ROBERT GRAVES
ESTÁ EN SU CASA

'Holá -- señor!'

The sudden summons came from a thin hook-nosed man in a baggy white shirt, blue striped cotton trousers, and a black felt hat, who rose suddenly from behind a mastic bush a few yards off. I had been sitting for ten minutes or more on the stone bench of the mirador, a look-out platform built on the cliff edge, idly watching a tall-funnelled Spanish destroyer disengage itself from the horizon and disappear behind the distant headland to the north-east. Below me was a drop of nearly a thousand feet to a glaring white stony beach. I sprang up, startled, and may have answered in English; but I do not remember. He forced a reassuring smile, spread out both hands to show that he was unarmed and said in Spanish: 'Please forgive my disturbance of your tranquillity. You are an American?'

I answered: 'No, señor, you must not judge me by my elegant straw hat, a gift from a friend in the United States. Judge me rather by my old shirt and patched trousers. I am one of the victorious but bankrupt English. What a stifling day, is it not?'

This put him at his ease. 'Yes, it is very hot,' he said. But he stayed where he was, so I strolled over to him.

'Your first visit to Majorca?' he asked.

'The first time since the troubles started in 1936, when I had to leave my house and lands. And I remember you well, even if you do not remember me. Surely you are Don Pedro Samper, the proprietor of Ca'n Samper on the other side of the mountain spur?'

We shook hands heartily as I went on: 'I visited you once in the company of your neighbour Don Pablo Pons, back in 1935. I needed some really good cuttings to graft on two young apricot trees that had proved to be of poor quality, and Don Pablo informed me that you had the best tree on the island. I had the pleasure of meeting your charming and sympathetic wife. I hope she is in good health?'

'Thanks be to God, we are well, and so are the children.' He apologized several times for not having recognized me, explaining that my sunglasses, the greying of my hair and the thinness of my face had deceived him. In return he enquired after my health, that of my family, and the condition of my property after ten years' absence. And of course he wanted to hear about the flying bombs in London. The Spanish Press had played up the havoc of the flying bomb until it was difficult for anyone to believe that

there could be a single survivor. 'And is it true that in England now potatoes sell at a hundred pesetas a kilo?'

'No, at about one peseta. The farmers are subsidized by the Government.'

'Well, well!' he said. 'Our journalists seem to have been misinformed about many things... But, tell me, did those apricot cuttings take?'

'Divinely well. I found a barbaric crop of apricots waiting for me -- the branches had to be tied up to prevent them from breaking off -- and wonderfully tasting apricots they are. Like orange-blossom honey. I sold a great quantity and bottled the remainder.'

'I am delighted... Have you perhaps visited Don Pablo since your return? You must know that he no longer lives in these parts but has taken a house in Palma?'

'Between ourselves, I have no intention of calling upon him. When I quitted the island at an hour's notice with only a suitcase and a wallet, I left a certain small affair for him to settle on my behalf. He neglected it, and his neglect has cost me a thousand pesetas or more. But I do not intend to recall the matter to his memory; it is already ancient history. And, finding my house in perfect condition, with everything in its place, I have reason to be grateful that his conduct is not characteristic of Majorcans in general.'

'No, indeed! His is a very special case. You know perhaps of my former disagreements with him?'

'You disputed about some irrigation rights.'

'We did indeed.'

'May I ask whether you are still on bad terms with him? In our village I find that the effect of the Troubles has been to end all personal and family feuds and unite the people as never before.'

'Está en su casa!, as we say here. He is in his own house; I am in mine.'

'I am sorry. I should be interested to hear the story if it doesn't inconvenience you to tell it.'

'It is a long one. But, Don Roberto -- may I first ask a favour of you?'

'Anything that lies in my power.'

'I wish to seat myself on the bench of the mirador where you have been. I have been trying to reach it all morning since ten o'clock. Will you help me?'

'But, man, are you lame?'

'Not in my legs. In my belly.'

'You mean that you are scared? Then why go? The view is as good from that rock over there as from the mirador itself.'

'My doctor orders it -- Doctor Guasp of Sóller, a specialist. He knows a great deal about psychology, having studied in Vienna as well as in Madrid. Once I have gone there, he says, and remained calmly for a while on the bench, making my peace with a certain important Saint, my nerves will recover and I shall once more sleep all night. He even offered to come with me, but I was ashamed to put him to the trouble. I said: "No, I will go alone. I am no coward." But now I find that I cannot walk the last few steps.'

He began to stutter and a light sweat broke from his forehead. 'Excuse me,' he said, 'the heat is excessive. You will perhaps take me there in a little while when we have smoked a cigarette or two in the shade of this rock? Meanwhile I will tell you about the irrigation dispute. Have you tobacco?'

'I stupidly left my pouch at home.'

'No matter. Here is good tobacco, and cigarette paper.'

'Contraband?'

