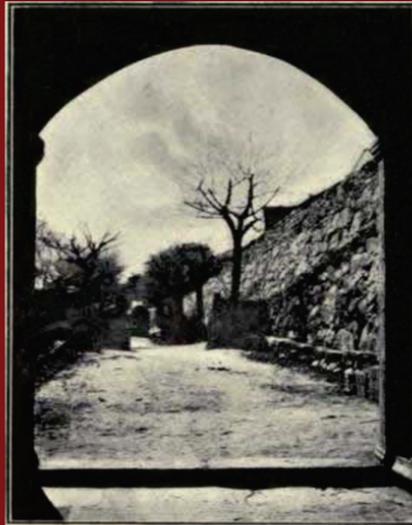


The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

European/World fiction



PETER THE
RENEGADE

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First serialised in *The Grand Magazine* between October 1914 and March 1915.

First published in book form by Ayton Publishing, 2016.

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

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www.srcrockett.weebly.com

INTRODUCTION

This fine series of stories of the Peninsular War was the last work of the late Mr S. R. Crockett. The Peninsular War is a subject in which Mr Crockett was particularly well informed, and we know that he undertook the writing of these stories for the Grand Magazine with pleasure and zest. The series is based upon the exploits of a soldier who, deserting from Sir John Moore's army, placed himself in command of one of the Spanish guerrilla bands, and on many occasions helped to turn the tide of battle in favour of British arms.

Crockett's serial was published posthumously from October 1914 - March 1915. Contemporaries writing in the same editions include H. G. Wells, Baroness Orczy and R. Austin Freeman. It is unclear when the serial was written but Crockett is known to have spent several periods of time in Spain throughout his life. He travelled abroad frequently, mostly to France and Spain, sometimes for pleasure but often in the belief it would aid his health, which suffered in the comparatively damp, cold Scottish climate.

It is often hard to date accurately the writing of Crockett's stories as they appear in various forms and multiple publications, but the first published full length work set in Spain appears to be *The Firebrand*, (1901). It is set during the Carlist War, in the 1830s.

In February 1901 Crockett writes to The Editor of Temple Bar in connection with the serialisation of *The Firebrand*. He writes 'but mainly what I wanted to say is this: Use your own discretion with the final

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proofs. I am going back to the wildest hills of Aragon and the Pyrenees about the 27th of this month and won't be home till the entire *Firebrand* is written. Hence I may miss a proof or two, but my friend (Spanish) J. Guardia of Messers Newman & Guardia, 92 Shaftesbury Avenue has undertaken to see to it that the Spanish words are right. Will you send him a proof? It will let me go away with a very easy mind.'

In March 1901 he writes a letter from Spain to George Frederick Watts the painter, advising him on the benefits and qualities of his typewriter, which he says he's had for nineteen years and has 'written my whole series of works on it, which is a fair testimonial.'

On 7th July 1902 Crockett writes to Douglas Sladon of Kensington (it is typed, so presumably on said aforementioned typewriter) saying: 'I never forget your kindness and my heart is always warm at the sight of your name. I have several times very nearly crossed your orbit (in Palermo and elsewhere) but as my habitat is chiefly with smugglers and bandits I am afraid you would not acknowledge me, with a striped plaid thrown over my shoulder and a basque cap on my head.' He is probably working on what became the non-fiction *An Adventurer in Spain*' during this trip.

Two of his short stories have obvious Spanish connections. 'Nuria' in *The Bloom of the Heather* (1908) is a pastoral tale while the short story 'Idyll of the Sud Express' sees the narrator masquerading as a Spaniard on the Spanish express train during the Spanish American war. It was published in the collection *Young Nick and Old Nick* in 1910. Both may have been written some time

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before their publication date.

We can surmise that from at least 1900 onwards, Crockett spent extended periods of time in Spain on something of a regular basis, and that it was both a fruitful time for him creatively and enabled him to gather resource material for novels and stories as well as for the non-fiction *An Adventurer in Spain* (1903) which also includes several photographs he took during his journey.

Letters suggest that he was travelling in Spain over the winter of 1903/4. The wife of William Robertson Nicoll wrote:

'We often had a visit ... from S R Crockett on his way through London to or from Spain or France.'

Crockett died abroad, in France in April 1914 and it is clear that this final sojourn abroad also included time in Spain. His friend and minister, Reverend William Thomson of Auchencairn wrote retrospectively:

'The last year he was with us he was far from well, and ere he left to go to Spain to seek more pabulum for his pen, in the Manse, depressed in spirit he said 'I'm going off and somehow I have a feeling I'll never be back again.' I tried to minister to that need of his - beseeched him to throw it off, believing that seeing Spain would set him right.'

It is most likely that *Peter the Renegade* was written during this time, The suggestion is that a contract must have been agreed with The Grand Magazine some months in advance of publication, but I cannot pin this down to a specific date. Whether Crockett was working on *Peter the Renegade* during his last winter has to remain conjecture for the present.

What we do know is that *Peter the Renegade* is set

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around the time of the Battle of Corunna in 1808 and that the hero Peter Blake claims relation to the real life Joaquín Blake y Joyes (19 August 1759 – 27 April 1827). He was a Spanish military officer who served with distinction in the French Revolutionary and Peninsular wars. Partially of Irish descent - his mother was from Galicia and his father an Irishman - Blake was born at Málaga to an aristocratic family. In his youth, he saw action as a lieutenant of the grenadiers in the American Revolutionary War. The guerrillas have their genesis both in the 'real' characters of the day and the people Crockett met in his own travels. As he says in *An Adventurer in Spain*, 'I mixed those babies up'; leaving the reader the freedom to conjecture at which point reality and fiction meet.

As is expected from Crockett, his 'ordinary' hero takes the foreground with the likes of the Duke of Wellington having to share the stage from the sidelines. All the same, Crockett's research of the history and knowledge of Spanish countryside both serve to give us a story which, while in the strongest tradition of boy's own adventure, is packed with interesting detail and brilliant natural description.

Cally Phillips

June 2022

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Episode One

The Scout-Master of the Fourth.

They broke like a whirlwind upon the three deserters straggling painfully away from the line of retreat. The roar of the storm among the foothills of Ludo dulled the feet of their horses.

Before they knew it they were surrounded in a tiny *cirque* or cove of the Sierras into which the snow was drifting in fierce gusts. And through the flurrying drifts came the rearguard of Paget's Horse, very angry and sharp-set on the track of just such laggards and renegades as were these three.

Their leader, or at least the man of mark amongst them, was tall Peter Blake, adventurer *pur sang*, late Scout-Master to the 4th Dragoons.

With him were Mark O'Hanlon of the pack train and a ragged linesman of unknown name whose back was still raw and scarred from Moore's ready triangles. All three had got drunk in the wine vaults of Bembibre and for this offence, one – the nameless man – had already suffered when the provost marshal set up his posts at the close of the day's march. These played a great part in Moore's retreat and were responsible for more men missing than were ever captured by Soult's *voltigeurs*.

Now it was that little *cirque* walled in with basalt that did it, for you cannot climb obsidian rocks black and slippery as the bottom of smashed wine bottles. Twenty feet of such work would cut both hands and feet to pieces.

So 'Bang-bang-bang!' Two cavalry pistols and one well-kept Brown Bess spoke out at short range. The leading sergeant of Lane's Light swayed towards the

edge of the precipice. His charger pawed desperately at the crumbly edge, lost grip, threw back his head, and both went rolling over and over till they fell with a splash into the green rush of the river.

O'Hanlon was taken with his musket still smoking. The linesman with the scarred back collapsed into a tumble of wet rags. He had blown out his brains rather than face the provost marshal rolling up his sleeves at the triangles. And who shall say that he had not chosen well?

The fate of ex-Scout-Master Peter Blake was different. Being a man of foresight and infinite experience, he wasted no time in fruitless musketry practice. At the first glimpse of the shining bits and light blue jackets of the British cavalry he clasped his knees with his hands, ducked his head well between his arms, and let himself go, turning desperate cartwheels down the pass of Dispeño Perros, the place for casting down dead dogs.

Such as could unsling their carbines fired at him. But Peter's route was accidental. Boulders were many. He plunged in and out of bewildering copse-woods. The sweeping party found the thresh of the snow exasperating. Clouds of stinging whiteness blinded the moving target, and at best it was but cavalryman's marksmanship – which is proverbially, twenty misses to a hit.

Of Peter they saw no more. He had gone to where the curlews nest the winter through.

'*Coorli – coorli – coorli!*' they cry as they go about in wide circles, discontented at being disturbed, flying low, touching the dead bracken with their wings. In the midst of this Peter was now sitting up, thoughtfully rubbing his bruises with dock-leaf juice.

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For him Ensign Vane made no search, recognising that the tall man had made good. He contented himself with tying up O'Hanlon and recovering the sergeant's body from the pool below, the right heel still locked in the stirrup. They took O'Hanlon off to the drum-head court-martial, to be condemned to die at break of day, a white sheet from the adjutant's notebook being mercifully pinned over his heart.

But far away among the curleywee and the rusty ferns sat Peter Blake, soldier of fortune, rough-rider, linguist, classic scholar, dashing fighter and present renegade.

He was canvassing his hurts and at the same time explaining his position to a young person who had apparently been waiting to receive him. She was seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, her chin in her palms and she regarded Peter's attempts at first aid surgery with contemptuous amusement. They had made acquaintance thus:

'Hallo!' cried Peter. 'Who are you?'

'I am Froyla,' she had replied. 'Who are you?'

She glanced at his rags of uniform.

'You are English,' she asserted and then without waiting she continued, 'I could mend that great tear at your elbow – and if you think licking your wounds is any good, you are mistaken. Dogs do that.'

Peter grinned.

'Licking is good,' he said, 'the frosty bite in the air stops the aching – ever try?'

'I know something better,' said the girl on the log. 'You are a soldier. Face about!'

Peter swung himself about on his tussock of grass. He heard the rustle of skirts, then the rending of linen, and in a moment the soft unhurried

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Spanish voice was bidding him 'keep still' – while she tied up a wound on his neck through which a chance bullet, half spent among the rocks, had rasped its way without doing much harm.

Now Peter made his first mistake. Of infinite ruse and guile in war, he had till now been content to make move *à la hussard* – hussar fashion. He put his arm about the girl's waist as she bent over him. It seemed no more than her due – the least he could do.

'Let go, I tell you!'

Peter drew her still closer. There was a short struggle, and then, chill as ice, hot as fire, a stiletto went through the fleshy part of his forearm. The next moment the bracken glade was empty, and Peter, much astonished and sucking instinctively at his wound, found himself alone with the whaups and the golden plover.

'*Coorli – coorli – coorli – coorli!*'

The cry died away in an airy diminuendo, and Peter a minute later could hardly believe that the girl calling herself Froyla had been there at all, within all too easy reach of his arm. But there was his neck bound knowledgably up. There was proof more pregnant in the little pinpricks of the stiletto, and abandoned on the russet fern tops, the remainder of the torn breadth of linen, of a fineness such as he had only seen on his mother's bleaching green by the Rerrick shore.

Peter Blake was a man of the present. His religion was chiefly the very practical one of how to make the best of the various 'bad jobs' into which his recklessness had led him.

He recognised that he had lost his nationality. He had cut himself off from all – regiment, rank,

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promotion, pension.

'Ended!' he muttered. 'Done with! Free Toom! Rubbish shot here! Thank God, that's over, Peter! Now what's next?'

There were other countries, other services, other people who would be glad to welcome a Peter Blake if only they would let him get within welcoming distance. Ah, but would they? Not very likely. He wished he had consulted the little lady of the stiletto and the torn breadth of linen on the point.

He blasphemed himself for a fool. Why could he not keep his hands to himself? At bottom he had meant no ill, but how was she to know that? He was rightly served, and covering up the stab with a tiny wisp of rag teased into waste, he took the linen between his teeth and bound it up tightly with the other hand.

'Lucky it's my left. It will stiffen presently, and a man never knows what is before him. Peter, were her eyes dark green or hazel? A pint of good Riocha that they were hazel!

High above him he made out above the tops of the pine trees the flicker of a camp fire – not the fire itself but the 'skarrow' of it in the sky. Then Peter suddenly discovered, without canvassing at all, that he was both cold and hungry. He was also sleepy and however mild the Gallegan night can be upon the peninsula where Spain thrusts a snout far out into the Gulf Stream, though roses and fuchsias bloom perennial, Peter knew better than to risk going to sleep on her bare mountains of a December night.

If only he had kept his arm to himself, he might have been warming his toes at that blaze, or one like it and now if that girl only spoke three words he

might have Romana or the skulking Molinos plundering him for the sake of his valuables.

'Valuables!' Peter laughed aloud.

Nevertheless he went through his pockets. He had only a very excellent knife, sheathed in pigskin, the copper ornaments on which were responsible for several grievous bumps and scratches upon his person. Ah, yes, there was his watch – gold, jewelled in holes, signed by the Chronometer Maker Royal – an instrument quite unfit for a renegade and an outcast. But as it reincarnated one of the several pasts of Scout-Master Peter, he had kept it by him. The inscription, 'To Peter Blake, writer at Dacca, for exceptional valour and the saving of life and property, from His Majesty's East India Company,' spoilt the selling value of it, and the fact that he had lost the key made it less useful than it might have been till he could obtain another.

Still the case was heavy enough to drive in tent-pegs with, and quite good enough to tempt thievish fingers to cut throats for its possession.

He must therefore hide the watch, which in that land of caverns and holes in the ground was easily done. He found one with a conspicuous white splash of silicate over the entrance. He groped his way within with extreme care, for far below him, somewhere in the bowels of the mountain, he heard the racing drum of falling water. Peter found a dry hiding-place, large as his palms laid together, and here he placed the inscribed watch, covering it with the rags of a handkerchief and blocking the orifice with a neat wedge picked from the floor. Then, always in the dark, he verified his marks, and came out with the feeling that somehow his life was astonishingly simplified for him.

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But far above among the dark pine blotches the watch-fire waxed and waned as armful after armful of pine branches and heath twigs were thrown upon it.

Peter took himself to meditation. He weighed carefully the *pros and cons* of his situation. A Spanish commando – good – not French certainly – still less British. But a free command here in Galicia, playing the shuttlecock between two armies, meant neither more nor less than a gang of thieves! But then, every soldier in Spain was a thief, and the biggest thief of all was one Buonaparte, at the head of three hundred thousand of them.

Peter had lifted loot too often to have any moral scruples in time of war. But he could have wished the guerrilla procedure a trifle more regular. It would mean no more than a stoop, a swoop, some cracking of pistols, much downward slashing of sabres, more stabbing upwards of knives, as much looting as the time and place would allow, and then hurry back again to the safe shelter of the *brousse* – which means prickly cover of all sorts, from plain gorse to self-sown saplings, and high enough in places to hide a man standing erect.

No great glory, thought Peter, but after all, the thing had its possibilities – and, indeed, he had not much choice.

Ex-Scout-Master Peter had been born on Solway side. He was, therefore, by nature the type of the ruseful adventurous, self-assertive, self-reliant Scot of Galloway – the stock of John Paul, the first American admiral. Not so fortunate, perhaps, had been Peter Black as the son of the Kirkbean gardener. But then Admirable Paul Jones was dead, while, though hard-pressed, Peter the Scout-Master

was very much alive –wherein he had undoubtedly the advantage.

Thirty years of age, fourteen of knocking about the world had produced only one broad-bladed Toledo knife, and a hidden watch with an inscription on it which spoilt its selling value. The harvest had not been great – wars, peace, quill-driving, treasure-seeking, gold-digging, man-hunting, slave-selling, had produced just these. By the pawnbroker's standard perhaps about ten guinea's worth, but to the inward eye much more – they had produced Peter! And what Peter was has yet to be told.

No drunkard, though he owed his present plight to a carouse in the wine vaults of Bembibre, where with some hundreds of others he had arrived, chilled to the bone by the drenching rain of the Sierras. Only his was the greatest sin for he had been carrying despatches. And owing to the picking of his pocket, the expected battle of Ludo had not been fought and General Frazer's whole column had lost itself on the mountains towards Vigo, sixty thousand pounds in coined gold had been hidden (Peter knew where) and the field artillery of an entire division had been abandoned.

Small wonder that the carrier of Sir David Baird's despatches had made haste to escape. He had sinned the sin without pardon – he a striped man, almost an officer.

Peter cursed the wine of Bembibre taken on an empty stomach, and compared it unfavourably with the fine ripe whisky of the paternal still.

'There is not a headache in a gallon of it,' he asserted rather at large. For as he had not tasted that since he was sixteen, and then under a severe paternal eye, Peter's experience of unlicensed

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Galloway liquor could not have been great.

'But never again – never again!' he vowed to himself. 'Yes,' he agreed with the unpleasant Something within him, which for old sake he called his conscience, 'it served me right. What business had I among such undisciplined swine – I a trusted man, an old soldier, with my hand on a commission?'

He was well served – he had got his deserts.

'And so here ye are Peter, my lad, shelterless on the mountains on a cold December night, enemies on every side and the devil of a hunger in your belly!'

But Peter's nature did not allow him to remain long depressed. Gloom was not in his line. In Galloway it rains so much that any blink of sunshine is welcomed as 'fine harvest weather,' or at least as the promise of it.

'A God's mercy it is to be dry,' said Peter, shivering as the Sierra wind cut him to the bone – 'dry and comfortable. I own I shall be warmer when I meet a woman with a needle and thread. Oh, Peter, what a fool ye were! If ye had behaved yersel' wi' the lass, by this time your coat would have been mended and you sitting cocking your toes at the fine warm fire.'

He examined injuries under the light of the stars.

'Ye are a wonder,' said Peter, addressing his coat. 'Faith, I came down that hillside whirling like a Bengalee fire-cracker!'

The fire above drew him with an irresistible fascination.

Down in the valley the British rearguard was keeping up a dropping fire of warning and advertisement while on the other side French bugles blew 'The March of Turenne' and 'Sambre et Meuse.'

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These were the *voltigeurs* advancing victoriously on the Southern Ridges.

Peter crawled carefully farther and farther away from these distant noises. They belonged to a past so remote as to be almost forgotten.

To get above and behind that wavering glow Peter climbed well to the left, worming his way among these scattered boulders. His riding boots dug deep into the stiff shingle. Ice-covered spikes of rock burned his fingers like hot iron; but Peter persevered with recovered spirits, cheerful and content with himself, never doubting that an active spirit and a serene conscience would bring all to a successful issue.

'After all you have been in tighter places, Peter,' he meditated; 'but 'ware that loose rock. If you send it down, my friend, you will have a dozen *comitados* up the hill to make inquiries.

'You must succeed my friend, or you must die,' he reminded himself; 'you can't draw the game this time. Success or death, friend Peter. So make it success, seeing that if what your mother taught you is true, to die you are singularly unfit!'

He reached, still crawling, a little bare rocky spur which jutted out over the wavering flicker of the fire. With an infinity of caution Peter craned his neck and looked over. His nerves, more on the strain than he had imagined, relaxed instantly.

An encampment of country folk escaped to a high-lying nest of pasture, had established themselves there among the dwarf pines. The little *campo* was green with the mild rains of the Gulf Stream, though on the opposite flank of the mountain the frost bit shrewdly enough. Here were horses, cattle, and sheep. Refuges had been

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established for the horses, and the face of the rock was pitted with caves and shelters.

Peter could not estimate the number of the refugees, but he remarked with contentment that there were among them many active young men, muscular and well armed.

