BLASCO IBÁÑEZ VICENTE

WOMAN TRIUMPHANT (LA MAJA DESNUDA)

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Vicente Blasco Ibáñez
Woman Triumphant
(La Maja Desnuda)

INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

The title of this novel in the original, *La maja desnuda*, "The Nude Maja," is also the name of one of the most famous pictures of the great Spanish painter Francisco Goya.

The word *maja* has no exact equivalent in English or in any of the modern languages. Literally, it means "bedecked," "showy," "gaudily attired," "flashy," "dazzling," etc., and it was applied at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth to a certain class of gay women of the lower strata of Madrid society notorious for their love of dancing and their fondness for exhibiting themselves conspicuously at bull-fights and all popular celebrations. The great ladies of the aristocracy affected the free ways and imitated the picturesque dress of the *maja*; Goya made this type the central figure of many of his genre paintings, and the dramatist Ramón de la Cruz based most of his *sainetes*—farcical pieces in one act—upon the customs

and rivalries of these women. The dress invented by the *maja*, consisting of a short skirt partly covered by a net with berry-shaped tassels, white *mantilla* and high shell-comb, is considered all over the world as the national costume of Spanish women.

When the novel first appeared in Spain some years ago, a certain part of the Madrid public, unduly evil-minded, thought that it had discovered the identity of the real persons whom I had taken as models to draw my characters. This claim provoked a scandalous sensation and gave my book an unwholesome notoriety. It was thought that the protagonists of *La maja desnuda* were an illustrious Spanish painter of world-wide fame, who is my friend, and an aristocratic lady very celebrated at the time but now forgotten. I protested against this unwarranted and fantastic interpretation. Although I draw my characters from life, I do so only in a very fragmentary way (like all the great creative novelists whom I admire as masters in the field of fiction), using the materials gathered in my observations to form completely new types which are the direct and legitimate offspring of my own imagination. To use a figure: as a novelist I am a painter, not a photographer. Although I seek my inspiration in reality, I copy it in accordance with my own way of seeing it; I do not reproduce it with the mechanical servility of the photographic camera.

It is possible that my imaginary heroes are vaguely reminiscent of beings who actually exist. Subconsciousness is the novelist's principal instrument, and this subconsciousness frequently mocks us, leading us to mistake for our own creation

the things which we have unwittingly observed in Nature. But despite this, it is unfair, as well as risky, for the reader to assign the names of real persons to the characters of fiction, saying, "This is So-and-so."

It would be equally unfair to consider this novel as audacious or of doubtful morality. The artistic world which I describe in *La maja desnuda* cannot be expected to have the same conception of life as the conventional world. Far from believing it immoral, I consider this one of the most moral novels I have ever written. And it is for this reason that, with a full realization of the standards demanded by the English-reading public, I have not hesitated to authorize the present translation without palliation or amputation, fully convinced that the reader will not find anything in this novel objectionable or offensive to his moral sense. Morality is not to be found in words but in deeds and in the lessons which these deeds teach.

The difficulty of adequately translating the word *maja* into English led to the adoption of "Woman Triumphant" as the title of the present version. I believe it is a happy selection; it interprets the spirit of the novel. But it must be borne in mind that the woman here is the wife of the protagonist. It is the wife who triumphs, resurrecting in spirit to exert an overwhelming influence over the life of a man who had wished to live without her.

Renovales, the hero, is simply the personification of human desire, this poor desire which, in reality, does not know what it

wants, eternally fickle and unsatisfied. When we finally obtain what we desire, it does not seem enough. "More: I want more," we say. If we lose something that made life unbearable, we immediately wish it back as indispensable to our happiness. Such are we: poor deluded children who cried yesterday for what we scorn to-day and shall want again to-morrow; poor deluded beings plunging across the span of life on the Icarian wings of caprice.

Vicente Blasco Ibañez.

New York, January, 1920.

WOMAN TRIUMPHANT

PART I

I

It was eleven o'clock in the morning when Mariano Renovales reached the Museo del Prado. Several years had passed since the famous painter had entered it. The dead did not attract him; very interesting they were, very worthy of respect, under the glorious shroud of the centuries, but art was moving along new paths and he could not study there under the false glare of the skylights, where he saw reality only through the temperaments of other men. A bit of sea, a mountainside, a group of ragged people, an expressive head attracted him more than that palace, with its broad staircases, its white columns and its statues of bronze and alabaster—a solemn pantheon of art, where the neophytes vacillated in fruitless confusion, without knowing what course to follow.

The master Renovales stopped for a few moments at the foot of the stairway. He contemplated the valley through which you approach the palace—with its slopes of fresh turf, dotted at intervals with the sickly little trees—with a certain emotion, as

men are wont to contemplate, after a long absence, the places familiar to their youth. Above the scattered growth the ancient church of Los Jerónimos, with its gothic masonry, outlined against the blue sky its twin towers and ruined arcades. The wintry foliage of the Retiro served as a background for the white mass of the Casón. Renovales thought of the frescos of Giordano that decorated its ceilings. Afterwards, he fixed his attention on a building with red walls and a stone portal, which pretentiously obstructed the space in the foreground, at the edge of the green slope. Bah! The Academy! And the artist's sneer included in the same loathing the Academy of Language and the other Academies—painting, literature, every manifestation of human thought, dried, smoked, and swathed, with the immortality of a mummy, in the bandages of tradition, rules, and respect for precedent.

A gust of icy wind shook the skirts of his overcoat, his long beard tinged with gray and his wide felt hat, beneath the brim of which protruded the heavy locks of his hair, that had excited so much comment in his youth, but which had gradually grown shorter with prudent trimming, as the master rose in the world, winning fame and money.

Renovales felt cold in the damp valley. It was one of those bright, freezing days that are so frequent in the winter in Madrid. The sun was shining; the sky was blue; but from the mountains, covered with snow, came an icy wind, that hardened the ground, making it as brittle as glass. In the corners, where the warmth

of the sun did not reach, the morning frost still glistened like a coating of sugar. On the mossy carpet, the sparrows, thin with the privations of winter, trotted back and forth like children, shaking their bedraggled feathers.

The stairway of the Museo recalled to the master his early youth, when at sixteen he had climbed those steps many a time with his stomach faint from the wretched meal at the boarding-house. How many mornings he had spent in that old building copying Velásquez! The place brought to his memory his dead hopes, a host of illusions that now made his smile; recollections of hunger and humiliating bargaining to make his first money by the sale of copies. His large, stern face, his brow that filled his pupils and admirers with terror lighted up with a merry smile. He recalled how he used to go into the Museo with halting steps, how he feared to leave the easel, lest people might notice the gaping soles of his boots that left his feet uncovered.

He passed through the vestibule and opened the first glass door. Instantly the noises of the world outside ceased; the rattling of the carriages in the Prado; the bells of the street-cars, the dull rumble of the carts, the shrill cries of the children who were running about on the slopes. He opened the second door, and his face, swollen by the cold, felt the caress of warm air, buzzing with the vague hum of silence. The footfalls of the visitors reverberated in the manner peculiar to large, unoccupied buildings. The slam of the door, as it closed, resounded like a cannon shot, passing from hall to hall through the heavy curtains.

From the gratings of the registers poured the invisible breath of the furnaces. The people, on entering, spoke in a low tone, as if they were in a cathedral; their faces assumed an expression of unnatural seriousness, as though they were intimidated by the thousands of canvases that lined the walls, by the enormous busts that decorated the circle of the rotunda and the middle of the central salon.

On seeing Renovales, the two door-keepers, in their long frock-coats, started to their feet. They did not know who he was, but he certainly was somebody. They had often seen that face, perhaps in the newspapers, perhaps on match-boxes. It was associated in their minds with the glory of popularity, with the high honors reserved for people of distinction. Presently they recognized him. It was so many years since they had seen him there! And the two attendants, with their caps covered with gold-braid in their hands and with an obsequious smile, came forward towards the great artist.

"Good morning, Don Mariano. Did Señor de Renovales wish something? Did he want them to call the curator?" They spoke with oily obsequiousness, with the confusion of courtiers who see a foreign sovereign suddenly enter their palace, recognizing him through his disguise.

Renovales rid himself of them with a brusque gesture and cast a glance over the large decorative canvases of the rotunda, that recalled the wars of the 17th century; generals with bristling mustaches and plumed slouch-hat, directing the battle with a

short baton, as though they were directing an orchestra, troops of arquebusiers disappearing downhill with banners of red and blue crosses at their front, forests of pikes rising from the smoke, green meadows of Flanders in the backgrounds—thundering, fruitless combats that were almost the last gasps of a Spain of European influence. He lifted a heavy curtain and entered the spacious salon, where the people at the other end looked like little wax figures under the dull illumination of the skylights.

The artist continued straight ahead, scarcely noticing the pictures, old acquaintances that could tell him nothing new. His eyes sought the people without, however, finding in them any greater novelty. It seemed as though they formed a part of the building and had not moved from it in many years; good-natured fathers with a group of children before their knees, explaining the meaning of the pictures; a school teacher, with her well-behaved and silent pupils who, in obedience to the command of their superior, passed without stopping before the lightly clad saints; a gentleman with two priests, talking loudly, to show that he was intelligent and almost at home there; several foreign ladies with their veils caught up over their straw hats and their coats on their arms, consulting the catalogue, all with a sort of family-air, with identical expressions of admiration and curiosity, until Renovales wondered if they were the same ones he had seen there years before, the last time he was there.

As he passed, he greeted the great masters mentally; on one side the holy figures of El Greco, with their greenish or

bluish spirituality, slender and undulating; beyond, the wrinkled, black heads of Ribera, with ferocious expressions of torture and pain—marvelous artists, whom Renovales admired, while determined not to imitate them. Afterwards, between the railing that protects the pictures and the line of busts, show-cases and marble tables supported by gilded lions, he came upon the easels of several copyists. They were boys from the School of Fine Arts, or poverty-stricken young ladies with run-down heels and dilapidated hats, who were copying Murillos. They were tracing on the canvas the blue of the Virgin's robe or the plump flesh of the curly-haired boys that played with the Divine Lamb. Their copies were commissions from pious people; a *genre* that found an easy sale among the benefactors of convents and oratories. The smoke of the candles, the wear of years, the blindness of devotion would dim the colors, and some day the eyes of the worshipers, weeping in supplication, would see the celestial figures move with mysterious life on their blackened background, as they implored from them wondrous miracles.

The master made his way toward the Hall of Velásquez. It was there that his friend Tekli was working. His visit to the Museo had no other object than to see the copy that the Hungarian painter was making of the picture of *Las Meninas.*

The day before, when the foreigner was announced in his studio, he had remained perplexed for a long while, looking at the name on the card. Tekli! And then all at once he remembered a friend of twenty years before, when he lived in Rome; a good-

natured Hungarian, who admired him sincerely and who made up for his lack of genius with a silent persistency in his work, like a beast of burden.

Renovales was glad to see his little blue eyes, hidden under his thin, silky eyebrows, his jaw, protruding like a shovel, a feature that made him look very much like the Austrian monarchs—his tall frame that bent forward under the impulse of excitement, while he stretched out his bony arms, long as tentacles, and greeted him in Italian:

"Oh, *maestro, caro maestro!*"

He had taken refuge in a professorship, like all artists who lack the power to continue the upward climb, who fall in the rut. Renovales recognized the artist-official in his spotless suit, dark and proper, in his dignified glance that rested from time to time on his shining boots that seemed to reflect the whole studio. He even wore on one lapel of his coat the variegated button of some mysterious decoration. The felt hat, white as meringue, which he held in his hand, was the only discordant feature in this general effect of a public functionary. Renovales caught his hands with sincere enthusiasm. The famous Tekli! How glad he was to see him! What times they used to have in Rome! And with a smile of kindly superiority he listened to the story of his success. He was a professor in Budapest; every year he saved money in order to go and study in some celebrated European museum. At last he had succeeded in coming to Spain, fulfilling the desire he had cherished for many years.

"*Oh, Velásquez! uel maestro, caro Mariano!*"

And throwing back his head, with a dreamy expression in his eyes, he moved his protruding jaw covered with reddish hair, with a voluptuous look, as though he were sipping a glass of his sweet native Tokay.

He had been in Madrid for a month, working every morning in the Museo. His copy of *Las Meninas* was almost finished. He had not been to see his "Dear Mariano" sooner because he wanted to show him this work. Would he come and see him some morning in the Museo? Would he give him this proof of his friendship? Renovales tried to decline. What did he care for a copy? But there was an expression of such humble supplication in the Hungarian's little eyes, he showered him with so many praises of his great triumphs, expatiating on the success that his picture *Man Overboard!* had won at the last Budapest Exhibition, that the master promised to go to the Museo.

And a few days later, one morning when a gentleman whose portrait he was painting canceled his appointment, Renovales remembered his promise and went to the Museo del Prado, feeling, as he entered, the same sensation of insignificance and homesickness that a man suffers on returning to the university where he has passed his youth.

When he found himself in the Hall of Velásquez, he suddenly felt seized with religious respect. There was a painter! *The* painter! All his irreverent theories of hatred for the dead were left outside the door. The charm of those canvases that he had

not seen for many years rose again—fresh, powerful, irresistible; it overwhelmed him, awakening his remorse. For a long time he remained motionless, turning his eyes from one picture to another, eager to comprise in one glance the whole work of the immortal, while around him the hum of curiosity began again.