'Did I not say it was good tobacco? You cannot buy this sort at any estanco. Allow me, you seem to have lost the habit of rolling cigarettes. In England you smoke only Luckies and Camels?'

He began his story between puffs. 'Well, if you know anything of the matter, you will know that I had been for fifteen years the tenant farmer of the estate called Ca'n Sampol, which Don Pablo Pons acquired by his marriage with Doña Binilde.'

I nodded.

'He dispossessed me, though I had an agreement with Doña Binilde's late husband that I was secure in my life-tenancy. Don Cristóbal Fuster y Fernández was a caballero, a man of the strictest honour. When he inherited the estate from his brother who was killed in the Rif War, he told me in the presence of his wife: "There will be no changes here. You may cultivate Ca'n Sampol for the rest of your life, friend Pedro. You have transformed the place since you took it over, and I am happy to leave it in your hands." In the island, as you know, a verbal agreement is sufficient between neighbours, and if

there is a witness present it becomes binding in law. To ask to have it put in writing is bad manners. We pride ourselves on being men of our word. Well, a catastrophe! In 1934, Don Cristóbal died in a road accident, and Doña Binilde fell in love, at the funeral itself, with a profligate adventurer -- this same Don Pablo -- and married him on the very first day that the law permitted.'

'I did not know that there are restrictions in Spain on immediate marriage in such cases.'

'There is a law that safeguards the rights of posthumous children. Well, as you can imagine, the marriage caused a scandal, and I, for one, did not attend the wedding -- out of respect for the memory of Don Cristóbal. Not a week later Don Pablo served me notice to quit the farm, which he proposed to cultivate himself.'

'And Doña Binilde?'

'She was infatuated with the man. He could do nothing wrong. And she was angry with me for my coolness towards her. When I appealed to her about the agreement made in her presence between Don Cristóbal and me, she answered: "Upon my word, peasant, I can remember nothing. I have a bad head for business matters."'

'But the Law protected you?'

'Certainly it did. In those days six years' notice was necessary. But I chose not to take the case to court. It is an uncomfortable position for a man to be tenant to a landlord who has a grudge against him, especially if the wife has instigated it. So I said to him, mildly enough: "Since Doña Binilde has lost her memory for the sayings of the best husband in Majorca, how can I press the matter? My word is not good enough for you, I see. Well, then, pay me ten thousand pesetas and I will leave on St Anthony's Day, when I have passed the olives safely through the mill." For it was not a bad olive year.

"'Ka, man! Why should I pay you ten thousand pesetas?" asked Don Pablo.

'"It is customary to compensate a tenant in lieu of notice. I am asking two years' rent."

'"Two years' rent! How two years' rent? You have ruined the estate by your mismanagement!" he yelled.

'I insisted: "The respected Don Cristóbal -- may his soul rest in peace -- thought otherwise. He knew that I found Ca'n Sampol in a derelict condition and added many thousands to its value. He told me so in the presence of Doña Binilde."

"'I remember nothing of that. I have a bad head for business matters," the lady said very stubbornly. "And, in the Virgin's Name, who are you to decide who is the best

husband in Majorca and who the worst?"

'I should not have believed it possible that a decent woman could change so, even with the help of peroxide and red nail-varnish; but some women are as accommodating as chameleons.'

'But you got some compensation, surely?'

'Not two reales. I will explain. Don Cristóbal, like so many gentlemen of a generous nature, had been slack about keeping accounts. He had a good memory for sums due, and sums owing, but disliked committing his memory to paper, and either demanding, or making out, receipts. Don Pablo was aware of this peculiarity and therefore asked me to show the rent receipts for the last few years of my Ca'n Sampol tenancy. Four half-yearly receipts were missing. So he set those against the two years' compensation that I asked, and I had no redress, having always paid in cash, not by cheque, and having no witness to the payments.'

'What a nasty insect! And then you went to live at Ca'n Samper?'

'Yes. It had been bequeathed me by my old uncle some three years before: family property descended from my great-grandparents. They had once owned Ca'n Sampol too, though that was before the big house had been built there in Carlist times. You have seen Ca'n Samper. It is a small place but the soil is good, there is plenty of water and the orchard is valuable.'

'Someone told me a local proverb about its position... something about twitching hairs from a beard -- I forget.'

He laughed nervously: 'Yes, that is right. St Peter, we say in our village, sits on St Paul's neck and twitches the hairs from his beard. The proverb refers to the two saints' sharing the same feast day. St Peter takes precedence and robs St Paul of the glory. And in the geographical sense Samper -- the name is a contraction of the Majorcan words San Per, or St Peter -- sits on the neck of Sampol, or San Pol, namely St Paul, because of my farm's situation just above the small western bulge of the Ca'n Sampol terraces. Yes, señor, though not showing any animosity, I decided to put a tight collar round Don Pablo's neck, a regular martingale, and pluck out a few bristles from his chin. Meanwhile, my wife and I could live comfortably enough at Ca'n Samper and enjoy the respect and affection of the village, who soon knew all about the negro's trick that Don Pablo had played us. Now we come to the story of the irrigation rights.'