All Spain laughs at the poverty of the Gallegan because the poverty of his mountains has made him hewer of wood and drawer of water to the more fortunate provinces. But the Gallegan everywhere is grave and trustworthy, dignified even in a menial capacity, and the ex-Scout-Master knew that if they would once let him come among them the game was in his own hands.

He blessed the chance which had sent him for two years as a super-cargo to the Havanna, where, from a girl in the tobacco monopoly, he had learned Spanish of limited vocabulary, but excellent quality. If only he had a woman to talk to, he thought that the business would not go tardy foot. In any case, it was no use staying up there to freeze.

The Scot took a long breath – the brave man's breath before he ventures all. Then from palms hollowed like a lily-sheath he produced the long melancholy whoop of the white owl. All country people know that the white bird hoots on the wing. So Peter judged that the sound thrice repeated from the same place would carry a message to the *campo* that a friend wished to communicate.

At the first sound, the movement of the camp was stilled.

'Whoo-oot – whoo – who-ut!'

The notes fell soft and distinct, just as many a night on the march through Spain Peter had heard them come down to the camp of the 4th Dragoons.

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In a moment only the men were to be seen taking their places behind the palisading which defended the *campo* on the only side from which it could be approached. Though he could not see, Peter knew that the women and children were in the caves, and the armed men each at his appointed place. The sentinel on the rock overlooking the valley had fallen back at the second hooting of the owl.

Only the cattle were left standing gazing stupidly at the *olla* bubbling over the heaped red embers.

Then, and not till then, did the three answering whoops come back from the *campo*.

‘Good stuff down there,’ said Peter as he descended: ‘if I don’t get my throat cut during the next five minutes I shall make something of these fellows yet. Now you are almost there, Peter. Nothing for it but to shut your eyes and take your gruel!’

He paused in the gateway, with a swift gesture threw his sheath and all into the middle of the *campo* and then advanced with a slow and regular pace, his hands open above his head.

‘Friend – friend – friend!’ he repeated aloud.

‘Stop where you are friend,’ a voice unseen but near answered.

‘What is your name, and what do you want in this place?’

‘Blake is my name – cousin of General Blake. I have escaped from the French. I ask only for food and a place to lay my head!’

‘It may be. It may well be,’ said the voice at his elbow, ‘but stand very still. We are poor ignorant folk and these are all our possessions. If you seek to rob us, God have mercy on your soul.’

‘I am poor, unarmed, wounded,’ Peter spoke with a very creditable break in his voice – ‘and very

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hungry. I shall die if you do not help me; even now I faint.'

'Señor,' said the voice of authority, 'very particularly I recommend you not to faint till the young men have searched you. You Carlos, Vincente, Ramon, go forward! Keep your guns pointed, Carlos and Ramon. Vincente, search him.'

The young men advanced, finger on trigger. Peter was calm personally, but he prayed a little that none of the others might be nervous. The lads were young, the muskets probably old and his anxiety for them was legitimate. They could just as well have crooked their fore-fingers over the trigger guard. If he lived he would show them how.

Vincente searched him carefully and Peter talked steadily all the time. He kept his hands up and his eyes front - but he talked. He embroidered adventures. He sang the greatness of his cousin the General, the friend of Castanos, the victor of Baylen. He told them how, born of a foreign father, but taught to love Spain by a Gallegan mother, he had battled against the French.

At last, as nothing whatever was found, he was permitted to drop his arms. The muskets were lowered and the men flocked eagerly about him. An old man, with a shaven chin and a monk's face roughly blocked out as with a hatchet, then took him in hand. He must answer many questions.

He told them how on his way back to his cousin he had been captured by the French, who would have certainly shot him, but that he saved himself by taking a cartwheel roll down the precipice over there - Dispeño Perres was the name of it.

They murmured their amazement in sympathy.

'Dispeño Perres! What a place to break necks.'

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Poverino, no wonder he had many wounds to dress!

The women closed about him eagerly to assist, but one gaunt old crone fingered the bandage about his arm which was ridiculously disproportioned to the pin-prink beneath, which had in fact, closed up almost as soon as it had done bleeding.

'I made that linen,' she cried; 'I and no other spun it!'

'How came you by the good mother's linen?' demanded the old man.

Peter, who told the truth by preference when it would serve as well as a lie, was about to tell the story, when his eyes fell on the very girl of the stiletto strolling nonchalantly towards him from the camp fire which she had been replenishing.

Very sweet and innocent she looked and instantly his will changed.

'I do not know,' he said. 'I lay upon the ground like one dead. Perhaps the Holy Virgin sent Saint Elizabeth while I swooned, but when the snowflakes on my face brought me round I was bandaged as you see.'

'More likely a band of good-for-nothing gipsies who have plundered our bleaching greens or the houses we left behind us at La Giralda. I myself have lost many things, a petticoat among others. I should not wonder; indeed it is very likely the same!'

So spoke Froyla, calmly bending over the wounds, her young head and supple body looking strangely out of place among the elders, worn by toil and childbirth.

'The bandaging is very badly done,' she went on, fingering the knots critically. 'But then all gipsies are heathen dogs, and for that matter so are the English.'

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'I shall take you at our word, señorita,' said Peter. 'I wager my good Toledan knife (which is all the robbers have left me) against one lock of your jetty curls that I know more prayers in Latin than any priest in the archdiocese of Tarragona! Why, till the rascals stole it, I read my breviary every day like a priest.'

'Better than many, I daresay,' said Froyla. 'You can borrow from the Reverend Father Molinos when he next comes to visit us.'

'The devil take him!' thought Peter; 'that is by no means so good. Molinos is, they say, the worst of all. He plunders the wounded, English and French alike, says a prayer, and cuts their throats afterwards.'

But nevertheless he went on talking. He must make a conquest of the tribe before the coming of the lawless priest. If the young men would only list with him he would teach them how to send Molinos skipping like a ball at *la pelote*.

Froyla had given him a grateful glance in recognition about the Romanichels. She was doubtless the chief's daughter, for she leaned confidently on the arm of the old man who had asked him so many questions. She might help him greatly if she would; but at present Peter knew better than to pay her the least attention.

Nevertheless he felt her soft nimble fingers about his head and arms, retying bandages and re-dressing wounds. A cap of woven silk was pulled down to his ears to hold it all in place. A red tassel dandled rakishly over one eye, and Peter, full of content in the present, told his tales, and with his toes to the fire of pine knots listened to the bubbling of the *olla* in the pots.

Supper seemed long in arriving, but that is the

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way of Spanish meals all over the peninsula. With the first rich aromatic platter of meat and vegetables, the first gurgle of warm wine in his throat, something gay and cheerful descended upon the encampment.

The men were served first, Gallegan fashion. They ate seated each upon his chair or stool, with a hasty table of planks laid on tressels in the midst. Froyla directed the women with a word or a movement of the hand.

Afterwards the women sat down and a few of the young men, of whom Peter made himself one, served them. He spoke deferentially to Froyla, continuing the tale of his marvellous adventures, and interesting all within reach of his voice, who often paused to listen to him. In return Froyla told him who they were among whom he found himself.

‘We are two families, much intermarried,’ she explained, ‘both from the same village, La Giralda - you have heard of it doubtless - the same in which Don Carlos Molinos was priest. Cardoños and Felicé are the only two family names, and now we do not know whether our poor little village has been burnt. At any rate, here we all are, safe as the *campo* of the Peak - men, women, children and cattle.’

Peter, contented with his good meal, spoke encouragement. They had good shelter, plenty of provender; with a little skill, of which he, the cousin of the General, had plenty, the young men might be drilled and the place made a fortress.

Froyla shook her head and sighed.

‘It is hard to keep the lads here all winter doing nothing. The *campo* is no place for them. We have lost several already to the guerrilla bands. And who can blame them? I should do the same if I were a

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man.'

Peter took his courage in both hands.

'What if we have a band of our own – the band Blake-Cardoños. Will you help me señorita?'

The girl looked at him curiously. He exhibited his wounded arm, about which as the bleeding had stopped, no compress had been put.

'I was rightly served,' he murmured; 'but pray consider the temptation.'

Froyla Cardoños examined the wound with the precision of an expert in such matters.

'Whoever gave you that little souvenir,' she said, 'wished you no great harm.'

And so with these words and from that moment the guerrilla band of Blake-Cardoños took shape.

The next morning at breakfast, when the men were seated, Peter remained standing.

'Are we Christians or dogs?' he said 'Is it right that we should fall on our food without a blessing asked in the holy Latin?'

'We have no priest,' said the old chief apologetically, laying down his clasp knife and horn spoon.

Peter crossed himself, and in excellent Latin repeated the Benediction upon such as sit down to meat, concluding in the name of Santa Eudoxia, Santa Isidora, and especially the great and holy Saint Jaime de Campostella.

The effect, upon the elders especially, was impressive and immediate. The family connection Cardoños-Feliçé had obviously entertained an angel unawares.

Only ex-Scout Master Peter was not content with the performance.

'It is a pity,' he said, stuffing his mouth with

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meat, potato and peppers, all steamed appetisingly together, 'I ought to have known the names of more saints!'

And he made a mental note to learn a dozen or so the next time that a calendar should fall under his eye.

Peter spent the day in busy preparation. He helped the old women to carry water. He talked unweariedly to the old men. He mended the trigger of a musket so cleverly that the whole of the fighting strength of La Giralda put in an appearance at an informal inspection of arms, where Peter praised, blamed, instructed and in bad cases promised repairs, when they should help him to set up a forge.

The dark Spanish eyes watched him first with slowly waning suspicion, then with interest, lastly with admiration. It was very well for the elders of the tribe to be impressed with his Latin. But these were men of his own age and younger. He must show himself no spoil-sport.

So to win them he kept his strongest card till after supper. He looked about for an instrument – anything from an organ to a penny whistle would serve. Peter had the gift. He knew no theory, but the music which set voices chanting and feet dancing flowed from anything he touched.

Had anyone a guitar?

Alas! They were poor mountaineers. They had nothing but the pipes.

'The pipes! Let us have them,' cried Peter delighted.

But when the poor apologies for the noble pipes of his own country were presented to him he hung his head for a moment almost discouraged.

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‘O for an hour of my uncle Sandy’s fiddle!’ he groaned; ‘How I could make a *jota* go to the tune of ‘Tullochgorum’ or ‘The Wind that Shakes the Barley.’

He handled the pipes a little contemptuously.

‘Well this is not Robin Oich, nor yet Macrimmon, but I daresay they will do well enough for my stupid Lowland fingers.’

But he need not have troubled himself. From the first shrill skirl of the drones and the lilt of a dance tune tentatively played there was no doubt of Peter’s success.

Heads began to nod in unison, feet jiggled on the beaten earth, where, in front of the great lean-to stable, was their dancing floor. The girls danced shyly in the direction of the young men. The men silently but with expressive eyes challenged each his *querido*, till with a snap of fingers and thumbs and a simultaneous rush Felicé and Cardoños were alike under the spell of their master and at his bidding forgot all the pinch of misery, their deserted village, whitewashed and tree-shaded, in the Mero Valley. The joy of life sang in their ears. Faster and faster went the dance, till with a shout of ‘Twenty Thousand Devils,’ Don Severino himself plunged into the dance and the aged wise women of the *campo*, tucking up their dismal robes of Isabellino flannel, legged it with the best.

Peter’s tune was ‘Mistress McLeod of Raasay’ and he played it as no tune had ever been played on the small pipes of Galicia. The piper himself could by no means keep still, but walked up and down as his teacher, Pipe-Major Ewan of the Black Watch, had recommended, ‘wagging his rump like a wild goat upon the mountains of Bether.’

The music died out in the long wail of the drones

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as the piper checked his quarter-deck promenade.

Peter went to bed and slept soundly that night. He knew that he had entered into a new incarnation. He was no longer ex-Scout Master Blake in danger of a firing party, but El Capitan Peter, chief of the new band of guerrillas, better armed, better disciplined, better led than any other, a power anywhere between Portugal and the Pyrenees.

Best of all, better than warmth, safety, friends, captainship, there was Froyla – Froyla of the dark hair and the lips scarlet as a June pomegranate flower.

Peter the renegade fell asleep thinking about her. Were her eyes dark sea-green or only hazel?

He must find out tomorrow.

And above the stars shone and silence fell, while Captain Peter Blake, soldier of fortune and gentleman adventurer, said over the Lord's Prayer and the twenty-third Psalm because of the promise he had made to his mother as they cowered awhile in the shelter of the march dyke the night he left Galloway fourteen years ago.

Episode Two

Peter Cleans the Slate.

A voice came to Peter's ear out of the darkness of the cave.

'Lie still, Pedro the stranger – I am Froyla. I have come to speak of the enlisting of the band. Nay, do not assure yourself that I speak the truth. Keep your hands within the sack. This is Brother Stiletto, who in case of need is as ready as ever to speak for me.'

Peter waked slowly to the sound of the low whispered words. For a moment he failed to understand. He had been through so much the day before. Was he still dreaming vinously after Bembibre? Would the rattle of the kettle-drums and the clear far-carrying clarion presently wake him? He turned about in his covering of sacks.

'Still – keep still!' warned the voice. 'You are in the Camp of the Peak. I am Froyla, the chief Cardoños' daughter. I did this!'

And she touched the stiletto thrust in the thick of his arm with her finger.

'Auff!' said Peter.

'That is to teach you to be still,' the voice went on. 'Turn your head – so. You see the camp-fire and the shining of a stove. Now you remember where you are. You can do many things with men and some women – those with foolish heads and light heels. But of such is not Froyla. No; do not answer till you know what is the will of Froyla.'

Peter kept still enough from motives of policy. But he chuckled within himself. When the time came he, Peter Blake, would take this girl up between his finger and thumb. In the meantime - well - let it

pass. It will be seen that Peter Blake did not suffer from any lack of self-esteem. In this also he was a Galloway shore-side man. Inland bred men are different.

‘Unless I choose, not a man will follow you.’ The voice spoke steadily in his ear. ‘Now a band we must have and you shall train the men for me. Ah! If only I had been a boy, how I would have trained them – led them – fought them. But you shall do this for me, and it is our secret between us.’

‘It is our secret,’ said Peter, as much to humour her as anything. He came of a race which scouts the modern idea of women’s equality, still less her possible superiority. But there were women whom it was wise to humour.

A shadow moved between them and the camp-fire without, and instantly Froyla withdrew from his side. She went as she had come, without a sound. A heavy double-armful of wood was flung on the embers. The red half-burned roots were raked together, the brushwood blazed up, and the Campo del Pico was as light as day. Through the doorway of the cave Peter could see something which turned and glittered. It was the bayonet of Don Severo’s sentinel outside the palisade.

Peter recognised that he had good material to work upon. The fire-tender was no other than Don Severo himself. Peter was on foot in a moment, and soon deep in conversation with the family chieftain.

His mind was prepared. Froyla had sown her seed already.

‘Yes,’ he agreed, ‘it would be an excellent thing.’ Rich in lands, they were poor in goods. There was much to gain. Still more, till the Cardoños were known for guerrillas they were considered as fitting

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prey for the other bands. These would plunder their provisions, live upon them at free quarters, and recruit their best young men.

The stars in their courses worked for Peter, and with the overt sympathy of Don Severo and the equally efficacious hidden influence of Froyla, the new band Cardoños-Blake took shape and being before the late sunrise of winter in Spain.

While the sun was still an orange-red targe scarce risen over the snow-clad Sierras of Ludo, two and twenty men, all armed, were marching and drilling on the little green *campo*. The elders regarded them with a kind of austere envy. In their time they had done as much and more. Old wounds began to ache and slow pulses to quicken. They were brave days for plunder, those of their youth, when Bourbon and Hapsburg fought for Spain.

Froyla made coffee and reprimanded the foolish young women who would persist in standing agape at the fierceness of Peter's voice of command, the energy of his gestures, his startling manner of stamping the foot, the military erectness of his figure, his broad shoulders and general air of command.

These things annoyed Froyla extremely. Not that she looked – not she. But somehow she was conscious of the atmosphere of admiration which was growing up about the image she had set up. A vague fear, too, that she had raised a spirit too strong for her to lay mingled with her admiration of Peter's powers of vituperation in the Spanish tongue. It was however, evident to all that the Gallegan mother of whom Peter boasted must have been a lady of remarkably free conversation.

Froyla, as she listened to the changeful tread and

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rattle of arms, felt that something was slipping from her. She was her father's daughter, and the only woman of education in the village. Ever since she came from the convent of the Good Shepherd at Compostella she had had her place at the village council. She had spoken after her father. She had been crowned Queen on Lady Day, and carried the lantern to the graveyard for the midnight mass of All Saints' Eve.

And now quite suddenly she saw herself superseded; the eyes that had followed her wherever she went were fixed upon another. He was giving them that strange foreign thing – discipline. He was teaching them to obey, to think of the band first and themselves afterwards.

Froyla raged internally. Something she had not counted on was growing out of all this. She had put this man in the saddle; but once there he would ride where he would. She could do nothing more.

And so, unable to restrain her tears, she left the encampment and went to fling herself in a fit of angry weeping high up among the red cinnabar rocks of the hillside. When she came down again Captain Peter was still commanding and gesticulating, praising and blaming. Suddenly he dismissed his men and came towards her with a smile of good-humoured welcome.

'Well, what do you think of them now? In another week you will have news of us!'

She turned away without speaking. Neither he nor they had even noticed her absence. It was a bitter moment for Froyla Cardoños.

A week later Peter leaped from his bed at the sound of angry voices. Then came a shot, which brought the men pouring out, each making for his

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post. The sentinel posted without on the spur had fired, and doubtless, as his orders were, escaped into the dense brushwood which escalated the cliff from beneath on either side of the pathway. It was not yet day, only that uncertain watershed of night at which the cocks begin to crow and shepherds and fisher-folk instinctively awake.

Someone was hammering on the gate and pouring forth out of a full sack all the treasure of Spanish blasphemy.

'Hijos de Putaña! Sangre de mi madre!'

'Open the gate or we will smoke you out, rats of Giralda!'

Peter had slept heavily. Warmth and a week's good feeding made slumber easy. Nevertheless, from mere force of habit he found himself in his place with musket and sword before he had rubbed the sleep out of his eyes.

Had the twenty-two men been as ready? He dared hardly hope it. He looked over the little breastwork, and with a painful throb of the heart saw the *campo* filled with an armed company. Two hundred of them at least he counted, all wearing the white *boinas* (or flat Kilmarnock bonnets) which were supposed to indicate the devotion of the wearers to the cause of the Spanish Bourbons.

While Peter was making up his mind whether to fight or fraternise, a musket barrel clicked against the embrasure close to his, and the voice of Froyla warned him to be careful.

'Molinos,' she whispered - 'Molinos, our unfrocked priest from the Giralda. He is here with all his gang!'

'Do they come as friends or enemies?'

'That's as may be,' she answered, still in his ear;

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‘they are always dangerous, Molinos especially so when he wants an excuse.’

‘An excuse for what?’

‘For taking our goods and for marrying me by force.’

‘But he is a priest?’

‘He *was* a priest. The archbishop unfrocked him, and for that he sacked the palace and carried off the cardinal’s hat, which he dragged through the streets of Compostella tied to a donkey’s tail. He was excommunicated for that. Yet every Sunday he hears mass.’

‘How so?’ said Peter as the colour was creeping back into the landscape with the flush of dawn.

‘He catches a priest – one has not far to go in Spain for such wildfowl – and if he will not say mass, why Molinos cuts his throat! And to think I have seen him in our village, playing *pelote*, black *soutane* and all, the champion of the North.

