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11. NURIA

Her name was Maria de la Conception de Nuria— that is, Mary, dedicated at the shrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin in the hamlet of Nuria. But very sensibly she insisted from the first upon being called Nuria, which is a pretty name and easily said. And in time even her father, who had been very proud of having loaded so small a girl with so formidable a name, gave in to the amendment.

So henceforth she was Nuria, except when she went to prepare for her First Communion, which consists of having on a new white frock, a wreath of white flowers in the hair, walking in procession through the church, and once of a fine Sunday afternoon through the village also. Nuria liked that part of her First Communion best.

There were other things too which Nuria had to learn and to do, but they were rather tiresome; so Nuria thought as little about them as possible. She told Jose that they bored her, and he looked scornful, though indeed he was secretly much interested, for no priest had ever taken any trouble about him to teach him his Catechism or how to find the place in the Missal. He was only a little gipsy boy who had come from the south with some trampers, umbrella-mending and tinkering, after his own father and mother died. But Jose had soon run away, because the umbrella-mender beat him too often, and besides, sent him to farms and houses where he had been during the day to steal whatever had taken the umbrella-mender's fancy. And if he did not find them, if they had been removed, or if the dogs came out and bit him, it was all the same—Jose was beaten.

So after a while Jose ran away at a place called Belvero; and because he had no other name, he called himself ever afterwards Jose Belvero, which, when you come to say it, is a pretty name, and was quite as useful to a gipsy boy as any other.

And this is the way that Jose came to know Nuria, or rather, Maria de la Conception de Nuria. Jose was at this time a little curly-headed, brown-skinned, black-eyed boy of ten, with bare legs of incredible fleetness. His feet were shod with alpargatos, or sandals of white canvas with soles of woven string. It was a prickly country, with lots of cactus growing along all the banks of the river, and Jose's first care in the morning was to see to it that the soles of his sandals were well enough mended to keep out the pricks. Next he went into a little niche of the great abbey ruins where he lived, and kneeled down before a little clay image he had made all by himself and baked in the sun in a very ancient manner which came to him by instinct, as it seemed. He prayed for his daily bread towards the clay image, and touched his forehead, after wetting his finger in his mouth, as he had seen people do on going into church.

The image did not represent the Holy Virgin, but was made as like a little girl sitting knitting as

Jose Belvero could make it. In short, it was meant for Nuria Garriga, and Jose worshipped her. Others have told their loves that they worshipped them, but Jose did it.

It is natural to worship that which we judge to be out of our reach, and indeed a queen is not more above ordinary people or the little King of Spain, riding with his escort in crimson and gold behind him, more exalted above ordinary boys than was Nuria Garriga, the daughter of Antonio Garriga of Francoli, above the gipsy vagrant who made his lair like a dog within the ruins of the famous Abbey of Montblanch.

Nuria was the daughter and heiress of a rich farmer, a man who owned two or three farms among the mountains, besides this on the fertile bottom lands of the valley of Francoli where Nuria dwelt. A rough, boisterous man was Garriga, kindly when he remembered, but often and easily angry with men and things. For he was a Catalan of the Cerdagna, a country where people are quickly irate and quarrels are as quickly made as they are difficult to heal.

Every morning, after taking her cup of chocolate and bread, Nuria Garriga went out to watch the sheep on the valley pastures. Her father had done so himself when he was a boy, and he saw no reason why Nuria in her turn should not do it as well as he. Nor, in truth, did Nuria. She loved it.

In one hand she carried her little tin can of milk— cows' milk, so you may judge how rich the Garrigas were— and in the other, or rather under her arm, there was nearly half a loaf of brown bread. The top had been cut off, and in a cunning little hole there was stuffed a bit of sausage, some olives, and a large lump of butter. In a satchel pocket which swung by her side Nuria carried also a book, sometimes the Misa, but more often the Adventures of the Seven Brave Knights of Christendom, though the Misa was much bigger type. The book was to teach Jose his letters out of.

For every winter Nuria went to dwell with one of her father's sisters, near whose house was a nunnery of the Good Sisters. And the nuns taught her many things— as, for instance, how to enter a church, how to bow before an altar, and how to hold her knife and fork at table. These things Nuria taught all over again to Jose Belvero as the sheep cropped and cropped onward, shouldering and jockeying each other out of the way of fat patches of grass or edging ever nearer to the forbidden young crops, the green withy maize, the scented lucem, and the beautiful red clover of Francoli with tops like half-dosed umbrellas.