He paused for a minute while he rolled and lighted another cigarette.

'"Water is gold,"' I quoted in the sententious local style which keeps conversation on the move.

'"And land without water is stones and dust,"' he agreed. 'Well, while I had been farming Ca'n Sampol, secure in my life-tenancy, I had not made much distinction in my mind between it and my own farm; in fact, I had rather robbed Peter to keep Paul fat. At Ca'n Sampol I had planted a very fine grove of orange trees -- Florida seedless navels, brought from Valencia, the first seen in the island. They need a lot of water about midsummer, but if well tended they yield fruit the size of canteloupes and of a marvellous juiciness. Well, St John's Day came around and Don Pablo's bailiff greeted me in the Church porch after mass, and asked me to let down the water from Ca'n Samper every Monday and Friday, if that suited me. And I said, playing the innocent: "Ka, man, why do you want water? You have plenty in Ca'n Sampol. Enough for goldfish ponds and fountains and a turbine for the electric light."

'"Yes," said he, "God be thanked that the greater part of the farm is well watered. But the part separated by the Rock of the Ass from the rest of the terraces, lying directly below Ca'n Samper, does not enjoy the benefit of the spring which rises on the other side of the rock. And that is precisely where you sited the new orange plantation."

'"Of course," I said. "I had almost forgotten that I planted about a hundred Florida navel oranges while I was the tenant of Ca'n Sampol. They no longer interest me." Many people were present and smiled at my words.

'"But those terraces have a right to the water from Ca'n Samper."

'"Certainly, they have. But only to the residue. Naturally in the winter and spring, when there is plenty of rain, you can have as much as you please because I cannot possibly use it all, not being a great water-drinker. But in June, July, August and September I intend to use it all. There will be no residue."

'"Master Pedro, that is a bad thing to say. You should never have planted those orange trees if you intended to starve them."

'"Be reasonable, man! Who is to starve first, myself or the orange trees? Now that I have to make a living for my children from a small place like Ca'n Samper, I must intensively cultivate every square metre of it. I can no longer afford to rob Peter to make Paul fat. If Don Pablo had considered things well he would have built a small reservoir to catch the winter residue."

'"It is a hold-up. This is midsummer, and unless you let down the water the trees will die. There is no great depth of soil in the plantation. The roots are touching rock already."

'"No, they will not die, but they will lose their leaves and shed their fruit, and be greatly discouraged until that reservoir is built. A pity, because they are beautiful

trees."

'"What are you going to cultivate so intensively this midsummer? This is not the season for planting vegetables or trees, and your terraces are not by any means fully sown."

'"What is it to you whether I grow twitch-grass or coconuts?" That raised a loud laugh.

'"You are ill-advised to quarrel with Don Pablo."

'"I am not quarrelling with him. He is in his own house; I am in mine. If he wishes to buy water let him come and talk to me, and we will call up a squadron of lawyers from Palma to write the affair down in a manner so clear that neither he nor I can escape our commitments." The occasion, Don Roberto, when you came with him to my house a fortnight later for the apricot cuttings -- that was when he finally prevailed on himself to talk to me. As you yourself have recalled, it was St Peter's Day and my fiesta; but it was also St Paul's Day and his fiesta. He brought you with him as a protection, trusting that my courtesy to foreigners would restrain me from making a scandal or slamming the door in his face. You may remember that, while you were chatting with my wife, and showing my little boy your watch that opened with a secret spring and also chimed the hour, I went out with Don Pablo to fetch you the cuttings. He did his utmost to soothe and caress me, pleading that I should let bygones by bygones, and give him at any rate a loan of the water until it was time to build a reservoir. "Have you no shame, man?" he asked. "Do you wish to lose the esteem of your neighbours? What will the village say if you let my trees die out of spite." I laughed loudly.

'"I laugh in your face," I said, "your neighbours are laughing behind your back."

'"It is not Christian behaviour," he said. "One would take you for a chueta."

'"Distinguished Don Pablo, even Christians disagree at times, and your Saint with my Saint. For the Hermit of the Moorish Tower, who knows the Scriptures like any priest -- he was once on the point of being ordained when he boxed the Superior's ears and was thrown out of the Seminary -- the Hermit, I tell you Don Pablo, was explaining something of importance to me last Sunday. He said that according to the Epistle to the Galatians, St Paul entered upon a public argument at Antioch with St Peter, declaring that he was much to be blamed and a regular chueta, trying to make everyone else into a chueta. But what did St Peter answer? He refused to be drawn into a scandalous scene (says the Hermit), and instead, like St Michael when insulted by the Devil, left the matter to be decided by God. And what was the result? He was preferred to St Paul in all things, and entrusted with the gold and silver keys of Paradise which St Paul was not allowed to touch, not even with one finger. I am Peter, you are Paul, and the silver key at my belt is water. Call me chueta, by all means, but if you want water, pay for it you must."

