

## Lunch with Efrén

A flurry of white-clad children rose as if from nowhere right in front of the bonnet of Colonel Marín's staff car and ran past with shouts and cries and a little tornado of clapping. The chauffeur braked so suddenly that I fell off the seat on to the floor.

Colonel Marín helped me up again. His tanned face, grey moustache, and wrinkled, boyish smile, gave him a striking resemblance to Field Marshal Alexander.

The chauffeur glanced round—'Are you all right? Perdón! Perdón!'—and looked back quickly at the street along which we were gliding. So close were the walls on either side that it was a miracle the children hadn't been crushed.

'Cádiz is the capital of *chiquillería*,' Colonel Marín said, sitting back and adjusting his gloves. '*Chiquillería*' is one of those abstract Spanish words that are infuriating to an Englishman because they mean so much and are so difficult to translate—'the abundance of children', 'the world of children', 'the state and condition of being children', all are inadequate.

Colonel Marín was Commanding Officer of the garrison at Cádiz. He had arranged for his officers to be taught English. I had one class, as I have said, which he attended himself when he had time, in the mornings, one class in the evenings and a class in the early afternoons—siesta time!—for some of the N.C.O.s. The person who organized the classes was Major Díaz, a handsome and elegantly dressed officer who looked remarkably young for his rank, although he was old enough to have fought in the Civil War. After morning classes the Colonel usually gave me a lift to the corner of my street. This time, however, he dropped me at the Monastery of San Francisco, where I had arranged to meet Paul Ellis. Paul gave English classes to one of the monks, Fray Tomás.

The monastery was the large yellow building that I had seen on my first drive through Cádiz with Benjemino, the bell-tower forming one side of the plaza where the Moorish café, made of cast-iron painted white, stood beneath the trees. In the middle of the triangular plaza a

row of barouches stood waiting, their skeletal horses dreamily munching in their nosebags.

I pulled the bell-rope on the wooden door, and was let in by a craggy-looking monk who walked with a limp. With great gentleness, as though I were some particularly precious and fragile gift entrusted to his care, he asked me to wait in the cloister—a long courtyard full of Mediterranean plants surrounded by a whitewashed Moorish arcade—until Señor Paul was ready. This monk had been a secret policeman, I was told, who had eventually become nauseated by the horrors and psychological tortures of his trade. In Cádiz he spent his time in charitable works of a hazardous or loathsome nature—scrubbing hospitals, visiting murderers and psychotics, and comforting isolation cases. His name, I think, was Fray Martín.

Paul arrived with Fray Tomás, a monk of short stature whose pink and cheerful face was fixed in an expression of incorrigible innocence. Without alluding directly to Brother Martín, Fray Tomás said: 'Mother Church always maintains a refuge for those whose sins would seem to be past redemption according to standards of human judgement. What sin is worse than the tormenting of a human soul and then the extinguishing of all traces of its existence from the eyes of men, as though we could say he had never been born? But a soul is one thing that cannot be wasted, and for everyone, no matter what he has done, Mother Church in her wisdom has provided the means by which he can return into society and be a benefit to it through his good works, and so save his soul.'

Fray Tomás spoke in a sibilant and sing-song voice, and he nodded enthusiastically while he spoke.

'Now what does the Communist Party offer to such a man, to those who one day listen to the voice of God and realize the ugliness and unhappiness of their lives? It offers interrogations, sacrilegious confessions and a bullet in the back of the neck. It offers inevitable damnation. You can be sure their Chekas have to steel themselves against the secret misery and fear in their hearts. But what refuge have they got within the terms of dialectical materialism? Now, this demonstrates the ease with which the Devil can take possession of human souls in countries that are outside the historical and geographical boundaries of Mother Church. For instance, it is a fact that in India, Burma and China cases of possession by the Devil are ten times more common than in countries which are *within* the geographical boundaries of Mother Church and her protecting power. This is an observed fact, witnessed by all those who have lived in the East and grown to know and love the people well. What traveller returning from India has no

tales to tell of madness and possession, of magic, levitations, spells, raisings from the dead, of murders at night by packs of spirit-dogs and all those manifestations of the Devil's power that are ubiquitous in the East?'

Fray Tomás waited for my reply, but I was unable to struggle out of my puzzled silence. He led us to the door, spoke to Paul and then turned to me, saying that he would pray for my soul every night for the next week if I so wished.