Now I will tell a day in the life of Nuria and Jose, for I knew them very well and loved them both. They had a good life at this time, and it is worth telling about— yes, even though the old bucket at the deserted farm-steading by the abbey ruins could not be more lonely, nor the white clouds sailing overhead like galleons more largely peaceful.

When Jose prayed to his lady's clay image he took more pains than most people, for morning devotions are more or less hurried all the world over. It is a way they have. Then he ate a piece of dry bread sopped in cold water from the well. Nuria had drawn it the night before, and Jose liked the taste of it much better than if he had taken the pail himself and drawn some fresh that morning. Which indeed to Josh's mind would have been little short of sacrilege, for there was no privilege about which Nuria was more firm than this. Nuria, and she alone, must draw up the water out of the deep cool well. Jose might hold the rope and pull farther back, but Nuria insisted upon letting the pitcher down and down till it struck the water with a fine clack, wet and resonant and hollow. She alone must guide the brimming bucket upwards and listen to the dripping swish it made as it brushed against the leathery-tongue ferns which grew so thick in the throat of the well. And she alone must receive it on the coping and taste the first drop with lips pouted. Ah, so good it was! And Jose watched her till it was time for him to take the pail down and carry it without spilling a drop across the field to the shelter of the olive tree on the slope in the great hollow of whose trunk was their frugal wine cellar.

So, after having eaten and drunk, Jose hid his clay image and swept out his shrine with a bunch of leaves. It was now time to look out for Nuria, so he put on his coat. It was a long coat with tails, which had been made for Antonio Garriga (who was a stout man with a presence), and it hung well down Josh's bare brown legs in spite of Nuria's care in shortening and repairing, which, as Nuria said, was evidently his own fault. For what could any one expect? He would wriggle about on his bed at night and pull out her stitches. At which Jose was wont to smile, for it was not easy to keep from wriggling on a rough plank floor, even when you have some hay underneath. His toes would persist in escaping from under the old coat which was his sole coverlet, so that in winter the cold nipped them, and in summer the mosquitoes did.

Not that Jose Belvero complained. Not he. Why indeed should he? He had something to eat, someone to worship, and— he was not beaten. At least, sometimes Antonio Garriga would give him a clip with his whip-lash when he came across him. But after the umbrella-mender, what was that? No more than a flick from the tail of one of the rats which took their ordinary exercise over him at nights.

Complain—nay, Jose knew better than that.

So he betook himself to a high place among the ruins of Montblanch, scrambling up the bare wall almost as quickly as one of the darting lizards which poked their heads at him out of the clefts and crevices as he went. All that he did was just to slip off his string-soled shoes and hang them about his neck by the strings.

Soon he sat in a niche in the belfry, with his legs swinging out over empty space. Dangerous? Fall? Ah, you do not know Jose. Does Tommaso your cat fall from the tiles at the hour of the evening concert?

Well, neither did Jose Belvero, who dwelt among the ruins of Montblanch.

Ah I there she was at last—or at least not she, but the cattle going in to be milked. They separated by the gate, great black Gregory, the Estramenian bull, waiting lowing at the gate by the duck-pond (not yet dried up), while various bullocks and calflings tried to imitate his sonorous bellow, but at the same time took care to keep well out of reach of his horns.

Now there would be about five minutes, and then, lo! round the corner of the white farm buildings would come the pushing, inquisitive noses of the sheep—Nuria's sheep. Esteban, the overseer, let them out by opening the door of the fold after he had seen the last of the cows into the yard. At the door of the house Nuria would be standing waiting, and when the sheep came next into sight of the watcher on the belfry—there—there was Nuria walking demurely in front of them, her can in her right hand and the loaf of bread in the other armpit.

The day had begun in earnest for Jose.

He came down the tower with a rush, ten bare toes instinctively seeking every crevice and projection of the stones, every crack between the joints and the sculptured tracery, ay, and finding them too without a mistake. So that in twenty seconds he was down on the groimd and calmly tying the strings of his alpargatos about his legs.

‘Bouch — ouch — ouch’ That was Nuria's dog Batcho—a good dog spoilt. He barked, and no shepherd's dog must bark when on duty. But— what would you?—Nuria was mistress. He was Nuria's dog—one of her dogs, rather; for the other and the better was Jose.