'So he asked me to name a price. And I said: "It is not much that I ask. Merely a written statement from your wife that I was never behindhand with my rent. That will be worth ten thousand pesetas to me. In return, I will cease to water my young coconut palms and you can have what water you require, summer and winter, and be saved the expense of building a reservoir." But he refused to do anything of the kind and called me a bad name. It was at this point that I made a great mistake, as Doctor Guasp has since pointed out to me. If I had been content to refer historically to the quarrel between the two Saints, long ago patched up in Heaven, no great harm would have been done. But before I parted with Don Pablo on this occasion I forgot the Hermit's moral about not answering in kind when insulted. I championed my own Saint, as was right, but in expressing my disgust of Don Pablo I foolishly sneered at the "Great Apostle to the Gentiles," as Doctor Guasp calls St Paul, in provocative words that I now deeply regret. Well, as I expected, Don Pablo was thoroughly incensed and fetched me before the tribunal.'

'And you won your case?'

'That was easy. Not only did I have justice and documents and important witnesses on my side, but I happened to be a friend of the prosecuting attorney's secretary, so that I knew in advance exactly what questions would be asked and had all my witnesses well primed, and a series of very cutting replies ready for my own use. Moreover, I had subpoenaed Doña Binilde and she had to take the oath. Despite her love for Don Pablo she was not going to risk her salvation by committing perjury; I knew that well. So my counsel forced her to admit that, so far as she knew, I had never been in arrears and that her husband had expressed great satisfaction with my labour. The prosecuting attorney protested that these questions were irrelevant, but the Judge, who knew of the case beforehand from Doña Binilde's brother, who was very much ashamed of his sister, overruled him. Then my counsel asked me in cross-examination, whether I intended to bring a counter-charge for non-payment of my compensation.

'I replied: "No. Since there has clearly been a misunderstanding between Don Pablo and his distinguished wife, it will not be necessary. He will obviously pay me, as a matter of personal honour, and shake hands with me in Court." Don Pablo grew very red, seeing that the dog was dead, as they say, and came out with the money. We shook hands, and I said in front of everybody: "Many thanks. Now I will see whether I can spare a few bucketsful of water for your orange plantation. My coconut palms are doing nicely now, and I can perhaps water them a little less intensively." Everyone laughed, including the Judge, because the coconuts of Ca'n Samper were already a byword. But Don Pablo had to pay costs... Well, then came the matter of his Large Black pigs, you may have heard of that?'

'They trespassed, did they not?'

'They trespassed gravely, stealing the mast from under my oak-trees. I went to the

Mayor, and served Don Pablo a formal injunction to keep his pigs under restraint, but he told the Mayor that he had a legal right to the mast. It was lying on the New Road, which was built to connect the Upper and Lower roads while the two farms were still under the same ownership, and the proprietor of Ca'n Sampol had, he said, a right of free passage through it and could graze his animals on their way through Ca'n Samper. So the Mayor brought this message back to me and I said: "If the answer is 'no,' then he must come to the Tribunal! And I lay you a hundred pesetas to one that I will win my case." And I won it.'

'Did he not have any grazing rights?'

'Certainly he had. One cannot stop a mule or an ass snatching a mouthful of grass as he goes along a road to which he has a right. And, to forestall all possible arguments on this head, the deed referring to the New Road -- a deed drawn at the time that my grandparents sold Ca'n Sampol -- contained a clause making the grazing rights reciprocal: my beasts equally had a right to graze in their passage along the New Road through Ca'n Sampol. But the Ca'n Samper oaks, planted since the deed was drawn, bore acorns of the sweet variety that are sold roasted on the barrows in the market. The ordinary bitter acorns rank legally as "pasture"; these ranked as fruit. So, having disregarded my injunction, he was ordered to pay damages and costs, and undertake that his pigs kept to their sty in future... That was another hair twitched from St Paul's beard. What date was it that you left the island?'

'It was August 2, 1936.'

'A few days only before the catastrophe of the Invasion of Majorca. I daresay you read all about it in the newspapers. One Captain Bayo had advertised in Barcelona for volunteers to reconquer Majorca for the Republican Government, and he arrived, with a few ships and a few thousand Catalans and Valencians and Frenchmen, one Sunday morning at Puerto Cristo on the other side of the island from here. He met with little opposition, and had he chosen to march directly on Palma, the city would have been his. But he did not, or he could not, for his scallywags -- and upon my word, though there may have been high-minded and idealistic revolutionaries among them, these were certainly a small minority -- his scallywags preferred to loot the shops and cafés and villas of that little seaside place and outraged the feelings of all those who might otherwise have welcomed them and marched in their ranks. Soon they were all drunk, and the acting Captain-General of the islands collected the coastguards and civil guards in lorries, and sent them to block the roads. By the time that Bayo had reorganized a part of his force and got them on the move, it was too late. The Italian war-planes had flown to the Palma airport, refuelled and came humming into action. The battle was lost, and much blood was shed, some of it by the peasant women who came out with butchers' knives to defend their property against Bayo's deserters, scattering them in twos and threes across the Plain.'