Severo had come out to parley. He stood by the embers of the fire, now grey under the growing light. A few old women, following the motion of his hand, were hastily hobbling up with backloads of branches and kindling wood.

In front of him stood a huge man, towering up five or six inches above the six-foot. There was no need to name the Abbé Molinos.

‘He asked me in marriage from my father. He caught the Bishop of Corunna and compelled him to release him from his vows. I fled up the mountain when he came. It was berry-time last year, and I lived upon them three days!’

‘What good wind has blown my brother so high among the mountains?’

It was Severo Cardoños who spoke – he, the

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ancient village chief humbling himself to his vicar.

'These accursed armies which pollute our land and render good food scarce,' cried the huge man, beating his palms together in the frosty air. 'We came for a meal, Don Severo – for a little dole out of your superfluity of provisions, for a horse or two out of your well-stocked stables, and lastly for the damsel you promised me, your daughter Froyla!'

'Liar!' spoke out a clear voice at Peter's elbow; 'he would not give me to a priest, one married to God and our Lady. I would slay myself first.'

The bandit slapped his thighs as at a good jest till the circle of pistol butts, all silver and mother-o'-pearl, clashed together.

He half turned to his men, speaking like a man who takes a jest good-humouredly.

'She speaks well, the little one. She will make me a worthy mate. But I see how it is – she has handfasted herself to some gallant of the village, promised herself to him. It is a pity, but it will make no difference. I am an honest man Don Severo, and I will fight that youth for his lady, which of us is to have and to hold (and so forth) till death us do part.'

Instantly Peter, the ex-scout master, stepped forward from his shelter.

'I am your man,' he said, calmly; 'I will fight for the girl.'

Molinos eyed him murkily from under his shaggy brows.

'And who the devil may you be,' he shouted, 'coming upon honest men like a gnome out of the earth?'

'I am the Cavalier Don Pedro Blake, cousin of General Blake and friend of Castaños. I take your challenge, Señor Capitaño. I have my men posted

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behind, a score as good marksmen as you will find in the seven Spains. They will see fair play, and when our little game is played the man who wins shall lead both bands. Do you agree, or are you afraid?’

‘Is what this fellow says true?’ queried the priest, ignoring Peter and speaking aside to Don Severo.

The chief bowed.

‘Well he is either a fool or a very bold fellow,’ quoth Molinos with a certain relishing admiration. ‘Let me look at him!’

He stepped back a pace and scrutinised Peter with an affectation of scorn.

‘A foreigner,’ he exclaimed, ‘in the red rags of the English! How comes it, friend, that I find you in my country, pretending to lead a loyal Spanish band?’

‘I lead because I am a soldier and the best man in it, or in yours either. If any doubt it, let him step out and have at me with his own weapon – that is to say, if *you* are afraid to risk your own skin!’

The priest cast off his plundered French coat, from which the gold lace of a colonel of dragoons had not been removed. The very chevrons and the number of the regiment – the 13th – were plain to the eye.

Thus disencumbered, Molinos appeared in a plain white unstarched shirt of finest linen, probably plundered along with the coat. He snatched up sword and dagger, and, wrapping his cape carefully about his arm, he dared Peter to come on.

‘Come on?’ said Peter, who had not even troubled to take off his coat.

‘That will I, and firm. Let us settle the little business out of hand. But, remember, no treachery – or a score of you shall die before you come within

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sight of my men.'

The full day had come, though the shadows were still long when the champions faced each other on the short grass of the *campo*. About the cave entrances all round the women clustered in terrified bands, anxious to see the fighting, but uncertain what might happen to them afterwards. Peter's twenty-two lay hidden, but he knew that the muzzles of their muskets could sweep the field. Behind their chief the Molinos gang were huddled, some sitting on the ground, but more leaning on their guns and smoking cigarettes with the habitual nonchalance of the Spaniard, whether the danger be his own or another's.

But Peter knew that the death of their chief would probably bring the whole command about his ears. And as twenty-two could not possibly fight two hundred, he must be careful. A partial disablement, such as would give him command of the large band for a month or two, was all that was needful.

The giant, who had never yet met his match either at sword-play or the *pelote*, attacked fiercely, parrying with his *capo* wrapped about his left arm in the Spanish manner.

Peter, without cloak or dagger, his hand behind his back, his sword-point following every turn of his opponent's weapon, yet in so small a circle that no opening was ever presented, fenced as at a *salle-d'armes*.

After the first trial of skill the priest divined himself overmatched and launched himself forward, hoping by speed and fury to grapple his adversary, and so use his dagger when the longer weapon became unserviceable.

He was disappointed. Peter, light of foot as a cat,

stepped aside, and ducking under the extended arm, calmly waited for his adversary to come about. In five seconds more Molinos was disarmed, the blade flying high over the heads of his own men. But almost immediately after the resumption of the fight Peter, using all his science, ran the giant neatly through the shoulder, close to the lung, a wound which, he knew would certainly disable Molinos for a long time. The priest, though bleeding profusely (as Peter was delighted to observe), was eager to continue the fight. But his lieutenant, Lissagarray, a bullet-headed little Basque, ordered men to take him up and carry him into the caves, where the women would tend him.

‘If he dies we will kill you,’ said the little Basque.

‘And whether he dies or no I am captain of your company,’ retorted Peter. ‘Does any man among you desire to dispute the position? If he does, my sword is at his service. Come forward, lads, and show yourselves!’

The last words were for his hidden twenty-two. Peter’s victory had given them confidence, and they ranged themselves behind him with a certain relief, for the fear of Molinos had lain heavy upon the land.

‘Speak to them – quick!’ murmured Froyla at his elbow. She stood there, eyes downcast, meek as a dove, and prompted him with the most outrageous taunts known to the Spanish language.

Peter used them all with such variations, emendations and provocations as occurred to him.

In vain; not a man stirred. It was clear that they would not fight singly, while an attack on these twenty-two well-armed, well-ordered men, even if successful, would certainly prove expensive.

‘Then if ye will not fight ye shall obey,’ cried Peter

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so loud that he could be heard all over the *campo*. 'Follow or fight – so it was agreed. Speak out! Choose your leader. There is no time to be lost and much to be done.'

'We choose El Capitano Blake,' said the little Basque lieutenant. 'It is his due. He has beaten Molinos.'

'El Capitano Blake!' chorused the commando.

'I shall teach you many things besides sword practice – how to march, how to shoot straight. How to take cover you already know as well as I.'

'I shall come with you,' affirmed Froyla. 'I will not stay at home and nurse the priest with the bad eyes. Besides, two of my brothers are in the troop.'

'And your father?' said Peter – 'what will he say?'

'Say,' she answered with an astonished countenance – 'why, what should my father say? However, I shall go and ask him.'

The band Molinos-Blake did well under Peter the Renegade. First of all they picked up and added to their numbers half-a-score of footsore warriors belonging to various English regiments, some of whom had known Peter as Scout Master to General Baird's division. They cut up a French convoy and grew rich. They entertained themselves royally at Vigo and waxed poor.

Their best captures, however, had been made along the line of the English retreat. Everything which could hamper the speed of the men had been left behind – waggons of ammunition, cases of new Brown Bess muskets, worth their weight in silver in Estramadura and Leon.

It was a chill morning, crisp and crackling with frost, when at last from the edge of the wide-set

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circle of hills Peter and his command looked down on the harbour of Corunna, glittering in the low winter sun. It was empty of ships; but there were plenty of soldiers. His eye took in the lines of blue smoke daintily pricked along the hills. The sound of musketry came to his ears from the western sea to the banks of the Mero – *patter – patter* – very dainty and far away.

Peter understood. The English were hard pressed. Every hour added to the solidity of these big battalions of Soult. From their mountain vantage the Blake-Molinos men looked down on the battle as from a box at an opera.

Peter's heart beat for joy, or at least so he thought. Yonder were the officers who, before lying down to sleep, though nothing of ordering a dozen men to be shot at dawn. He had seen them calmly eating breakfast while poor devils were being tortured at the triangles.

Ah, Soult would teach them! Good luck to Soult! He had them at his mercy – the boastful generals, the cruel colonels, the brutal captains. All of them, said Peter in his strong Northern phrase, were going to get their kail through the reek.

Why should he not go down there? Who had more scores to pay off than he? There was the linesman, whose scarred back Peter had never been able to get out of his mind, and how merry O'Hanlon's face suddenly blanched at the sight of his captors coming at him through the mist. 'Come lads,' he cried, 'they are beaten. They have no ships. They will be driven into the sea, and their waggons are bogged in the swamps. They cannot muster a score of cannon. I see rich spoil for us; while the French are fighting we shall cut out the treasure-waggons from

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under their noses!’

The guerrillas always answered to the appeal of loot. Of patriotism they knew nothing, though at Cadiz and Seville the Cortez talked a great deal about it.

Peter led his men well to the west of the English, where from a wilderness of gorse and boulder the guerrillas, couched at their ease, could look down on the tragedy of Corunna working itself out.

The end could not be long delayed. So soon as the French batteries could crown El Crupione – the hill thrust like a clenched fist into the centre of their defences – the English must surrender or be swept out of existence.

Peter’s keen eyes marked the positions of his ancient comrades. Baird, struggling desperately to bring up the ammunition, the provisions, and what was still left of the treasure, swore at large. Peter could not hear the words, but he divined them from the gestures of that angry arm.

He laughed softly to himself and pointed out to Froyla the exact place where he meant to fall upon the waggons. He must wait till the swarthy kilts of the Black Watch were out of the way, with the decimated 52nd and the Border Regiment – when there were only his own dragoons, against every officer of which, except the pot-bellied Major, he had a grudge. And General Baird, wrathful veteran, he would stand and fight it out till the last wheel had passed the last ditch, before he would turn the tail of his old grey mare and ride after his convoy. Oh, there would be plenty of choice fighting; but two hundred and thirty guns at short range would empty many saddles.

‘Now *camerados*, follow the line of the wall. We

shall wait for them at the bottom.'

Baird's rearguard had been forgotten, bogged by the valley swamps, commanded by heights on every side, and presently, doubtless, to be swept by the batteries Soult was bringing into position on Rump Hill.

'Keep still, men!' said the Renegade, and leaning forward he listened to the babble of familiar voices. That was McLean of the 42nd, a Duart man who owed him three shillings.

Well, McLean should pay principal and interest before he was a day older.

Leaving the wall, the command crossed at the double an open space where there had been fighting. Bearskins and cavalry helmets surmounted with the imperial eagle showed how the French had suffered. Dead men lay about in strangely contorted attitudes, like marionettes dropped from a peg or dolls flung from the hand of an angry child.

'Hallo, Blake,' where are you going with all that rabble?' cried a young voice, and the careless English smote on Peter's ear like the trump of doom. 'We thought you were lost, man! Go on and give the men a hand. Never mind me. My passage is taken and the ship is coming for me right enough!'

Peter, with every particle of colour gone from his face, turned and saw Wellwood Maxwell, a young Ensign whom he had taught to ride. He was shot through the body, but in spite of his wound his eye was bright and his smile irresistible.

But as he panted a little with the exertion of raising himself on an elbow, he pointed to the batteries on El Crupione, over the edge of which Soult's big twelve-pounders were poking their black snouts.

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‘That’s what’s wrong with us, Blake, and nobody seems to notice. Get a few men and have a try for it. I would, but I’m used up, Blake, and that’s the God’s truth. Bend down, Blake. There – give that to Elsie Ferguson of Craigdarroch. Don’t forget. No, never mind me. I’m all right, and my love to them all at home. A drink of water? Well, that’s good anyway. Now off with you. Tell Baird I sent you. I may as well be mentioned in dispatches as not. It will please the dad – and – it’s my last chance. Good-bye, Blake; hold them till the ships come!’

Saying which the boy laid his head down on a tuft of grass, and the soul of the Renegade was shaken within him.

Clean of soul himself, Wellwood Maxwell had never dreamed any possible treachery. How could Peter now deliver that love token? How could he ever go back to Galloway with such a tale to tell?

‘Double back, men!’ he commanded; ‘the enemy is behind us. They are closing us in. Quick, get up the hill!’

Peter kept his own twenty-two close about him. He was not yet sure of the others. But the Molinos men, seeing no chance of plunder so close to the line of battle, followed up the hill willingly enough.

Peter’s tenth legion, the twenty-two La Giraldans, with Froyla acting as their lieutenant, kept close behind. But there was no treachery to fear. For a dash-and-be-done-with-it no troops could have fought better than the band of Molinos.

They broke like a wave from the Atlantic on the French gunners, occupied with the alignment of their pieces.

‘One volley and at them with the bayonet!’ had been Peter’s orders as he saw that the artillery-men

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were without infantry supports. To show a good example Peter fired, flung down his musket and charged, shouting at the head of his Giraldans. Molinos' men hung a moment as if judging the risk, but when their volley came it rang out strong and united, and Peter, already almost upon the guns, waved them on. The Frenchmen had hardly time to draw a pistol. They fought with ramrods and spanners, while the wiser turned and ran in the direction of their own line of battle.

No time was to be lost. The French would certainly strike back in overwhelming force, but meantime Peter and his free-lances would at least do what harm they could.

The lighter guns followed each other over the precipice, crashing and jangling from point to point of rock. The crags rang with the clangour of their passage, till they exploded like fire-crackers in a shower of iron hail. The larger were merely spiked, and run to the edge of the steep gravel slope, down which they plunged into the river, or, sticking at the bottom, thrust their black noses into the mud and turned heavily over.

The badgered and hard-beset army of Moore, fighting hard to hold the advancing French, could make nothing of these strange happenings upon El Crupione. But they had a respite, which was grateful enough. From the precipices of Rump Hill they saw the French guns come tumbling, crashing and exploding. But none knew the cause, nor even guessed it, till blackened with powder and bleeding from a wound on the head, ex Scout-Master Peter Blake strode through the ruck of bewildered outposts.

He marched straight up to where General Baird

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stood directing the retreat in the midst of his staff.

‘What the devil, sir?’ roared the veteran. ‘What’s this? Who are you? Where did you get those breeches?’

Peter saluted gravely in the exact regulation attitude, a dignified figure, keen and hardbitten in spite of the rags of dragoon’s uniform in which he was clad.

Holding himself like a lance under the questioning gaze of his sometime General, Peter delivered himself as calmly as if he were about to give the report on the states of men and horses in the ordinary course of duty.

‘I have come to report, Sir David, that by the instructions of Ensign Maxwell, I have taken and destroyed the French artillery upon Rump Hill – twenty three-pounders and a dozen long twelves – ships’ guns those – and how they got them up there is more than I can guess.’

‘*Humph!*’ snorted the General angrily. ‘Taken Rump Hill! Destroyed the guns! Well, I call it a damn liberty! You’re a rascally renegade, sir, and I order you out of my sight, or by God, sir, I’ll have you shot for insolence to your superior officer!’

‘Thank you, Sir David!’ said Peter calmly. And saluting with the utmost correctness, he strode back to his command, which had stood all the time with their muskets at the ready.

But already the topsails of the English squadron were rounding the point of Ferrol. The French had been held in check, and General Moore could say, ‘Now I hope that the people of England will be satisfied.’

Peter found Froyla waiting for him, a proud light in her eyes of dusky emerald.

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‘What said he, the great man on the horse? He did not embrace and kiss you on both cheeks?’

‘No,’ said Peter, ‘it is not the English custom.’

‘Then what did he say? He must have rejoiced.’

‘He gave me titles of nobility,’ said Peter calmly.

‘What were they? Is there a pension attached?’

‘He promoted me marquis and general,’ asserted Peter. ‘He promised me a great reward from the King of England -’

‘Then,’ cried Froyla, ‘you will leave us – you will go back to the King of England to receive your rewards we have won for you. You will think no more of Cardoños and Félicé – no more of Don Severo!’

‘I renounce them all,’ said Peter nobly, ‘for the sake of one who is dearer to me than money or titles. I say *pecunia tua tecum sit* – which means ‘Keep your money and give me only Froyla, the daughter of Severo of La Giralda.’”

Froyla clasped Peter’s hand in both of hers.

‘Oh,’ she cried impetuously, ‘I never dreamed that any man could be so noble.’

‘Nor I,’ said Peter, patting the girl’s heaving shoulders. ‘But what would you have? I cannot help it. I was made like that.’

And from the soul of Peter radiated the peace of a good action, while Froyla’s eyes were moist and soft with the thought of so great a renunciation.

Episode Three

The Treasure Seeking.

'Froyla,' said Peter to his acting lieutenant, 'tis just as well these fellows went back to Molinos. That leaves us a neat twenty-five, ourselves included, and still more than enough to keep a secret.'

'But a score of men can do so little,' objected the girl, swinging her legs discontentedly over the fallen pine on which she was seated, oiling and cleaning a pistol. Her superior officer, stretched at her feet, after making grave choice of the most succulent stems, at grass after the manner of Nebuchadnezzar.

They were in the lowest corner of Roz Alva, the huge forest which runs along the southern side of the Cantabridgian range from Corunna to Santander. Oak and chestnut stretched below from horizon to horizon. Pine and birch rose behind in serried files, sending scouting parties of dark green seedlings right up to the shale-slides and the snow.

'It is better,' said Peter calmly finishing the succulent white of his grass stem, 'to have twenty-five men and sleep contentedly than two hundred and wake up with your throat cut.'

'Why did you give up?' said Froyla, still refractory. 'I like men who succeed.'

Peter made a grimace with the new stalk he was choosing.

'I like to succeed myself,' he answered, biting the choice morsel between his firm white teeth, 'but not when the price is too high. First of all, merely to feed two hundred men means frank plunder and the hatred of every village within forty miles. When the armies have moved on, you must follow likewise, as

the vulture follows the carrion. You must plunder. You must let the men run free. You have dead fathers lying across violated thresholds. You ride away pursued by the curses of mothers. No, Froyla, we have quite enough down yonder' (he pointed to the cluster of wooden huts down in a clearing made by the wood-cutters of El Roz). 'Twenty-five honest fellows who will obey without question and follow where I lead them, who gather their own crops, and are everywhere welcome because they are Cardoños and Felicés from La Giralda. Defile not your own nest Froyla!'

'I defile not my own nest,' said the girl, 'and I know better than you the worth of my own kin. But you have forgotten the strangers. Are they safe? Are they obedient?'

'Both safe and obedient when I have the leading of them,' exclaimed Peter Blake. 'Has any one of them dared?'

'No - no,' said Froyla, who dreaded Peter's sudden and violent fits of passion; 'none of them has spoken word or laid hand upon me. No one has been lacking in respect.'

'Just as well,' growled Peter, completely awakened now, 'or I should have hung him as high as I did Long Ben Davis on the road between Leon and Astorga.'

Froyla shuddered at the memory. Twelve renegades, mostly English, but one or two French, had gradually joined the band and had soon proved the most dangerous and unmanageable elements in it. They denied all authority except that of the strongest hand and readiest knife. But on this basis Peter was by no means slack to argue with them. Of the twelve remained only four. The others had found

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Peter a nut beyond their powers to crack.

Some had died sudden and violent deaths. Others had been condemned in full council and adjudged to die in the dawn with all the forms, but most had melted away in search of other bands where liberty was greater and risks fewer.

Four only remained, survivors of the fiery furnace of Peter's wrath. First came Cherry Bates, formerly chief cook to General Moore's staff, a smooth, plausible man, good looking in the red-cheeked, soft-fleshed Devonshire manner, but really a thievish adventurer, too craven to be dangerous, and as a cook honest enough when someone else did the marketing.