Batcho was good—yes, to sit on his tail and cock his ears for scraps. Good to throw bits of hard bread into the air at a signal and catch them with a wolfish snap as they descended. But (here Jose laughed) when it came to disentangling two flocks which had got mixed on the highway, or taking them along the perilous edge of a neighbour's field of lucern without their eating one clover-

head that did not belong to Antonio Garriga, who could do these things like Jose Belvero?

Batcho—he laughed at Batcho. Batcho could run faster certainly, but what of that, when more than half the time he did not know where he was running to or why?

But these opinions Jose very judiciously kept to himself. For Batcho was a favourite of his mistress —a clever dog at anything but his work, and, what was more to Nuria, a handsome dog with abundant hair; sharp, intelligent eyes that were black when you looked into them, but filmy blue when they sighted anything to which chase might be given.

'Good morning to you, dear Nuria!'

'Good morning, little Jose—but you must not call me 'dear Nuria '!'

'And why—when you are 'dear Nuria'?'

'Because my father might hear you, or any one. You are only a silly little gipsy boy, and you sleep among the hay.'

'Ah, Nuria,' said Jose wistfully, 'I wish I did. For Antonio Garriga has taken away all the bundles, and last night I had to lie upon the bare boards!'

This he only said to make her sorry. Nevertheless, Nuria considered deeply upon the matter. Her deep brown eyes looked pitiful.

'Well,' she said gently, 'I will wait till my father is in a good humour, and then I will ask him to give you a bolt of straw and the old blanket they wrapped the sick foal in before it died.'

For Antonio Garriga was a great horse master, and many colts ran on his pastures, in order, apparently, that little Jose should ride them when he listed—ride and never fall off, while the herdsmen and stable lads laughed and lashed the unbroken beasts secretly from behind. But Jose only leaned forward and whispered the Word. For he was gipsy bred, and at that sound the wildest Andalusian, half-Arab, half-devil, would tremble in all his limbs and gentle himself like an abbot's white ambling palfrey.

But Jose laughed. He was not cold, he said; or if he had been, he was so no more. How could he be now that Nuria— the beautiful, imperious little Nuria —had come? He did not say this, but (as his sex can) he looked it. Then, having set the flock of pushing moist noses in the right direction, so that they could not stray off the narrow selvage of pasture which was their own, Jose made Batcho sit between the sheep and the red umbrella clover which they sniffed at so wistfully. All attention, therefore, sat Batcho, pricked ears, restless eyes, tip of bushy tail beating the ground, while the dark brown woolly backs and the one white sheep (which Nuria called Christopher, because he could carry anything) drifted slowly like a cloud near and nearer to the red clover. It was always Christopher who was the leader in every mischief. For you know the folks' proverb which says truly, 'There is a white sheep in every flock.'

Then 'Bring them!' commanded Nuria.

And Jose went to a little bit of ruined wall within the roofless sacristy and prised up a large flat stone that had been part of an oven— the place where many monkish bakers had shoved in the bread— and took from a cosy little chamber underneath certain mysterious articles.

There was an old slipper,—a real slipper of leather with a heel,— two rods of beech twigs and another of willow, a copy-book half written and several little picture cards, such as priests give to children when they prepare them for Communion.

He brought all these out to Nuria. The little girl had meantime been arranging a wide half-circle of flat stones with a higher one in the middle, a stone so large, indeed, that she was quite unable to move it even slightly; so that the others had to be set round it.

Jose went round the circle laying a card on each stone, with a smaller one to hold it down,

while Nuria, who had seated herself on the high central seat, called out for each a name and a little word of praise or blame.

'Jesusita, naughty girl, you have not washed your face this morning; your ears are black—stand aside for punishment!'

And at once Jose picked up Jesusita's card and held it in his left hand by itself.

'Tobal, I will give you a good mark—your hair is beautifully done! Diegnito, oh, wicked Diegnito! thou shalt have the slipper. Yes, the slipper with the heel! You have torn your copy-book, sir. There is mud upon it. Stand thou also aside for punishment!'

And Jose, secretly trying to brush away an undeniable stain of earth from the blue cover of his copybook, picked up the card belonging to the imaginary 'wicked Diegnito' with a look of affected penitence upon his face.

By the time that all the circle of seats had been covered this curious result was attained: of the scholars with boys' names only one, the aforesaid Diegnito, had been adjudged worthy of stripes. Of the girls not one was found good: all must endure punishment. Nuria was hard upon her sex.