'A great disappointment to the Liberals and Socialists of the island! Before I left they were saying: "Now that General Goded has failed to secure Barcelona, the rebellion will be over in three weeks."'

'They were disappointed to tears. The precipitate and disorderly Bayo invasion was the worst possible advertisement for their cause, and they had no resistance left when it came to the Terror. The hotheads of the Falange soon got busy on the Reds and hunted them like thrushes. Not merely the few Communists and militant Socialists, not merely the Socialist mayors and councillors and their supporters, but all sympathizers with what was, after all, the legal government. Of this I do not wish to say much except that the military commanders, who were in control, behaved correctly for the most part and discouraged lynch law. But for many months terrible things happened, in revenge for the terrible things said to have been done to the Anti-Republicans in Minorca, Catalonia and elsewhere; and as propaganda became fiercer on both sides, so the acts of revenge became more horrible. In all, about four thousand men died in Majorca, for the Nationalists were numerically weak and could take no risks of a counter-revolt. Majorca with its natural riches, its air-fields and sea-plane base must be held at all costs. "To be relentless now," they said, "is to be merciful in the long run." Trials became tragically brief. A civil war is like the shaking of a bottle of clear wine. It froths and grows dark with unsuspected dregs. I tell you, there are men who die here every month in remorse for their deeds of that day, though the doctors diagnose tuberculosis or heart trouble.'

'Private feuds become complicated with public causes,' I suggested.

'That is well said. In peace time, jealousy and rancour pass unnoticed or find vent in petty ways, but in a civil war it is different. If a bad man -- and every village has one or two bad men, and many sour old women of the devout sort we call "Saints" -- had been worsted in a bargain by his neighbour, or been passed over in a legacy in favour of a cousin, that was enough. The unfortunate rival would be denounced as a Red who had expressed sorrow at the news of Bayo's defeat, and off he would have to go to the overcrowded and insanitary Castle prison until his case came up months later. Sometimes he never even reached prison. He would "resist arrest" or "attempt to escape" and be found dead by the roadside with a bullet in him, or with a broken neck at the foot of a cliff.'

'Where were your own political sympathies?'

'I have no politics. I voted for the Socialists at the election which was the cause of the war, because the candidates for our Council had undertaken to build a new school for the girls and to bring the telephone to the village. My politics are the same, I suppose, as any peace-loving man's: I hate disorder, graft and inefficiency in government, and I dislike change. But when a thing stinks it must be thrown away.'

'And Don Pablo?'

'He came out as an ultra-patriotic Right-winger, talking as valiantly and immoderately as the famous "General Manzanilla," the self-appointed Nationalist spokesman, himself. He was so far to the Right that he nearly dipped over the horizon and came to China. Our village is isolated, as you know. No telephone, no telegraph, and at that time we did not even have a Civil Guard stationed there. And nobody had heard of the Falange except from the newspapers. But the priest preached the necessity of rallying to the Church against the miscreants who had murdered children and violated nuns and crucified priests in their own churches and wished to destroy every vestige of decent civilization. So Don Pablo stepped into the breach, as the largest landowner, and formed a League for Defence against the Reds. He said that since we had no armed forces in the village, we must get help from the Falange Headquarters at Palma. The next thing that we knew, he had two gunmen installed in the barn next to the Church, and was soliciting subscriptions to maintain them there at ten pesetas apiece a day until the danger had passed. He collected a large sum with the priest's help, so now we were thoroughly secure. The men were not of the island; the younger was an Aragonese, the elder a Valencian. Well, of course, in times like those, it was not enough for them to sit still and draw their pay. Defence was understood as offence, and since it happened that the Socialist candidates for the local council were all men of property and well-connected -- the one who had hoped to be mayor was married to the priest's sister and had freely given a plot of his ground to make an extension of the crowded churchyard -- well then, less prominent victims had to be found. There was a harmless one-eyed ancient, a bit silly, but the village bee-expert; he boasted that he had been a Socialist since the year of the Second International -- whatever that may have been -- and that all his bees were Socialists too. He was hauled off to prison with the face of a martyr and died there a few weeks later of peaceful senility. It's now ten years since there has been honey in the village. And the schoolmaster, who was not from these mountains, but a nobody from the Plain, he too suffered. He was altogether too independent and progressive in his views for Don Pablo's taste. He even favoured careers for women and, instead of attending mass in the parish church, used to go for confession to a friend of his, a retired priest with an interest in antiques and literature, who lived five kilometres away. Don Pablo had him lodged in the "Grand Hotel", as we called the prison, for six months before his trial came off. He was acquitted, but asked the Ministry of Education for an exchange of posts, and is now teaching in Palma, where he has a school of some importance.'