Christmas was approaching, and the atmosphere of the city became excited and high-spirited. Students (Tunas) arrived in coaches. Their processions marched quickly through the streets at night, the sonorous jangling of their mandolins and guitars echoing between walls and tiers of balconies. The leaders performed their silent, gyrating leaps into the air, black cloaks and coloured ribbons flying, like Draculas got up for the Italian Comedy. Here and there, groups would gather round a flickering street-lamp under a balcony and serenade the invisible occupant—some girl, a typist or a student perhaps, or merely a girl waiting to get married or one who had dared them to do it—for half an hour. The guitars strummed the rhythm and the bandurrias and mandolins—tinkling like melancholy and melodious barrel-organs—played the airs. They played the sobbing love-songs of Naples, fragments of Verdi and Puccini and, sweetest and saddest, 'O Night of Love' from the *Tales of Hoffmann*.

In the daytime men went to and fro through the streets carrying bundles of live turkeys on their backs. The birds were strapped together by their feet and hung upside-down from the shoulder. Their swaying heads were bent up in a pathetic effort to maintain their dignity as they beat their great wings and jabbed out at passers-by in protest.

A first son was born to Efrén (he had three daughters so far) and was christened Antonio. On that day, when I walked with him from his *vecindad* to the *Café Español*, he said, 'Today, all the world loves me,' because so many people congratulated him in the streets, but was immediately buttonholed by a thin-faced man in a workman's cap who wouldn't let us pass until he had told Efrén what he thought of him, and what he was doing about it: 'Me cago en la leche de tu pa're y me cago en tu ma're y me cago en to' tus muertos! (I shit on the milk of your father and I shit on your mother and I shit on all your dead!)' The cause of this man's indignation was hidden from me, because some older natives of Cádiz speak in a Gaditanian dialect so rapid, elliptic and slurred, and with so many consonants left out, that I can hardly decipher

a word they say. It was to do with fish and the making away with money that rightfully belonged to somebody else. While the man raved on, prodding Efrén's shoulder with his finger, Efrén caught my eye for a split second and made a sort of Andalus 'Gor Blimey!' face. The man delivered his parting shot: 'Robber of blind men's bowls! The poor lottery-ticket sellers and the *pobrecitos* struck down by misadventure!'

When we had got away I said to Efrén:

'I thought all the world loved you today.'

'So they do.'

'Well, what was that about then?'

'That? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Just a *guasón*.'

'He didn't seem to love you much.'

'Who, him? Of course he does. At bottom, more than anybody. I've told you, everybody loves me today.'

But at the *Café Español* he was again cornered, this time by Luis El Ciego—Luis the Blind—a singer of considerable powers, who seemed, to judge by his clothes, and the way he drove around in taxis, to have a private income. He wore sunglasses to hide his sightless eyes, but I never saw him with a stick. There always seemed to be people around to lead him where he wanted to go. He abused Efrén and expostulated and reasoned with him for half an hour without a stop, in a voice, already high by nature, that rose higher and higher with incredulous fury. It seemed—and presumably this was what the man in the street had alluded to, for gossip travels fast in Cádiz—that Efrén had been playing for Luis in the famous *Venta del Chato*,\* that stands halfway along the isthmus between Cádiz and the mainland. Luis had given Efrén the money to buy drinks: 'What's this note, fifty pesetas? twenty-five? Pues, give me a duro and a real change.' Now he was accusing Efrén of having fiddled the change, of saying that a banknote Luis gave him was only twenty-five pesetas when it was really fifty.

Efrén wore his best expression of innocence, which changed to despair and then to irritation and boredom. He denied everything. When Luis was led away to his waiting taxi, still complaining and threatening, Efrén came round the bar and invited me to lunch at his house on Saturday week, in twelve days' time.

My daily lessons with Efrén, at a hundred pesetas a month, petered out altogether for a while. As it was, daily lessons meant that I would turn up at his room from time to time to see how he was. Sometimes he was in; a pile of sheets on the bed, with a tuft of hair at one end and a dirty foot at the other, proclaimed his presence. After some prodding from his daughters, the sheets would stir, and a bloodshot, baleful eye would appear and stare at me with intense hostility. Then he would sit

up, naked, scratch himself all over, stretch and order me to pass down his guitar, and the lesson would begin.