"Renovales! That's Renovales!"

The news had started from the door, spreading through the whole Museo, reaching the Hall of Velásquez behind his steps. The groups of curious people stopped gazing at the pictures to look at that huge, self-possessed man who did not seem to realize the curiosity that surrounded him. The ladies, as they went from canvas to canvas, looked out of the corner of their eyes at the celebrated artist whose portrait they had seen so often. They found him more ugly, more commonplace than he appeared in the engravings in the papers. It did not seem possible that that "porter" had talent and painted women so well. Some young fellows approached to look at him more closely, pretending to gaze at the same pictures as the master. They scrutinized him, noting his external peculiarities with that desire for enthusiastic imitation which marks the novice. Some determined to copy his soft bow-tie and his tangled hair, with the fantastic hope that this would give them a new spirit for painting. Others complained to themselves that they were beardless and could not display the curly gray whiskers of the famous master.

He, with his keen sensitiveness to praise, was not long in observing the atmosphere of curiosity that surrounded him. The

young copyists seemed to stick closer to their easels, knitted their brows, dilated their nostrils, and moved their brushes slowly, with hesitation, knowing that he was behind them, trembling at every step that sounded on the inlaid floor, full of fear and desire that he might deign to cast a glance over their shoulders. He divined with a sort of pride what all the mouths were whispering, what all the eyes were saying, fixed absent-mindedly on the canvases only to turn toward him.

"It's Renovales—the painter Renovales."

The master looked for a long while at one of the copyists—an old man, decrepit and almost blind, with heavy convex spectacles that gave him the appearance of a sea-monster, whose hands trembled with senile unsteadiness. Renovales recognized him. Twenty years before, when he used to study in the Museo, he had seen him in the same spot, always copying *Los Borrachos*. Even if he should become completely blind, if the picture should be lost, he could reproduce it by feeling. In those days they had often talked together, but the poor man could not have the remotest suspicion that the Renovales whom people talked so much about was the same lad who on more than one occasion had borrowed a brush from him, but whose memory was scarcely preserved in his mind, mummified by eternal imitation.

Renovales thought of the kindness of the chummy Bacchus and the gang of ruffians of his court, who for half a century had been supporting the household of the copyist, and he fancied he could see the old wife, the married children, the grandchildren

—a whole family supported by the old man's trembling hand.

Some one whispered to him the news that was filling the Museo with excitement and the copyist, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully, raised his moribund glance from his work.

And so Renovales was there, the famous Renovales! At last he was going to see the prodigy!

The master saw those grotesque eyes like those of a sea-monster, fixed on him, with an ironical gleam behind the heavy lenses. The grafter! He had already heard of that studio, as splendid as a palace, behind the Retire What Renovales had in such plenty had been taken from men like him who, for want of influence, had been left behind. He charged thousands of dollars for a canvas, when Velásquez worked for three *pesetas* a day and Goya painted his portraits for a couple of doubloons. Deceit, modernism, the audacity of the younger generation that lacked scruples, the ignorance of the simpletons that believe the newspapers! The only good thing was right there before him. And once more shrugging his shoulders scornfully, he lost his expression of ironical protest and returned to his thousandth copy of *Los Borrachos*.

Renovales, seeing that the curiosity about him was diminishing, entered the little hall that contained the picture of *Las Meninas*. There was Tekli in front of the famous canvas that occupies the whole back of the room, seated before his easel, with his white hat pushed back to leave free his throbbing brow that was contracted with a tenacious insistence on accuracy.

Seeing Renovales, he rose hastily, leaving his palette on the piece of oil-cloth that protected the floor from spots of paint. Dear master! How thankful he was to him for this visit! And he showed him the copy, minutely accurate but without the wonderful atmosphere, without the miraculous realism of the original. Renovales approved with a nod; he admired the patient toil of that gentle ox of art, whose furrows were always alike, of geometric precision, without the slightest negligence or the least attempt at originality.

"*Ti piace?*" he asked anxiously, looking into his eyes to divine his thoughts. "*È vero? È vero?*" he repeated with the uncertainty of a child who fears that he is being deceived.

And suddenly calmed by the evidences of Renovales' approval, that kept growing more extravagant to conceal his indifference, the Hungarian grasped both of his hands and lifted them to his breast.

"Sono contento, maestro, sono contento."

He did not want to let Renovales go. Since he had had the generosity to come and see his work, he could not let him go away, they would lunch together at the hotel where he lived. They would open a bottle of Chianti to recall their life in Rome; they would talk of the merry Bohemian days of their youth, of those comrades of various nationalities that used to gather in the Café del Greco,—some already dead, the rest scattered through Europe and America, a few celebrated, the majority vegetating in the schools of their native land, dreaming of a final masterpiece

before which death would probably overtake them.

Renovales felt overcome by the insistence of the Hungarian, who seized his hands with a dramatic expression, as though he would die at a refusal. Good for the Chianti! They would lunch together, and while Tekli was giving a few touches to his work, he would wait for him, wandering through the Museo, renewing old memories.

When he returned to the Hall of Velásquez, the assemblage had diminished; only the copyists remained bending over their canvases. The painter felt anew the influence of the great master. He admired his wonderful art, feeling at the same time the intense, historical sadness that seemed to emanate from all of his work. Poor Don Diego! He was born in the most melancholy period of Spanish history. His sane realism was fitted to immortalize the human form in all its naked beauty and fate had provided him a period when women looked like turtles, with their heads and shoulders peeping out between the double shell of their inflated gowns, and when men had a sacerdotal stiffness, raising their dark, ill-washed heads above their gloomy garb. He had painted what he saw; fear and hypocrisy were reflected in the eyes of that world. In the jesters, fools and humpbacks immortalized by Don Diego was revealed the forced merriment of a dying nation that must needs find distraction in the monstrous and absurd. The hypochondriac temper of a monarchy weak in body and fettered in spirit by the terrors of hell, lived in all those masterpieces, that inspired at once

admiration and sadness. Alas for the artistic treasures wasted in immortalizing a period which without Velásquez would have fallen into utter oblivion!

Renovales thought, too, of the man, comparing with a feeling of remorse the great painter's life with the princely existence of the modern masters. Ah, the munificence of kings, their protection of artists, that people talked about in their enthusiasm for the past! He thought of the peaceful Don Diego and his salary of three *pesetas* as court painter, which he received only at rare intervals; of his glorious name figuring among those of jesters and barbers in the list of members of the king's household, forced to accept the office of appraiser of masonry to improve his situation, of the shame and humiliation of his last years in order to gain the Cross of Santiago, denying as a crime before the tribunal of the Orders that he had received money for his pictures, declaring with servile pride his position as servant of the king, as though this title were superior to the glory of an artist. Happy days of the present, blessed revolution of modern life, that dignifies the artist, and places him under the protection of the public, an impersonal sovereign that leaves the creator of beauty free and ends by even following him in new-created paths!

Renovales went up to the central gallery in search of another of his favorites. The works of Goya filled a large space on both walls. On one side the portraits of the kings and queens of the Bourbon decadence; heads of monarchs, or princes, crushed under their white wigs; sharp feminine eyes, bloodless faces,

with their hair combed in the form of a tower. The two great painters had coincided in their lives with the moral downfall of two dynasties. In the Hall of Velásquez the thin, bony, fair-haired kings, of monastic grace and anæmic pallor, with their protruding under-jaws, and in their eyes an expression of doubt and fear for the salvation of their souls. Here, the corpulent, clumsy monarchs, with their huge, heavy noses, fatefully pendulous, as though by some mysterious relation they were dragging on the brain, paralyzing its functions; their thick underlips, hanging in sensual inertia; their eyes, calm as those of cattle, reflecting in their tranquil light indifference for everything that did not directly concern their own well-being. The Austrians, nervous, restless, vacillating with the fever of insanity, riding on theatrical chargers, in dark landscapes, bounded by the snowy crests of the Guadarrama, as sad, cold and crystallized as the soul of the nation; the Bourbons, peaceful, adipose, resting —surfeited—on their huge calves, without any other thought than the hunt of the following day or the domestic intrigue that would set the family in dissension, deaf to the storms that thundered beyond the Pyrenees. The one, surrounded by brutal-faced imbeciles, by gloomy pettifoggers, by Infantas with childish faces and the hollow skirts of a Virgin's image on an altar; the others bringing as a merry, unconcerned retinue, a rabble clad in bright colors, wrapped in scarlet capes or lace mantillas, crowned with ornamental combs or masculine hats —a race that, without knowing it, was sapping its heroism in

picnics at the Canal or in grotesque amusements. The lash of invasion aroused them from their century-long infancy. The same great artist that for many years had portrayed the simple thoughtlessness of this gay people, showy and light-hearted as a comic-opera chorus, afterwards painted them, knife in hand, attacking the Mamelukes with the agility of monkeys, felling those Egyptian centaurs under their slashes, blackened with the smoke of a hundred battles, or dying with theatrical pride by the light of a lantern in the gloomy solitude of Moncloa, shot by the invaders.

Renovales admired the tragic atmosphere of the canvas before him. The executioners hid their faces, leaning on their guns; they were the blind executors of fate, a nameless force, and before them rose the pile of palpitating, bloody flesh; the dead with strips of flesh torn off by the bullets, showing reddish holes, the living with folded arms, defying the murderers in a tongue they could not understand, or covering their faces with their hands, as though this instinctive movement could save them from the lead. A whole people died, to be born again. And beside this picture of horror and heroism, in another close to it, he saw Palafox, the Leonidas of Saragossa, mounted on horseback, with his stylish whiskers and the arrogance of a blacksmith in a captain-general's uniform, having in his bearing something of the appearance of a popular chieftain, holding in one hand, gloved in buckskin, the curved saber, and in the other the reins of his stocky, big-bellied steed.

Renovales thought that art is like light, which acquires color and brightness from the objects it touches. Goya had passed through a stormy period; he had been a spectator of the resurrection of the soul of the people and his painting contained the tumultuous life, the heroic fury that you look for in vain in the canvases of that other genius, tied as he was to the monotonous existence of the palace, unbroken except by the news of distant wars in which they had little interest and whose victories, too late to be useful, had the coldness of doubt.

The painter turned away from the dames of Goya, clad in white cambric, with their rosebud mouths and with their hair done up like a turban, to concentrate his attention on a nude figure, the luminous gleam of whose flesh seemed to throw the adjacent canvases in a shadow. He contemplated it closely for a long time, bending over the railing till the brim of his hat almost touched the canvas. Then he gradually moved away, without ceasing to look at it, until, at last, he sat down on a bench, still facing the picture with his eyes fixed upon it.

"Goya's *Maja*. The *Maja Desnuda!*"

He spoke aloud, without realizing it, as if his words were the inevitable outburst of the thoughts that rushed into his mind and seemed to pass back and forth behind the lenses of his eyes. His expressions of admiration were in different tones, marking a descending scale of memories.

The painter looked with delight at the gracefully delicate form, luminous, as though within it burned the flame of life, showing

through the pearl-pale flesh. A shadow, scarcely perceptible, veiled in mystery of her femininity; the light traced a bright spot on her smoothly rounded knees and once more the shadow reached down to her tiny feet with their delicate toes, rosy and babyish.

The woman was small, graceful, and dainty; the Spanish Venus with no more flesh than was necessary to cover her supple, shapely frame with softly curving outlines. Her amber eyes that flashed slyly, were disconcerting with their gaze; her mouth had in its graceful corners the fleeting touch of an eternal smile; on her cheeks, elbows and feet the pink tone showed the transparency and the moist brilliancy of those shells that open their mysterious colors in the secret depths of the sea.

"Goya's *Maja*. The *Maja Desnuda!*"

He no longer said these words aloud, but his thought and his expression repeated them, his smile was their echo.

Renovales was not alone. From time to time groups of visitors passed back and forth between his eyes and the picture, talking loudly. The tread of heavy feet shook the wooden floor. It was noon and the bricklayers from nearby buildings were taking advantage of the noon hour to explore those salons as if it were a new world, delighting in the warm air of the furnaces. As they went, they left footprints of plaster on the floor; they called out to each other to share their admiration before a picture; they were impatient to take it all in at a single glance; they waxed enthusiastic over the warriors in their shining armor or

the elaborate uniforms of olden times. The cleverest among them served as guides to their companions, driving them impatiently. They had been there the day before. Go ahead! There was still a lot to see! And they ran toward the inner halls with the breathless curiosity of men who tread on new ground and expect something marvelous to rise before their steps.

Amid this rush of simple admirers there passed, too, some groups of Spanish ladies. All did the same thing before Goya's work, as if they had been previously coached. They went from picture to picture, commenting on the fashions of the past, feeling a sort of longing for the curious old crinolines and the broad mantillas with the high combs. Suddenly they became serious, drew their lips together and started at a quick pace for the end of the gallery. Instinct warned them. Their restless eyes felt hurt by the nude in the distance; they seemed to scent the famous *Maja* before they saw her and they kept on—erect, with severe countenances, just as if they were annoyed by some rude fellow's advances in the street—passing in front of the picture without turning their faces, without seeing even the adjacent pictures nor stopping till they reached the Hall of Murillo.