Of quite other metal were the two Donegal men – the 'Papes' as they had been called in the regiment – ancient rebels of 'ninety-eight, raparees and moonlighters, blood-money on their heads, murder on their souls. But gay dogs and rollicking jesters for all that, whose songs and dances enlivened any company.

The 'Papes' were named Kinstrey and O'Hanlon, the latter having escaped on the morning of Corunna. They came from the bay of Killibegs – which for unknown reasons is called the Holy Sea. Instead of which certain wise men would read the 'Holy See,' and surcharge the calendar of Ireland with an unnamed saint who landed there and built of clay and wattle the church of which only the noble name has come down – 'The Little House of the Great King.'

Kinstrey and O'Hanlon would stand by each other against all comers till the day came for the equal division of the spoils. Then inevitably Kinstrey would kill O'Hanlon or O'Hanlon Kinstrey. And whichever

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way the thing turned out, the earth would be the wholesomer for one ruffian the less upon its face.

Of quite another type was Ephraim Marrowman, formerly quartermaster to my Lord Nelson, a West Country 'Seceder,' kirk-elder, developed by the hazard of voyages into a 'hot-gospeller,' or Wesleyan local preacher, and severe critic of all men's morals save his own. Ephraim was nevertheless a man exceptionally worldly wise, daring upon occasion, patient always, hovering silently, but with talons ever ready for the pounce, over any advantage.

Peter asked no questions of Ephraim Marrowman, but judged that it must have been some matter of contraband or shady contractor's deal which had brought a man so staid and severe among those outcasts of twenty races who slew and were slain in the rear of the Peninsular armies.

From this man alone of all the renegades some reasonable help was to be hoped. His interests and his instincts were with the forces of order, and so long as Peter could make it worth his while Ephraim Marrowman was his to command.

'You must, of course, know best,' said Froyla, who could not abide the stiff-lipped man who looked at her with cold, disapproving eyes, 'but I prefer any of the other three.'

'I *do* know best,' said Peer, suddenly truculent. 'I can judge my own people. And do not let me see you talking to Bates or the Teagues. They will need to be settled with some fine morning when very suddenly I shall have need of a friend at my back.'

'Well, I shall be that friend,' said Froyla jealously, 'Let old Crosspatch go about his business.'

Peter sat down on the great log, bestriding it, and placed his elbows on his knees. Then he leaned his

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chin upon his plaited knuckles and looked into the girl's eyes.

'Froyla,' he said, 'when the band has worn itself down to two, I have a piece of work which will be worth the doing.'

'Worn itself down to two – the band? Froyla gazed at him wonderingly. 'Who are the two?'

'You and I.'

Froyla's eyes glittered and darkened as they did when she was angry.

'You and I – we two – no more?'

Peter nodded, and drawing clear whispered, 'I know where the troop pay-chests were abandoned with all the army treasure. If the French do not find it, which is little like, you and I are rich, Froyla.'

'I thought they flung the gold in handfuls down the rocks so that the French and the peasants scrambled for it among the stones and grass.'

Peter smiled a quiet smile.

'I left the chests in a safe place,' he said, 'but I filled my pockets with gold and sowed them down the steep places as I went so there is none within a league of the main treasure, which is lying waiting for us in a gorge I know of.'

'I am to go with you?' Froyla inquired.

'We two – no others,' said Peter, 'and we must find a good excuse which will explain a prolonged absence. I have thought of one.'

'Ah!' said Froyla softly, 'so have I.'

'Good,' said Peter cheerfully, 'yours is probably the best. At any rate, let us have it.'

I am promised to marry Juan Julio Felicé. You shall be my sponsor. You can pretend to be my *cavalier servente*. Then it will seem quite natural that you and I should go away together. Juan Julio

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is an old man, you understand, older than my father, and it is done for the sake of the family to keep the lands and properties together. That is nothing to me.'

'But it is a great deal to me,' said Peter promptly. 'I will be no *cavalier servente*. I must be your husband and none other, and if any cavalier comes after you I will serve him as William of Cabestan served the troubadour -.'

'And how did he serve him?' said Froyla, looking up from the cigarette she was rolling so deftly in a single blonde leaf.

'At supper, in a pie!' affirmed Peter viciously.

'But why - was it not the custom of the country?'

'It is not the custom of honest men who love their wives.'

'*Sangre meo*, but it is curious,' said Froyla, much interested, 'I have read of such things in old books. But it is - oh, so stupid and old-fashioned, like Don Quixote and his suit of armour.'

'By the Lord! Then I shall set a new fashion,' cried Peter, crushing an imaginary *cavalier servente* in the palm of his hand.

'But what difference can it make to you?' said Froyla. 'I have been well brought up, and I know what is due. What difference can a wizened old ape like Juan Julio Felicé make to you, if all the Giralda is ours to the foothills of Ludo? It is important for the families that these be kept together. Otherwise we shall have vendetta quarrels perpetually, and everyone will say what a bad daughter I have been.'

'Let them,' Peter broke forth eruptively; 'let them go warm their toes at the devil's hearth! Mark you, Froyla, I am going to marry you - first point - no cavalier-at-secondhand business for me. Now,

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second point, you love me Froyla?’

Froyla nodded assent with a smile which meant ‘Of course I do, otherwise would I be following you about, serving in your company and proposing to accept you, in spite of your curious foreign scruples as squire and cavalier?’

Froyla’s smile and the way she had of opening out the palms of her hands said all that.

Reassured, Peter continued.

‘Then I shall go and ask your father for your hand. We shall have enough treasure to buy out the Felicés, lock, stock and barrel, with the vineyards of Carda and the orchards of Ludo. He would consent then, I think?’

Froyla put her fingers among the tightly curled locks of the man at her knee. How (she thought) could she make him understand that the marriage was a mere family arrangement – that it made no difference – that every one would understand and approve?

His objection appeared to her a want of delicacy, even of moral sense; but instinctively, like all women, she was thrilled by quixotry when the man is quixotic for their sakes.

So she pulled at Peter’s hair before she answered him with a kind of gentle recognisant pity.

‘You have not the treasure!’ she said; ‘you can only *say* you know where it is. Everyone says that. Galicia is a land of hidden treasure. All the galleons cast away between Portugal and the Lion of Vigo carried gold, and all is hidden away here. Not true? Perhaps not, but at any rate the Gallegans believe it.’

‘We shall have the gold in hand - English guineas every coin of it. Have I not sown a few down a score

of precipices to keep the hounds well away from the quarry?’

Froyla sighed and pulled gently at the short curls which tightened about his neck.

She had been brought up all her life in the knowledge that she was to marry Juan Julio Felicé – so much so that it seemed as if the thing were already done. In the country of Giralda they were treated upon state occasions as married persons. Juan Julio was sixty-eight years of age, an ancient smuggler and famous frontier fighter, but for many years chained to his chair in the corner of the family house of the Felicés, having been touched more than ten years ago by the finger of partial paralysis.

Now for the sake of the lands and heritages, intact and considerable, it was necessary that Froyla should wed old Juan Julio. Equally necessary was it that in the interest of posterity she should immediately make choice of a ‘little spouse.’ Everyone understood except this stupid Englishman. Juan Julio himself understood, and would hold the children up at the christening receptions. Did not King Ferdinand the same – Ferdinand for whom they were all fighting – while at the Queen’s right hand handsome Prince Godoy sat smiling?

Of a truth this man from England had no education, no morality. But then he was brave and handsome – masterful too, and accustomed to command. Besides which she loved him. What a pity he was so stubborn! That was the worst of being foreign born, and especially from the North. Froyla sighed again. The path of duty was so obvious and smooth, if only Peter would give himself the trouble of treading it. But then Peter would not – a prejudice

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most strange – hardly respectable indeed. Yet which somehow warmed the heart of Froyla Cardoños.

To her marriage meant property, the adding of field to field, the consolidation of vested interests – the whole Roman law, in fact which Rome has ground into the very souls of those who inhabit her first and greatest colony.

As for love, that was altogether another affair. What a strange people these English, thus to put the reaping before the sowing! How can any woman tell whom she will love when it is time for her to marry?

But Froyla knew well enough that it was quite useless to argue with an obstinate and hot-headed man like Captain Peter. She must let him come to the sense and meaning of life gradually. He would remain in Gallicia, and in time doubtless would grow to think like a Christian.

But Peter had two fashions of going about an affair so simple. When possible he went straight ahead. If not – well, then he went round about till he could climb over or creep under. The main thing was to get there.

Now he trampled straight before him, for his heart was hot with this abomination, so calmly proposed to him by an innocent girl. He put it down, quite wrongly, to religion and promised a good round sum to the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

Froyla watched him as he strode away through the dusky forest glades in which the spring flowers were beginning to bloom faintly blue in the hollows and shady places, pale yellow in the open sandy glades. Oh yes, a man to warm any woman's heart, and a man who, even if one were to marry would know how to guard his own.

And Froyla rose and followed far off, keeping her

misguided Captain in sight, and smiling the demure interior smile of a woman who in the long run is sure of getting her own way.

So Peter, observed of many, strode up the village street of La Giralda. The masons had finished repairing the few damaged houses, but their piles of stone-flakes and snowy chippings still lay about. Peter ascended the steep street with great strides, saluting no one, but with a darkened brow going about his business. Not a '*Buenos tarde*' was heard. They knew that till he had discharged his thought Peter had no time for salutations. Presently he would reappear smiling, his hands in his pockets, and ready for a chat with the world. But for the affairs of the Band they let him alone. It was safest so, they whispered. Captain Peter was not always good to approach when he had grave matters on his mind. He passed his own lodging, next door to the house of Severino Cardoños; up and up he climbed till he found himself in the Felicé quarter, and there (marvel of marvels!) he entered the house of Juan Julio – and shut the door after him.

Now except when it was a case of defending a house against an enemy, or a driving winter rain-storm from the Atlantic, one does not shut doors in Galicia, nor indeed in anywhere in Spain out of Castille. All stands open and everyone enters as into a mill.

Peter found the old man, his head a little sunk on his breast among the silken waves of a white beard, which he combed incessantly till it had a lustre like floss-silk. The visitor did not beat about the bush.

'Don Juan Julio,' he said, 'I have come to speak with you about Froyla.'

The veteran continued to caress his beard with

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the single hand which remained to him.

He fixed Peter with the brightness of his left eye, which still burned keen like a lantern in a ruined house after nightfall.

'Early days, Señor Capitano,' he murmured in a voice wholly without modulation, 'to be speaking to me about Froyla Cardoños. But say on young man – say on!'

'We love one another, Juan Julio, and I have come here to tell you.'

'Well, well,' said the old man, nodding his head tolerantly and paternally, as if he listened to the prattle of babes. 'Well, well, I do not know that she could have chosen a better. They say you are a brave man, that you beat Molinos, who vaunted himself the best blade in all the Western Spains. You will make me respected, and my children shall be noble babes.'

'But I will not have Froyla married to you, Don Juan Julio. I shall marry her myself.'

The old man's hand stopped caressing his silken beard, and he fixed Peter with his solitary eye. Had he heard aright, or had the young man gone suddenly mad?

'Eh!' he said, 'say that again!'

Peter repeated his objection to anybody but himself marrying Froyla, but the old man cut him short.

'If she does not marry me she will have to marry Don Thomas Felicé, who is a young man and will want a wife for himself.'

'But that is just what *I* want – a wife for myself,' cried Peter who was beginning to be seriously angry.

It is an unsettled time. I should think twice before encumbering yourself. You may change your

flag again and then you leave hostages behind you. Besides, as like as not a wife would get you into trouble with Froyla; for she comes of a quick tempered race, and our women have high sentiments about the loyalty of their lovers. Ah, she is well-bred Froyla – she has all the delicacies! I will wager she never sent you on this fool's errand.'

'Indeed no,' Peter admitted.

'Indeed she did not seem to understand.'

'A good girl, Froyla Cardoños and deserves her luck. Listen, man, if there be any sense in a young man's head. I shall not be here long. My old bones will hamper you not at all. These are my wants – a sop and my potions, a stout wench to rub my legs when the wind is in the east. For the rest, go your own way. And as soon as the spring grass is over me you can go before the priest, if the thought takes you – a little penance, a few *aves* to say, and you are married safe and sound – you have the girl and the lands too.'

Abruptly Peter abandoned argument and tried corruption. The moral principles of La Giralda were very firmly fixed.

'What is the value of the Felicé lands in question?'

'Let me see – let me see; the vineyards are the best in the country and the charcoal woods, the high pastures, ten *campos*, besides the wheatfields by the river, thirty houses with barns and stables. By holy St. Vincent, it is an evil time to sell with bands and brigands and foreign armies. But never a *maravedi* less than fifty thousand *duros* would buy all that.

'Very well,' said Peter, reaching for his hat, 'that makes ten thousand English guineas. I will go and get them. We shall bring back a notary with us, so have your papers ready.'

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‘And you have all that money hidden away?’ exclaimed the patriarch, twisting his beard in his excitement. ‘You who came to the *campo* in the rags of an English uniform?’

Then a new thought struck him.

‘But why will you give all that money for what in a few years, most likely in a few months, you would have for nothing?’

But Peter was already striding down the valley in search of Froyla. He had no time to answer questions.

Already Peter and Froyla had been three days on the hills without venturing to descend towards the densely-wooded region between Nogales and Bembibre, where the treasure had been abandoned. The first day they had spent in manœvering for safety. Froyla, interested in the matter as an adventure, and happy, because she could be with Peter, captured and drove off to a secret *campo* a couple of her father’s best mules, with pack saddles and loading gear all complete. She was back before daybreak, and in the afternoon the two departed, ostensibly directing their march towards Campostella along the track by which General Frazer’s army had made its weary and useless march.

It was certain that they would be watched. Juan Julio was cunning and would send his young men to discover Peter’s hiding-place. The hillsides sown with gold had excited all the north, and many lives had been lost, either by the slipping of a foot on perilous crags, or by the long-range practice of the French *voltigeurs*, who from their posts on the opposite hill shot down the gold-seekers like crows.

But as soon as night fell, Peter and Froyla left the

warm shelter of the hayshed where they had passed the afternoon, quite silent, listening to the mild tinkle-tinkle of the cowbells in the pastures, the light air-borne noises from the little village far beneath in its trough of restless leaves and running waters. The crickets had sung all day in the pastures. The torrents boiled and raced. The rays of sunshine in which the motes danced wheeled across the hay like the hands of a clock as the sun swung slowly westward.

At last they saw the last light go out in the village, and hand in hand they stole out, the grasshoppers still busy about them, and took their way down towards Froyla's high *campo*. Through meadows where the cows still tinkled and scented the air with the sweetness of their breath, springing from boulder to boulder across torrents where the basalt rocks showed black in the midst of white tormented water, up, down, and across, till after a final wait of half an hour to make sure that all was silent and solitary, they reached the goal.

There were the mules at last, moving restlessly and pining for deliverance. Forward then; there before them were the wild peaks under the stars, and the last pasture of all from which the snows of the year had hardly had time to melt, yet through which the gentian and the dwarf foxglove of the Sierras were already pushing. Higher still the pass was wholly sterile, the rock scarps bare, denuded of vegetation, the precipices abrupt, and the single path narrow and dangerous. They were getting near the gorge of Escaldos where four men – three of whom were now dead – had hidden away the treasure of golden guineas abandoned by their general.

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For Moore had been resolved that nothing should for a moment delay his getting to his ships.

'But it is money!' the officers who were ordered to lighten the retreat of the rearguard had objected, with inherent British awe for the stamped and milled image of their sovereign.

'Money is it?' exclaimed Moore. 'Well, so is powder and shot. Over with it!'

But four men charged with the conduct of the operation saved the treasure chests, hid them in a cleft of the rock high up a side alley, and were back in time to be caught by a hailstorm of bullets from the sharpshooters of Lagrange's brigade.

Only the ex-scoutmaster of dragoons remained, and he looked upon the abandoned guineas as his undeniable property. He had been ordered to throw them over a cliff. He had saved them at the risk of his own life and the cost of three other lives. He was besides no longer in the English service; and in any case it could be argued that so soon as the General had cast the treasure out of his baggage train it became anybody's property, and in no wise that of any British Government.

Not that Peter troubled himself with scruples and fine distinctions. If he could get the money he would not argue about questions concerning the right of trover.

But when at last Peter and his lieutenant looked down upon the gorge of Escaldos it was a mere drove-road of hurrying regiments, artillery, all Soult's baggage train, tumbling flamboyantly southward to support the King. Romana might go where he liked. The French were evacuating Galicia. The northern ports were deserted by their garrisons, all because there was news of the arrival of one man

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on the Tagus – a certain Sir Arthur Wellesley, with some Indian reputation, but apparently quite unable with twenty thousand troops to oppose the pick of Napoleon's marshals, trained by the greatest master of war the world ever saw, and experienced in every corner of Europe.

Nevertheless instinct warned Soult that the new man would bear watching, and so, leaving an indignant Ney to shift for himself, he poured his army southward to the relief of King Joseph upon the Tagus.

It was clearly impossible that so long as this tide lasted there could be any safety in the gorge of Escaldos or its tributary defiles. Moreover, they must keep high up, for hard on the heels of the troops, gleaming the spare plunder and slaying all the stragglers, would come the hateful *partidas*.

So higher and higher among the pines mounted Peter and Froyla with their borrowed mules till they found a camp in a dell where a charcoal-burner had been at work. There they installed their beasts in a cavern still half-filled with charcoal, while they made themselves as comfortable as possible in the hut among the tall trees under the crest of the Sierras, high above everything except the jagged peaks themselves.

As philosophically as possible Peter settled down to wait. He would teach his lieutenant English. He would correct his own Spanish, which, though fluent, bore traces of the tobacco girl of the Havana. But all such projects simmered down into day-long talks, interrupted only by scrappy meals. Peter, with his arms clasped behind his neck, spoke of India and Tippoo Sahib, of the storming of Seringapatam, also of the treasure of the Rajah of Travancore.

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Then all suddenly he sprang to his feet, ran to the door, looked about him carefully as if spying certain marks. Memory returned to Peter. He saw on the hillside a hundred yards above him a dark cave-mouth with above it a white stain.

'Bide where you are Froyla,' he commanded her. 'I will bring you an 'arles' of the treasure now.'

She watched him climb the rugged side of El Pico with the long, slow strides of a mountaineer. He disappeared, and though she looked eagerly into the noon brilliance, her hand above her brow, she saw nothing except peewits swooping and the long planning flight of the curlews declining towards their nests.

'Oorli-ooo-ooo-Oourli-oo!'

Presently he was back with something that showed bright in his hand – a long chain, which he threw about her neck, and a gold watch, which he slipped into the sautoir she wore crossed upon her breast, in white leather, burnished, the Imperial eagle upon the shoulder straps, the spoil of some young officer who had dressed himself for the Spanish Sierras as if for an afternoon's promenade in the Rue de Rivoli. Peter, wholly without pride, but content to prove himself not nameless, showed the inscription inside. She could read his name, and the reason for the gift, 'for exceptional valour,' was also plain.

Froyla threw her arms about his neck.

They were true then, all the tales to which she had been listening. They were not mere bubbles of words blown to amuse on a long afternoon.

'I love you, do you know, Don Peter?'

'I know,' said Peter, not at all surprised; 'but why particularly now?'

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'Because it is all true.'

'And you thought it was not?'

'I thought it kind of you to amuse me -'

'Oh,' said Peter, 'if I had taken the trouble to lie I could have told you some really remarkable things. But between you and me, the truth will serve our turn.'