Don Pedro was now coming to the part of the story that made painful telling. Tears started to his eyes and he had difficulty in controlling his voice. But he continued: 'After these routine arrests, others followed of a different sort altogether. Bernat Martí, a schoolfellow of mine, who kept a café and butcher's shop near the Church and was a great wag, was arrested late one night by the two gunmen, despite the frantic cries of his daughter, a deaf-mute, and carried off in Don Pablo's car. He was shot in the back while trying to escape. "A dangerous Red," Don Pablo subsequently reported

to the military officer at the Port. But if Bernat was a Red, then I am a negro. The truth was that on St Anthony's Day, when we have a bonfire and the beasts and cars are blessed by the priest, it is the custom in our village to make copeos -- that is to say scurrilous rhymes to the accompaniment of an ancient jig. And on St Anthony's Day, two years before this, Bernat had rhymed about the indecent haste with which Doña Binilde had rushed to the Church with Don Pablo. When I heard the news of his death, I went at once to my cousin Amador, a good fellow but impulsive. I said to him: "The shameless wretches have murdered Bernat. Take my advice, go off at once to stay with your brother-in-law, the coastguard Lieutenant, at the other end of the island."

'"Why should I go? I am no Red."

'"Because you went to the trouble of indirectly warning Doña Binilde, before she married, of the profligate record of Don Pablo which you had discovered during your recent visit to the Continent."

'"Ka! I am not afraid of the man. If you suspect him of framing Bernat, why do you not clear out yourself?" But I could not convince Amador, and two nights later the gunmen took him off in Don Pablo's car as he was returning from a game of cards at the café. He tried to escape, they reported afterwards, and fell into the ravine, breaking his neck.'

I asked: 'Well, Don Pedro, and why did you not clear out?'

'For the same reason that my cousin Amador did not: for pride. My reason told me "go"; my pride said "stay". I stayed. So they picked me up the very next night, just before dawn, while I was coming home from Amador's father's house, where I had sat with the family to condole with them, as the custom is. They slowed down the car and shouted: "Jump in, we are going your way." But while the younger drove, the elder kept me covered with his pistol from the back seat. "I have a warrant for your arrest," he remarked casually.

'"It would interest me much to see that," said I. "Before you take me to prison, please have the goodness to conduct me to my house. There I can read the document by a better light than the moon, and also collect bedding, clothing and food. You understand that I must let my wife know what has become of me and give her instructions about managing my affairs if I should happen to be away for a long time."

'"No, no, we are in a hurry and the New Road would cut our tyres to pieces. You can read the warrant at the prison guard-house. You are a dangerous Red and supported Socialists in their candidature..."

'"And twice defeated Don Pablo at the tribunal," I interrupted.

'"Not another word," said the elder gunman, "or I shall use the butt first, and then the barrel."

'So I kept quiet and thought only of escape. As we passed the Mayor's house, where the car had to slow down to turn an awkward corner, I took a chance. I knew that they would not dare to shoot me in the middle of the village. I slipped off my heavy signet ring and flung it at his bedroom window; by luck my action was not noticed, because the elder gunman at that moment was leaning forward and muttering instructions into his companion's ear. And my aim was good; as usually happens when one is in danger, with no time to reason or calculate. The shutters were open, and the windows too, because it was a very hot night, and my ring flew straight in and rang on the wash basin. The Mayor leaped up with a start, lighted a candle and rushed to the other window. He recognized Don Pablo's car by its make and the beat of its engine as it disappeared down the road to the port; it was a German Opel, nearly worn out. Then he searched the floor and found my ring.

'"Bless my soul!" he cried. "A P. and an S. This is Pedro of Ca'n Samper's signet ring. The assassins have taken him for a ride."

'His wife, now wide awake, though at first she had grumbled at his making such a disturbance when she wanted to sleep, sat up in bed and said: "Man, there is no time to lose. Don't stand there gaping and saying: 'He is taken for a ride.' Hurry into your trousers, never mind your shoes; and unlock the garage, take the car and go after them."

'"I am unarmed," the poor man bleated.

'"You are a great coward. If I could drive I should go myself. Pedro is a good man, besides being your maternal cousin and the godfather of your eldest son. Have you no shame? You have nothing to fear. Drive fast, until you catch them up -- yours is the better vehicle -- and keep close behind them to make sure that Pedro reaches the prison safely. They will not dare to do anything with witnesses about and will hold their fire until they reach the desolate stretch of road between the mirador and the Moorish Tower. For the Virgin's sake, get busy!"