It was the hatred for the nude, the Christian, century-old abomination of Nature and truth, that rose instinctively to protest against the toleration of such horrors in a public building which was peopled with saints, kings and ascetics.

Renovales worshiped the canvas with ardent devotion, and placed it in a class by itself. It was the first manifestation in

Spanish history of art that was free from scruples, unhampered by prejudice. Three centuries of painting, several generations of glorious names, succeeded one another with wonderful fertility; but not until Goya had the Spanish brush dared to trace the form of a woman's body, the divine nakedness that among all peoples has been the first inspiration of nascent art. Renovales remembered another nude, the Venus of Velásquez, preserved abroad. But that work had not been spontaneous; it was a commission of the monarch who, at the same time that he was paying foreigners lavishly for their studies in the nude, wished to have a similar canvas by his court-painter.

Religious oppression had obscured art for centuries. Human beauty terrified the great artists, who painted with a cross on their breasts and a rosary on their sword-hilts. Bodies were hidden under the stiff, heavy folds of sackcloth or the grotesque, courtly crinoline, and the painter never ventured to guess what was beneath them, looking at the model, as the devout worshiper contemplates the hollow mantle of the Virgin, not knowing whether it contains a body or three sticks to hold up the head. The joy of life was a sin. In vain a sun fairer than that of Venice shone on Spanish soil, futile was the light that burned upon the land with a brighter glow than that of Flanders: Spanish art was dark, lifeless, sober, even after it knew the works of Titian. The Renaissance, that in the rest of the world worshiped the nude as the supreme work of Nature, was covered here with the monk's cowl or the beggar's rags. The shining landscapes were dark and

gloomy when they reached the canvas; under the brush the land of the sun appeared with a gray sky and grass that was a mournful green; the heads had a monkish gravity. The artist placed in his pictures not what surrounded him, but what he had within him, a piece of his soul—and his soul was fettered by the fear of dangers in the present life and torments in the life to come; it was black—black with sadness, as if it were dyed in the soot of the fires of the autos-de-fé.

That naked woman with her curly head resting on her folded arms was the awakening of an art that had lived in isolation. The slight frame, that scarcely rested on the green divan and the fine lace cushions, seemed on the point of rising in the air with the mighty impulse of resurrection.

Renovales thought of the two masters, equally great, and still so different. One had the imposing majesty of famous monuments—serene, correct, cold, filling the horizon of history with their colossal mass, growing old in glory without the centuries opening the least crack in their marble walls. On all sides the same façade—noble, symmetrical, calm, without the vagaries of caprice. It was reason—solid, well-balanced, alien to enthusiasm and weakness, without feverish haste. The other was as great as a mountain, with the fantastic disorder of Nature, covered with tortuous inequalities. On one side the wild, barren cliff; beyond, the glen, covered with blossoming heath; below, the garden with its perfumes and birds; on the heights, the crown of dark clouds, heavy with thunder and lightning. It was

imagination in unbridled career, with breathless halts and new flights—its brow in the infinite and its feet implanted on earth.

The life of Don Diego was summed up in these words: "He had painted." That was his whole biography. Never in his travels in Spain and Italy did he feel curious to see anything but pictures. In the court of the Poet-king, he had vegetated amid gallantries and masquerades, calm as a monk of painting, always standing before his canvas and model—to-day a jester, to-morrow a little Infanta—without any other desire than to rise in rank among the members of the royal household, to see a cross of red cloth sewed on his black jerkin. He was a lofty soul, enclosed in a phlegmatic body that never tormented him with nervous desires nor disturbed the calm of his work with violent passions. When he died the good Dona Juana, his wife, died too, as though they sought each other, unable to remain apart after their long, uneventful pilgrimage through the world.

Goya "had lived." His life was that of the nobleman-artist—a stormy novel, full of mysterious amours. His pupils, on parting the curtains of his studio, saw the silk of royal skirts on their master's knees. The dainty duchesses of the period resorted to that robust Aragonese of rough, manly gallantry to have him paint their cheeks, laughing like mad at these intimate touches. When he contemplated some divine beauty on the tumbled bed, he transferred her form to the canvas by an irresistible impulse, an imperious necessity of reproducing beauty; and the legend that floated about the Spanish artist connected an illustrious

name with all the beauties whom his brush immortalized.

To paint without fear or prejudice, to take delight in reproducing on canvas the glory of the nude, the lustrous amber of woman's flesh with its pale roses like a sea-shell, was Renovales' desire and envy; to live like the famous Don Francisco —a free bird with restless, shining plumage in the midst of the monotony of the human barn-yard; in his passions, in his diversions, in his tastes, to be different from the majority of men, since he was already different from them in his way of appreciating life.

But, ah! his existence was like that of Don Diego—unbroken, monotonous, laid out by level in a straight line. He painted, but he did not live. People praised his work for the accuracy with which he reproduced Nature, for the gleam of light, for the indefinable color of the atmosphere, and the exterior of things; but something was lacking, something that stirred within him and fought in vain to leap the vulgar barriers of daily existence.

The memory of the romantic life of Goya made him think of his own life. People called him a master; they bought everything he painted at good prices, especially if it was in accordance with some one else's tastes and contrary to his artistic desire; he enjoyed a calm existence, full of comforts; in his studio, almost as splendid as a palace, the façade of which was reproduced in the illustrated magazines, he had a wife who was convinced of his genius and a daughter who was almost a woman and who made the troop of his intimate pupils stammer with embarrassment.

The only evidences of his Bohemian past that remained were his soft felt hats, his long beard, his tangled hair and a certain carelessness in his dress; but when his position as a "national celebrity" demanded it, he took out of his wardrobe a dress suit with the lapel covered with the insignia of honorary orders and played his part in official receptions. He had thousands of dollars in the bank. In his studio, palette in hand, he conferred with his broker, discussing what sort of investments he ought to make with the year's profits. His name awakened no surprise or aversion in high society, where it was fashionable for ladies to have their portraits painted by him.

In the early days he had provoked scandal and protests by his boldness in color and his revolutionary way of seeing Nature, but there was not connected with his name the least offence against the conventions of society. His women were women of the people, picturesque and repugnant; the only flesh that he had shown on his canvases was that of a sweaty laborer or the chubby child. He was an honored master, who cultivated his stupendous ability with the same calm that he showed in his business affairs.

What was lacking in his life? Ah! Renovales smiled ironically. His whole life suddenly came to mind in a tumultuous rush of memories. Once more he fixed his glance on that woman, shining white like a pearl amphora, with her arms above her head, her breasts erect and triumphant, her eyes resting on him, as if she had known him for many years, and he repeated mentally with an expression of bitterness and dejection:

"Goya's *Maja*, the *Maja Desnuda*!"

II

As Mariano Renovales recalled the first years of his life, his memory, always sensitive to exterior impressions, called up the ceaseless clang of hammers. From the rising of the sun till the earth began to darken with the shadows of twilight the iron sang or groaned on the anvil, jarring the walls of the house and the floor of the garret, where Mariano used to play, lying on the floor at the feet of a pale, sickly woman with serious, deep-set eyes, who frequently dropped her sewing to kiss the little one with sudden violence, as though she feared she would not see him again.

Those tireless hammers that had accompanied Mariano's birth, made him jump out of bed as soon as day broke and go down to the shop to warm himself beside the glowing forge. His father, a good-natured Cyclops—hairy and blackened—walked back and forth, turning over the irons, picking up files, giving orders to his assistants with loud shouts, in order to be heard in the din of the hammering. Two sturdy fellows, stripped to the waist, swung their arms, panting over the anvil, and the iron —now red, now golden—leaped in bright showers, scattered in crackling sprays, peopling the black atmosphere of the shop with a swarm of fiery flies that died away in the soot of the corners.

"Take care, little one!" said the father, protecting his delicate

curly-haired head with one of his great hands.

The little fellow felt attracted by the colors of the glowing iron, till with the thoughtlessness of childhood he sometimes tried to pick up the fragments that glowed on the ground like fallen stars.

His father would push him out of the shop, and outside the door—black with soot—Mariano could see stretching out below him in the flood of sunlight the fields with their red soil cut into geometric figures by stone walls; at the bottom the valley with groups of poplars bordering the winding, crystal stream, and before him the mountains, covered to the very tops with dark pine woods. The shop was in the suburbs of a town and from it and the villages of the valley came the jobs that supported the blacksmith—new axles for carts, plowshares, scythes, shovels, and pitchforks in need of repair.

The incessant pounding of the hammers seemed to stir up the little fellow, inspiring him with a fever of activity, tearing him from his childish amusements. When he was eight years old, he used to seize the rope of the bellows and pull it, delighting in the shower of sparks that the current of air drove out of the lighted coals. The Cyclops was gratified at the strength of his son, robust and vigorous like all the men of his family, with a pair of fists that inspired a wholesome respect in all the village lads. He was one of his own blood. From his poor mother, weak and sickly, he inherited only his propensity toward silence and isolation that sometimes, when the fever of activity died out in him, kept him for hours at a time watching the fields, the sky or the brooks that

came tumbling down over the pebbles to join the stream at the bottom of the valley.

The boy hated school, showing a holy horror of letters. His strong hands shook with uncertainty when he tried to write a word. On the other hand, his father and the other people in the shop admired the ease with which he could reproduce objects in a simple, ingenuous drawing, in which no detail of naturalness was lacking. His pockets were always full of bits of charcoal and he never saw a wall or stone that had a suggestion of whiteness, without at once tracing on it a copy of the objects that struck his eyes because of some marked peculiarity. The outside walls of the shop were black with little Mariano's drawings. Along the walls ran the pigs of Saint Anthony, with their puckered snouts and twisted tails, that wandered through the village and were supported by public charity, to be raffled on the festival of the saint. And in the midst of this stout procession stood out the profiles of the blacksmith and all the workmen of the shop, with an inscription beneath, that no doubt might arise as to their identity.

"Come here, woman," the blacksmith would shout to his sick wife when he discovered a new sketch. "Come and see what our son has done. A devil of a boy!"

And influenced by this enthusiasm, he no longer complained when Mariano ran away from school and the bellows rope to spend the whole day running through the valley or the village, a piece of charcoal in his hand, covering the rocks of the mountain

and the house walls with black lines, to the despair of the neighbors. In the tavern in the Plaza Mayor he had traced the heads of the most constant customers, and the innkeeper pointed them out proudly, forbidding anyone to touch the wall for fear the sketches would disappear. This work was a source of vanity to the blacksmith when Sundays, after mass, he went in to drink a glass with his friends. On the wall of the rectory he had traced a Virgin, before which the most pious old women in the village stopped with deep sighs.

The blacksmith with a flush of satisfaction accepted all the praises that were showered on the little fellow as if they belonged in large part to himself. Where had that prodigy come from, when all the rest of his family were such brutes? And he nodded affirmatively when the village notables spoke of doing something for the boy. To be sure, he did not know what to do, but they were right; his Mariano was not destined to hammer iron like his father. He might become as great a personage as Don Rafael, a gentleman who painted saints in the capital of the province and was a teacher of painting in a big house, full of pictures, in the city. During the summer he came with his family to live in an estate in the valley.

This Don Rafael was a man of imposing gravity; a saint with a large family of children, who wore a frock-coat as if it were a cassock and spoke with the suavity of a friar through his white beard that covered his thin, pink cheeks. In the village church they had a wonderful picture painted by him, a *Purísima*,

whose soft glowing colors made the legs of the pious tremble. Besides, the eyes of the image had the marvelous peculiarity of looking straight at those who contemplated it, following them even though they changed position. A veritable miracle. It seemed impossible that that good gentleman who came up every morning in the summer to hear mass in the village, had painted that supernatural work. An Englishman had tried to buy it for its weight in gold. No one had seen the Englishman, but every one smiled sarcastically when they commented on the offer. Yes, indeed, they were likely to let the picture go! Let the heretics rage with all their millions. The *Purísima* would stay in her chapel to the envy of the whole world—and especially of the neighboring villages.

When the parish priest went to visit Don Rafael to speak to him about the blacksmith's son, the great man already knew about his ability. He had seen his drawings in the village; the boy had some talent and it was a pity not to guide him in the right path. After this came the visits of the blacksmith and his son, both trembling when they found themselves in the attic of the country house that the great painter had converted into a studio, seeing close at hand the pots of color, the oily palette, the brushes and those pale blue canvases on which the rosy, chubby cheeks of the cherubim or the ecstatic face of the Mother of God were beginning to assume form.

At the end of the summer the good blacksmith decided to follow Don Rafael's advice. As long as he was so good as to

consent to helping the boy, he was not going to be the one to interfere with his good fortune. The shop gave him enough to live on. All it meant was to work a few years longer, to support himself till the end of his life beside the anvil, without an assistant or a successor. His son was born to be somebody, and it was a serious sin to stop his progress by scorning the help of his good protector.

His mother, who constantly grew weaker and more sickly, cried as if the journey to the capital of the province were to the end of the world.

"Good-by, my boy. I shall never see you again."

And in truth it was the last time that Mariano saw that pale face with its great expressionless eyes, now almost wiped out of his memory like a whitish spot in which, in spite of all his efforts, he could not succeed in restoring the outline of the features.