For as an instructor of youth the Senorita Nuria had this peculiarity: to her boy pupils she was kind even to indulgence, but those of her own sex could scarce purchase tolerance with strivings and tears. Which at the first blush does not seem quite fair.

The reception and review of the scholars being done, Jose presented himself before his mistress.

'Well, Brother Chepito,' she said in a severe and dignified manner, 'who are the culprits this morning, and what is their punishment?'

'Four beech twigs, one willow rod, and once the slipper with the heel!'

'And who are the four who are to be beaten with the twigs of beech?' demanded the inquisitor-in-chief, with a fierce frown.

'The names are Marta, Matilde, Teodora, and Jesusita,' said the usher gravely.

'Wicked Marta, void of all decency and cleanliness, ignorant of religion, stand forth! How many strokes, usher?"

'Three, worthy maestra!' said the usher, making at the same time a curious movement with his right hand in his pocket as if he were rolling something in the palm of it. So he was—a piece of cobbler's wax.

'I think five strokes will be required,' said the court of punishments. 'Hold out your hand, wicked Marta of the uncombed hair!'

And Jose, the late usher, assistant-maestro, and superintendent of the ceremonies, held out his hand in the room of the absent Marta, and received from his stern mistress five stripes, cleanly and well laid on with the twigs of beech.

Now Jose's hand was so hard with climbing and so nicely coated with cobbler's wax that the strokes did not really hurt him more than if the whipping had been done with so many clover heads. Nevertheless, so completely did he enter into the dramatic occasion that at each swish of the twigs he uttered a little squeak, such as the rats often emitted at night scampering and chasing each other under the floor or up among the thatch of the corn stacks.

As soon as this was over, the much-enduring Jose had to be beeched for Matilde, Teodora, and Jesusita, willowed for Cristina, and slippered for the wicked Diegnito. All these sufferings he endured with ready and varied emotion, whining and begging for mercy in so lifelike a manner that the performance yielded the greatest pleasure to his mistress and stimulated her to yet greater exertions in flagellation.

All the time Jose was keeping a sharp eye over his shoulder in the direction of Batcho and his charge, and at a sharp yelp-yelp, a kind of cry for assistance, Jose broke off in the midst of a final and quite unjustifiable slippering to scour away over the grass to Batcho's aid. He found that one or two of the flock, following the lead of white Christopher, had made a break for the red clover, and were snatching a few precarious mouthfuls to carry off with them before they could be interfered with.

In another moment Jose had the matter settled, Christopher turned from the error of his ways, and Batcho restored to self-respect. Christopher, still chewing the stolen mouthfuls, threw up his nose to heaven in thankfulness for the hasty good of which he had been permitted to partake, and forthwith began to manoeuvre for a second helping.

Whereupon Jose returned to his place of vicarious suffering.

'How many more, usher?' said Nuria.

'Four more!' answered the usher gravely.

'Five, I think!' said the judge sternly, with the slipper in hand.

And five it was.

In this way and with such pauses for reflection did Jose Belvero, the gipsy boy, learn all that Nuria Garriga, the rich farmer's daughter of Francoli, could teach him, including some things which are not set down in any lesson-book or taught in any seminary of the Good Sisters.

Yet, if you had looked at them from the poplar-fringed road, or down from the rocky bridle-path, you would have seen nothing but a maid sitting knitting under the scant shade of an olive, shifting only as the sun swung round in the heavens, while a dog, erect with cocked ears and tense forelegs, watched a stupid set of nibbling sheep, brown and black mostly but with one white fleece among them.

You would not have seen Jose the gipsy, nor dreamed of the presence of the dirty Jesusita, the untidy Marta, the thrice-wicked Diegnito. All that you could have discerned would have been no more than a ripple among the standing corn, a break in the gently waving lucern, a short furrow from which the half-opened umbrellas of the red clover had been pushed aside. This indicated the spot where Jose had taken cover upon the first alarm.

For long before you approached, that sharp eye of Batcho would have perceived you.

'Oucfhwouch! Gurr!' That would have been his remark, uttered almost under his breath. His nose would have pointed straight in your direction, while his tail would have erected itself like a danger-signal. For if Batcho is a conceited dog, even Jose Belvero, his rival, allows that he has something to be conceited about—which is not always the case with conceited canines, dog or puppy.