There were days when nothing would wake him, for he had returned the night before from what he described as work, which meant getting so drunk at somebody's else's expense that he couldn't play any more, in such a state that he had kicked his family out on to the balcony where they had gone weeping and wailing from door to door until somebody took them in.

There were days when he would escape before I arrived, and spend the morning lurking in a bar playing dominoes. Other times he taught with frenzied activity for hours, several days at a stretch, nights as well, teaching so hard that I couldn't keep up with him. He would even abandon his morning shift at the fish-stall, coming in, his bare feet and arms covered with fish-scales, put his foot up on a stool and teach me standing, as though there was no time to sit down. He would bang out a *falseta* without explanation and hand over his stinking and sticky guitar (the Santos Hernández!) for me to repeat it on.

'You don't go from here till you've learnt it. We can't have you getting behind!' Then, when I played it: 'Me cago en tu' muerto'? Don't you practise *anything*?'

When a singer was needed, so that he could show me the accompaniment for a particular *cante*, he would call in one of his brothers, who would sing the *soleá* or *seguiriya* or whatever it was.

But I could never make them understand my difficulties. Getting lost at some odd chord-change, I would ask them to sing the bit again.

'Which bit?'

'The bit you just sang. Now. Just this minute ago.'

Efrén's brother would ponder a moment, and then start from the beginning again, and, not only that, but a different *soleá* altogether.

'No!' I would cry impatiently. 'The bit you sang before! Just the last bit of the last *soleá*! There's no need to start again! Anyway, you're singing a different one.'

'What different one?'

It was quite useless. When he finally got back to the one I really wanted he would sing it '*corto*'—that is, with the second line cut out, so that my gropings towards understanding this simple yet tricky problem were frustrated once more.

Perhaps I should explain that the *soleá* exists in many versions, all with slightly different accompaniments, but all, to unaccustomed ears, practically indistinguishable.\* Further, as Efrén's brothers showed me, they can be sung *largo* (fully) or *corto* (short—with the second line omitted). And so it is with the range of flamenco music—the *Cañas*,\*

Malagueñas, Tarantas, Alegrías and so forth—there are seemingly endless variants on each of them, and they each have their special accompaniments. The guitarist's job is to know them all, and to be able to 'carry' the singer right through without faltering, or losing '*compás*' (time), in the slightest degree, regardless of whether the *cantaor* may suddenly switch from one variant to another without warning, or is suddenly inspired to improvise a new '*tercio*' (part). The guitarist must do all this, and do it with '*aire*' (feeling) and '*coraje*' (dash), accenting the right notes, stopping dead when the singer pauses, never drowning or holding up the singer, and yet never losing the flow and timing, so that even during the pauses one can feel the rhythm pulsating, so to speak, in the air.

This is the first obligation of the flamenco guitarist—the *tocaor*. After that he is judged and praised by the way he deals with it.

Pepe Martínez, a *tocaor* of Sevilla, told me in strong terms that all talk of 'schools' and 'styles' is twaddle. 'There are only two kinds of *tocaóres*,' he said. 'Good and bad.'

Nevertheless, differences do exist outside this somewhat restricting division. Some, like Niño Ricardo and Sabicas, are admired as '*largo*' (of wide repertoire), '*enflorecido*' (baroque and flowery) and '*marchoso*' (elegant, polished, dashing, gallant). Others are admired as '*corto*' (short, terse, practical and to the point), such as Paco Aguilera, and Manolo Moreno, 'El Moraito de Jerez' (The Purple Face of Jerez). And some again are admired for their elusive and mysterious quality and passion, such as Melchor de Marchena and Manolo de Huelva, who are held by many to be the greatest of all, the purest, the most unpredictable, the most Spanish, the players of true flamenco.

Efrén's style was '*corto*', very '*corto*' indeed. He knew barely more than half a dozen *falsetas* for each '*toque*'. He saved himself, through some intuitive process he was hardly aware of, by playing them with every bit of feeling that could be got out of them. This was why he was considered by many, despite his limitations and a torn third finger on his right hand (he could play no *arpeggios*!) to be the best guitarist in Cádiz.

For this reason also, because he was as raw and pure a flamenco guitarist as anyone would wish to meet, and notwithstanding certain flaws in his character, he was the best teacher Providence could have put in anyone's way. Once, in despair after weeks without a single lesson, I told Aurelio that it was impossible, that I would have to change to another guitarist, perhaps Serafín de Algodonales.