In the city his life was radically different. Then for the first time he understood what it was his hands were striving for as they moved the charcoal over the whitewashed walls. Art was revealed to his eyes in those silent afternoons, passed in the convent where the provincial museum was situated, while his master, Don Rafael, argued with other gentlemen in the professor's hall, or signed papers in the secretary's office.

Mariano lived at his protector's house, at once his servant and his pupil. He carried letters to the dean and the other canons, who were friends of his master and who accompanied him on his walks or spent social evenings in his studio. More than once he

visited the locutories of nunneries, to deliver through the heavy gratings presents from Don Rafael to certain black and white shadows, which attracted by this sturdy young country boy, and aware that he meant to be a painter, overwhelmed him with the eager questions born of their seclusion. Before he went away they would hand him, through the revolving window, cakes and candied lemons or some other goody, and then, with a word of advice, would say good-by in their thin, soft voices, which sifted through the iron of the gratings.

"Be a good boy, little Mariano. Study, pray. Be a good Christian, the Lord will protect you and perhaps you will get to be as great a painter as Don Rafael, who is one of the first in the world."

How the master laughed at the memory of the childish simplicity that made him see in his master the most marvelous painter on earth!… Mornings, when he attended the classes in the School of Fine Arts, he grew angry at his comrades, a disrespectful rabble, brought up in the streets, sons of mechanics, who, as soon as the professor turned his back, pelted each other with the crumbs of bread meant to wipe out their drawings, and cursed Don Rafael, calling him a "Christer" and a "Jesuit."

The afternoon Mariano passed in the studio, at his master's side. How excited he was the first time he placed a palette in his hand and allowed him to copy on an old canvas a child St. John which he had finished for a society!… While the boy with his forehead wrinkled in his eagerness, tried to imitate his master's

work, he listened to the good advice that the master gave him without looking up from the canvas over which his angelic brush was running.

Painting must be religious; the first pictures in the world had been inspired by religion; outside of it, life offered nothing but base materialism, loathsome sins. Painting must be ideal, beautiful. It must always represent pretty subjects, reproduce things as they ought to be, not as they really are, and above all, look up to heaven, since there is true life, not on this earth, a valley of tears. Mariano must modify his instincts—that was his master's advice—must lose his fondness for drawing coarse subjects—people as he saw them, animals in all their material brutality, landscapes in the same form as his eyes gazed upon.

He must have idealism. Many painters were almost saints; only thus could they reflect celestial beauty in the faces of their madonnas. And poor Mariano strove to be ideal, to catch a little of that beatific serenity which surrounded his master.

Little by little he came to understand the methods which Don Rafael employed to create these masterpieces which called forth cries of admiration from his circle of canons and the rich ladies that gave him commissions for pictures. When he intended to begin one of his *Purísimas*, which were slowly invading the churches and convents of the province, he arose early and returned to his studio after mass and communion. In this way he felt an inner strength, a calm enthusiasm, and, if he felt depressed in the midst of the work, he once more had recourse to this

inspiring medicine.

The artist, besides, must be pure. He had taken a vow of chastity after he had reached the age of fifty, somewhat late to be sure, but it was not because he had not known before this certain means of reaching the perfect idealism of a celestial painter. His wife, who had grown old in her countless confinements, exhausted by the tiresome fidelity and virtue of the master, was no longer anything but the companion who gave the responses when he prayed his rosaries and Trisagia at night. He had several daughters, who weighed on his conscience like the reproachful memory of a disgraceful materialism, but some were already nuns and the others were on the way, while the idealism of the artist increased as these evidences of his impurity disappeared from the house and went to hide away in a convent where they upheld the artistic prestige of their father.

Sometimes the great painter hesitated before a *Purísima*, which was always the same, as if he painted it with a stencil. Then he spoke mysteriously to his disciple:

"Mariano, tell the gentlemen not to come to-morrow. We have a model."

And when the studio was closed to the priests and the other respectable friends, with heavy step in came Rodríguez, a policeman, with a cigarette stub under his heavy bristling mustache and one hand on the handle of his sword. Dismissed from the gendarmerie for intoxication and cruelty, and finding himself without employment, by some strange chance he began

to devote himself to serving as a painter's model. The pious artist, who held him in a sort of terror, nagged by his constant petitions, had secured for him this position as policeman, and Rodríguez took advantage of every opportunity to show his rough appreciation, slapping the master's shoulders with his great hands and blowing in his face, his breath redolent with nicotine and alcohol.

"Don Rafael, you are my father. If anybody touches you, I'll fix him, whoever he is."

And the ascetic artist, with a feeling of satisfaction at this protection, blushed and waved his hands in protest against the frankness of the rude fellow with his threats for the men he would "fix."

He threw his helmet on the ground, handed his heavy sword to Mariano, and like a man that knows his duty, took out of the bottom of a chest a white woolen tunic and a piece of blue cloth like a cloak, placing both garments on his body with the skill of practice.

Mariano looked at him with astonished eyes but without any temptation to laugh. They were mysteries of art, surprises that were reserved only for those who, like him, had the good fortune to live on terms of intimacy with the great master.

"Ready, Rodríguez?" Don Rafael asked impatiently.

And Rodríguez, erect in his bath robe with the blue rag hanging from his shoulders, clasped his hands and lifted his fierce gaze to the ceiling, without ceasing to suck the stub

that singed his mustache. The master did not need the model except for the robes of the figure, to study the folds of the celestial garment, which must not reveal the slightest evidence of human contour. The possibility of copying a woman had never passed through his imagination. That was falling into materialism, glorifying the flesh, inviting temptation; Rodríguez was all he needed; one must be an idealist.

The model continued in his mystic attitude with his body lost in the innumerable folds of his blue and white raiment, while under it the square toes of his army boots stuck out, and he held up his grotesque, flat head, crowned with bristling hair, coughing and choking from the smoke of the cigar, without ceasing to look up and without separating his hands clasped in an attitude of worship.

Sometimes, tired out by the industrious silence of the master and the pupil, Rodríguez uttered a few grumbles that little by little took the form of words and finally developed into the story of the deeds of his heroic period, when he was a rural policeman and "could take a shot at anyone and pay for it afterward with a report." The *Purísima* grew excited at these memories. His hands separated with a tremble of murderous joy, the carefully arranged folds were disturbed, his bloodshot eyes no longer looked heavenward, and with a hoarse voice he told of tremendous beatings he administered, of men who fell to the ground writhing with pain, the shooting of prisoners which afterwards were reported as attempts to escape; and to give

greater relief to this autobiography which he declaimed with bestial pride, he sprinkled his words with interjections as vulgar as they were lacking in respect for the first personages of the heavenly court.

"Rodríguez, Rodríguez!" exclaimed the master, horror-stricken.

"At your command, Don Rafael."

And the *Purísima*, after passing the stub from one side of his mouth to the other, once more folded his hands, straightened up, showing his red-striped trousers under the tunic, and lost his gaze on high, smiling with ecstasy, as if he contemplated on the ceiling all his heroic deeds of which he felt so proud.

Mariano was in despair before his canvas. He could never imitate his illustrious master. He was incapable of painting anything but what he saw, and his brush, after reproducing the blue and white raiment, stopped, hesitating at the face, calling in vain on imagination. After futile efforts it was the grotesque mask of Rodríguez that appeared on the canvas.

And the pupil had a sincere admiration for the ability of Don Rafael, for that pale head veiled in the light of its halo, a pretty, expressionless face of childish beauty, which took the place of the policeman's fierce head in the picture.

This sleight-of-hand seemed to the boy the most astounding evidence of art. When would he reach the easy prestidigitation of his master!

With time the difference between Don Rafael and his pupil

became more marked. At school his comrades gathered around him, recognizing his superiority and praising his drawings. Some professors, enemies of his master, lamented that such talent should be lost beside that "saint-painter." Don Rafael was surprised at what Mariano did outside of his studio—figures and landscapes, directly observed which, according to him, breathed the brutality of life.

His circle of serious gentlemen began to discover some merit in the pupil.

"He will never reach your height, Don Rafael," they said. "He lacks unction, he has no idealism, he will never paint a good Virgin—but as a worldly painter he has a future."

The master, who loved the boy for his submissive nature and the purity of his habits, tried in vain to make him follow the right way. If he would only imitate him, his fortune was made. He would die without a successor and his studio and his fame would be his. The boy only had to see how, little by little, like a good ant of the Lord, the master had gathered together a fair sized future with his brush. By virtue of his idealism, he had his country house there in the village, and no end of estates, the tenants of which came and visited him in his studio, carrying on endless discussions over the payment and amount of the rents in front of the poetic Virgins. The Church was poor because of the impiety of the times, it could not pay as generously as in other centuries, but commissions were numerous, and a Virgin in all her purity was a matter of only three days—but young Renovales made a

troubled, wry face, as if a painful sacrifice were demanded of him.

"I can't, Master. I'm an idiot. I don't know how to invent things. I paint only what I see."

And when he began to see naked bodies in the so-called "life" class he devoted himself zealously to this study, as if the flesh caused in him the most violent intoxication. Don Rafael was appalled by finding in the corners of his house sketches that portrayed shameful nudes in all their reality. Besides, the progress of his pupil caused him some uneasiness; he saw in his painting a vigor that he himself had never had. He even noted some falling-off in his circle of admirers. The good canons, as always, admired his Virgins, but some of them had their portraits painted by Mariano, praising the skill of his brush.

One day he said to his pupil, firmly:

"You know that I love you as I would a son, Mariano, but you are wasting your time with me. I cannot teach you anything. Your place is somewhere else. I thought you might go to Madrid. There you will find men of your stamp."

His mother was dead; his father was still in the blacksmith shop, and when he saw him come home with several duros, the pay for portraits he had made, he looked on this sum as a fortune. It did not seem possible that anyone would give money in exchange for colors. A letter from Don Rafael convinced him. Since that wise gentleman advised that his son should go to Madrid, he must agree.

"Go to Madrid, my boy, and try to make money soon, for your father is old and will not always be able to help you."

At the age of sixteen, Renovales landed in Madrid and finding himself alone, with only his wishes for his guide, devoted himself zealously to his work. He spent the morning in the Museo del Prado, copying all the heads in Velásquez's pictures. He felt that till then he had been blind. Besides, he worked in an attic studio with some other companions and evenings painted water-colors. By selling these and some copies, he managed to eke out the small allowance his father sent him.

He recalled with a sort of homesickness those years of poverty, of real misery, the cold nights in his wretched bed, the irritating meals—Heaven knows what was in them—eaten in a bar-room near the Teatro Real; the discussions in the corner of a café, under the hostile glances of the waiters who were provoked that a dozen long-haired youths should occupy several tables and order all together only three coffees and many bottles of water.

The light-hearted young fellows stood their misery without difficulty and, to make up for it, what a fill of fancies they had, what a glorious feast of hopes! A new discovery every day. Renovales ran through the realm of art like a wild colt, seeing new horizons spreading out before him, and his career caused an outburst of scandal that amounted to premature celebrity. The old men said that he was the only boy who "had the stuff in him"; his comrades declared that he was a "real painter," and in their iconoclastic enthusiasm compared his inexperienced works with

those of the recognized old masters—"poor humdrum artists" on whose bald pates they felt obliged to vent their spleen in order to show the superiority of the younger generation.

Renovales' candidacy for the fellowship at Rome caused a veritable revolution. The younger set, who swore by him and considered him their illustrious captain, broke out in threats, fearful lest the "old boys" should sacrifice their idol.

When at last his manifest superiority won him the fellowship, there were banquets in his honor, articles in the papers, his picture was published in the illustrated magazines, and even the old blacksmith made a trip to Madrid, to breathe with tearful emotion part of the incense that was burned for his son.

In Rome a cruel disappointment awaited Renovales. His countrymen received him rather coldly. The younger men looked on him as a rival and waited for his next works with the hope of a failure; the old men who lived far from their fatherland examined him with malignant curiosity. "And so that big chap was the blacksmith's son, who caused so much disturbance among the ignorant people at home!… Madrid was not Rome. They would soon see what that *genius* could do!"

Renovales did nothing in the first months of his stay in Rome. He answered with a shrug of his shoulders those who asked for his pictures with evident innuendo. He had come there not to paint but to study; that was what the State was paying him for. And he spent more than half a year drawing, always drawing in the famous art galleries, where, pencil in hand, he studied the

famous works. The paint boxes remained unopened in one corner of the studio.

Before long he came to detest the great city, because of the life the artists led in it. What was the use of fellowships? People studied less there than in other places. Rome was not a school, it was a market. The painting merchants set up their business there, attracted by the gathering of artists. All—old and beginners, famous and unknown—felt the temptation of money; all were seduced by the easy comforts of life, producing works for sale, painting pictures in accordance with the suggestions of some German Jews who frequented the studios, designating the sizes and the types that were in style in order to spread them over Europe and America.