But there arrived for Jose the gipsy a dark day. From his perch on the belfry he saw the winter sun rise upon a certain cavalcade. First, there was Antonio Garriga bestriding his black horse. Jose shrunk down at the sight, and cast an anxious look to where, in the hollow behind the abbey, Batcho was shepherding the transferred flock, as it were, single-handed.

For Jose was no longer a gipsy wanderer. He was to be shepherd to Antonio Garriga, full pastor with a salary and a chamber to sleep in, with a little window which overlooked the sheep-fold. But— the trouble in the breast of Jose was that on a surefooted, tun-barrelled pony a little behind Antonio Garriga, lo! there was his mistress, teacher, and comrade, little Nuria, riding gaily forth.

It was so great an event for Nuria, this excursion to the hill-set town of Puymorens, that scarcely had she time even to wave her hand to the new shepherd, Jose. Aquilles was such a fine

pony, and she so proud of riding on a horse of her own for the first time, that— well, was it not enough to turn any little girl's head? And Jose — well, Jose had a warm bed at any rate. She had seen to that herself— he had Batcho and the care of the sheep. Moreover, she would soon be back again, and all would go on as before.

But Jose knew better. And as the black figures on the horses, big and little, dimpled out and in of the trembling morning shadows which the poplars cast on the white winter road, there were tears in Jose's eyes and a bitter little pain eating angrily at his heart. He sat there and watched till Batcho had called for his assistance more than half a dozen times, and white Christopher had pulled several large mouthfuls out of the good clover hay which was for the winter feeding of Antonio's cattle.

Then that sad little 'turn in the road' which so often and so inevitably shuts out the beloved and familiar of our lives, cut them off; and Jose Belvero descended to the relief of Batcho, hard pressed by Christopher and his crowding followers.

But though the new pastor did his duty, it was sad, bitter work. Nothing to look forward to in the morning— no one to speak to during the day, no one to bid good-night to when the sun went down. How grey the fields were! How ugly the mountains with their capping of winter snow! He had thought it so pretty at sunrise last year, and looked out a place from which Nuria could see the high peaks. And when she did come with him, she only slapped him for bringing her so far for nothing, saying, 'You silly boy; why, I can see it far better from my bedroom window, if I even cared to look!'

Jose had been disappointed at the time, but now, strangely enough, the memory was good to keep in his heart, and he smiled and looked across the mountains not a little consoled. Jose was an admirable shepherd. He led the flocks farther afield than any one else, looking for green places where the winter grass was beginning to come up through the stubble, and at the same time scouting for gaps through the hills by which he could see a little farther in the direction of Puymorens.

The days went by slowly, and still he did his duty, though there came no news to Francoli. Even Antonio was absent, for he had gone over into France to sell his wine, leaving little Nuria in the care of her aunt, the Senora Catalina Garriga, and the tutelage of the Good Sisters of the convent half down the hill. Bitter and black waxed the winter. The winds blew icy from the snow-fields of the sierras. But there in Jose's little chamber, with the warmth of the baking oven on one side and the pleasant warm smell of the sheep-fold coming into the little window on the other, who might not have been happy? All the country said so — indeed, they thought Antonio Garriga uncommonly soft to receive such a fox into his poultry yard as this gipsy to take care of the sheep.

But Antonio Garriga knew better than them all, and he left his flocks in the care of Jose and Batcho with the greatest confidence, thinking chiefly of the price he was to get for his wine in Toulouse.

But one day there came a rumour. It was a time of trouble, and the town of Puymorens had been besieged by roving Carlist bands. The people were defending it. There was the noise of cannon and the rattle of musketry among the garden walls and out upon the terraces of the convent.

The news cut into Josh's soul like a knife. Nuria was there— it might be in danger. She might need him, and he here in Francoli. Yet—there was his duty to Antonio and his flock. There was, about the lalqueria, no one to whom he could commit the care of roving Christopher and his companions. There was no one whom Batcho would obey. What was he to do? To reach Antonio in France was impossible. Jose's writing consisted only in scrawling a few large print letters on a piece of smooth slate—

NURIA

—that was all, and he practised it all day long. But that would not call Antonio Garriga back

even if he had known his address.

Esteban, the overseer or sobrestante of the farm, was a well-known Carlist partisan, and indeed all the district was of Carlist leaning. It was possible that a raiding party might descend from the hills and carry off all his master's property.