They went back to the hut, and she sat down beside him, her cheek pressed closely against his.

'Will it ever go - this watch? Will it tell the time?'

'As soon as I get a key in any town - a few pennies buy one.'

Froyla clapped her hands.

'Then I shall be able to tell the time.'

'But you have only to look at the sun.'

'I know - but at night.'

'The stars.'

'Then what is the good of a watch?' demanded Froyla, impatiently tapping her foot on the floor of split pine saplings.

'Not much,' owned Peter, 'but it is pretty, and - wait a moment - look at the hour the hands are marking - five hours less a quarter.'

'Pray heaven the thing is working,' he thought as he pulled the lever. 'Listen!' he exclaimed when he caught the preliminary click and purr of the escapement.

'It will speak for itself. Four strokes slow and mellow - four o'clock - *ting-ting-tang* thrice repeated - three-quarters - then one small *ping*, very distant and clear, makes one minute more. So you can always tell the time in the darkest room in the blackest night.'

'Oh!' cried Froyla, 'I shall always sleep with my shutters closed on purpose.'

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That night Peter, who soldier-like slept in a shed outside on a bed of heather and romarin, awoke to a warm rain of tears and the sound of sobbing. He sat up in a moment.

'What is the matter?' Why have you left your bed in the hut? Why are you dressed at this hour?'

'I am so happy – I could not sleep.'

'Good luck! But why?' said Peter. 'Happiness never keeps me awake. But why cry?'

'Because you are such a true man and I love you.'

'Well,' sighed Peter, kissing her gently, 'that is the treasure. The other doesn't matter three pins.'

'Oh but it does!' cried the true daughter of the house of Cardoños. 'I want that too.'

Episode Four

The Treasure of Ten Thousand.

The tide flowed on, glittering breastplates of Lagrange's Cuirassiers, plumed shakos, pale blue lancers, all aflutter with gold and embroidery, little, nimble, crisp-headed, chattering Provençal infantry men, good at a charge and the very devil to swarm up an enemy's entrenchments. A great sight were the gorges of Escaldos those short June nights of Soult's famous forced march, when the very name of Wellesley sent that huge army southward with the rush and fury of a dam broken loose. A memorable watch they kept, these two alone upon the mountain verge – the girl with her hand on the man's shoulder, and her eyes going to and fro between the rivers of flashing steel and thundering hoofs and the man's face. For Froyla was now at the stage when she wondered all the time what he was thinking, and strove to divine the thought.

At last they had drawn themselves away from the marvel of force and discipline which was a night march of Napoleon's veterans.

The real danger came afterwards. The gorges emptied and filled – filled and emptied. And so long as the gold and steel, the crimson and black, the sky-blue and silver marched and rode, or drove light mule teams, swagging cannon and lumbering wagon, Froyla and Peter were safe on their heights. But afterwards, at a safe distance from Soult's inexorable rearguards, came the plunderers, the worst of all the free companies, scouring the country for all that was left or had dropped behind.

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Then Peter and Froyla betook themselves to the cave where were the mules, for it was well to be ready.

Froyla examined the ammunition and provender. Peter arranged such temporary defences as would enable them to stand a siege, supposing always that they were not rushed. A bend in the road beneath and a Devil's Thumb of rock afforded an excellent rifle range. They practised assiduously, till Peter could hit the mark every time, and Froyla about three times out of every five.

Assuredly with a couple of rifles apiece they could make it unpleasant for anyone coming that way.

But time passed, and still they abode in silence and peace, cleaning their rifles and talking incessantly in low tones, as if someone were dead in the next room.

On the afternoon of the third day of their residence in the charcoal-burner's hut a man appeared. Froyla spotted him from far, and through the old three-draw marine telescope ('Puig Hijos, Calle Ferdinando, Barcelona 1789') they kept him in sight. Unless he came as a spy, one man could do them no harm. He might be anyone – a mountaineer seeking his goats abandoned among the peaks, or their landlord the charcoal-burner himself, prepared to light the furnace and resume possession of his cabin of split pine saplings, with the bark still on and the resin still oozing, a cruel trap for the hair when you leaned too confidently against it.

Their visitor advanced carefully. They could see him in the dim, bluish light of the old telescope, with something vaguely marine about him, a foreshortened water-beetle moving painfully upward through a vague glimmer of mist.

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It could not be the charcoal-burner, because obviously he did not know the way. He made casts from side to side of the road like a questing collie.

Yet he sought for something, for he bent often and examined the ground with attention, particularly in the soft places. The goatherd then, or someone spying upon them? The dim bluish silhouette in the lenses of ancient Puig (pronounced 'push') revealed nothing except a country-cut coat and white linen trousers (or bragas, pattern old as the Romans), with the yellow hose cross-gartered in white, common to all the peasantry of the North from the Aragon to the Atlantic headlands.

Steadily and quietly the man made his way, trudging up the narrow glens, seamed and torn with the torrents of a thousand winter floods. His eyes were upon the ground, following the unseen sign, but every now and then he would straighten himself and stand gazing upward, as if daring them to make a mark of him.

Presently, however, he would pass in front of the rock they had called the Devil's Thumb; and then they must make up their minds as to whether or not he was to be allowed to pass.

For an hour he mounted, nowise hasting or troubling himself save about the direction, which he certainly followed with uncanny exactness. Now and then a pile of stones attracted his attention. There are a good many such along every Spanish mountain path, and merely signify that some man, name unknown or forgotten, had died a violent death on that spot. The new-comer examined each of these, carefully perusing their structure and examining their arrangement with the air of a man who gains valuable information.

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They lost him a while as the gorge continued to narrow. But Peter, his rifle at his shoulder, watched both ridges so that he could not possibly escape unseen. Presently he would come out almost in front of the black monolith of the Devil's Thumb, and there he must be stopped.

Froyla's eye was glued to the telescope. Peter fastidiously depressed his guiding sight a hair's breadth, and kept the small glittering speck of his hind-sight steady on the black basalt pillar.

It was very silent up there on the Sierra when a man's life hung in the crook of Peter's finger – not a bird's note, not a bee, not even the jingling accoutrement of the mules whisking their tails in the rock shelter behind.

Peter's rifle cracked, and all the circle of the hills gave back the report. At the very feet of the man by the rock a little puff of dust sprang up and hung an instant in the air.

The climber paused, noted the smoke high above him, straightened himself, and leaning against the black Devil's Thumb in an attitude of careless ease, rolled and lit a cigarette.

It was a challenge in form.

'A bold fellow,' growled Peter, 'but he means mischief, or he would not take matters so coolly.' And he adjusted his sights, this time – with the full intention of not missing twice.

Suddenly Froyla held up a hand.

'Stop!' she ordered. 'Do not fire. It is my father, Don Severino. Let us go down to him!'

And with a shout of joy she dropped the spy-glass and ran straight down the hill towards the sullen obelisk of the Devil's Thumb.

Peter followed with his piece ready to set to fire.

But he soon shouldered his gun, for it was indeed Severino Cardoños who came nearer to him, his daughter upon his arm.

On his face there was an air of guileless simplicity. He was pleased with himself, for he had performed a notable feat of tracking. But he was quite ready to explain how the matter had been carried through.

‘I had the front of the big he-mule Buscar’s shoes turned up like hatbrims, because Buscar has an abominable habit of dragging his forefeet and stumbling upon the rasps left to bite into the path in dangerous places. So I looked for the trace of Buscar’s hoof-brims, and it was quite simple.’

Severino had come to warn Peter of sedition in the band. Juan Julio had not been silent. The tidings of the bargain had flown round the camp of the Felicés. Juan Julia had sold their lands and properties to the stranger. They would be turned out of white houses, resplendent meadows, ancient vineyards and other yards. There would be no more Felicés at all. The Cardoños would possess all, and they would be no more than gitanos, road trampers, petty thieves – all that Juan Julio might have forty, fifty, a hundred thousand duros to live upon in Madrid or Saragossa.

Don Severino and all the Cardoños had maintained that nothing should be altered. Everything should be as if Froyla had married Juan Julio. Every Felicé should retain his own house, his meadows, his vineyards and fruit-trees, his ‘alps’ and pasturages, his rights of wood and water, all protected by legal entitlement.

But the obstinate tribe replied: ‘Why then so much money for nothing? There is some trick

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beneath.' So Severino had come on to warn Peter not to go back to La Giralda with the money, but to pay it into the hands of the brothers Pereira of Bayonne, who were the bankers of all the North of Spain and had agencies in every town.

Severino watched the expression upon Peter's face keenly. He expected that he would now see the folly of attempting to tamper with family arrangements, and with so clear a lesson before him would accept the position and settle down to the clearly defined and highly respectable functions of Prince Consort in the Platonic ménage of Froyla and the venerable Chief of the Feliçes.

But Peter never gave that solution a thought. He was thinking of the band and of those Feliçes who were reported to be mutinous.

'They shall obey as soon as I look them between the eyes.' He muttered rather than spoke the words. 'They would not dare - they would not dare!'

Aloud he said, 'Don Severino Cardoños, I honour you as my benefactor and I have honoured and respected the lady your daughter as though I were her blood brother. But we love one another. I have my own honour. I obey my own law. So before I return to La Giralda, we must find a priest who will marry us. You shall be our witness and give your consent.'

'And the treasure?' said Don Severino, ignoring on his side the demand for immediate marriage.

'The treasure,' said Peter, 'I shall lodge it with the Pereiras in the name of my wife Donna Froyla Blake; so my promise will be fulfilled - so it shall be ready for Juan Julio whatever happens to me!'

'But when there is no need?' said Don Severino. 'It is safer where it is in these troubled times.'

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'My word is my word,' asserted Peter dourly. 'I take the girl and I pay over the price.'

That night they slept both in the outer hut, while the couple of saddle-cloths hung over a stretched cord provided a sleeping room for Froyla. But with the coming of a third person a certain awkwardness over-shadowed the confident simplicity of their lives.

Peter meditated all night on the problems of life, and in the morning, rising early to stir the faggots from under the grey ash, he articulated the result of the night's thoughts in this flinty formula:

'Priest before payment.'

The three remained four days more in the charcoal-burner's hut, and then, after diligent spying out of the land, they began to descend into the main gorge of Escaldos. The clean, eager airs of the hilltops, keen even in June, were left behind. They descended into a zone of shadow and quiet. The air grew soft, fragrant with the scent of mown hay and acacias in bloom.

But the mountains shut them more quickly in. The twilight came sooner. The dawn lingered longer, and only for a few hours each day the deep gorge sweltered and sweated under the direct rays of the sun.

It was silent and deserted down there. No one on the much-rutted powdery road, stamped hard by ten thousand feet of men and horses. Above on the arching branches of the trees a few handfuls of cherries had escaped the hasty gleaning of the French soldiers. Boughs had been roughly hacked down with sword cuts, but still a little higher, and often within a few yards of the track, Peter and Froyla found plenty of the ruby fruit, sweet-juiced,

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and now almost black with ripeness.

But everywhere the houses had been sacked. In Escaldos itself not a house remained entire. Fire had destroyed the roofs, and every scrap of wood had been carried off to keep the soldiers off the chill ground or barren rock at the next camping place.

It was with a sigh of thankfulness that Peter at last turned from the main gorge up one of the side defiles. He recognised the place immediately. There was his own blaze on the trees, the little cairn with the erect stone in the centre which his companions had set up, and before them the black overhanging rocks of La Catalina, the highest of the Sierras, blocking the way.

All that afternoon they advanced up the narrow *cul de sac*. That way there was no exit. They must return by the path they came, and in this lay their danger, for if Ney took it into his head to follow Soult through the gorges of Escaldos the cork was in the bottle indeed.

Peter, however, found no traces of recent passage either of man or beast. The place was desolate as when God made it, the black hills surrounding it, and a mere crack of blue sky roofing it irregularly in.

They camped for the night under an overhanging rock-shelf, beside which a pool was formed by the downward trickle of innumerable little rills from the springs in the hillside.

The place had been noted by Peter on the brief visit he had paid as a good place for a camping ground. But then he and his companions had passed hastily on. Nevertheless, Peter had been looking out for it ever since they turned out of the pass. Now he hobbled the mules at once, and after a good feed of barley and chopped straw he turned

them out to graze on the scanty tufts of grass and self-sown sapling which pushed up sparsely and reluctantly among the rocks.

Severino slept like a tired soldier on the mule furniture, but in the eye of the pass, looking down towards Escaldos, Froyla and Peter kept watch.

The silence was broken only by the croak of the raven high among the rocks, the hissing of a stone slide on the slopes, and the deep sonorous pour of a score of waterfalls from the heights.

Peter and Froyla talked in whispers, her head on his shoulder, and her fingers plaited about his arm. She fell asleep while Peter was telling her of his dreams – how they would go to America and do great things, found cities, and build them, become owners of immense wheat-fields, orchards, dairies – all of which was perfectly the same to Froyla so that Peter was going with her. That being settled, she slept, warm, peaceful and invincibly safe within the circle of an arm, while Peter, with a heart troubled by that delicately warm proximity, looked resolutely out into the night.

The next morning Severino was left behind to watch the narrow entrance to the upper reach of the gorge where the treasure was hidden. Peter went on fifty yards ahead with his rifle over his arm. Froyla came behind with the two mules. They had progressed thus two hours when all at once Peter darted forward, caught at the edge of a dwarf pine clinging to the edge of a precipice, and appeared to launch himself into the abyss. Froyla hastened forward, leaving the mules to follow, and in an instant was standing beside him on a broad shelf, the floor of a former cave from which the side next the cañon had been wrenched out in some

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convulsion. Beneath the torrent roared and fretted, and in the dim alcoves at the back many small boxes like tea-chests were piled. The treasure at last, and quite untouched, just as Peter and his companions had left it! With a cold chisel and a pocket hammer Peter soon opened the first chest which came to hand. No doubt about it – good honest English guineas, neatly done up in rolls of a hundred. Ten of these would therefore make a thousand, and a hundred the exact count of ten thousand.

'Your price, Froyla,' said Peter exultingly, as he laid the firm little packages out side by side on the dry stone floor. Then he bade her go and bring the mules close up one after the other to receive their load.

Peter had little sacks ready in which he placed the rouleaux of coin. These were passed up one by one to Froyla, who placed them carefully in the panniers, bedding each down with heath and bracken, so that no noise of clinking coin might be heard.

When everything was complete Peter carefully effaced all marks of their passage, and the cavalcade took its way down to where Severino was anxiously awaiting their coming.

As soon as she saw her father Froyla leaped on a rock and waved her neckerchief. All was well then. The stranger who had cast a spell over his daughter, and indeed over all the clan of Cardoños, had been speaking the truth.

It was with a trembling avidity that the chief dipped his hand among the rolls of gold. He turned his face towards Peter, and his eyes were eager as those of a child who asks permission. Peter nodded

his head, and with extreme care old Cardoños unrolled a pile of glittering pieces fresh from the mint. His eyes grew strange and reminiscent. A mist rose before them.

'Where did you find all that?' he said, and the words sounded hoarse and strange in his own ears.

'Froyla knows,' Peter answered calmly. 'It is *her* Treasure.'

Severino looked longingly up at the glen. Had he been alone he would have gone there to search for it. But he understood that Peter was not a man to be trifled with on such an occasion.

They took their way back down the glen, their eyes and ears keen to catch the first intimations of the passage of troops through the Gorge of Escaldos. But the footmarks of the mules were still upon the dust where they had turned aside to the right, and Severino pointed out the smooth shuffling plough made by the turned-up horn of Buscar's right forefoot.

'No one has passed this way since,' he said, confidently, and filled with an equal desire to be done with the dangerous trap, they urged the laden mules towards the upper entrance. The scout-master went on ahead, and Froyla and her father brought up the rear. The little side glens were more numerous towards the entrance of the gorge, and Peter arranged that the mules should be hidden in one of those, exactly as in a side street of a town, till he should signal from the corner of the next. Then the beasts would be urged to the new shelter, while again the scout-master went ahead to spy out the way.

At last the arid steepness of the hills opened out and it was possible by striking up among the

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chestnut trees to cross the last shoulder into the plain. The worst of the danger was now over; but not on that account did Peter relax the smallest part of his vigilance.

He went on ahead through pleasant shades of oak and chestnut, his eye keenly alert for any sign of French cavalry or Spanish irregulars.

And at last, just as they were descending into the Vale of Ludo, Peter came quite unexpectedly upon a man. He had evidently been propped up against the trunk of a tree, but had collapsed, and slipped down into an attitude which bespoke mortal weakness.

'Molinos!' muttered Peter, and without attempting any succour he turned instantly back to signal Froyla and her father to take the higher road with the mules.

The presence of Molinos in that place might be the result of some tragedy in the band, or again it might be a trap. In one case or the other, Peter, rendered cautious by his knowledge of the man, did not propose to run any risks.

He returned to Molinos, and forcing the neck of his silver flask between his clenched teeth, he turned the priest's head back. The fiery liquid caused him to open his eyes, coughing and spluttering.

'Ah! The Englishman,' he muttered. 'Good day, Englishman! See how they have arranged me – their leader! Proper and grateful is it not? Another sup from that bottle.'

'I think,' said Peter, 'you had better let me look at your wounds.'

And putting two fingers in the mouth after the fashion of the Galloway shepherds, he whistled shrilly. Severino came down immediately at his slow

hillman's trot, which yet so swiftly covers the ground.

'Ah, Don!' said the wounded man, as Cardoños bent his knee to receive the muttered benediction; 'they have left your poor *cura* out here to die with as many holes in him as a colander! But I shall be glad of your help to get as far as Ludo, where I have well-wishers. Ah, if only I could see the white towers of my village church again I should grow well. I have had enough of storming and fighting. I shall make my submission to the bishop, shave my tonsure, dust my old breviary, and till the day you bury me under the chestnuts I shall no more be Captain Molinos of the Free Companies, but only Padre Esteban, parish priest of La Giralda. And all for a nothing.' Molinos continued, 'for a letter, a little letter which I wrote and sent to General Lagrange, warning him that the attack of the Free Companies was for such an hour of such a night. It was, indeed the day and hour fixed, but I meant to change it – after I had received the reward. But the Frenchman – twenty thousand devils enter by his eye-holes! – cursed be Lagrange through the high, the middle and the deep, deep hell! – threw back my little letter at the messenger, saying that he had now no need to spend money on Gallegan traitors. Let them go dig truffles with their swine-snouts! He was marching southwards with Soult. Little mattered it to him that he delivered to the devil a poor *cura* who had tried to serve him! He tossed my letter to Paulo Santa Anna, who, not being able to read himself, pouched it and brought it back to those who could.

Lissengaray read it aloud to the band and said:

Thus it is you are betrayed. There is a Judas among you and he hath not received his thirty

pieces of silver. What will you give the poor man instead?’

‘Then they bound my hands and blindfolded my eyes. I heard the chill whisper of many knives drawn from their sheaths, and then by their order and companies they passed and struck, some lightly (these were my friends) and others with the utmost ill-will of their right arms, till I fell down prone from loss of blood.’

‘But you had been propped up against a tree - so, at least we found you,’ said Peter.

‘Ah, yes,’ groaned the priest. ‘That would be Felix de Rey, my parish clerk, *marguillier*, and good servant. He would doubtless mean to come back to find me. But then - ’tis as good as certain that they have put their daggers through him also. Ah! If Felix had not been lame, I should have made him my messenger to the French dog Legrange, and all this would not have happened. Oh, the devil’s animals upon whom be evil! Not a Christian among them - malediction befall them, sons of impure mothers!’