When Renovales visited the studios, he saw nothing but *genre* pictures, sometimes gentlemen in long dress coats, others tattered Moors or Calabrian peasants. They were pretty, faultless paintings, for which they used as models a manikin, or the families of *ciociari* whom they hired every morning in the Piazza di Espagna beside the Sealinata of the Trinity; the everlasting country-woman, swarthy and black-eyed, with great hoops in her ears and wearing a green skirt, a black waist and a white head-dress caught up on her hair with large pins; the usual old man with sandals, a woolen cloak and a pointed hat with spiral bands on his snowy head that was a fitting model for the Eternal Father. The artists judged each other's ability by the number of thousand lire they took in during a year; they spoke with respect of the

famous masters who made a fortune out of the millionaires of Paris and Chicago for easel-pictures that nobody saw. Renovales was indignant. This sort of art was almost like that of his first master, even if it was "worldly" as Don Rafael had said. And that was what they sent him to Rome for!

Unpopular with his countrymen because of his brusque ways, his rude tongue and his honesty, which made him refuse all commissions from the art merchants, he sought the society of artists from other countries. Among the cosmopolitan group of young painters who were quartered in Rome, Renovales soon became popular.

His energy, his exuberant spirits, made him a congenial, merry comrade, when he appeared in the studios of the Via di Babuino or in the chocolate rooms and cafés of the Corso, where the artists of different nationalities gathered in friendly company.

Mariano, at the age of twenty, was an athletic fellow, a worthy scion of the man who was pounding iron from morning till night in a far away corner of Spain. One day an English youth, a friend of his, read him a page of Ruskin in his honor. "The plastic arts are essentially athletic." An invalid, a half paralyzed man, might be a great poet, a celebrated musician, but to be a Michael Angelo or a Titian a man must have not merely a privileged soul, but a vigorous body. Leonardo da Vinci broke a horseshoe in his hands; the sculptors of the Renaissance worked huge blocks of marble with their titanic arms or chipped off the bronze with their gravers; the great painters were often architects

and, covered with dust, moved huge masses. Renovales listened thoughtfully to the words of the great English æstheticist. He, too, was a strong soul in an athlete's body.

The appetites of his youth never went beyond the manly intoxications of strength and movement. Attracted by the abundance of models which Rome offered, he often undressed a *ciociara* in his studio, delighting in drawing the forms of her body. He laughed, like the big giant that he was, he spoke to her with the same freedom as if she were one of the poor women that came out to stop him at night as he returned alone to the Academy of Spain, but when the work was over and she was dressed—out with her! He had the chastity of strong men. He worshiped the flesh, but only to copy its lines. The animal contact, the chance meeting, without love, without attraction, with the inner reserve of two people who do not know each other and who look on each other with suspicion, filled him with shame. What he wanted to do was to study, and women only served as a hindrance in great undertakings. He consumed the surplus of his energy in athletic exercise. After one of his feats of strength, which filled his comrades with enthusiasm, he would come in fresh, serene, indifferent, as though he were coming out of a bath. He fenced with the French painters of the Villa Medici; learned to box with Englishmen and Americans; organized, with some German artists, excursions to a grove near Rome, which were talked about for days in the cafés of the Corso. He drank countless healths with his companions to the Kaiser whom he

did not know and for whom he did not care a rap. He would thunder in his noisy voice the traditional *Gaudeamus Igitur* and finally would catch two models of the party around the waist and with his arms stretched out like a cross carry them through the woods till he dropped them on the grass as if they were feathers. Afterwards he would smile with satisfaction at the admiration of those good Germans, many of them sickly and near-sighted, who compared him with Siegfried and the other muscular heroes of their warlike mythology.

In the Carnival season, when the Spaniards organized a cavalcade of the Quixote, he undertook to represent the knight Pentapolin—"him of the rolled-up sleeves,"—and in the Corso there were applause and cries of admiration for the huge biceps that the knight-errant, erect on his horse, revealed. When the spring nights came, the artists marched in a procession across the city to the Jewish quarter to buy the first artichokes—the popular dish in Rome, in the preparation of which an old Hebrew woman was famous. Renovales went at the head of the *carciofalatta*, bearing the banner, starting the songs which were alternated with the cries of all sorts of animals; and his comrades marched behind him, reckless and insolent under the protection of such a chieftain. As long as Mariano was with them there was no danger. They told the story that in the alleys of the Trastevere he had given a deadly beating to two bullies of the district, after taking away their stilettos.

Suddenly the athlete shut himself up in the Academy and did

not come down to the city. For several days they talked about him at the gatherings of artists. He was painting; an exhibition that was going to take place in Madrid was close at hand and he wanted to take to it a picture to justify his fellowship. He kept the door of his studio closed to everyone, he did not permit comment nor advice, the canvas would appear just as he conceived it. His comrades soon forgot him and Renovales ended his work in seclusion, and left for his country with it.

It was a complete success, the first important step on the road that was to lead him to fame. Now he remembered with shame, with remorse, the glorious uproar his picture "The Victory of Pavia" stirred up. People crowded in front of the huge canvas, forgetting the rest of the Exhibition. And as, at that time, the Government was strong, the Cortes was closed and there was no serious accident in any of the bull-rings, the newspapers, for lack of any more lively event, hastened in cheap rivalry to reproduce the picture, to talk about it, publishing portraits of the author, profiles, as well as front views, large and small, expatiating on his life in Rome and his eccentricities, and recalled with tears of emotion the poor old man who far away in his village was pounding iron, hardly knowing of his son's glory.

With one bound Renovales passed from obscurity to the light of apotheosis. The older men whose duty it was to judge his work became benevolent and extended kindly sympathy. The little tiger was getting tame. Renovales had seen the world and now he was coming back to the good traditions; he was going

to be a painter like the rest. His picture had portions that were like Velásquez, fragments worthy of Goya, corners that recalled El Greco; there was everything in it, except Renovales, and this amalgam of reminiscences was its chief merit, what attracted general applause and won it the first medal.

A magnificent debut it was. A dowager duchess, a great protectress of the arts, who never bought a picture or a statue but who entertained at her table painters and sculptors of renown, finding in this an inexpensive pleasure and a certain distinction as an illustrious lady, wished to make Renovales' acquaintance. He overcame the stand-offishness of his nature that kept him away from all social relations. Why should he not know high society? He could go wherever other men could. And he put on his first dress-coat, and after the banquets of the duchess, where his way of arguing with members of the Academy provoked peals of merry laughter, he visited other salons and for several weeks was the idol of society which, to be sure, was somewhat scandalized by his faux pas, but still pleased with the timidity that overcame him after his daring sallies. The younger set liked him because he handled a sword like a Saint George. Although a painter and son of a blacksmith, he was in every way a respectable person. The ladies flattered him with their most amiable smiles, hoping that the fashionable artist would honor them with a portrait gratis, as he had done with the duchess.

In this period of high-life, always in dress clothes from seven in the evening, without painting anything but women who wanted

to appear pretty and discussed gravely with the artist which gown they should put on to serve as a model, Renovales met his wife Josephina.

The first time that he saw her among so many ladies of arrogant bearing and striking presence, he felt attracted towards her by force of contrast. The bashfulness, the modesty, the insignificance of the girl impressed him. She was small, her face offered no other beauty than that of youth, her body had the charm of delicacy. Like himself, the poor girl was there out of a sort of condescendence on the part of the others; she seemed to be there by sufferance and she shrank in it, as if afraid of attracting attention, Renovales always saw her in the same evening gown somewhat old, with that appearance of weariness which a garment constantly made over to follow the course of the fashions is wont to acquire. The gloves, the flowers, the ribbons had a sort of sadness in their freshness, as if they betrayed the sacrifices, the domestic exertions it had taken to procure them. She was on intimate terms with all the girls who made a triumphal entrance into the drawing-rooms, inspiring praise and envy with their new toilettes; her mother, a majestic lady, with a big nose and gold glasses, treated the ladies of the noblest families with familiarity; but in spite of this intimacy there was apparent around the mother and daughter the gap of somewhat disdainful affection, in which commiseration bore no small part. They were poor. The father had been a diplomat of some distinction who, at his death, left his wife no other

source of income than the widow's pension. Two sons were abroad as attachés of an embassy, struggling with the scantiness of their salary and the demands of their position. The mother and daughter lived in Madrid, chained to the society in which they were born, fearing to abandon it, as if that would be equivalent to a degradation, remaining during the day in a fourth-floor apartment, furnished with the remnants of their past opulence, making unheard-of sacrifices in order to be able in the evening to rub elbows worthily with those who had been their equals.

Some relative of Doña Emilia, the mother, contributed to her support, not with money (never that!) but by loaning her the surplus of their luxury, that she and her daughter might maintain a pale appearance of comfort.

Some of them loaned them their carriage on certain days, so that they might drive through the Castellana and the Retiro, bowing to their friends as the carriages passed; others sent them their box at the Opera on evenings when the bill was not a brilliant one. Their pity made them remember them, too, when they sent out invitations to birthday dinners, afternoon teas, and the like. "We mustn't forget the Torrealtas, poor things." And the next day, the society reporters included in the list of those present at the function "the charming Señorita de Torrealta and her distinguished mother, the widow of the famous diplomat of imperishable memory," and Doña Emilia, forgetting her situation, fancying she was in the good old times, went to everything, in the same black gown, annoying with her

"my dears" and her gossip the great ladies whose maids were richer and ate better than she and her daughter. If some old gentleman took refuge beside her, the diplomat's wife tried to overwhelm him with the majesty of her recollections. "When we were ambassadors in Stockholm." "When my friend Eugénie was empress...."

The daughter, endowed with her instinctive girlish timidity, seemed better to realize her position. She would remain seated among the older ladies, only rarely venturing to join the other girls who had been her boarding-school companions and who now treated her condescendingly, looking on her as they would upon a governess who had been raised to their station, out of remembrance for the past. Her mother was annoyed at her timidity. She ought to dance a lot, be lively and bold, like the other girls, crack jokes, even if they were doubtful, that the men might repeat them and give her the reputation of being a wit. It was incredible that with the bringing up she had had, she should be so insignificant. The idea! The daughter of a great man about whom people used to crowd as soon as he entered the first salons in Europe! A girl who had been educated at the school of the Sacred Heart in Paris, who spoke English, a little German, and spent the day reading when she did not have to clean a pair of gloves or make over a dress! Didn't she want to get married? Was she so well satisfied with that fourth-story apartment, that wretched cell so unworthy of their name?

Josephina smiled sadly. Get married! She never would get

to that in the society they frequented. Everyone knew they were poor. The young men thronged the drawing-rooms in search of women with money. If by chance one of them did come up to her, attracted by her pale beauty, it was only to whisper to her shameful suggestions while they danced; to propose uncompromising engagements, friendly relations with a prudence modeled on the English, flirtations that had no result.

Renovales did not realize how his friendship with Josephina began. Perhaps it was the contrast between himself and the little woman who hardly came up to his shoulder and who seemed about fifteen when she was already past twenty. Her soft voice with its slight lisp came to his ears like a caress. He laughed when he thought of the possibility of embracing that graceful, slender form; it would break in pieces in his pugilist's hands, like a wax doll. Mariano sought her out in the drawing-rooms which she and her mother were accustomed to frequent, and spent all the time sitting at her side, feeling an impulse to confide in her as a brother, a desire of telling her all about herself, his past, his present work, his hopes, as if she were a room-mate. She listened to him, looking at him with her brown eyes that seemed to smile at him, nodding assent, often without having heard what he said, receiving like a caress the exuberance of that nature which seemed to overflow in waves of fire. He was different from all the men she had known.

When someone—nobody knows who—perhaps one of Josephina's friends, noticed this intimacy, to make sport of her,

she spread the news. The painter and the Torrealta girl were engaged. That was when the interested parties discovered that they loved each other. It was something more than friendship that made Renovales pass through Josephina's street mornings, looking at the high windows in the hope of seeing her dainty silhouette through the panes. One night at the duchess' when they were left alone in the hallway, Renovales caught her hand and lifted it to his lips, but so timidly that they scarcely touched her glove. He was afraid after his rudeness, felt ashamed of his violence; he thought he was hurting the delicate, slender girl; but she let her hand stay in his, and at the same time bowed her head and began to cry.

"How good you are, Mariano!"

She felt the most intense gratitude, when she realized that she was loved for the first time; loved truly, by a man of some distinction, who fled from the women of fortune to seek a humble, neglected girl like her. All the treasures of affection which had been accumulating in the isolation of her humiliating life overflowed. How she could love the man who loved her, taking her out of that parasite's existence, lifting her by his strength and affection to the level of those who scorned her!

The noble widow of Torrealta gave a cry of indignation when she learned of the engagement of the painter and her daughter. "The blacksmith's son!" "The illustrious diplomat of imperishable memory!" But as if this protest of her pride opened her eyes, she thought of the years her daughter had spent going

from one drawing-room to another, without anyone paying any attention to her. What dunces men were! She thought, too, that a celebrated painter was a personage; she remembered the articles devoted to Renovales because of his last picture, and, above all, a thing that had the most effect on her, she knew by hearsay of the great fortune that artists amassed abroad, the hundreds of thousands of francs paid for a canvas that could be carried under your arm. Why might not Renovales be one of the fortunate?