It was a solemn day when Jose Belvero made up his mind what he was to do. But when once made up, there was no hesitation.

The next morning there was alarm about the farm. Neither sheep nor shepherd were to be found. They had vanished like snow off a roof in the spring sun. But whither?

Surely that was easily discovered. There is no trail so clear and so easily followed as that of a flock of sheep. The road down the valley looked as if it had been swept with a twig broom. The sheep stealer was going in the direction of the town of Sarria, and the overseer pursued rapidly after him. He might come in sight of the runaway at any moment. But it was not long before other sheep trails met, crossed, and confused the one from the farm of Francoli. It was market day in Sarria surely. Other flocks were going to pasture. Other farmers were driving their flocks to places of greater safety, for fear of the Carlist bands was upon the people.

Then again the overseer did not care to trust himself within the power of so 'red' a municipality as that of Sarria. He was a known Carlist sympathiser, and as likely as not he might find himself in prison, or even backed up against a wall in the morning sunshine with a firing party in front of him.

The overseer turned rein and rode slowly back to the farm. The sheep were stolen. The gipsy had taken them. The cub was true to his nature—as he, Esteban, had always prophesied. It served Antonio Garriga right for taking up with kinless waifs like Jose, the umbrella-mender's apprentice.

But in the meantime, by steady travelling, Jose had brought all his flock to market, and as the town of Sarria was at the time expecting to be besieged at any moment, he could not have found in the length and breadth of the Spains any town where he would have been asked fewer questions or obtained a more ready sale.

By nine in the morning Jose had parted with his whole flock and was jingling the money in his pocket, all good undipped coin. Jose was dubious of paper money, and insisted upon cash in dollars. Several of the thieves of the town were following him about with stealthy foot and eager eye, while some had even betaken themselves to quiet corners on the Francoli road, by which he would need to pass on his return from the town.

But not for nothing did the blood of Egypt run dark in the veins of Jose Belvero. He smiled at the thought that the paltry 'little rats' of such a town as Sarria could outwit a countryman of the great Jose Maria of Ronda, first brigand in Spain. Very well he knew that he would assuredly be charged with stealing the sheep if he lost a penny of the money, four hundred undipped dollars all in silver of Mexico. It was like carrying an anvil about with you in each pocket. So that there were the alternatives before him—either he would be arrested by the gendarmes as a thief, or have his throat cut by a greater and stronger thief.

But the wit of Jose was not at fault.

The alcalde and regidores of the town of Sarria were seated in their court-house taking anxious counsel. The paltry police cases of the morning had all been dismissed, and now the wise beards were nodding, and the grey heads were dose together over the latest scraps of news from the disturbed districts, when all at once, from before the raised dais on which they sat, a young voice spoke out—

'Most noble senors,' the voice said, 'I am Jose Belvero, herdsman to Don Antonio Garriga.

He is absent in Francia, and the overseer of the farm is a factious man. Also my young mistress needs me. So I came and sold my flock of sheep for a great price in your market-place, and now, senor alcalde, I come to place the money in your hands in charge for my master, Don Antonio, whom you know— so that if anything happen to me, it shall be known that I, Jose Belvero, am no thief. Here is the money, four hundred dollars in silver. Write me a receipt upon stamped paper and seal it with the seal of the city.'

And the grave men first of all gazed in astonishment, peering down through their glasses at the dark little lad standing so boldly with his bags of dollars, and then with one accord they broke into a loud laugh.

'Count it, gentlemen!' he cried. And forthwith poured the shining silver upon the table.

The alcalde motioned his clerk of the town to count the money and to write a receipt. And while he was doing this, he himself questioned the boy.

'Why have you done this?— Are you not a gipsy?'

'I do not know,' said Jose. 'I am an honest man.'

'That is much to say in these times, little man,' said one of the magistrates.

'Why do they laugh?' thought Jose. 'Surely wisdom is not in the dotards!'

So when the receipt was given him he scrutinised it very closely, and seeing a man in black of a grave and sombre aspect, who sat a little back from the others, he said, 'Will that gentleman there also witness the receipt?'

Whereupon they all laughed still more, because the man was the richest banker and manufacturer in the district, and one in great respect, though one who, they said, cared naught for politics.

And he said, 'Little man, when you leave your present service, come to me and I will employ you.'

'I am going to Puymorens, where there are many Carlists,' said Jose, 'and I may never come back. But if I do, I shall not forget.'