‘The devil is very sick,’ thought Peter as he bound up the dagger wounds, which were scattered over all parts of the priest’s body - the arms, back and breast chiefly.

However, none of these appeared in Peter’s experienced eye to put the priest’s life in danger, but he had certainly lost a great deal of blood, and it was evident that for a while he would be at leisure to repent of his sins and read his neglected breviary.

‘The devils,’ he murmured over and over as he passed from one fainting fit to another, while his wounds were being staunched, ‘they cut me to pieces - I, with my eyes blindfolded, and they compelling everyone to strike in turn - even my

friends. But I know the ring-leaders!’

‘Whom,’ said Peter, ‘as a priest reconciled with God, it is your duty to forgive.’

‘I will – oh, I will!’ cried the priest; ‘only get me to some place of safety where I can be nursed.’

‘First of all, Father Molinos,’ said Peter, ‘I have a small service to require of you, and then I shall carry you at once to an hospital. You can administer the sacraments – well then marry us two. Froyla Cardoños and myself. You are the priest of our parish, and Froyla’s father shall be our witness. Besides, if you desire to live peacefully, I have means of causing the archbishop to raise his interdict.’

The wounded man was suddenly awake and alert.

‘I will see you frying in hell first!’ he exclaimed fiercely, trying to raise himself upon the palms of his hands. But he fell back exhausted by the effort. ‘I am dying,’ he groaned, ‘bring Don Ramon, the priest of Logo, that I may die confessed.’

‘You will be better presently,’ said Peter, who knew the effect of the tot of Angoulême brandy he was administering. ‘If you will not marry us we shall instantly be compelled to leave you as we found you, holy father, and go find Don Ramon for ourselves. But if you have forgotten your Latin, I have here a Church Ritual printed by Fabricius of Antwerp for your own diocese of Campostella. Here are also a pen and scrivener’s ink wherewith to write your certificate. Is that complete and clear? Now let me call down Donna Froyla.’

Again with palms hollowed like a conch-shell, he hooted three times, and presently through the glades of the wood came the tinkling of mule chains.

‘Tie them to the trees at the edge of the clearing and come hither,’ called out Peter. And as Froyla

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approached, Peter announced calmly, 'Padre Molinos is about to marry us. Your father will do us the honour to serve as witness.'

Molinos propped against the tree, ghastly under his spotted bandages, glared at them speechless with wrath and amazement.

Peter prompted him.

'Petrus Blake, vis accipere Froylam Cardoños hic presentum in legitimam uxorem.'

The wounded priest repeated the words in a prolonged snarl as if he were spitting the Latin at them. One after another they responded. 'Volo!' while Peter, book in hand, checked the accuracy of the ceremonial to see that nothing necessary was omitted.

As the priest blessed the ring which Don Severino gave him from the half-dozen he wore, Peter whispered to Froyla:

'After all, he is but a feeble rascal. All the time he is saying to himself, 'A good little knife-thrust will cut any marriage bonds.'

'Let him alone,' Froyla answered. 'After his office is said we shall see.'

'In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.'

Molinos sank back and closed his eyes. A little more brandy and the certificate was written, signed, and witnessed.

'We shall have it proclaimed and transcribed as soon as we reach La Giralda,' said Peter as he slipped the stamped parchment into his old leather pocket-book.

Faithfully they conveyed Molinos to the house of his friend Don Ramon. Faithfully they paid down the ten thousand English guineas to Israël Goldsmidt,

Pereira's agent in Ludo, the only man whom neither side dared rob, because he represented the power from which all in turns had borrowed, and might need to borrow again.

Israël accepted the deposit with perfect calmness. It was made in the name of Froyla Blake, wife of Peter Blake, of Rerrick in Scotland, and La Giralda in the country of Galicia.

The next Sunday was the feast of the Virgin, and at La Giralda the vicar the Abbé Jaime, read in a loud voice the certificate of marriage signed by his *cura*, and placed in his hands by the bride's father, while in the presence of the congregation Froyla put into the hands of Juan Julio the bank certificate and a deed of gift of the ten thousand guineas English moneys to the said Juan Julio and his heirs, in consideration of which moneys Froyla Blake and her heirs became the possessors and overlords of La Giralda, exactly as if she had married Juan Julio Feliçé. All existing rights of tenancy were to be respected, and the purchase money to be divided according to valuation among the family of which he was the head.

As for the band, it was constituted more strongly than ever. The Cardoños were now more dominant, and looked upon their new leader as their legitimate chief. His reputation for wealth went abroad, and it was currently reported that if he would he could lend to emperors and kings even as he did the great house of the Pereiras of Bayonne.

Israël Goldsmidt had said it, and who should know if not he?

As for the Señora Froyla Blake, she hunted out her mother's provision of lace and linen, to which Juan Julio good-naturedly added all that was to be

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found in the Felicé family chests. So that Froyla walked like a slender dusky queen in the shadow of priceless mantillas, and swung her legs no more on tables and window sills, but like a wise married woman did her best to keep her husband quiet and contented at home.

Which thing, in the thirty-second year of his age, was little likely to happen to Peter Blake.

Episode Five

Capturing a King.

King Joseph Buonaparte was a proud man when he rode out of Madrid amid the cheers of a rabble to whom his steward distributed largesse, and the staid salutations of comfortable citizens, who wished for nothing so much as peace in which to fatten their money-bags. For the French, if they plundered the North, spent their money in Madrid like water.

I have them at last, he murmured, tapping the pocket of the green uniform he wore in imitation of his brother. 'Generals and marshals. Now they shall take the word from me. I have the Emperor's written orders. The Generalissimo is King Joseph - *moi el Rey!*'

The young man in the carriage with him pretended not to hear, not because he feared to be indiscreet but because he had heard nothing else ever since leaving Paris.

'Count Leon,' the King repeated, 'this time Marshal Massena shall not flout me. I have that here, as you know, which will bring even Soult to his knees!'

'It is indeed to be hoped so most fervently,' said the young secretary courteously.

'We need not hope for what we have,' exclaimed his Majesty, suddenly losing patience. 'Do you see that - his Imperial Highness's hand from beginning to end - the supreme direction of the central army, whoever is in command, and of the other armies whenever I am in their several provinces - Bessières

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to be treated as he deserves, Jourdain to be put in his place, Béliard on the retired list, my establishment to be doubled, twice as much money to be paid in monthly – that is what we have gained by going to Paris!’

‘Your majesty speaks no more than truth!’ There is nothing like seeing the Emperor face to face.’

‘Ah, he knows my value, old Joseph! He has an affection for me, the little Napoleon. Many a beating I saved him from because I was our mother’s favourite. And he does not forget, nor yet the crowns I sent him at Brienne. He cannot do without me; whenever there is a hard nut to crack, it is ‘Where is Joseph – Joseph, my brother? He conquered Naples for me and put down Fra Diavolo. He will pick Spain out of the fire and put it on my plate.’ And so I should have done long ago, had it not been for those wretched quarrelling marshals. But now they have a head and that head is ... the King!’

Count Leon smiled to himself. What Napoleon could scarcely manage with all the reins of Government and prestige in his hands was wholly beyond the power of his good, easy brother. But though all save Joseph’s Spanish adventurers knew the truth, it was judged wisest to let him find out for himself.

Count Manuel de Leon was no adventurer, but a man of wide possessions. Only, as he sometimes smilingly agreed, Fortune had dealt hardly with his patriotism in placing the most valuable of these among the vineyards of Médoc. He was, therefore, a Spaniard by race and training, but compelled to pass for a well-wisher of the French because of his vast holdings in that country. Yet he had become the friend and confidential adviser of King Joseph,

as much from pity and a curious personal liking as anything.

At Vilalba, the first village on the route to Medina del Campo, King Joseph, who loved not the saddle, descended and took his place in the comfortable carriage which was to convey him to his armies. Count Leon would far rather have remained where he was, but his business being to accompany his King, he was compelled to give up his white alezan with the sweeping tail and shut himself up in the great padded interior of the King's state coach.

They were accompanied only by a small personal escort, because Joseph had sent on ahead the five thousand horsemen who had come with him from France. The Tagus road was counted the safest in Spain. Details of troops traversed it at all hours. Every two leagues a military post had been established. The towns were fortresses, strongly held by the French, or by his own favourite Spanish army, the 'Josephists,' composed of Madrillenes and such partisans of his great lords as could be gathered together – an army which manœuvred well enough on the Prado or on the plain beneath the royal palace, but which would certainly desert *en masse* to the enemy at the first battle.

But this was a thing also mercifully hidden from the King, who knew that the exiled Ferdinand was no great 'Ferdinandist,' and that he contented himself very well in France, where nobody worried him, and he had his wife to himself. So Joseph Buonaparte imagined that a little showing of favour to Spaniards and a good deal of bickering with the marshals would win him favour with the Spanish people.

But in spite of his best intentions, his kindest

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thoughts and endeavours, the open favouritism he showed to all things Spanish, he still remained the intruder, the alien, the 'Outlander.'

King Joseph had given the honour of escorting him to a battalion of the Royal Palace Guards, which had ridden all the way to the frontier with him, where they had so distinguished themselves by their magnificent apparel of scarlet and gold that Ney's veterans, scoffing openly, had called them the Tambour Majors. They carried indeed so much gold lace that they were popularly believed to be proof against ordinary pistol bullets, and even musketry fire if at all oblique.

No doubt the Tambour Majors were individually gallant men. Indeed, many of them proved it afterwards from Vimiera to the walls of Toulouse. But as they jogged along under the stars, the chill wind of the Sierras sweeping out the Tagus valley, and the flaws of rain whisking and snatching at their cloaks, it is perhaps small wonder that they gazed with no friendly feelings at the sleeping figure of the 'Outlander' monarch whom they had sworn to protect, extended on the cunningly devised couch within.

Which may explain the fact why, when at the great bend of the river east of Talavera, where the thick wood called Peñada Grande makes a green darkness across the road, at the first shout of '*Mina, Mina,*' the household troops set spurs to their horses and rode as hard as they could back to Madrid with tidings of terrible disaster.

It was Peter who opened the carriage door pistol in hand, demanding instant surrender. Peter it was who, with his faithful Giralda command, surrounded and defended the carriage. The rest of the *partida*

hurled itself upon the convoy of rich meats for the royal table, valuable arms, badges of orders, swords of honour, and all the paraphernalia of luxury and comfort with which it behoved the brother of Napoleon to travel through the 'loyal' parts of his own dominions.

The Count de Leon was under no misapprehension as to what had happened. He knew where the royal guards would go to, and the tale that they would spread when they got there.

But he was ready for Peter when that bold leader opened the coach door. He pointed to the figure of the slumbering King clearly discernible under the light of the lamp which burned above his head.

'My father,' he said in pure Castilian, 'he has Mina's pass to go to his country house as Yuste.'

'Hum,' said Peter extracting a gold piece from his waistcoat pocket and presenting the image and superscription of 'Joseph, King of Spain.'

'I was not aware that they coined money with your father's picture!'

Count Leon took his defeat well.

'Send back your men a little and we shall talk. You are not Spanish? No? English I think?'

'I am from Scotland, which though poorer, is the better kingdom.'

Peter waved a hand for his men to fall back out of earshot. He was the man of the Treasure, and they trusted him fully. He would arrange about the ransom. The old man looked rich and the young one promising. They would trust their leader. Was he not Froyla's husband? His future - indeed all his interests - were theirs. Let these noisy brutes roar and drink, kindle fires and dance the jota. They were of the breed of La Giralda, and their chief would act

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for them in all things as was fitting.

'My friend,' said Count Leon, speaking rapidly as one who may be interrupted at any moment. 'if the *partidas* know that this is Joseph Buonaparte, they will shoot him, if only to avenge the Dos de Mayo. Then there will be no ransom forthcoming – all will be divided among your followers. But if you bring us safe to the camp of Massena, who is the King's friend, you shall have a hundred thousand napoleons, and, what you will value more, the whole plans of the Emperor for this year's campaign, which you can take to Sir Wellesley. I warrant you he will welcome you, and if you value rank, take you back as an officer into his army!'

The Count had certainly most cunningly baited his hook. Nothing could more absolutely have suited Peter's ambitious heart than to have the stigma of deserter removed from his name. But he felt that he must not act hastily.

'If I bring you to the camp of Massena,' he said, 'what guarantee have I that you will not clear all scores by having me shot?'

'The same I have now that you will not shoot me – the honour of a gentleman! But listen; when we reach the outskirts of the French army I shall leave the King with you. We shall arrange a meeting place, and if I fail in anything, the King is still yours to kill or to ransom. I shall bring the money, half in gold and half in orders upon Pereira of Bayonne, who is agent for my estates in Médoc.

'The money,' said Peter, rather contemptuously – 'yes, that will keep the men quiet; but the papers, the plans of campaign?'

'Ah,' said Count Leon, 'I thought those would be dearer to your heart!' And he slipped a hand over

the slumbering King and from the carriage pocket drew a wallet of green leather covered with imperial bees, containing a thick sheaf of papers and parchments folded lengthways and tied with broad green ribbon. 'I trust a Scottish gentleman!' said the Count de Leon. 'Keep them, and when alone assure yourself that I have told you no more than the truth.'

Peter, who was the son of an honest farmer and of his own right arm, was pleased to be called 'a Scottish gentleman,' and though in his own country he never would be so designated, he had no idea of acting otherwise than as a gentleman.

The King, who had slept peacefully through the musketry and pistol fire, who had never heard the clatter of his departing escort, now showed signs of waking. His companion with an anxious face bent over him. He might yet spoil all. With the Buonapartes one never knew.

'Where are we?' said the King, starting up on one elbow and looking out at the dark figures motionless without. 'Why are we stopping? Where is my guard? Who is this gentleman?'

The Count put a hand firmly on his Majesty's arm.

'We are captured, but say nothing - I have arranged a ransom with this gentleman. You are the Count de Leon, I am your son. Your guards are half-way to Madrid by this time - that is, those who did not take the road to Toledo. Turn over and pretend to go to sleep!'

His tone was so serious and pressing that the King obeyed, though he must have wished to ask a thousand questions. It was the greatest proof of courage a man could give, thus, on the mere word of

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a man alien in blood, to accept his fate, and Peter felt in his heart a kindling of sympathy and admiration for the best, if certainly the most irritating, of the Buonapartes.

The pre-occupation of the *partida*, full fed with plunder so easily obtained, enabled Peter to carry the coach of the King through the press of men quarrelling and gesticulating over the division of loot.

'The Count of Leon going to Yuste to drink the waters,' Peter proclaimed to all who passed him. 'We take him for our share. His son shall pay us the ransom.'

'He does not look worth much,' exclaimed a Basque from across the frontier. 'yet I seem to have seen that head somewhere.'

'No doubt,' quoth Peter, 'He has great estates in your country, vineyards in the Médoc, forests of pitch pine along the *étangs*, grazings on the Landes – and I don't know what all!

'A Frenchman, then?'

'A good Spaniard, with excellent French gold to pay his ransom,' snapped Peter. 'I do not ask his birth certificate when he counts me out his loius-d'or.'

'Good luck,' laughed the Pole. 'I have not so many men at my back as you, but I have three horses laden with fine things down in the glade. I must see that no one drives them off. Good fortune with your water-drinker. Bleed him well!'

At last they were clear and King Joseph was able to sit up. Peter rode by the carriage door and was witness to the strange strife within.

'They are Spaniards, I tell you,' argued the King. 'I will go out and harangue them. I am their legal

monarch. I have a Spanish household. I hear mass each morning at six. I eat nothing but Spanish dishes, though the oil and the garlic disagree with me. Give me my hat with the red and yellow cocarde. I wear the Spanish colours. I have only to speak to bring these men to their knees!

'Sire,' said his companion, holding him in place with respectful firmness, 'you are the Count de Leon, my father, going to Yuste to drink the waters. Till we are on the outskirts of Marshal Massena's camp you must speak no word except to me. I have made the best arrangements possible, but all depends upon your silence and discretion.

'Ah, Massena!' mourned the poor King; 'he would do something for me, he and Suchet; Jourdain also and Hugo, though he is only a general.'

'Sire,' said the young man warmly. 'I am doing more for you than all your marshals and generals put together. I am risking my head for yours, and, whatever happens, I stand to lose no inconsiderable part of my estate. All I ask is that you shall obey my instructions till I place you safe in the midst of your soldiers.'

The King folded the young man in his arms.

'Forgive me,' he said, 'I am so set about with enemies that sometimes I know not friend from foe. But I have good and grateful instincts, if only my brother would not persist in making a king of me. Why could he not have left me in Naples, where the people liked me? Why will he not let me go back to Montefontaine, where at least I was happy and the cooking agreed with me?'

'The Emperor has been extraordinarily good,' said the Count; 'he has left you all his best soldiers, his ablest marshals, his 'bulls of the ring,' and he is off

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to Vienna himself with only his little conscripts, his name, and his big boots.'

'You are a Spaniard, Leon,' said Joseph, shaking his head, 'but your soul is among your vines on the other side of the Pyrenees.'

'It is well for your Majesty that those vineyards do stand on French soil, else where would I find the hundred thousand louis I am to pay for your ransom? Would Massena or your friend Suchet lend you such a sum even if they possessed it - aye, or Jourdain the Jacobin?'

The King was touched and again pressed the young man in his arms. He was profligate of caressings, *el Rey* Joseph.

'You shall be my heir,' he cried. 'I leave you my throne. Marry one of Jerome's girls. He will be glad to get them off his hands. That will give you a right to the name, and the Emperor will give his consent.'

'God forbid!' said the young man earnestly; 'better Count of Leon than King of all the Spains. I would rather sit in my courtyard at Château Sainte Grace and watch the wagons roll in with the full vintage baskets than be King at Madrid, sustained by three hundred thousand foreign bayonets!'

'Sustained by the love and confidence of my people,' corrected Joseph; and the strange thing was that he believed it.

'Thou, brave, honest, stupid sponge of a man!' thought Leon as he resigned himself to await events. 'No evil in thee, much cross-grained goodness, and of purpose as pliable as baker's dough.'

And, indeed, had Joseph been a Spaniard he might have ruled the nation better than Ferdinand or any Spanish Bourbon had ever done. But as far as real authority went, outside the walls of his

palace the least French general had more power than he. And as for the headstrong marshals, men like Sault, Murat, Ney, Victor and Massena, they rode rough shod over his orders, and laughed at his protestations.

‘But now,’ he told himself, ‘all will be different. The marshals – aye, even Sault – are to be placed under my direct orders, and I shall be King of Spain in fact as well as in name.’

After today Ney would not toss a bundle of his letters which had tumbled about in his saddle-bags for a week to his newest secretary with the insulting words, ‘See what that blunderer in Madrid wants of us now.’ And when the report was made and the King’s orders read out in full, Ney would no longer dare to ‘bid the fellow go scratch himself.’

These things the fine, soft dough-cake of a man, good as wheaten bread, has taken sorely to heart, and it was because of the constant dignified respect showed him by the Count of Leon that Joseph had chosen him for a companion.

They approached Talavera, where Massena lay entrenched, and at a convenient spot the coach was drawn by the efforts of the twenty-two and the judicious use of tracing chains as far from the highway as was necessary for security.