'"Alas, woman," he said, getting into his trousers, "there is not a drop of gasolene in the tank, and it would take me more than five minutes to rouse a neighbour and fill up."

'"In the name of God, have you no sense? Take Tomeu's motorcycle -- it is in our garage. You can ride a motorcycle. And if I hear tomorrow that Pedro is dead, I swear to you by all the Saints and Blessed Ones that I will be your woman no longer. You can sleep in the kitchen with the cats." In Majorca, it is the women who command in the home, just as Solomon prophesied.

'Meanwhile, Don Roberto, you can imagine that I was far from comfortable with the pistol barrel between my shoulders and the car bumping and rattling along the road. We continued to the Port and then turned around the mountain-spur by the coast road past your house, and reached Ca'n Bi; then there were no more houses for some kilometres. But I could not see what I hoped to see across the valley as we turned the corner, namely the headlights of the Mayor's car coming in pursuit. So I addressed the elder gunman: "Friend, here we are in a conveniently desolate place. Before you kill me, will you allow me to address a few words to an old acquaintance of mine?"

'"Where is he?"

'"Far enough from here."

'"What do you mean? Do you want to telephone?"

'"I only want a word or two with my patron saint, St Peter."

'"He is dead," sneered the younger man. "You will not get through."

'"Shot while resisting arrest?" I asked, mimicking his Aragonese accent.

'The elder gunman laughed. "This is a courageous peasant. I am sorry that we have to cancel his account. Very well, Master, we will stop here and you can kneel in peace on the mirador yonder and put your call through while I smoke a cigarette. Though, upon my word, I cannot make out why you should take the trouble to telephone one whom you will be confronting in person the moment I throw away my cigarette butt." They stopped the car and we got out, and walked to where we are now sitting.

'This is country that I know very well, by day and by night. When I was young I bought myself out of military service with the money I made by smuggling here. I used to hump forty kilos' weight of tobacco up from the beach below us, by way of the cliff track, and take it across the road past the Moorish Tower and away over the mountains. My hope was that perhaps I could break away from my captors and escape down the cliff where, being ignorant of the footholds and handholds they would be unable to follow me. But they knew their trade and kept me covered with both pistols; unfortunately, too, the moon was very bright and the first signs of dawn were already showing beyond the headland. I tried bribery, but could not interest them. The younger gunman said: "If we took you back alive you would certainly inform the Mayor, or the priest, and claim his protection and we should lose not only the money but also the confidence of Don Pablo."

'At this I suddenly solved a problem that had been troubling me for a long time. I cried out: "Chests full of gold ! Why did I not think of it earlier? You are a pair of Bayo's

deserters, and you have hoodwinked the District Party-leader and Don Pablo and everyone else into accepting you as Falangist incorruptibles. Well now, that is very funny and I must laugh, even if it is the last joke that I am ever confronted with."

'"It is very funny, very funny indeed," agreed the elder. "My companion and I took the Falangist badges off a couple of young gentlemen whom we sandbagged in Barcelona during General Goded's visit, and kept them in our pockets in case of need. But get on with your prayer, without unseemly laughter, because the dawn, of which you will not see the corresponding sunrise, is nearly here."

'I was trembling like a valley poplar in the sea-breeze, yet would not admit to myself that my last five minutes had come. There was still hope of rescue; for, as I say, I know this region well, and all that normally happens here, day and night. So I advanced alone to the mirador and made my genuflexion to the East, as if in Church, and then settled down to pray with my head on the bench where you were seated just now. I prayed in a low, clear voice so that the gunmen should hear every word. My brain was working with great clarity, though my body was shaken with spasms.

'"Most blessed and illustrious Saint Peter," I prayed, "you who jangle at your belt the great keys of Heaven, the silver and the gold! Most merciful and humane Saint, once the chief of sinners -- your colleague Paul alone excepted -- insomuch as you cursed and swore from first cockcrow to second cockcrow, denying our Saviour Jesus Christ. Deign to listen to one who is neither a great saint nor a great sinner, but a villager of villagers who calls upon you in his extreme hour of necessity. Permit me respectfully to remind your Holiness that your servant has a peculiar lien upon your care. He is called by your name; he was born upon the very day which you share with your colleague St Paul; he was baptized in the Parish Church of which you are patron; and for the last ten years, as the senior Pedro in the village has been your Obrero -- he has been charged with the organization of your annual fiesta, when we glorify your name with a religious service, a candled procession, and with dances, fireworks, a football match and agreeable diversions for the children in the Plaza."

'"Eloquent, is he not?" interrupted the younger gunman, tossing a pebble at me. "He prays like a bishop's bastard."

'"Leave him alone," said the elder. "This is as good as the graveyard scene in Don Juan Tenorio."