And scarcely had he gotten out of the town before he was tripped up and searched by footpads, who beat him and let him go. So Jose felt his receipt, which he had sewed in the lining of his cap, and hearing it crackle, went his way cheerfully.

And as he went, though his bones still smarted with the drubbing he had received from the robbers for not having any money, his heart sang, and he cried out, 'I shall see her! I shall see her!'

Then at the foot of the first hill there was waiting for him one whom he did not expect. It was Batcho. And he kept his tail between his legs. For well he knew that he ought to have gone home as Jose had bidden him. But instead he only sat on a wall out of reach and wagged his tail beseechingly and humbly.

But Jose was glad at his heart, though with lips he upbraided. But dogs and children judge by tones and not by words. So as soon as Jose had spoken, Batcho came bounding joyously upon him. And Jose hugged little Nuria's dog with delight, shaking his head, nevertheless, and saying, 'Ah, Batcho, Batcho, you make it ten times more difficult to get to your mistress. Yet I cannot send you away, though I ought!'

And Batcho leaped and wagged his tail— but moderately and soberly without barking, for he knew well enough that he was there on sufferance.

And so these two friends fared on towards Puymorens. And at the close of the second day Jose saw it clear and hard across the northern sky. And the next morning he was so near the fortress town that he could hear the roar of the besieging cannons on the heights and see the puffs of white

smoke drifting from the walls and terraced gardens.

But that day Batcho all unwitting did Jose an ill turn, or at least so it seemed at first. The gipsy boy had managed to evade the first pickets of the Carlists. He had made his way all unseen between two batteries which were firing with a loud noise, and the men shouting every time a ball left the mouth of the gun.

Then, with infinite caution, Jose wormed his way up towards the gate of the town, hoping to get near enough to some of the defenders to tell them who he was, and why he had come there at such a time. For he had no desire to be shot for a spy.

But at last he came to a terrace (as he thought) beyond the line of fire, and there he lay still, cuddling his dog to his breast. And from the other side of the garden wall there came voices and then something like a child's stifled crying. And at the sound instantly Batcho leaped up, sprang over the wall, and with a fierce yelp flung himself upon the man who was hiding in an arbour with half a dozen others. And, lo! when Jose looked over, there was his own little mistress, Nuria Garriga, tied hand and foot. And the man who held her was the overseer Esteban, the Carlist from the farm of Francoli.

And instantly Jose understood what had happened. This fellow, finding a favourable opportunity, had resolved to capture the daughter of the rich farmer and agriculturist in order to hold her to ransom. So Jose drew his knife and sprang over. At that moment two or three of the men were cautiously circling round Esteban, manoeuvring to get a shot at Batcho. But in the meantime they could not, because dog and man were mixed up together.

Then as Jose sprang between with his knife, the over-seer managed to fling off Batcho, who immediately leaped over the wall and vanished. Then the overseer, a strong man, struck Jose a numbing blow on the muscles of his arm with the butt of a pistol, so that the knife dropped out of his hand.

A gag having been slipped into his mouth and his legs being tied, Esteban flung him like a bag over his shoulder. The party set off down the hill towards the Carlist position, and as soon as they got outside the line of firing, the overseer came to where Jose was standing propped up against a wall.

‘Ah,’ said he, ‘you are a young thief. What have you done with your master's sheep?’

‘And what,’ retorted Jose, who had a gipsy's talent for repartee, ‘may you be doing with your master's daughter?’

But the overseer had an answer to that, which was to strike Jose heavily across the mouth with the back of his hand.

‘Tell me what you have done with the money for which you sold the sheep in Sarria. Do not imagine you can escape. I heard about that.’

‘The money is on its way to Senor Antonio,’ said Jose boldly; ‘it is where neither you nor any other thief can touch it.’

‘You will either tell me where it is or I will shoot you,’ said the overseer.

And Jose laughed. For, being a gipsy, he had no fear of death. The oldest races in the world are not afraid to die. Only new crude peoples lust inordinately for life.

‘And pray,’ he said, ‘tell me what good it will do to kill me? Will it bring the money into your palm?’

Nevertheless, the overseer would have slain Jose after he had searched him and found nothing. But the men that followed him demurred, and said, ‘Let us take him to headquarters. Don Juan Sebastian will tell us what to do with him.’