'All right, but I think you should stick to Efrén. I have told you he will teach you the *compases* and the proper tones and changes, which

is more than any other of the young idiots in this town will do. Algodonales!' Aurelio leaned over toward me, as though he were about to whisper a secret, his face a picture of contempt. He held his right hand in front of his chest, the fingers pointed down and waving back and forth rapidly, like someone showing off on the guitar. 'Clever fingers, tricks, decorations, confections—es tontería, hombre! (It's rubbish.) Froth and fiddle-faddle! Of course, Efrén is rather rough and lacks the benefits of a good education—things of the poor. But you stick to him and listen to the feeling he puts into his playing, and then perhaps some of it will infect your own.'

And that, so long as I was with Efrén, was exactly what happened. If I didn't acquire a wide repertoire, or learn how to do double and even triple arpeggios interposed between scales and tremolos (played on the second and third strings alternately!) and other such refinements regarded with almost religious veneration by followers of the great Niño Ricardo, I did learn to play flamenco.

I had had lunch at Efrén's once before. It had been an exhausting, indeed shattering, experience which, I told Benjemino at the Westminster afterwards, had taken ten years off my life. I steeled myself, therefore, to the repetition of this ordeal, and when Efrén said, 'On Saturday, then!' peering up at me, his evil little black eyes full of suspicion after the incident with Luis, I said:

'Efrén, you know perfectly well I'd love to come.'

'Ah! Está! Bueno! I'll have a present for you!' and Efrén, to my astonishment, put his arm round my shoulders and hugged me to him with a chuckle of pleasure.

It happened that that Saturday I was to go over to Puerto de Santa María by boat, with Juan Puebla, he to see an elderly gentleman who had been negotiating a lawsuit for fifteen years, and I to see the same person about buying some old and rare gramophone records. Our friend showed us into his study, actually in the courtyard but protected from the sky by a coloured awning. He sat down behind an ancient desk between two marble columns. He was wearing a dirty old dressing-gown and slippers; his face was lined in every direction, and his thick white hair seemed to sprout straight up from his brown skull like some peculiar grass.

'I don't know how you can travel about the world like that,' he said to me, rubbing his nose. 'Why, I don't even like to go out in the street. If it isn't wars, it's revolutions. And now the hydrogen bomb. Here in my house, at least until the end, I'm quiet and alone. Out in the street there's always someone after you.'

For a man who had renounced the world he charged me a pretty steep price for the records. And at the end of an hour his lawsuit seemed no nearer being disentangled than it had been when I first met him shortly after my arrival in Cádiz. Indeed, he was still receiving Juan Puebla on monthly visits, or popping over to Cádiz himself, when I left Spain a year later. I suppose it had become a sort of hobby with him.

We left him and caught the boat back. In front of us out at sea the city of Cádiz seemed to float like a mirage of shimmering domes and towers, suspended in a void of intense blue—blue sky and blue ocean, with a glittering thread of sand stretching away and disappearing into the haze.

We did not speak for a while. Then Juan said: 'The oldest city in Western Europe. Ours was a prosperous and thriving port, founded by the first real business men in the world, when your London was a dismal forest. Now, of course . . .' He gestured with his hand and stopped, staring at me, his face half smiling with irony. 'Of course, our thriving port is very near Cape Trafalgar.'

I shrugged my shoulders and changed the subject. 'I'm having lunch with Efrén,' I said. 'I want to try something out on him. Yesterday an American was in town, collecting information for a book on García Lorca. He had a theory that Lorca was known by heart by all the people, especially flamenco singers, and he had got hold of old Aurelio who'd met Lorca once or twice. I told him: "You won't get much out of Aurelio or any other flamenco. Lorca was a gentleman, a señorito, and, anyway, between flamencos and señoritos there is an unbridgeable gap. After all, these guys are professionals." He said he was investigating the mystery of Lorca's death.'

Juan was quiet a moment before replying. 'There's no mystery, really. It's just that every other person you meet seems to know someone who was involved. He must have had the biggest firing squad in history. Take Juan-Antonio Campuzano, for instance. When he came back from Russia he was stationed in Morocco; there was nothing to do in the evenings, so the officers entertained themselves reciting poetry. One night Juan-Antonio was just finishing a piece by Lorca when in came a captain posted there that day. 'Lorca, you said?' he cried. "I had the pleasure of putting a bullet in him. I'm proud to say that I saw the brains from that fat head splashed out on the roadway!" Of course, he realized after a while that he was in the wrong company, and no one would speak to him for months, until he applied for a transfer. He's in West Africa now.'

