing cry:

"Viva el libertad!"

The sun glinted on his glazing eyes, and blazed down hotly on all the rocky hills of Badajoz.