And though the overseer grumbled he was forced to comply. He did not seem a very popular leader with his men. So in a half-ruinous house they found certain grey-bearded men talking, and at the head of the apartment, in a place by himself, stood the same grave-faced man in black, whom Jose had seen in the chamber of the ayuntamiento when the alcalde and regidores laughed at him.

And at the sight Jose was glad, for he thought that this man, being of an honest face, would surely do him justice. And the overseer and the others took off their caps and spoke very humbly, saying that Jose had been captured as a spy, and that beside he was known for a thief, who had stolen a great sum from his master.

But Don Juan Sebastian bade them untie him, and drew him apart where he might speak privately with him.

'Why did you come here?' he asked. And Jose told him in a word.

'To see Nuria,' he said, 'and to find out if I could be of any use to her. And I found her with these men on the hillside, and they have left her on the edge of the camp with two fellows to look after her.'

Then Don Juan cried an order to the Carlist with the white cap at the door, and he called half a dozen others, and they took the weapons from the overseer and his fellows. Then said Don Juan Sebastian, 'Go out and bring me the daughter of Antonio Garriga from the place you have left her. And, if any evil hath befallen her, I swear that not one of you shall see the sun set. I will have no private ruffianing in my camp!'

So they brought in Nuria, and when they had set her down, Don Juan Sebastian gave her a little white wine mixed with water. So, after a little, she came to herself and told them how she had been wiled from her aunt's garden by the overseer on the pretext that he brought her a letter from her father. But that the men had been kind to her, save once when they had thrust a gag into her mouth to stop her crying out.

And Don Juan looked at the overseer, and nodded grimly.

'It is indeed well for you,' he said, 'that the maid hath this testimony to give. Had it been otherwise!'

He did not complete the sentence.

Then he said to Jose, 'Go back to Francoli. I will send an escort with you till such time as you reach a place of safety!'

So he wrote a letter to Antonio Garriga, and gave it to Jose to deliver. Then he called two soldiers, kindly lads, and gave them charge to convey the children south to Francoli, or until they had placed Jose and Nuria in the hands of their friends.

But as they went along the highway and were come about half of the distance to the farm, they saw a cloud of dust (as it seemed) sweeping along the valley, and lo! there in front of them was Antonio Garriga and half a dozen armed youths, spurring furiously.

At first he was very angry and not inclined to listen. Because he thought that the overseer and Jose had made it up between them to rob him and hold his daughter to ransom.

But Nuria spoke sharply to her father, and told him he ought rather to kiss Jose's hand and thank him. For it was wholly through him that she had been delivered.

And Jose gave him Don Juan Sebastian's letter, and while he was reading it, he grabbled in the lining of his cap till he found the receipt of the alcalde and regidores of Sarria for the four hundred dollars, at sight of which Antonio Garriga scratched his head in perplexity. For he would very gladly have parted with the flock for half that money.

And then the two Carlist soldiers saluted and asked leave to return with a note to their general

that they had done his commission, and placed the two children in safety. This Don Antonio wrote, and they departed, refusing all reward, except a few double handfuls of good cartridges.

Then all turned their horses' heads and rode back to Francoli.

And as they went Nuria rebuked her father still more, so that at last he went to Jose who was upon the saddle before one of the lads of his company.

'I did you wrong,' he said; 'you have been very faithful. Will you come back and be shepherd, and I will give you, besides your shepherd's wages, one sheep out of every score for your own?'

So Jose was very glad, and Nuria clapped her hands.

'Oh, there is Batcho!' she cried, 'dear, good Batcho!'

And on the road before them there was indeed Batcho, who, attacking the overseer, and being fired at, had been skulking after Jose and his mistress all the way to see what was going to befall them.

And when they had got back to the farm, Nuria came to Jose in his little chamber by the sheepfold, and instead of thanking him she said, 'Go, get three switches, good and strong—of beech, of birch, and of willow. Also, father says that I may have the cane that he rides with. It will do famously. And go round to all my lazy scholars and tell them that school begins again at eight o'clock tomorrow morning in the sunny corner by the abbey wall!'

And Jose nodded gravely, and answered, 'I will go and bring all of them—Gil and Juan and naughty Diegnito, and Jesusita and Matilde, and the wicked Marta!'

'And above all, do not forget the switches,' Nuria called back as she went out. 'I have been looking forward to them more than anyhing.'

'So have I!' said Jose, with a little grimace. And the story went on.