'Still,' I said, 'I'll show some of Lorca's poetry to Efrén and see if he understands it as much as they say in England he ought to.'

When I left the boat I went to Rosiana's dwelling first. Like Efrén, he lived on the top floor of a *vecindad*, but it was in the central part of Cádiz, near the Monastery of San Francisco. I had had the idea of asking my parents to send Christmas cards from England to Aurelio, Rosiana and Efrén. The cards had arrived that morning—large, beautiful reproductions of Nativity scenes by old masters—and I decided to deliver each one personally.

I waited in the courtyard for someone to show me which room was Rosiana's. At length a woman came down and stood in front of me drying her hands on her skirt and looking embarrassed.

I produced my envelope and gave it to her.

'This is a Christmas card for Rosiana, from my father and mother. I told him to expect it.'

She held the envelope, but didn't open it. Brushing her hair with the back of her hand, she asked, 'You've brought some money?'

'No,' I said, 'this isn't money. It's a Christmas card. It is a custom we have in England, to send Christmas cards to our friends, and I thought it would be an agreeable thing if my parents sent one to my friends here—to Aurelio, Efrén and yourselves.'

'Oh.' Then she turned and shouted up at the top balcony:

'Rosiana! There's a man here with something for you! Come on down!'

A door opened high above, and Rosiana's head popped over the railings. When he saw me he gave a loud 'Ah' of recognition and disappeared. I could hear his feet clop-clopping down and round and round the concrete staircase until he emerged into the sunlight. He came forward, stiff, straight and formal, dabbing his mouth with a handkerchief which, as always, he folded into a square before putting it into his breast pocket and shaking my hand.

'Buenas días, Gerardo! Eso que és? What news of Aurelio? Efrén? Woman, this is the Englishman I've told you about.'

'I know he is,' said his wife.

'I've brought you the Christmas card I said my parents were sending you,' I said.

'The what? Let's see it, woman. Hurry up.' He took it from her, turned the envelope and pulled out the card. It showed the Nativity by Botticelli, with a garland of singing angels carrying scrolls and lilies, floating in the air above the stable.

He nodded uncertainly, said, 'Precioso,' and put it in the envelope again and gave it back to me.

'No, Rosiana, it's for you,' I said. 'For Christmas.'

'For me? That's very kind of you. Thank you for the attention.'

'Not from me, Rosiana, from my mother and father. They have sent them from England, one for you, one for Aurelio and one for Efrén.'

'I thought he'd brought some money,' Rosiana's wife said to him.

'Cállete mujer! (Shut up, woman!) Can't you see he speaks Spanish?' The poor woman looked more confused than ever.

Rosiana took the card back, shook hands ('Hasta la vista!') and returned to the entrance of the stairway. As they went up, I could hear his wife asking: What are we going to do with it, Rosiana? We haven't got a frame for it, have we? I ask you, where on earth can we get a frame to fit that?'

I was late at Efrén's house. Still clutching the records, the Christmas card and a copy of Lorca, I held my breath as I ran through the frightful entrance, released it in the courtyard, climbed the staircase and entered Efrén's room.

Efrén was seated at the table, looking more like a bad-tempered gorilla than ever. The family were jostling round him, shouting at the tops of their voices. Their hands were red and sticky with blood; there was blood on their arms, their clothes, their faces and their hair. Great pools of it were on the floor and it was smeared over the pigsty-gate affair that served them as a front door.

On the table was a pile of banknotes. Efrén was trying to keep control over the situation by striking out with his fists and by heaping indignities upon the ancestors of his mother and his wife and cursing his two young daughters, who were pulling each other's hair over a wad of notes they had both got hold of.

'Me cago en to' tu' muerto!' he shouted at his mother.

'Hijas de la Gran Puta! (Daughters of the Great Whore!)' he shouted at his daughters.

'Hijo de puta! (Son of a Whore!)' his mother shouted back at him.

An enormous turkey, their Christmas dinner, was standing on the bed, gobbling to itself and opening and closing one wing like a vulture; on the bed also was Efrén's youngest daughter, aged five, lying huddled and silent, with a small black dog. The bed, the table and a battered sideboard occupied nearly all the space in the room.