She began to annoy her countless relatives with requests for advice. The girl had no father and they must take his place. Some answered indifferently. "The painter! Hump! Not bad!" evidencing by their coldness that it was all the same to them if she married a tax-collector. Others insulted her unwittingly by showing their approval. "Renovales? An artist with a great future before him. What more do you want? You ought to be thankful he has taken a fancy to her." But the advice that decided her was that of her famous cousin, the Marquis of Tarfe, a man to whom she looked upon as the most distinguished citizen in the country, without doubt because of his office as permanent head of the Foreign Service, for every two years he was made Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"It looks very good to me," said the nobleman, hastily, for they were waiting for him in the Senate. "It is a modern marriage and we must keep up with the times. I am a conservative, but liberal, very liberal and very modern. I will protect the children. I like the marriage. Art joining its prestige with a historic family! The

popular blood that rises through its merits and is mingled with that of the ancient nobility!"

And the Marquis of Tarfe, whose marquisate did not go back half a century, with these rhetorical figures of an orator in the Senate and his promises of protection, convinced the haughty widow. She was the one who spoke to Renovales, to relieve him of an explanation that would be trying because of the timidity he felt in this society that was not his own.

"I know all about it, Mariano, my dear, and you have my consent."

But she did not like long engagements. When did he intend to get married? Renovales was more eager for it than the mother. Josephina was different from other women who hardly aroused his desire. His chastity, which had been like that of a rough laborer, developed into a feverish desire to make that charming doll his own as soon as possible. Besides, his pride was flattered by this union. His fiancée was poor; her only dowry was a few ragged clothes, but she belonged to a noble family, ministers, generals—all of noble descent. They could weigh by the ton the coronets and coats-of-arms of those countless relatives who did not pay much attention to Josephina and her mother, but who would soon be his family. What would Señor Antón think, hammering iron in the suburbs of his town? What would his comrades in Rome say, whose lot consisted in living with the *ciociari* who served as their models, and marrying them afterward out of fear for the stiletto of the venerable Calabrian

who insisted on providing a legitimate father for his grandsons!

The papers had much to say about the wedding, repeating with slight variations the very phrases of the Marquis of Tarfe, "Art uniting with nobility." Renovales wanted to leave for Rome with Josephina as soon as the marriage was celebrated. He had made all the arrangements for his new life there, investing in it all the money he had received from the State for his picture and the product of several pictures for the Senate for which he received commissions through his illustrious relative-to-be.

A friend in Rome (the jolly Cotoner) had hired for him an apartment in the Via Margutta and had furnished it in accordance with his artistic taste. Doña Emilia would remain in Madrid with one of her sons, who had been promoted to a position in the Foreign Office. Everybody, even the mother, was in the young couple's way. And Doña Emilia wiped away an invisible tear with the tip of her glove. Besides, she did not care to go back to the countries where she had been *somebody*; she preferred to stay in Madrid; there people knew her at least.

The wedding was an event. Not a soul in the huge family was absent; all feared the annoying questions of the illustrious widow who kept a list of relatives to the sixth remove.

Señor Antón arrived two days before, in a new suit with knee-breeches and a broad plush hat, looking somewhat confused at the smiles of those people who regarded him as a quaint type. Crestfallen and trembling in the presence of the two women, with a countryman's respect, he called his daughter-in-law "Señorita."

"No, papa, call me 'daughter.' Say Josephina to me."

But in spite of Josephina's simplicity and the tender gratitude he felt when he saw her look at his son with such loving eyes, he did not venture to take the liberty of speaking to her as his child and made the greatest efforts to avoid this danger, always speaking to her in the third person.

Doña Emilia, with her gold glasses and her majestic bearing, caused him even greater emotion. He always called her "Señora marquesa," for in his simplicity he could not admit that that lady was not at least a marchioness. The widow, somewhat disarmed by the good man's homage, admitted that he was a "rube" of some natural talent, a fact that made her tolerate the ridiculous note of his knee breeches.

In the chapel of the Marquis of Tarfe's palace, after looking dumbfounded at the great throng of nobility that had gathered for his son's wedding, the old man, standing in the doorway, began to cry:

"Now I can die, O Lord. Now I can die!"

And he repeated his sad desire, without noticing the laughter of the servants, as if, after a life of toil, happiness were the inevitable forerunner of death.

The bride and groom started on their trip the same day. Señor Antón for the first time kissed his daughter-in-law on the forehead, moistening it with his tears, and went home to his village, still repeating his longing for death, as though nothing were left in the world for him to hope for.

Renovales and his wife reached Rome after several stops on the way. Their short stay in various cities of the Riviera, the days in Pisa and Florence, though delightful, as keeping the memory of their first intimacy, seemed unspeakably vulgar, when they were installed in their little house in Rome. There the real honeymoon began, by their own fireside, free from all intrusion, far from the confusion of hotels.

Josephina, accustomed to a life of secret privation, to the misery of that fourth-floor apartment in which she and her mother lived as though they were camping out, keeping all their show for the street, admired the coquettish charm, the smart daintiness of the house in the Via Margutta. Mariano's friend, who had charge of the furnishing of the house, a certain Pepe Cotoner, who hardly ever touched his brushes and who devoted all his artistic enthusiasm to his worship of Renovales, had certainly done things well.

Josephina clapped her hands in childish joy when she saw the bedroom, admiring its sumptuous Venetian furniture, with its wonderful inlaid pearl and ebony, a princely luxury that the painter would have to pay for in instalments.

Oh! The first night of their stay in Rome! How well Renovales remembered it! Josephina, lying on the monumental bed, made for the wife of a Doge, shook with the delight of rest, stretching her limbs before she hid them under the fine sheets, showing herself with the abandon of a woman who no longer has any secrets to keep. The pink toes of her plump little feet moved as

if they were calling Renovales.

Standing beside the bed, he looked at her seriously, with his brows contracted, dominated by a desire that he hesitated to express. He wanted to see her, to admire her; he did not know her yet, after those nights in the hotels when they could hear strange voices on the other side of the thin walls.

It was not the caprice of a lover, it was the desire of a painter, the demand of an artist. His eyes were hungry for beauty.

She resisted, blushing, a trifle angry at this demand which offended her deepest prejudices.

"Don't be foolish, Mariano, dear. Come to bed; don't talk nonsense."

But he persisted obstinately in his desire. She must overcome her bourgeois scruples, art scoffed at such modesty, human beauty was meant to be shown in all its radiant majesty and not to be kept hidden, despised and cursed.

He did not want to paint her; he did not dare to ask for that; but he did want to see her, to see her and admire her, not with a coarse desire, but with religious adoration.

And his hands, restrained by the fears of hurting her, gently pulled her weak arms that were crossed on her breast in the endeavor to resist his advances. She laughed: "You silly thing. You're tickling me—you're hurting me." But little by little, conquered by his persistency, her feminine pride flattered by this worship of her body, she gave in to him, allowed herself to be treated like a child, with soft remonstrances as if she were

undergoing torture, but without resisting any longer.

Her body, free from veils, shone with the whiteness of pearl. Josephina closed her eyes as if she wanted to flee from the shame of her nakedness. On the smooth sheet, her graceful form was outlined in a slightly rosy tone, intoxicating the eyes of the artist.

Josephina's face was not much to look at, but her body! If he could only overcome her scruples some time and paint her!

Renovales kneeled down beside the bed in a transport of admiration.

"I worship you, Josephina. You are as fair as Venus. No, not Venus. She is cold and calm, like a goddess, and you are a woman. You are like—what are you like? Yes, now I see the likeness. You are Goya's little *Maja*, with her delicate grace, her fascinating daintiness. You are the *Maja Desnuda!*"

III

Renovales' life was changed. In love with his wife, fearing that she might lack some comfort, and thinking with anxiety of the Torrealta widow, who might complain that the daughter of the "illustrious diplomat of imperishable memory" was not happy because she had lowered herself to the extent of marrying a painter, he worked incessantly to maintain with his brush the comforts with which he had surrounded Josephina.

He, who had had so much scorn for industrial art, painting for money, as did his comrades, followed their example, but

with the energy that he showed in all his undertakings. In some of the studios there were cries of protest against this tireless competitor who lowered prices scandalously. He had sold his brush for a year to one of those Jewish dealers who exported paintings at so much a picture, and under agreement not to paint for any other dealer. Renovales worked from morning till night changing subjects when it was demanded by what he called his *impresario*. "Enough *ciociari*, now for some Moors." Afterwards the Moors lost their market-value and the turn of the musketeers came, fencing a valiant duel; then pink shepherdesses in the style of Watteau or ladies in powdered wigs embarking in a golden gondola to the sound of lutes. To give freshness to his stock, he would interpolate a sacristy scene with much show of embroidered chasubles and golden incensaries, or an occasional bacchanalian, imitating from memory, without models, Titians' voluptuous forms and amber flesh. When the list was ended, the *ciociari* were once more in style and could be begun again. The painter with his extraordinary facility of execution produced two or three pictures a week, and the *impresario*, to encourage him in his work, often visited him afternoons, following the movements of his brush with the enthusiasm of a man who appreciated art at so much a foot and so much an hour. The news he brought was of a sort to infuse new zest.

The last bacchanal painted by Renovales was in a fashionable bar in New York. His pageant of the Abruzzi was in one of the noblest castles in Russia. Another picture, representing a dance

of countesses disguised as shepherdesses in a field of violets, was in the possession of a Jewish baron, a banker in Frankfort. The dealer rubbed his hands, as he spoke to the painter with a patronizing air. His name was becoming famous, thanks to him, and he would not step until he had won him a world-wide reputation. Already his agents were asking him to send nothing but the works of Signor Renovales, for they were the best sellers. But Mariano answered him with a sudden outburst of bitterness. All those canvases were mere rot. If that was art, he would prefer to break stone on the high roads.

But his rebellion against this debasement of his art disappeared when he saw his Josephina in the house whose ornamentation he was constantly improving, converting it into a jewel case worthy of his love. She was happy in her home, with a splendid carriage in which to drive every afternoon and perfect freedom to spend money on her clothes and jewelry. Renovales' wife lacked nothing; she had-at her disposal, as adviser and errand-boy, Cotoner, who spent the night in a garret that served him as a studio in one of the cheap districts and the rest of the day with the young couple. She was mistress of the money; she had never seen so many banknotes at once. When Renovales handed her the pile of lires which the impresario gave him she said with a little laugh of joy, "Money, money!" and ran and hid it away with the serious expression of a diligent, economical housewife—only to take it out the next day and squander it with a childish carelessness. What a wonderful thing painting was! Her

illustrious father (in spite of all that her mother said) had never made so much money in all his travels through the world, going from cotillon to cotillon as the representative of his king.

While Renovales was in the studio, she had been to drive in the Pincio, bowing from her landau to the countless wives of ambassadors who were stationed at Rome, to aristocratic travelers stopping in the city, to whom she had been introduced in some drawing-room, and to all the crowd of diplomatic attachés who live about the double court of the Vatican and the Quirinal.

The painter was introduced by his wife into an official society of the most rigid formality. The niece of the Marquis of Tarfe, perpetual foreign minister, was received with open arms by the high society of Rome, the most exclusive in Europe. At every reception at the two Spanish embassies, "the famous painter Renovales and his charming wife" were present and these invitations had spread to the embassies of other countries. Almost every night there was some function. Since there were two diplomatic centers, one at the court of the Italian king, the other at the Vatican, the receptions and evening parties were frequent in this isolated society that gathered every night, sufficient for its own enjoyment.

When Renovales got home at dark, tired out with his work, he would find Josephina, already half dressed, waiting for him, and Cotoner helped him to put on his evening clothes.

"The cross!" exclaimed Josephina, when she saw him with his dress-coat on. "Why, man alive, how did you happen to forget

your cross? You know that they all wear something there."

Cotoner went for the insignia, a great cross the Spanish government had given him for his picture, and the artist, with the ribbon across his shirt-front and a brilliant circle on his coat, started out with his wife to spend the evening among diplomats, distinguished travelers and cardinals' nephews.

The other painters were furious with envy when they learned how often the Spanish ambassador and his wife, the consul and prominent people connected with the Vatican visited his studio. They denied his talent, attributing these distinctions to Josephina's position. They called him a courtier and a flatterer, alleging that he had married to better his position. One of his most constant visitors was Father Recovero, the representative of a monastic order that was powerful in Spain, a sort of cowled ambassador who enjoyed great influence with the Pope. When he was not in Renovales' studio, the latter was sure that he was at his house, doing some favor for Josephina who felt proud of her friendship with this influential friar, so jovial and scrupulously correct in spite of his coarse clothes. Renovales' wife always had some favor to ask of him, her friends in Madrid were unceasing in their requests.

The Torrealta widow contributed to this by her constant chatter among her acquaintances about the high position her daughter occupied in Rome. According to her, Mariano was making millions; Josephina was reported to be a great friend of the Pope, her house was full of Cardinals and if the Pope

did not visit her it was only because the poor thing was a prisoner in the Vatican. And so the painter's wife had to keep sending to Madrid some rosary that had been passed over St. Peter's tomb or reliques taken from the Catacombs. She urged Father Recovero to negotiate difficult marriage dispensations and interested herself in behalf of the petitions of pious ladies, friends of her mother. The great festivals of the Roman Church filled her with enthusiasm because of their theatrical interest and she was very grateful to the generous friar who never forgot to reserve her a good place. There never was a reception of pilgrims in Saint Peter's with a triumphal march of the Pope carried on a platform amid feather fans, at which Josephina was not present. At other times the good Father made the mysterious announcement that on the next day Pallestri, the famous male soprano of the papal chapel, was going to sing; the Spanish lady got up early, leaving her husband still in bed, to hear the sweet voice of the pontifical eunuch whose beardless face appeared in shop windows among the portraits of dancers and fashionable tenors.