The King was warned that he must not call out to any passing regiments or he would be immediately shot. The Count went on to arrange with Pereira’s agent for the payment of half the agreed sum in gold. The King lay and read ‘Gil Blas’ in Spanish as a preparation for the cares of state. Down in the dell away from the road Froyla and Peter prepared the royal meals, while in the intervals of his toils the company’s cook aided them with advice and the loan

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of utensils. The younger men foraged for wine and firewood, while the veterans stood sentry. Everyone waited for the return of Count Leon, and in the intervals of ladling and basting Peter fingered nervously at the precious packet of documents in his breast pocket.

Peter was to meet the Count Leon down on the road near the rocky gorge where the Tagus has cut through the western Sierras. The Count was to come on alone, ahead of his train of muleteers, a white kerchief tied about his hat, and a branch of green willow in his hand.

Froyla must also go. She absolutely refused to be left behind. The danger, as represented to her, only doubled her determination, as Peter ought to have known.

'Where thou goest I will go,' she quoted from her favourite tale, which Peter had translated for her from the Bible his mother had given him, wherein indeed he found many things very pleasing to his wife, to her as fresh as the *Morning Post* of that day and date.

They waited among the pines, the two grey mules tethered behind in the blue gloom of the wood. Froyla and Peter looked into a hot pulsing furnace of sunshine, for the sun beat down furiously into the close defile of the Tagus, and the evening valley wind had not yet sprung up. They lay in the very last clump and watched the Talavera road, thrown like a pink whiplash along the side of the mountain, among the rocky ridges and self-sown green plantations.

They saw them come from afar, a band of muleteers with their mules, and before them, riding on a white mare, the Count of Leon. They counted

three mule-drivers – more than enough, if they were French guardsmen, to account for Peter and Froyla, who were unarmed, according to arrangement.

But from their watch tower under the high green pines they saw the Count de Leon order his men to return, which they did, leaving him alone with the laden mules.

So Peter and Froyla went down fearlessly, and the Count of Leon paid them over the fifty thousand gold pieces, and Peter pocketed the orders for fifty thousand more to be paid by the Pereiras of Bayonne or their agents. Then Peter lit a fire of leaves and damp branches on one side of the Talavera road, while Froyla did as much on the other – which was the signal to bring down the King. So, after a little waiting they heard the noise of wheels and the voice of King Joseph bidding the outriders to make haste. He had been deserted (so he said) by those who ought to have served him best, but he had fallen among a grateful peasantry, who had shown him that the heart of Spain beat true to him. He had eaten bread with them. He had played at ‘dames,’ and had been beaten. They were people of spirit, and far better and more trustworthy than any diplomat or Court lounge. He had even promised to return and teach them chess. The Count of Leon? He had forgotten all about him. He was *el Rey* Joseph, and had so written his name on several documents, relative to a village in Gallicia of which he had never heard, with the nobility and authority of a Charles the Fifth.

All this ambiance and largesse the Count de Leon cut short by ordering (yes, actually ordering) his Majesty back into his coach. He had parted with several years’ rental of his best patrimonial estates

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to keep this vantard out of the hands of the English, and it was too much to find him vapouring there, deluding himself with false hopes as he had done in his palace in Madrid, touched by the slightest politeness of a Spaniard, but taking the gravest and greatest services of his real friends as matters of course.

The band of La Giralda regained its fastnesses on the mountain side and soon made equitable division of the ransom. Peter would have left the whole of the gold to the band, reserving the more uncertain orders upon Pereira for himself. He believed that the Count would not deny his signature, but Froyla was of quite a different opinion.

'My brothers,' she said to the band, 'your chief has won for you a noble ransom such as no *partida* has ever handled since the Tagus cut Spain in half. He and I have news which may help to repel the French, and with it we ride to the camp of my Lord Wellington, *el Gran Lor*'. For that there is no money to be received. It is a service. So because it is possible that we may not return, we shall first divide the gold according to the rules of plunder – ten shares for the captain, three for each lieutenant, and for the band, one share each, coined money of France. During our absence Lieutenants Darros and Guardia shall have the command. They shall prevent all gambling and card-playing. The man who quarrels and draws a weapon shall be judged to lose his portion and be dismissed the band, and I counsel you to deposit your money, each in his own name, with Pereira of Bayonne, which advice you will not take, but dig a hole in the corner among your cabbage plot after the manner of your kind since the world began.'

The band grinned at the wit of the Captain's wife. She knew them because she was of them. Neither Cardoños nor Felicé had any faith in a Jew banker of Bayonne, even though he kept the money of two Kings and an Emperor. As she said, a hole dug hastily among the cabbage beds was their best safe deposit. The Captain being of foreign blood, might do as he liked, and his wife might speak by his book, but not for so little could the custom of generations be changed.

Froyla and Peter passed the armies of Massena without any great difficulty, thanks to the passports and permits given them by the Count de Leon. They were an honest miller and his wife returning to their parents in the big bourg of Torres after having had their mill burnt by the *partidas* for supplying flour to the French.

They went forward with great care, because immediately in front of them rose the abrupt and frowning summits, the black precipices, the cyclopean masonry and innumerable towers of the first lines of Torres Vedras. When the two first saw them they loomed up purple-black against a red sunset.

'Good God,' exclaimed Peter, 'I thought I knew something about fortification! I have helped to batter down enough of it, but the old Tiger-killer has fortified a mountain range!'

Peter thrilled at the sound of the English bugles ringing across the valleys under the placid yellow gold which in the moonless nights marked the lighted squares of Lisbon.

But he knew that with such papers and plans in his possession he must walk warily. Any rashness might bring him into the midst of a tumultuous

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foraging party, and then, as he knew well, not he but another would present these papers to my Lord Wellington.

'We shall have to wait,' said Peter, 'till we see old Cut-the-Wind riding the posts himself. Then we must throw ourselves in his way.'

'But how shall we know?' demanded Froyla, who did not wish her husband to run any unnecessary risks.

'Know him? Because there is no one in the least like him. Have I not seen him a hundred times – erect as a lance in his saddle, but with a head that turns slowly like a wary heron watching fish in a river shallow? He will ride a score of paces ahead of all the others, and answer the challenges himself, salute like a semaphore, ask for news of the enemy, and ride on to the next post, cheerful as an old weathercock with his yellow beak and battered comb.'

Under cover of the night they waited, Froyla and Peter. Slate-coloured clouds poured down over the ridges of Torres Vedras. The Atlantic was sending in an advance-guard of fog, billow upon billow, one overriding the other, till through every notch and pass in the long rugged line the mist began to pour down into the great valley between the English and the French lines.

'Ah,' said Peter in a hushed voice, 'here they come! Close to me – so! They will let me speak before shooting, if there is a woman with me.'

'Sir Arthur – remember Seringapatam!'

'Damn Seringapatam – who the devil are you?' shouted the general, checking, however, his steed, which was coming headlong upon them out of the blue scud.

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Peter Blake saluted gravely.

'I *was* a Company's writer, but you made me intelligence officer, and mentioned me twice in despatches. Peter Blake is my name.'

'Oh,' said the General, 'distinguished bravery,' 'exceptional service,' fellow with a head-piece and so on? But, as I said before, what the devil are you doing here – and with a woman with you?'

'This is my wife, Froyla,' said Peter, his voice losing its tremor. 'I am captain of the duly-enlisted Cardoños company -'

'Thieves and rogues!'

'Regularly enrolled Spanish militia from Romana's army, and we have captured the plans of campaign sent by the Emperor from Paris for the guidance of all his marshals.'

'Eh, what's that? No fooling sir. This is a hanging matter!'

'I know, Sir Arthur – I know,' said Peter firmly; 'but if you will cast your eye upon this envelope you can judge for yourself. I served too long with you in the Deccan to play tricks here with my wife by my side!'

'Hi! A lantern there – you Wear, Grant, Ponsonby!'

My Lord Wellington, an imposing figure in a dark cloak which drooped over his horse's tail, loomed above them all. Drops of the night-dew dripped on Peter's hand from the peak of his cocked hat as he handed up the great sealed packet with the Imperial arms framed in green and embossed upon the leather.

Wellington cast one glance at the superscription and with a brief order to an officer to continue the grand rounds, bade Colonel Grant bring Peter and Froyla to headquarters. He himself put spurs to his

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horse and rode back with his own personal escort as fast as if the rugged mountain track were a broad military road.

Colonel Grant was a man of many questions. He had served in India and demanded details of Peter's doings there. On these Peter was voluble, and as the daylight came, bade Froyla show the officer her gold watch with the inscription. What Peter really wanted to ask was if the 4th Dragoons were with the force behind Torres. His life depended on that – at least until he had time to right himself with the Commander-in-Chief. But he judged it better not to refer in any way to his old regiment. After all, there might be nothing to connect him with the renegade Scoutmaster, who had been broken for drunkenness and losing despatches.

Peter, having no particular claim upon Providence, trusted to luck, which seemed to him not at all the same thing, for Peter was from Galloway, where they are strong upon the 'eternal decrees.'

Peter and Froyla were ushered into a great barnlike building which had been whitewashed and garnished with rude benches and planks laid upon trestles.

'The staff officers' mess-room,' whispered Peter, 'there they are at the upper end.'

Peter, with Froyla a pace behind him, stopped motionless at the end of the long table. The packet had been opened, and Wellington with the great door of the barn yawning behind him, sat poring over the papers, his face no longer stern and haughty but irradiated with joy.

Peter understood very well.

Wellington had scarcely a tenth of the numbers of

the enemy. He had to lead new and untried men against veterans – and such veterans – generated by Soult, Ney, Victor, Massena, the pick of Napoleon's 'fighting bulls.'

But now he had their plans, and already half a dozen swift secretaries were busily copying the papers scrawled by way of signature with the hieroglyphic 'N' which promulgated authority.

As soon as one had been read and the contents jotted in a little pocket-book by Wellington, it was tossed across the table to be copied. The envelope had been taken in hand by an expert in seal-craft.

At last Wellington had finished, and leaning back with his hand still upon the great map of the Peninsula, the lightnings of thought seemed almost visibly to come and go under that calm high brow. Suddenly he awakened to a duty not yet done. He gathered up his notebook, some scattered papers, and the map of Spain.

'Blake – Blake – Peter Blake – the man from India who captured these papers? Ah, there you are! Come to my private quarters. I would speak with you.'

Peter had that fear of the great general which sat cold upon every man who ever campaigned with him. No one loved Wellington as Napoleon was loved – fiercely, passionately, frantically. But every man from general to drummer boy trusted him, revered him, and died gladly in obeying him. The troops marched out in the dark along unknown roads into the face of a foe infinitely superior.

'We do not know where we are going,' they said, 'but *he* knows.'

When he rode along the battle-front, cloaked and cockhatted, his plume bedraggled and his head

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turning restlessly, there was no irresistible gust of cheering such as ran along the lines before the Emperor, as it were the wind of his coming.

On the contrary, a hush fell on regiment after regiment as it dressed itself proudly in line of battle, eyes right, alignment impeccable, feet among the corpses of comrades.

So much to explain why Peter the Bold followed trembling as Colonel Grant ushered him into the presence.

Wellington's quarters were in a cottage outside the little village of Valle, called Valle de Mauro on the maps. Two rooms – no more – one with a table strewn with maps and papers, had several chairs set about the walls, but no other furniture except a great eight-foot clock with a vast circular belly, behind the glass of which went to and fro the father of all pendulums, a shining brass disk swinging to its triple cordage of copper wire with a gleam like the full moon seen through the brumous mists of autumn. On the other side, a room with bare walls, a small gilded Virgin and child in the corner, and a folding camp-bed of the simplest sort, over the end of which hung the Commander-in-Chief's great blue cloak with the silver chain and clasp.

'I think,' said Wellington, 'the lady had better retire.'

'I beg your Excellency to let her stay. She does not understand English – and – we have just been married. You will pardon her. She would think something was going to happen to me!'

Wellington made a little tolerant gesture. Froyla curtsied gratefully, whereupon the tall general rose and bowed in his most stately fashion.

'You have rendered us a great service,' he said,

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‘the value of which depends on how you came by these papers, and whether they can be restored to their owners without any suspicion of having come under my eye.’

Peter recounted the tale of the capture of King Joseph and the bargain he had made with the Count of Leon.

Wellington nodded his head.

‘Very good – very good,’ he repeated. ‘What should *we* have done with King Joseph? He is better in the camp of Massena, setting the marshals by the ears. Who taught you strategy, Mr Peter Blake?’

‘I had the honour of serving two years under Sir Arthur Wellesley,’ said Peter readily.

‘Then you are a countryman of my own, and have kissed the Blarney Stone?’

‘I am from Scotland, your Excellency,’ said Peter.

‘Then you left that country early in life. I never yet knew the Scotsman who had the manners of a pickaxe – though in spite of occasional insubordination, you make admirable officers, but not what one might call boon companions! Now what do you want for all this? Speak out, man – we are alone!’

‘I ask,’ said Peter with some difficulty of utterance, ‘for my old place as Intelligence Officer. I think I can serve you well. I am the head of a Spanish village. I have twenty-two excellent spies under my orders, men of the country, accustomed to disguises, men who can go anywhere. I can reach the French councils through the Count de Leon, who wishes the marshals safe across the Pyrenees for the sake of his vineyards at Medoc.’

‘Ah, yes,’ said the General. ‘Château Leon is a fine sound wine. I drink it myself; but can you get the

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packet back to him safely and, as it were, unopened?’

‘If your Excellency will overlook the past,’ said Peter mournfully. ‘I am no deserter, but some years ago I fell behind General Moore’s march. I was carrying dispatches and... forgot myself in the wine vaults of Bembibre. But I made up for that by taking the French artillery in flank at Corunna and tumbling their pieces over the precipice.’

‘I have heard of that,’ said Wellington grimly, ‘but I always thought it was the work of a rascal scoutmaster of the 4th Dragoons!’

‘I am that rascal!’ said Peter, hanging his head.

‘You never came to claim any reward, though Frazer and Baird both put your service in their dispatches.’

‘Nevertheless I duly reported myself to Sir David,’ said Peter.

‘And what did he say?’

‘He bade me go to the devil for a renegade and called my meddling with the French guns a damned impertinence!’

‘He would – he would!’ said Wellington relishingly. ‘So now you want a fresh start, and nothing will do you but a commission - ’

‘And a staff uniform,’ said Peter. ‘I left my old one in India.’

‘Help yourself,’ said Wellington ironically. ‘Perhaps you would like my cloak and cocked hat!’

‘No, your Excellency,’ said Peter, ‘but when I meet the Count of Leon I must have some visible authority to treat.’

‘You shall have an acting commission as Intelligence Officer – and by gad, sir, Grant is about your size and as spick and span as the devil. Grant

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– I say, Grant.’

Peter quitted the lines of Torres Vedras in full staff colonel’s uniform, his commission in his pocket, and in his breast, to be remitted to the Count de Leon, the reconstituted packet of the Imperial papers, not one wanting, every seal intact, and the golden bees on their green ground untarnished in the corner.

Episode Six

The Crowning Mercy.

The carrion crows were gathered together. They had scented the battle from afar, and amid the acrid stench of blood and the lust of plunder they filled the air with the flapping of their wings.

The twelve original foreign recruits of the Molinos band had by Peter's pruning become a scant four. Now two only were camped together on the bleak Sierra di Hermanos, overlooking Pampeluña. It was the day after the first battle of the Pyrenees, and down there the ravens and vultures were still picking the bones.

But O'Hanlon and Kinstrey were superior birds of prey. They had made their rounds as soon as night fell, in spite of the danger of the British fatigue parties and ambulance men, patrols and reconnaissances, which still furrowed that stricken field in all directions.

Such men as O'Hanlon and Kinstrey had but one watchword:

'Stop the mouth of him afore he squeals!'

Then there were watches and purses, perhaps a locket with a coil of hair (at which Kinstrey laughed his most sinister snigger), or a roll of bank-notes sewed in a waistcoat and betrayed by their crackling. These two got the best, and in their own eyes they deserved it. For the risks were great – indeed, immense. English, French or Spanish, no one would give them a moment's quarter. They would not have dreamed of asking it, but when cornered have fought to the last snap and snarl like the wolves they were.

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Yet, what is strange to think upon, thirty years before they had been a pair of bare-legged, freckled and tanned little fisher brats making sand castles, digging bait, fishing for saithe and hooking lobsters among the rocks of Killibegs, where the Atlantic eternally batters the nose of County Donegal.

Now they were just plain wolves taking counsel together. O'Hanlon – the superior fiend – if any superiority can exist where all have fallen so low – still asserted his leadership by a certain care for his person, a carefully shaven chin and a uniform coat of some gay French lance regiment, mended at collar and wrist. He wore a fur-lined waistcoat with immense pockets, the loot of a dead sutler, and his knee-breeches were of large plaided material. Over these his hose were pulled high, and his feet were thrust into a pair of *espadrillas*, the '*alpargatas*' of the East, than which no more noiseless footgear exists.

'Clocks and snippets of jewellery are all very well,' said Kinstrey, a weasel-faced little man with carrotty hair of the startling tint which in County Donegal goes with abundant freckles and china blue eyes. 'But how are we to get rid of them in this damned country? Every honest man who buys the like shows you piles just the same and offers you three halfpence for the lot. He does not want such things, he swears. Look you, how is *he* to sell all these?'

'Bah!' said O'Hanlon, puffing contentedly on his pipe; 'he can sell or he would not have bought.'

'Very true,' answered the flame-headed man with a sneer, 'but we are as far off as ever from that fortune you are for ever talking about. I want enough to buy me mother's cow run at Killibegs, and the four fields at the back that will come to be sold

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when the old Steve Moriarty turns up his toes; and that can't be long now. He is over ninety, the craitur!'

The caressing amble of the West Irish accent could not be mistaken. It fell soft as peat fresh cut from the bog, or wool carded ready for the great spinning wheels which fill Donegal upon winter evenings with the saddest sound in the world - the *whoo-whoo-a* of the women going backwards and forwards while the wind wails in the chimney of the cabin, mightily cheerful by contrast.

Who shall say that all that music - the days of rain, soft and implacable, from the Atlantic, the stormy nights with inexplicable lulls and sudden brutal gusts - did not remain fresh in the mind of those bad men who had played as boys about the rocks of Killibegs?

O'Hanlon regarded his inferior scornfully.

'Tis great science now, ye will be having in the head of ye, Tim Kinstrey,' he spat as he mouthed the words as if a Protestant had passed that way; 'you to be speaking to me about plans and strategies, you that never had the invention of a louse in a beggar's bonnet. And yet while you are counting trinkets and winding watches, I have this!'

And he thrust a large sheet of official letter-post paper under his companion's nose.

'Read - read!' he commanded authoritatively. The other drew away as from an evil odour, so near had come the fist which could have felled an ox.

'If I had been let stop steady wid ould Terence Kernan at the hedge school, as you were, I might. But as ye well know, me father always needed me to mind the still, or keep the cows, or do a message in the town. Read I cannot - write I cannot, and well do

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ye know it Michael avick!

'Well, then, will ye listen to them that can?' thundered O'Hanlon.

'I can listen,' grumbled Kinstrey, 'God knows my ears have grown long enough wid staying alongside o' you, Michael O'Hanlon!'

'Five thousand napoleons in gold to the man who rids us of my Lord Wellington!'

'If the job is worth five, thinks I, 'tis worth ten. So I said as much plainly to the man who brought me the message.'

'And who might he be?' his companion inquired.

'Count your trinkets and wind your watches,' sneered O'Hanlon, frowning with black brows suddenly levelled like a file of muskets brought to the present.

'I was only asking,' said Kinstrey, suddenly humble.