'Efrén! What on earth's going on? Have you murdered a rich man or something?'

'Óla, Gerardo! Come on in! You've come on a lucky day! My girls found a tunny fish on the beach; we've just cut it up and sold it. Now you can have tuna with your salad.'

Efrén stuffed what was left of the money in a drawer of the sideboard. Turning to his daughters, he said, 'The Englishman thought

you'd murdered a rich man!' at which they stopped fighting and broke into a high, hoarse cackle of laughter which went on and on till I wondered if they were mad.

I gave Efrén the card and, to forestall any misunderstanding, stood it on top of the chest of drawers. It was the Nativity scene, with a choir of angels, by Piero della Francesca.

I sat down on the bed with the turkey, the dog and the little girl; Efrén thrust a guitar into my hands and said, 'Play while we get the lunch.'

Outside, the blue sky had turned a luminous grey. Illuminated by flickering sheet lightning, the rain began to drive down, transforming the white roof-tops and towers into the same shiny bone-like colour.

I was strumming quietly to myself until I noticed the goldfinches and canaries stacked in cages on the balcony outside were singing louder than ever.

'I thought,' I said to Efrén, 'that birds went quiet before a thunderstorm.'

Efrén looked at me and produced a needle out of his coat. 'That's in the country. But these birds—we spike out their eyes so they'll sing better.'

For a moment I was so blind with anger that I could think of nothing to say. Then I bent my head and went on playing rather louder.

'You're not playing that in time!' Efrén came bounding round from the table, seized the guitar roughly from me, and, propping himself on one leg, played the passage through once, twice, three times.

I had never ceased to be amazed at the sensitivity and artistry with which Efrén played, nor at the beauty and purity of the variations which he improvised upon the traditional themes. It was not as if I had never heard his falsetas before. Yet with Efrén it was rather like that. Every time he played through the old, well-worn flamenco melodies it seemed to me that I had never really heard this music before.

'There you are. Now try again. It goes in twelve beats like the rest.' He looked at me with concern and handed the guitar back. 'Look, try and hold your thumb like this, flat. You'll get a more flamenco tone. But don't force it, or you'll sound like a lot of old tin cans.'

This went on intermittently until lunch. The table was stacked with plates of red pimento, sausages, octopus, tomatoes, tunny-fish meat, sardines and a large bowl of potatoes and runner beans floating in olive oil. They gave me a large soup-plate, filled it with bits of everything and, in spite of my protests, dowsed it liberally with hot olive oil poured from a can. 'Eat!' they cried.

All through the meal a procession of women from neighbouring

houses came in to admire little Antonio, who had been sleeping quietly in his cot. They hauled him out, removed his clothes and poked and prodded him about with cries of delight, admiring his infantile manliness in simple Rabelaisian terms.

'Ay! Ooh, que bueno, que fuerte es! Look how strong he is, what a lot of children he's going to have! Oh, Efrén, you man you! He's going to be worse than you are!'

Efrén gathered him in his arms and strutted about. 'Antonio!' he cried, 'Antonio, my love; my consolation for the miseries of this world. Antonio, little son of my soul, son of my soul!'

As he was about to show Antonio to me, Antonio did what little Antonios all over the world are wont to do, all over Efrén's chair and dinner-plate. Efrén took no notice whatever. He handed the baby back and sat down and went on eating. He prodded me with his fork. 'Come on! Eat!'

I was just trying to force myself to eat another mouthful of oil and potatoes when a woman came in from the rain, in a black plastic mackintosh with a hood over her head, and a small suitcase. She pulled back her hood to reveal grey hair, and a pale grey face, with a resigned and grave expression.

'She's the practicante!' shouted Efrén's wife at me. She always shouted at me as though I were deaf. 'She's come to give Rosita an injection.' She pointed at the little girl on the bed. 'She has 'flu. You know, 'flu!'

Practicantes are a tribe of people who earn money on the side by giving injections for every illness under the sun. In any of the cheaper bars it is a common sight to see some old fellow crouching down behind a door while a practicante slips him an injection for a few pesetas.

The woman opened the suitcase on the sideboard, took out a little tin tray and poured some methylated spirit into it, lit it and then produced a hypodermic needle which she held in the flame.