'"Peter, Peter!" I continued. "Magnanimous Apostle, who alone of the Twelve had the guts of a man and dared draw a sword in defence of your innocent Master, when the gangsters came to arrest him a little before dawn on Holy Friday. Glorious Saint, whose name signified 'The Rock,' upon you I build my hopes, and call upon you with all my heart and soul. It is for no favour at the Celestial Gates that I am pleading: I ask for immediate help. I conjure you, beloved Patron, by the blue waters of the Galilean Lake,

and the blue waters that surround our island, until the other day called 'The Island of Calm'; I conjure you, Saint, by the nets that you spread from the boat of Zebedee, your father, and by the nets that we spread from our boats at the Port for salmonete and the tunny; I conjure you by the silver coin which you found in the fish's mouth, and by the silver coins which I yearly pay towards the upkeep of your Church and the glory of your name -- Peter, my Peter, come, be present, appear ! Help, Peter, help!" These last words I shouted with such passion that they could be heard a kilometre away.

'"Silence, man!" exclaimed the elder gunman, flinging away his cigarette butt. "Come, Miguel, over the cliff with him."

'But I pointed with my finger: "Lo! Behold!" I cried.

'They looked, and gaped with astonishment, and the younger gunman whimpered like a dog: "Alas! See who comes! You should never have allowed him to pray with such force." Both stood irresolute, and in the silence that ensued I heard the distant crowing of a cock from Ca'n Bi, and the distant pam-pam-pam of a fishing boat as it chugged towards the Port with the night's catch. I closed my eyes again, and waited.

'"Hand over those pistols," cried St Peter, waving his bundle of fishing-rods menacingly. He stood nearly two metres high and the keys clanked loudly at his belt as he sprang towards us through the rosemary and mastic, his beard blowing wildly in the dawn breeze. They gave up their pistols like little boys caught in an act of naughtiness. He tossed one over the cliff in a high arc and handed the other to me. "Accompany me back to your car, rogues," he said, "lest I cast the pair of you where I cast that pistol!"

'They stumbled back, the Saint not saying a word but flogging them at intervals with his rods while I kept them covered with the pistol. He was red with wrath. When we reached the road there was the Mayor, barefooted but with the motorcycle, waiting by Don Pablo's car, and we were three to one. So the Mayor left the motorcycle on this side of the wall, and climbed into the car, and drove us straight to the District Barracks, where he demanded to see the Commanding Officer at once. From that moment everything went very well indeed. The Commandant knew the Saint well, and knew the Mayor by name and reputation, and had once bought a cob from me which fortunately had proved as sound and sweet-tempered as I had guaranteed it to be. When the gunmen had made a full confession and had been put into the guardroom, the Saint said to the Commandant: "Don Pablo of Ca'n Sampol, when he hears of this, will laugh with one side of his face only."

'Believe it or not, that was precisely what happened. When the Civil Guards came later in the day to arrest him, he suffered a sort of paralytic stroke, which screwed up the left half of his face in a grin which has not since left him. After he had spent some months in the Grand Hotel, waiting his turn, he was sentenced to death for conspiracy

against the life of an innocent man, but by the influence of Doña Binilde's relations, one of whom was the Vicar-general of Palma, the sentence was commuted to life-imprisonment, and they let him out after three years. Está en su casa. And I am in mine. But ever since then I have had recurrent nightmares of the mirador, and have felt myself tossed in a high arc over the cliff by a furious Saint whom I suppose, by the portfolio of documents at his side, to be St Paul. It comes upon me just before dawn and afterwards I cannot sleep a wink.'

It is one of the beauties of Majorcan story-telling that the point is never laboured. Don Pedro counted on my knowledge of local affairs to supply the details which he omitted. The gunmen, being newcomers to the district, were unaware that in the ruined Moorish Tower on the rock pinnacle high above the coast road, lives a Hermit, who just before dawn every morning -- Sundays and important feasts excepted -- locks his great nail-studded Hermitage door, scrambles through the evergreen oak glades and olive groves, crosses the road close to the mirador and climbs down by the smugglers' track to his boat-house at the bottom. There he says his matins, attends to his lobster pots in season, collects driftwood and sometimes gathers samphire from the cliff face, or caper buds for pickling, and goes fishing with rod and line. He is a very tall, strong, quick-tempered man, formerly a sailor, and disdains to wear shoes or sandals. Pilgrims visit his Hermitage often, to leave little gifts when they know he will be at home. They kiss the rope that girds his rough brown habit and sometimes consult him about difficult matters with which they do not wish to trouble the parish priest who, they say, is a good man but inexperienced in the ways of the world.

'Come, friend Pedro,' I said. 'You have recovered from your lameness. Up with you to the mirador ! Lean right over and you will be able to tell Doctor Guasp from what a fall you were saved. Here is my arm.'

'A thousand thanks, friend. If you will pardon me, I can dispense with help.'

He went leisurely up the steps to the mirador and leaned over the parapet with bowed head, humbly making his peace with the energetic Saint whom he had insulted.