'And I'll tell ye no lies!' retorted O'Hanlon savagely. 'Ten thousand gold pieces I asked for the job, and ten thousand I will get, when I can present them with the burial certificated of my countryman *and* the pride av the Brrritish arrrmy!'

'*Humph!*' snarled Kinstrey; 'they will deny ye, corpse and all. Is it likely now that colonels and generals – for I expect they are the cattle in the service of the Emperor of all the French – would have anny token's wid the likes of you?'

O'Hanlon brought his hand heavily upon his knee.

'I have it wrote out in the Emperor's own hand,' *The day after my Lord Wellington's death, let the man have the reward agreed upon.* NAPOLEON.

The order was genuine. There the Corsican had

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spoken. He could be generous towards those whom he conquered, especially if, as in the case of Poland, some fair country-woman spoke for them. But such was his hatred of Wellington that he left a thousand pounds in his will to the man who should assassinate the victor of Waterloo.

Kinstrey said no more. He moved uneasily, however, as one who would speak if he dared, and blew off the large snowflakes which, like white butterflies, poised themselves before alighting on his hands.

He was angry with himself for being there; angry with O'Hanlon for keeping him out on a bleak hillside among the Pyrenees when he might be cosy by a turf fire, a double gill of usquebaugh by his side and his pipe alight, in a well-thatched cabin in Donegal, with the roar of the Holy Sea of Killibegs filling his ears, like the drone of the people chanting in chapel of a Sunday.

My Lord Wellington was proverbially careless of his person. He would often answer the supplications of his officers who besought him to retire to a less exposed position with the words:

'Gentlemen, I must see. If I do not see, I might as well command the Army of the Peninsula from a stool in Whitehall, and of that we have had enough already.'

On several occasions the French cavalry, by a clever dash, almost cut off Wellington and his whole staff. They had to fling themselves upon their horses and gallop for their lives.

Never was his determination to see everything more to the front than during the final winter campaign in the Pyrenees. Wellington exposed himself among those wild mountains, where every

hillside bristled with sharpshooters, as if, as a staff sergeant said, 'the ould man had been the umpire at a sham fight.' When a man was ordered to go on the Commander-in-Chief's staff he made his will and prepared letters to his weeping relations.

The French officers to whom Napoleon's order had been transmitted were not those of the highest rank – a Paymaster General, a Colonel of Chasseurs whom the Emperor had already employed at the time of the proposed invasion of England in 1802, and Voyer-Bertrand, one of the men who hung about every army commanded by a Marshal of Napoleon's, nominally on staff duty or in charge of the hospitals, but really acting as spies upon the Commander-in-Chief and his Generals of Brigade. These men were known throughout the armies as *mouchards-en-gros*. The death-rate was accordingly heavy among them, and they well deserved their pay. Most died from wounds in the back received during action, or were quietly killed in their bivouacs by gun shots fired through the tent wall.

But those who survived had great rewards, and at any rate a strong Marshal like Massena or Soult cared little for such cattle. Let the rascal write as he liked. Their master could not do without *them*, in any case.

'See now, Jaimsie,' said O'Hanlon, 'this is how we will bait the trap. Me Lord Wellington wad not be likely to come where he would be us use to us, supposin' that we sent him a letter signed Mike O'Hanlon and Jaimsie Kinstrey! No, he would send a wasp's nest of blasted Spaniards after us with a general order 'to be shot wherever found.' And that would be the end of one of the most promising combinations ever imagined by the fertile brain of a

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Killibegs boy. But hark now, Jaimsie. Ye remember that renegadin' rascal of a Scot that called himself a *partida*?'

'Aye, Peter Blake. He strook me, Crommle's curse on him!' growled Kinstrey, pulling at his red whiskers.

'That same, Jaimsie. Do not curse him, 'tis too great trouble. We shall make him curse himself. He has risen high since our time, me son, wear's colonel's uniform, no less, and calls himself Intelligence Officer. Have ye a bit av his hand o' write about you, now, Jaimsie? 'Tis not to be expected, but ye might.'

'Devil a spit. How should I read it if I had?'

'Ye could not, Jaimsie; but I could – aye, and write it too. But since we have not, we must just run our chance. 'Tis not likely our grrand officher Peter will have made many reports in writing. If intelligence is what he is after, he would trust nothing to paper, but go to headquarters himself. That's what kaping in touch means, me son – credit and the money down, according to the value of the article. But you, Jaimsie, will watch till Peter is well off among these accursed mountains wid all his cavalcade at his heel, and then I will send what I have written by a sure hand, which will bring my Lord Arthur within four paces of our two rifles. He will be on a bridge, a Spanish bridge, his horse stepping gingerly, and we could not miss him if we tried.'

'And what about getting away after?' demanded Kinstrey.

'Oh, I know the spot, Jaimsie. I am not talkin' through me hat as a Tyrone man might, but as wan Donegal man to another. We have only to turn to be

deep in the wood among rocks and precipices where no cavalryman could follow us. Moreover, there will be only grand big feathered officers there, and what wid my Lord Arthur gasping there wid two big holes in him, and the fear of the like from the same quarter, you and me, Jaimsie, will be safe as in our beds. Then we shall go to the French paymaster to touch the gold napoleons, and so home to Killibegs to live next door in two cottages on the beach, each with a bouncing Donegal lass for a wife, shell walks in the gardens, the figure-head of the *Bridget* or *Good Intent* looking through the green railings, and Father McFadden bidding us good-day at the gate, an' hopin' that he will have the happiness of seeing us regular at chapel!

It was in the gently sloping green rectangle at the mouth of the Val Carlos, through which the waters of the mountain torrents are led to the flour and meal mills of Arneguy, that O'Hanlon had established his trap. The canal cut the turf halfway down, was crossed by a little mossy bridge without parapets, covered thickly with short grass on which the hill sheep were wont to graze, and where, looking over, they could see their horns and great wild eyes mirrored in the placid water. This was the path by which Wellington must come to the rendezvous – that is to say, if he came at all. And to ensure this O'Hanlon had devised a most cunningly laid snare.

He had written:

My Lord, – I am at present with some Spanish levies in the camp of Marshal Soult. I am, therefore, prevented from coming to your Lordship's headquarters. I have important news for your private ear. If your Lordship places sufficient confidence in

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me, let him come to the mill bridge at the Arneguy end of the Val Carlos canal, during the afternoon of Sunday, and I shall lay the matter before you.

PETER BLAKE.

O'Hanlon dared not risk himself to add Peter's rank and service. He had indeed seen the Colonel's insignia as Peter passed in a cloud of dust with his faithful two-and-twenty, and he had heard it said that El Gran' Lor' had made him an Intelligence Officer.

But though his pen was lifted to write, he withheld himself. He dared not make a mistake which might spoil all.

The message was carried to the British outposts by Roderigués the hunchback, a sort of mountain carry-all, well known in all the camps, and meantime O'Hanlon and Kinstrey repaired to the wood of Rio Carlos, which ran down to the valley in a tongue of dense green pines. There all day axe and pickaxe rested not, and by eventide O'Hanlon was satisfied with his work. Two loopholes in the breastwork completely screened by brushwood commanded the low green arch of the bridge, while all manner of intricate interlacings and stretched cord, such as poachers use, prevented pursuit to right and left. O'Hanlon and Kinstrey, the black and the red Celt, would be in good hiding long before any force could be launched on their tracks.

But they had reckoned without Peter and his twenty-two. Peter never left his own lines of communication unwatched, and when little Elsa Felicé, a promising postulant of fifteen, brought him word that two men were scouting about the mill lade of Val Carlos, he instantly put back his negotiation

with Count Leon and set off to see for himself what was happening nearer home.

Peter was an Intelligence Officer, also, as he said, a colonel *in partibus*, and what an Intelligence Officer made Peter! Not an enemy's corporal's guard moved a stone's throw without his knowledge, and what Peter knew my Lord Wellington knew within the hour. At first Froyla made an equally incomparable lieutenant, but of late she had begun to busy herself with the beautiful little house, all stone walls and *miradors*, wooden balconies and wide verandahs, which was being built on the hill above the river of La Giralda. She was a loss to the command, for not only had she great influence among the twenty-two, but she spoke with facility the marvellously inflected speech of the Basques – her mother had been of the blood of Guipuzcoa, and at the siege of Pampeluña she had been of constant use, translating messages and interpreting the reports of peasants and spies.

Of late, however, she had grown curiously shy of camps and the bivouacs of men, and had contented herself with bustling the workmen from Ludo and the coast villages who, as in common with their kind, dragged out their task as long as possible.

She looked hourly for a messenger from her husband. She was always expecting him, or at least a brief scrawled note from his order-book telling of his doings. But mostly she was content to stay within doors and receive the counsels and congratulations of her father and Don Juan Julio, who came daily up the slopes together to judge of the progress of the work. They shook their heads over the extravagance of the *miradors* (glass enclosed balconies) on every storey, 'like a house in

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Victoria,' as they said, approved the depth and shade of the verandahs, and the wind-screens which slid so easily upon unseen wheels. Their old bones would find kindly shelter there on windy days when they could 'drink the sun' nowhere else.

The great pinewood of the Rio Carlos which swept across the valley immediately below the green canal bridge was a wilderness of tall reeds, rusty ferns, and last year's climbing vines. But at certain hours of the morning the sunlight sifted it through and through, glorifying everything. The pools of the poor despoiled river beneath glittered among arid wastes of stones, but the canal pushed calmly forward, a pleasant six foot breadth of green water sluicing placidly towards the mill wheels in the valley below.

Upon this restricted space, looking no bigger than an unfolded handkerchief threaded by the green serpent of the mill canal, Peter and his men looked down from a point of rock called Puerto Marguerita, the Gate of the Pearl. Beneath them, and four hundred yards away, dense brakes of bramble and fern, all pale turquoise and orange with the frosts of late autumn, hid the despoiled watercourses. All was bathed in a gracious and unreal opaline haze which rendered every object marvellously clear and lucid.

Peter and his band were struck with amazement at the changes which had been made behind the barricade of creepers and underbrush on the edge of the wood. They saw clearly, as on a map the felled trees, the intricate entanglements, the woven brushwood, the deadly openings in front, to right and left of the bridge, which were to receive gun barrels.

They also saw, very small and black, creeping

hither and thither like abominable insects, the foreshortened figures of the two men in waiting. It was too far to distinguish features, but Peter recognised the jerky, disjoined movements of O'Hanlon, and the square scarabæic figure of Kinstrey, squatting toad-like at his loophole, patient as a spider among the cords of his web.

Before the party on the rock above the Val Carlos had time to change position a little cloud of mounted men was seen approaching along the highway from Pampeluña. The tall spare man with the cocked hat and white plume driven well down over his brows paused to consult a map. With a crook of the finger he summoned an officer to assist him. They consulted the chart together, verifying their position by pencil and compass. Then half a dozen men dismounted and knocked down half a dozen paces of mortarless stone wall, through which the cavalcade poured itself out upon the pleasant green sward of the canal pasture.

'My God!' exclaimed Peter hoarsely, as the plot flashed upon him, 'the devils are waiting to murder the General! Give me my rifle.'

Even in Spain, where the thing is common, the word murder has an ugly sound. The twenty-two clustered closer about, and those who had rifles looked well to the priming. There was no order to fire. There would be none. Peter, and he alone, could pick off these two men before the tall man on the chestnut mare should ride opposite the muzzles of their guns over the low green arch of the canal bridge.

They were so near, it seemed to the eager watchers above that they could have pushed their victim with the muzzles of their pieces.

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A tremulousness crept over the band. They could see the heads of the men in ambush go down. The tall man, whom they knew to be El Gran' Lor', the hope of Spain, rode nearer down the slope. In another minute he would be passing those deadly muzzles. Could nothing stop them? They saw their captain take a long breath, nestle the butt of his rifle against his cheek as if he loved it, and slowly depress the muzzle. It was not his habit to hang upon his shot, but now the waiting seemed interminable.

The feet of the General's horse had touched the bridge, and the men's heads bent towards the quarry.

With a jerk of all their nerves the twenty-two heard Peter's shot ring out. He threw up the smoking barrel and instantly a second rifle was passed to him. The reek cleared in time for them to see O'Hanlon fallen flat on his face, his musket cocked harmlessly in the air, and his face between his hands.

But to him Peter paid no attention whatever. All his power of vision was concentrated on the shorter man, who had raised himself on one elbow and was looking back over his shoulder, meditating flight. But the General, riding fifty yards ahead, was now on the bridge, and the second villain, doubtless thinking of the great reward, bent again towards the loophole.

'*Crack!*' went Peter's second shot. Kinstrey threw up his arms, his gun exploding harmlessly among the cord entanglements. Wellington rode straight at the bulwark of fallen trees, leaped his horse over the barricade, and stood gazing with astonishment at the two men, one dying, the other dead.'

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The riddle was, however, easy enough to read. The breastwork, the loopholes, the cords to trip the horses were clear evidence of treachery, and the fluttering signals from above showed from which direction help had come.

Presently Peter came down and saluted with his usual grave decorum.

'You fired those shots?' said Wellington, almost in a tone of reprimand. He hated to be indebted to anyone, which always gave him an air of ill-humour when acknowledging favours face to face. On paper and in all reports, written and oral, no man was ever more ready to do justice to every subordinate.

'I hit this second man a little too high,' said Peter, touching Kinstrey with his foot, 'but he was bending to the loophole, and I dared not hang upon the trigger.'

He noticed the mouth of Wellington's horse bleeding. A bullet had glanced from the bridle, making a slight furrow on the cheek to the corner of the mouth.

'The fellow came nearer than I had thought,' Peter meditated, as Busaco, impatient of a stranger's touch, tossed his noble head, which the frivolous declared grew more and more like that of his master every day.

'God!' cried Wellington, with a sudden outburst of anger, 'this fellow embarrasses me. Shall we hang him or make him General? First, he destroys the French artillery at Corunna. Then he brings important dispatches which carry us across Portugal and all the Spains. Now he saves my life. What the devil can we do with such a fellow?'

'Make him a General, as you say, your Excellency,' suggested Ponsonby. 'Cameron died this

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morning and the Anglo-Portuguese will follow this fellow anywhere.'

Wellington rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

'What education have you?' he jerked out, frowning his brows as if he were about to condemn Peter to death.

'The best a man can have,' quoth Peter: 'Master of Arts of Edinburgh University.'

'And how came you to be fighting like the devil all over the face of the earth from the Deccan to the Pyrenees?'

'Indeed I don't know,' said Peter, 'unless, like your Excellency, I had a taste for the job.'

Wellington laughed, and tapping him on the shoulder, ordered him to be off and take in hand Cameron's brigade of Anglo-Portuguese.

'Nippy little chaps they are, I understand, and need some leading; but you speak their language and your little band there can act as gallopers. Off with you and take hold! Ponsonby will give you a send off.'

Behold Peter installed as acting general of brigade! Pack was wounded, Crittenden dead. Only Campbell remained to help him with the useful fighting contingent which Wellington had made out of the Portuguese troops.

'Good soldiers,' approved Campbell, a red-bearded Highlander: 'no Cortez, no numskull Spanish generals. Good big man (that's you or me) says 'Do this!' Good little man smelling of garlic goes and does it without any question. Ever commanded a brigade before?'

'Mostly Intelligence Department,' said Peter, carefully picking his words, 'but in India I took a command when it came my way. Here I have mostly

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been with the Spaniards – free companies and Romana’s army, which always does its best to fight another day. My fellows did not quite run away. They plundered. But I own a village up there to the north-west, and these twenty-two of my own people stick as close as any man could wish. I do not know what the Portuguese will say to them.’

‘Why, make them your personal escort. Give the stripes and the gold lace to the little ginger-coloured Dons, and you are all right.’

And now we have Peter general of the brigade, cloaked and cock-hatted at the expense of the British Government! The Bidassoa has been crossed. The last battle on Spanish soil fought. Before them Soult was sullenly retiring, fighting, as always, an excellent rearguard action. Bayonne, Toulouse were before him – Paris, triumph!

They halted awhile in the height of the last mountain pass, the great commander and Peter watching the slow passage of the troops across the Bidassoa.

‘Come with us,’ said Wellington; ‘there is good warm work ahead. We have got at the giant’s feet of clay at last. We will put you on the English Army List, and ‘Sir Peter,’ will go very well with an estate – they tell me you are rich.’

‘I thank you, my Lord,’ said Peter very quietly, ‘but I have a little house and a village up there and in that house there is a wife – and the sound of a young child crying.’

‘Tut-tut!’ exclaimed Wellington explosively, and, wheeling, he set Busaco’s nose in the direction of the ford.

‘Dam sentimental Scotchman!’ grumbled the Chief. ‘Glad I was never taken that way. Where

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should I have been if I had?

But Peter was already a dim figure riding slowly up the misty pass, away from titles and honours, but every moment nearer to love and the crying of the young child whom he had never seen.

About the Author.

S.R.Crockett was born Samuel Crocket at Little Duchrae farm, Galloway on 24th September 1859 and died Samuel Rutherford Crockett in Tarascon, France on 16th April 1814.

The illegitimate son of dairy maid Annie Crocket, he was raised in Galloway by his grandparents and won the Galloway Bursary to study at Edinburgh University in 1876. He supported himself through tutoring (including prolonged spells in Europe) as well as through journalism.

He became minister of the Free Church Penicuik in 1886 and married Ruth Milner in 1887. They had four children. He resigned the ministry in 1895, a year after his first full length novel '*The Raiders*' became a best seller. He continued to write serial fiction for the rest of his life, many of his works subsequently being published as novels – he has 67 published works to his name – this new edition of '*Peter the Renegade*' brings the total up to 68.

To find out more about S.R.Crockett's life and work you can join The Galloway Raiders which is a free to join online literary society. The Galloway Raiders also hold the archives of two significant Crockett scholars: Dr Islay Murray Donaldson and Richard D. Jackson.

You can join the Galloway Raiders at www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

About Ayton Publishing

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Founded in 2012 in order to promote the work of S.R.Crockett and other 'forgotten' Scottish writers, in 2014 we published the 32 volume *'The Galloway Collection'* to commemorate the 100th anniversary of S.R.Crockett's death.

In 2015 we published his seven children's novels as *'The Rainbow Crockett'* as well as a new edition of Malcolm McLachlan Harper's biography *'Crockett and Grey Galloway.'* a compilation of short stories: *'A Cameronian Christmas'* and a short introduction to Crockett by Richard D.Jackson; *'Another Scottish Teller of Tales.'*

Series editor Cally Phillips is currently working on the *'Discovering Crockett'* series. Volume 1 of *'Discovering Crockett's Galloway'* was published in 2015 with Volume 2 due out in 2016 and more in the pipeline.

In 2016 also sees the publication of a new version of the definitive Crockett biography by Dr Islay Murray Donaldson. First published in 1989 it has been revised and includes a new chapter on Crockett's children's fiction.

We remain committed to publishing work by and about S.R.Crockett, especially that which is hard to find.

Most of our books are available in digital and paperback formats. You can buy all our Crockett books online from our partner bookstore: www.unco.scot.

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- 1912 Anne of the Barricades
- 1912 Sweethearts at Home
- 1912 The Moss Troopers
- 1913 Sandy's Love
- 1913 A Tatter of Scarlet
- 1914 Silver Sand

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POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

- 1915 Hal o' the Ironsides
- 1917 The Azure Hand
- 1920 The White Pope
- 1926 Rogues' Island
- 2016 Peter the Renegade

Find out more about Crockett's life literature and legacy at: www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

www.srcrockett.weebly.com and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at www.youtube.com

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large "S" and "R" at the beginning.