Renovales laughed good-naturedly at the countless occupations and futile entertainments of his wife. Poor girl, she must enjoy herself; that was what he was working for. He was sorry enough that he could go with her only in her evening diversions. During the day he entrusted her to his faithful Cotoner who attended her like an old family servant, carrying her bundles when she went shopping, performing the duties of

butler and sometimes of chef.

Renovales had made his acquaintance when he came to Rome. He was his best friend. Ten years his senior, Cotoner showed the worship of a pupil and the affections of an older brother for the young artist. Everyone in Rome knew him, laughing at his pictures on the rare occasions when he painted, and appreciated his accommodating nature that to some extent dignified his parasite's existence. Short, rotund, bald-headed, with projecting ears and the ugliness of a good-natured, merry satyr, Signor Cotoner, when summer came, always found refuge in the castle of some cardinal in the Roman Campagna. During the winter he was a familiar sight in the Corso, wrapped in his greenish mackintosh, the sleeves of which waved like a bat's wings. He had begun in his own province as a landscape painter but he wanted to paint figures, to equal the masters, and so he landed in Rome in the company of the bishop of his diocese who looked on him as an honor to the church. He never moved from the city. His progress was remarkable. He knew the names and histories of all the artists, no one could compare with him in his ability to live economically in Rome and to find where things were cheapest. If a Spaniard went through the great city, he never missed visiting him. The children of celebrated painters looked on him as a sort of nurse, for he had put them all to sleep in his arms. The great triumph of his life was having figured in the cavalcade of the Quixote as Sancho Panza. He always painted the same picture, portraits of the Pope in three different sizes, piling them up in

the attic that served him for a studio and bedroom. His friends, the cardinals whom he visited frequently, took pity on "Poor Signor Cotoner" and for a few lire bought a picture of the Pontiff horribly ugly, to present it to some village church where it would arouse great admiration since it came from Rome and was by a painter who was a friend of His Eminence.

These purchases were a ray of joy for Cotoner, who came to Renovales' studio with his head up and wearing a smile of affected modesty.

"I have made a sale, my boy. A pope; a large one, two meter size."

And with a sudden burst of confidence in his talent, he talked of the future. Other men desired medals, triumphs in the exhibitions; he was more modest. He would be satisfied if he could guess who would be Pope when the present Pope died, in order to be able to paint up pictures of him by the dozen ahead of time. What a triumph to put the goods on the market the day after the Conclave! A perfect fortune! And well acquainted with all the cardinals, he passed the Sacred College in mental review with the persistency of a gambler in a lottery, hesitating between the half dozen who aspired to the tiara. He lived like a parasite among the high functionaries of the Church, but he was indifferent to religion, as if this association with them had taken away all his belief. The old man clad in white and the other red gentlemen inspired respect in him because they were rich and served indirectly his wretched portrait business. His admiration

was wholly devoted to Renovales. In the studio of other artists he received their irritating jests with his usual calm smile of affability, but they could not speak ill of Renovales nor discuss his ability. To his mind, Renovales could produce nothing but masterpieces and in his blind admiration he even went so far as to rave naively over the easel pictures he painted for his impresario.

Sometimes Josephina unexpectedly appeared in her husband's studio and chatted with him while he painted, praising the canvases that had a pretty subject. She preferred to find him alone in these visits, painting from his fancy without any other model than some clothes placed on a manikin. She felt a sort of aversion to models, and Renovales tried in vain to convince her of the necessity of using them. He had talent to paint beautiful things without resorting to the assistance of those ordinary old men and above all, of those women with their disheveled hair, their flashing eyes and their wolfish teeth, who, in the solitude and silence of the studio, actually terrified her. Renovales laughed. What nonsense! Jealous little girl! As if he were capable of thinking of anything but art with a palette in his hand!

One afternoon, when Josephina suddenly came into the studio she saw on the model's platform a naked woman, lying in some furs, showing the curves of her yellow back. The wife compressed her lips and pretended not to see her, listened to Renovales with a distracted air, as he explained this innovation. He was painting a bacchanal and it was impossible for him to proceed without a model. It was a case of necessity, flesh could

not be done from memory. The model, at ease before the painter, felt ashamed of her nakedness in the presence of that fashionable lady, and after wrapping herself up in the furs, hid behind a screen and hastily dressed herself.

Renovales recovered his serenity when he reached home, seeing that his wife received him with her customary eagerness, as if she had forgotten her displeasure of the afternoon. She laughed at Cotoner's stories; after dinner they went to the theater and when bedtime came, the painter had forgotten about the surprise in the studio. He was falling asleep when he was alarmed by a painful, prolonged sigh, as if some one were stifling beside him. When he lit the light he saw Josephina with both fists in her eyes, crying, her breast heaving with sobs, and kicking in a childish fit of temper till the bed-clothes were rolled in a ball and the exquisite puff fell to the floor.

"I won't, I won't," she moaned with an accent of protest.

The painter had jumped out of bed, full of anxiety, going from one side to the other without knowing what to do, trying to pull her hands away from her eyes, giving in, in spite of his strength, to Josephina's efforts to free herself from him.

"But what's the matter? What is it you won't do? What's happened to you?"

And she continued to cry, tossing about in the bed, kicking in a nervous fury.

"Let me alone! I don't like you; don't touch me. I won't let you, no, sir, I won't let you. I'm going away. I'm going home to

my mother."

Renovales, terrified at the fury of the little woman who was always so gentle, did not know what to do to calm her. He ran through the bedroom and the adjoining dressing room in his night shirt, that showed his athletic muscles; he offered her water, going so far as to pick up the bottles of perfumes in his confusion as if they could serve him as sedatives, and finally he knelt down, trying to kiss the clenched little hands that thrust him away, catching at his hair and beard.

"Let me alone. I tell you to let me alone. I know you don't love me. I'm going away."

The painter was surprised and afraid of the nervousness in this beloved little doll; he did not dare to touch her for fear of hurting her. As soon as the sun rose she would leave that house forever. Her husband did not love her. No one but her mother cared for her. He was making her a laughing stock before people. And all these incoherent complaints that did not explain the motive for her anger, continued for a long time until the artist guessed the cause. Was it the model, the naked woman? Yes, that was it; she would not consent to it, that in a studio that was practically her house, low women should show themselves immodestly to her husband's eyes. And as she protested against such abominations, her twitching fingers tore the front of her night dress, showing the hidden charms that filled Renovales with such enthusiasm.

The painter, tired out by this scene, enervated by the cries and tears of his wife, could not help laughing when he discovered the

motive of her irritation.

"Ah! So it's all on account of the model. Be quiet, girl, no woman shall come into the studio."

And he promised everything Josephina wished, in order to be over with it as soon as possible. When it was dark once more, she was still sighing, but now it was in her husband's strong arms with her head resting on his breast, lisping like a grieved child that tries to justify the past fit of temper. It did not cost Mariano anything to do her this favor. She loved him dearly, so dearly, and she would love him still more if he respected her prejudices. He might call her bourgeois, a common ordinary soul, but that was what she wanted to be, just as she always had been. Besides, what was the need of painting naked women? Couldn't he do other things? She urged him to paint children in smocks and sandals, curly haired and chubby, like the child Jesus; old peasant women with wrinkled, copper-colored faces, bald-headed ancients with long beards; character studies, but no young women, understand? No naked beauties! Renovales said "yes" to everything, drawing close to him that beloved form still trembling with its past rage. They clung to each other with a sort of anxiety, desirous of forgetting what had happened, and the night ended peacefully for Renovales in the happiness of reconciliation.

When summer came they rented a little villa at Castel-Gandolfo. Cotoner had gone to Rivoli in the train of a cardinal and the married couple lived in the country accompanied only by a couple of maids and a manservant, who took care of Renovales'

painting kit.

Josephina was perfectly contented in this retirement, far from Rome, talking with her husband at all hours, free from the anxiety that filled her, when he was working in his studio. For a month Renovales remained in placid idleness. His art seemed forgotten; the boxes of paints, the easels, all the artistic luggage brought from Rome, remained packed up and forgotten in a shed in the garden. Afternoons they took long walks, returning home at nightfall slowly, with their arms around each other's waists, watching the strip of pale gold in the western sky, breaking the rural silence with one of the sweet, passionate romances that came from Naples. Now that they were alone in the intimacy of a life without cares or friendships, the enthusiastic love of the first days of their married life reawakened. But the "demon of painting" was not long in spreading over him his invisible wings, which seemed to scatter an irresistible enchantment. He became bored at the long hours in the bright sun, yawned in his wicker chair, smoking pipe after pipe, not knowing what to talk about. Josephina, on her part, tried to drive away the ennui by reading some English novel of aristocratic life, tiresome and moral, to which she had taken a great liking in her school girl days.

Renovales began to work again. His servant brought out his artist's kit and he took up his palette as enthusiastically as a beginner, and painted for himself with a religious fervor as if he thought to purify himself from that base submission to the commissions of a dealer.

He studied Nature directly; painted delightful bits of landscapes, tanned and repulsive heads that breathed the selfish brutality of the peasant. But this artistic activity did not seem to satisfy him. His life of increased intimacy with Josephina aroused in him mysterious longings that he hardly dared to formulate. Mornings when his wife, fresh and rosy from her bath, appeared before him almost naked, he looked at her with greedy eyes.

"Oh, if you were only willing! If you didn't have that foolish prejudice of yours!"

And his exclamations made her smile, for her feminine vanity was flattered by this worship. Renovales regretted that his artistic talent had to go in search of beautiful things when the supreme, definitive work was at his side. He told her about Rubens, the great master, who surrounded Elène Froment with the luxury of a princess, and of her who felt no objection to freeing her fresh, mythological beauty from veils in order to serve as a model for her husband. Renovales praised the Flemish woman. Artists formed a family by themselves; morality and the popular prejudices were meant for other people. They lived under the jurisdiction of Beauty, regarding as natural what other people looked on as a sin.

Josephina protested against her husband's wishes with a playful indignation but she allowed him to admire her. Her abandon increased every day. Mornings, when she got up, she remained undressed longer, prolonging her toilette while the

artist walked around her, praising her various beauties. "That is Rubens, pure and simple, that's Titian's color. Look, little girl, lift up your arms, like this. Oh, you are the *Maja*, Goya's little *Maja*." And she submitted to him with a gracious pout, as if she relished the expression of worship and disappointment which her husband wore at possessing her as a woman and not possessing her as a model.

One afternoon when a scorching wind seemed to stifle the countryside with its breath, Josephina capitulated. They were in their room, with the windows closed, trying to escape the terrible sirocco by shutting it out and putting on thin clothes. She did not want to see her husband with such a gloomy face nor listen to his complaints. As long as he was crazy and was set on his whim, she did not dare to oppose him. He could paint her; but only a study, not a picture. When he was tired of reproducing her flesh on the canvas they would destroy it,—just as if he had done nothing.

The painter said "yes" to everything, eager to have his brush in hand as soon as possible, before the beauty he craved. For three days he worked with a mad fever, with his eyes unnaturally wide open, as if he meant to devour the graceful outlines with his sight. Josephina, accustomed now to being naked, posed with unconscious abandon, with that feminine shamelessness which hesitates only at the first step. Oppressed by the heat, she slept while her husband kept on painting.

When the work was finished, Josephina could not help admiring it. "How clever you are! But am I really like that, so

pretty?" Mariano showed his satisfaction. It was his masterpiece, his best. Perhaps in all his life he might never find another moment like that, of prodigious mental intensity, what people commonly call inspiration. She continued to admire herself in the canvas, just as she did some mornings in the great mirror in the bedroom. She praised the various parts of her beauty with frank immodesty. Dazzled by the beauty of her body she did not notice the face, that seemed unimportant, lost in soft veils. When her eyes fell on it she showed a sort of disappointment.

"It doesn't look much like me! It isn't my face!"

The artist smiled. It was not she; he had tried to disguise her face, nothing but her face. It was a mask, a concession to social conventions. As it was, no one would recognize her and his work, his great work, might appear and receive the admiration of the world.

"Because, we aren't going to destroy it," Renovales continued with a tremble in his voice, "that would be a crime. Never in my life will I be able to do anything like it again. We won't destroy it, will we, little girl?"

The little girl remained silent for a good while with her gaze fixed on the picture. Renovales' eager eyes saw a cloud slowly rise over her face, like a shadow on a white wall. The painter felt as though the floor were sinking under his feet; the storm was coming. Josephina turned pale, two tears slipped slowly down her cheeks, two others took their places to fall with them and then more and more.

"I won't! I won't!"

It was the same hoarse, nervous, despotic cry that had set his hair on end with anxiety and fear that night in Rome. The little woman looked with hatred at the naked body that radiated its pearly light from the depths of the canvas. She seemed to feel the terror of a sleep-walker who suddenly awakens in the midst of a square surrounded by a thousand curious, eager eyes and in her fright does not know what to do nor where to flee. How could she have assented to such a disgraceful thing?