Rosita began to scream and scream. Efrén's wife and ancient mother cleared things off the table. I moved to get up, but: 'No, no, you carry on with your lunch, don't mind us.' Efrén and his two elder daughters went and grasped Rosita by the hands and feet and lifted her struggling and shrieking and plonked her face down on the table, still covered with bits of food, about a foot in front of my plate. Rosita's screams were quite deafening. They managed to hold her still for a moment while the practicante pulled up her dress and stuck the needle into her thigh.

She was carried away and laid gently on the bed. Efrén pushed the turkey on to the floor, and the two girls lay down beside her and stroked her hair.

Efrén came and sat down at the table again. 'You are a slow eater!' he said. I could eat no more, and was remembering the last time I had eaten here, when he had been brought a bowl of live snails, and how he had burnt off their heads with his cigarette lighter, watching them writhe and twist and suddenly shrivel up, his face screwed up with wonder.

His eldest daughter, who was about fourteen years old, got up from the bed and sat at the table.

'Look at my daughter,' Efrén said. He pointed his fork at the soft down that was beginning to grow above her upper lip. 'Look at the moustache on her mouth! She's got hair on her coño too!'

His daughter looked at me and tapped her forehead, saying, '... más loco . . . ! ( . . . more mad than . . . ! )'

Efrén, hunched up defensively as though even he realized he had overstepped the mark, ate a mouthful of potatoes and then, his perpetual war on all living creatures taking a new turn, remembered it was time to beat the dog. 'She was wicked last Thursday and must be punished.'

'That won't do any good,' I said.

'Paqui! Where are you? Come here! Paqui!' He looked furiously round him. 'Paqui!'

The little dog bounded under the bed and tried to squeeze between the wall and the bedpost. He was after her in a flash; she was trembling and urinating wildly on the floor, quite out of her mind in her terror. Efrén was merciless. He caught hold of her tail and pulled her out. Then he stood up, grasping her round the throat, and, with his clenched fist, began punching her head with all his strength until I thought he would knock it off. The dog gave the most blood-curdling, high-pitched yelps: the women and girls fled from the room with their hands over their ears. The turkey, tethered as it was to the bed, beat with its wings against the sideboard.

I jumped up, put my arm round his neck and pulled back with all my strength. We fell in a heap on the table. Efrén, who is very strong, shook himself free, and turned to face me, his expression complete amazement. 'What is the matter with you?'

'Efrén, put her down!'

'All right, if you wish.' He tossed her contemptuously into a pile of saucepans in the corner, and she raced out on to the balcony.

'Efrén, please sit down and listen.' I thought quickly, trying to calm down, and, remembering the esteem in which all things German are held in Spain, began: 'We once had a German trainer of dogs—a German, you understand—who came to our school for a lecture. Now he said you must never punish a dog except in the actual moment of

doing something wrong, or when it is just about to do it. If you do it after, it is too late, and it cannot connect the punishment with its own actions. It has no memory like we have. Now he was a trainer. He must have known what he was talking about.'

Efrén looked very serious and shook his head.

'You're right, you know. She's just a poor animal, and has no memory. Just a poor animal.'

He shouted for the rest of his family, and when they were all in the room, addressed them: 'I don't want to see any of you hitting the dog any more. She's just a poor animal; got no memory. She doesn't remember why you're hitting her. Understand?' He was his old self again, shouting in his hoarse voice.

The two girls came up and kissed him, darted out and came back with Paqui. At the sight of her master she wagged the whole rear half of her body, jumped up on his lap and licked all over his face.

'There you see,' he said. 'She still loves me . . . Ah, yes. I have a present for you. I've fixed up for you to play on the radio next week. First with me, and then solo. How's that for a present, eh? Of course, they don't pay anything. And here's another.' He produced a cigar.

I expressed my gratitude. He chuckled and kissed me on the cheek and patted my back. Then he caught my other cheek between his thumb and forefinger and squeezed hard until I was forced to pull away.

'You show them how to play the guitar! And then I can be proud of my best pupil!'

I began to realize that they obviously did pay and that he was going to keep the money for himself. I said nothing.

Guitars were brought out, brothers came in and sang and the women and girls danced, snapping their fingers and stamping their feet. I lit my cigar, and after a few minutes the thing exploded in my face, and it stayed there in my hand looking like a palm tree. Everybody laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks. It was time to go, anyway, and I could still hear their laughter when I reached the street. And then I remembered I had forgotten all about García Lorca.