"I won't have it!" she cried angrily. "Destroy it, Mariano, destroy it."

But Mariano seemed on the point of weeping too. Destroy it! Who could demand such a foolish thing? That figure was not she; no one would recognize her. What was the use of depriving him of a signal triumph? But his wife did not listen to him. She was rolling on the floor with the same convulsions and moans as on the night of the stormy scene, her hands were clenched like a crook, her feet kicked like a dying lamb's and her mouth, painfully distorted, kept crying hoarsely:

"I won't have it! I won't have it! Destroy it!"

She complained of her lot with a violence that wounded Renovales. She, a respectable woman, submitted to that degradation as if she were a street walker. If she had only known! How was she going to imagine that her husband would make such abominable proposals to her!

Renovales, offended at these insults, at these lashes which her

shrill, piercing voice dealt his artistic talent, left his wife, let her roll on the floor and with clenched fists, went from one end of the room to the other, looking at the ceiling, muttering all the oaths, Spanish and Italian, that were in current use in his studio.

Suddenly he stood still, rooted to the floor by terror and surprise. Josephina, still naked, had jumped on the picture with the quickness of a wild cat. With the first stroke of her finger nails, she scratched the canvas from top to bottom, mingling the colors that were still soft, tearing off the thin shell of the dry parts. Then she caught up the little knife from the paint box and —rip! the canvas gave a long moan, parted under the thrust of that white arm which seemed to have a bluish cast in the violence of her wrath.

He did not move. For a moment he felt indignant, tempted to throw himself on her but he lapsed into a childish weakness, ready to cry, to take refuge in a corner, to hide his weak, aching head. She, blind with wrath, continued to vent her fury on the picture, tangling her feet in the wood of the frame, tearing off pieces of canvas, walking back and forth with her prey like a wild beast. The artist had leaned his head against the wall, his strong breast shook with cowardly sobs.

To the almost fatherly grief at the loss of his work was added the bitterness of disappointment. For the first time he foresaw what his life was going to be. What a mistake he had made in marrying that girl who admired his art as a profession, as a means of making money, and who was trying to mold him to the

prejudices and scruples of the circle in which she was born! He loved her in spite of this and he was certain that she did not love him less, but, still, perhaps it would have been better to remain alone, free for his art and, in case a companion was necessary, to find a fair maid of all work with all the splendor and intellectual humility of a beautiful animal that would admire and obey her master blindly.

Three days passed in which the painter and his wife hardly spoke to each other. They looked at each other askance, humbled and broken by this domestic trouble. But the solitude in which they lived, the necessity of remaining together made the reconciliation imperative. She was the first to speak, as if she were terrified by the sadness and dejection of that huge giant who wandered about as peevish as a sick man. She threw her arms around him, kissed his forehead, made a thousand gracious efforts to bring a faint smile to his face. "Who loved him? His Josephina. His *Maja* but not his *Maja Desnuda;* that was over forever. He must never think of those horrible things. A decent painter does not think of them. What would all her friends say? There were many pretty things to paint in the world. They must live in each other's love, without his displeasing her with his hateful whims. His affection for the nude was a shameful remnant of his Bohemian days."

And Renovales, won over by his wife's petting, made peace, —tried to forget his work and smiled with the resignation of a slave who loves his chain because it assures him peace and life.

They returned to Rome at the beginning of the fall. Renovales began his work for the contractor, but after a few months the latter seemed dissatisfied. Not that Signor Mariano was losing power, not at all, but his agents complained of a certain monotony in the subjects of his works. The dealer advised him to travel; he might stay awhile in Umbria, painting peasants in ascetic landscapes, or old churches; he might—and this was the best thing to do—move to Venice. How much Signor Mariano could accomplish in those canals! And it was thus that the idea of leaving Rome first came to the painter.

Josephina did not object. That daily round of receptions in the countless embassies and legations was beginning to bore her. Now that the charm of the first impressions had disappeared, Josephina noticed that the great ladies treated her with an annoying condescension as if she had descended from her rank in marrying an artist. Besides, the younger men in the embassies, the attachés of different nationalities, some light, some dark, who sought relief from their celibacy without going outside diplomatic society, were disgracefully impudent as they danced with her or went through the figures of a cotillion, as if they considered her an easy conquest, seeing her married to an artist who could not display an ugly uniform in the drawing rooms. They made cynical declarations to her in English or German and she had to keep her temper, smiling and biting her lips, close to Renovales, who did not understand a word and showed his satisfaction at the attentions of which his wife was the object

on the part of the fashionable youths whose manners he tried to imitate.

The trip was decided on. They would go to Venice! Their friend Cotoner said "Good-by," he was sorry to part from them but his place was in Rome. The Pope was ailing just at that time and the painter, in the hope of his death, was preparing canvases of all sizes, striving to guess who would be his successor.

As he went back in his memories, Renovales always thought of his life in Venice with a sort of pleasant homesickness. It was the best period of his life. The enchanting city of the lagoons, —bathed in golden light, lulled by the lapping of the water, fascinated him from the first moment, making him forget his love for the human form. For some time his enthusiasm for the nude was calmed. He worshiped the old palaces, the solitary canals, the lagoon with its green, motionless waiter, the soul of a majestic past, which seemed to breathe in the solemn old age of the dead, eternally smiling city.

They lived in the Foscarini palace, a huge building with red walls and casements of white stone that opened on a little alley of water adjoining the Grand Canal. It was the former abode of merchants, navigators and conquerors of the Isles of the East who in times gone by had worn on their heads the golden horn of the Doges. The modern spirit, utilitarian and irreverent, had converted the palace into a tenement, dividing gilded drawing rooms with ugly partitions, establishing kitchens in the filigreed arcades of the seignorial court, filling the marble galleries to

which the centuries gave the amber-like transparency of old ivory, with clothes hung out to dry and replacing the gaps in the superb mosaic with cheap square tiles.

Renovales and his wife occupied the apartment nearest the Grand Canal. Mornings, Josephina saw from a bay window the rapid silent approach of her husband's gondola. The gondolier, accustomed to the service of artists, shouted to the painter, till Renovales came down with his box of water-colors and the boat started immediately through the narrow, winding canals, moving the silvered comb of its prow from one side to the other as if it were feeling the way. What mornings of placid silence in the sleeping water of an alley, between two palaces whose boldly projecting roofs kept the surface of the little canal in perpetual shadow! The gondolier slept stretched out in one of the curving ends of his boat and Renovales, sitting beside the black canopy, painted his Venetian water-colors, a new type that his impresario in Rome received with the greatest enthusiasm. His deftness enabled him to produce these works with as much facility as if they were mechanical copies. In the maze of canals he had one of his own which he called his "estate" on account of the money it netted him. He had painted again and again its dead, silent waters which all day long were never rippled except by his gondola; two old palaces with broken blinds, the doors covered with the crust of years, stairways rotted with mold and in the background a little arch of light, a marble bridge and under it the life, the movement, the sun of a broad, busy canal. The neglected

little alley came to life every week under Renovales' brush—he could paint it with his eyes shut—and the business initiative of the Roman Jew scattered it through the world.

The afternoons Mariano passed with his wife. Sometimes they went in a gondola to the promenade of the Lido and sitting on the sandy beach, watched the angry surface of the open Adriatic, that stretched its tossing white caps to the horizon, like a flock of snowy sheep hurrying in the rush of a panic.

Other afternoons they walked in the Square of Saint Mark, under the arcades of its three rows of palaces where they could see in the background, by the last rays of the sun, the pale gold of the basilica gleaming, as if in its walls and domes there were crystallized all the wealth of the ancient Republic.

Renovales, with his wife on his arm, walked calmly as if the majesty of the place impelled him to a sort of noble bearing. The august silence was not disturbed by the deafening hubbub of other great capitals; no rattling of carts or footsteps of horses or hucksters' cries. The Square, with its white marble pavement, was a huge drawing room through which the visitors passed as if they were making a call. The musicians of the Venice band were gathered in the center with their hats surmounted by black waving plumes. The blasts of the Wagnerian brasses, galloping in the mad ride of the Valkyries, made the marble columns shake and seemed to give life to the four golden horses that reared over space with silent whinnies on the cornice of St. Mark's.

The dark-feathered doves of Venice scattered in playful

spirals, somewhat frightened at the music, finally settled, like rain, on the tables of the café. Then, taking flight again, they blackened the roof of the palaces and once more swooped down like a mantle of metallic luster on the groups of English tourists in green veils and round hats, who called them in order to offer them grain.

Josephina, with childish eagerness, left her husband in order to buy a cone full of grain, and spreading it out in her gloved hands she gathered the wards of St. Mark around her; they rested on the flowers of her head, fluttering like fantastic crests, they hopped on her shoulders, or lined up on her outstretched arms, they clung desperately to her slight hips, trying to walk around her waist, and others, more daring, as if possessed of human mischievousness, scratched her breast, reached out their beaks striving to caress her ruddy, half-opened, lips through the veil. She laughed, trembling at the tickling of the animated cloud that rubbed against her body. Her husband watched her, laughing too, and certain that no one but she would understand him, he called to her in Spanish.

"My, but you are beautiful! I wish I could paint your picture! If it weren't for the people, I would kiss you."

Venice was the scene of her happiest days. She lived quietly while her husband worked, taking odd corners of the city for his models. When he left the house, her placid calm was not disturbed by any troublesome thought. This was painting, she was sure,—and not the conditions of affairs in Rome, where he would

shut himself up with shameless women who were not afraid to pose stark naked. She loved him with a renewed passion, she petted him with constant caresses. It was then that her daughter was born, their only child.

Majestic Doña Emilia could not remain in Madrid when she learned that she was going to be a grandmother. Her poor Josephina, in a foreign land, with no one to take care of her but her husband, who had some talent according to what people said, but who seemed to her rather ordinary! At her son-in-law's expense, she made the trip to Venice and there she stayed for several months, fuming against the city, which she had never visited in her diplomatic travels. The distinguished lady considered that no cities were inhabitable except the capitals that have a court. Pshaw! Venice! A shabby town that no one liked but writers of romanzas and decorators of fans, and where there were nothing higher than consuls. She liked Rome with its Pope and kings. Besides, it made her seasick to ride in the gondolas and she complained constantly of the rheumatism, blaming it to the dampness of the lagoons.

Renovales, who had feared for Josephina's life, believing that her weak, delicate constitution could not stand the shock, broke out into cries of joy when he received the little one in his arms and looked at the mother with her head resting on the pillow as if she were dead. Her white face was hardly outlined against the white of the linen. His first thought was for her, for the pale features, distorted by the recent crisis, which gradually were

growing calmer with rest. Poor little girl! How she had suffered! But as he tip-toed out of the bed room in order not to disturb the heavy sleep that, after two cruel days, had overpowered the sick woman, he gave himself up to his admiration for the bit of flesh that lay in the huge flabby arms of the grandmother, wrapped in fine linen. Ah, what a dear little thing! He looked at the livid little face, the big head, thinly covered with hair, seeking for some suggestion of himself in this surge of flesh that was in motion and still without definite form. "Mamma, whom does she look like?"

Doña Emilia was surprised at his blindness. Whom; should she look like? Like him, no one but him. She was large, enormous; she had seen few babies as large as this one. It did not seem possible that her poor daughter could live after giving birth to "that." They could not complain that she was not healthy; she was as ruddy as a country baby.

"She's a Renovales; she's yours, wholly yours, Mariano. We belong to a different class."

And Renovales, without noticing his mother's words, saw only that his daughter was like him, overjoyed to see how robust she was, shouting his pleasure at the health of which the grandmother spoke in a disappointed tone.

In vain did he and Doña Emilia try to dissuade Josephina from nursing the baby. The little woman, in spite of the weakness that kept her motionless in bed, wept and cried almost as she had in the crises that had so terrified Renovales.

"I won't have it," she said with that obstinacy that made her

so terrible.

"I won't have a strange woman's milk for my daughter. I will nurse her, her mother."

And they had to give the baby to her.

When Josephina seemed recovered, her mother, feeling that her mission was over, went home to Madrid. She was bored to death in that silent city of Venice, night after night she thought she was dead, for she could not hear a single sound from her bed. The calm, interrupted now and then by the shouts of the gondoliers filled her with the same terror that she felt in a cemetery. She had no friends, she did not "shine"; there was nobody in that dirty hole and nobody knew her. She was always recalling her distinguished friends in Madrid where she thought she was an indispensable personage. The modesty of her granddaughter's christening left a deep impression in her mind in spite of the fact that they gave her name to the child; an insignificant little party that needed only two gondolas; she, who was the godmother, with the godfather, an old Venetian painter, who was a friend of Renovales and, besides, Renovales himself and two artists, a Frenchman and another Spaniard. The Patriarch of Venice did not officiate at the baptism, not even a bishop. And she knew so many of them at home. A mere priest, who was in a shameful hurry, had been sufficient to christen the granddaughter of the famous diplomat, in a little church, as the sun was setting. She went away repeating once more that Josephina was killing herself, that it was perfect folly for her to

nurse the baby in her delicate condition, regretting that she did not follow the example of her mother who had always intrusted her children to nurses.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.