UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY
OU_160445
UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 633/L97A Accession No. G.10572

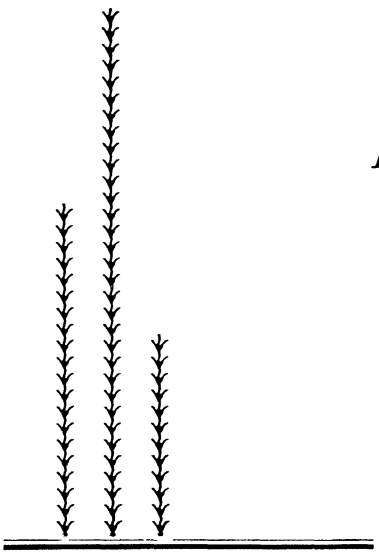
Author Lussier, Betty

Title Amid my alien Corn. 1958

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

AMID MY ALIEN CORN

AMID MY ALIEN CORN



By Betty Lussier

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY / *Philadelphia / New York*

Copyright © 1957, 1958 by Betty Lussier

FIRST EDITION

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 58-6904

For CTC *who missed all this*

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is the true story of my three years spent farming in the Lukus Valley of what was then Spanish Morocco—compressed, for convenience in telling, into one season.

Contents

1. Finding the Land *11*
2. The Sowing *103*
3. The Growing *167*
4. The Harvest *231*

1 Finding the Land

1

THE LAND OF SPAIN might seem vaguely familiar to you—it might remind you of southern California, near the Mexican border, with its expanses of arid terrain and baked roads and stark, primitive houses. But Spanish Morocco will not remind you of any place you have ever known. It is truly a foreign country: It is tall eucalyptus trees with their spotted trunks casting a leprous shade over the roads and bringing there a momentary relief from the burning of the sun into the sand. It is towering, fat-leaved cacti spreading out over miles of desolate, unpopulated hills. It is thick-walled-against-the-heat villas, whitewashed and set in picture-card orange groves. It is the occasional camel harnessed with a burro to a wooden plow. It is the Arab man padding along a sandy road huddled inside his heavy brown hand-woven woolen jelab to protect him from the hot summer sun, followed at a respectful distance by his plodding, inferior Fatima swathed from head to ankle in a white haik and veiled carefully so that all that is visible are her eyes and one gnarled, brown paw clutching the halter rope of the family burro.

Yes, Morocco is foreign, unlike our United States in physiography and character. And yet, because I lived and worked there the very thought of returning to Morocco gives me a great feeling of returning to a homeland.

I had farmed in Spanish Morocco only a short time when the enormous difference between man and woman, and the

still more pronounced difference between native woman and foreign woman, was thrust upon me.

I was out riding, accompanied by my two Spanish foremen. Marrón, Pepe and I were examining a new parcel of land we intended to plant for the first time that spring. It was late afternoon, with the long shadow of the Riff Mountains lengthening across the vast Mehasen Valley, giving it an eerie darkness, while farther away, toward the Mehasen River, there was still relentless sunshine.

Our work was done. We three could start for home, across the river. I slapped the bridle reins gently across the neck of my big mare, Quimera. There is something uplifting about trotting away from a mountain's shadow and into the sunshine, a feeling of having defeated again the darkness, if only for a little while longer. Marrón rode close beside me, but my tractor chief, Pepe, was not following. He remained behind on the narrow path, engaged in serious conversation with a strange horseman who had come out of nowhere.

"Who is this stranger?" I asked Marrón.

Marrón twisted in his saddle and looked at the newcomer from under the brim of his battered felt hat.

"Don't know," he answered, with a shrug.

Together we nudged our horses around and retraced the path to Pepe and the stranger.

The new horseman was a lean and wiry Arab with a pock-marked, chocolate skin, set off handsomely by a beautiful white woolen jelab—the all-purpose Arab garment—and a yellow silk turban wound artfully around his head. His arms, sticking out of the jelab sleeves, were sinewy and his slender fingers clutched the reins like the best English jockey. His was the bulky Moroccan saddle, lined with the whole crude sheepskin and he was astride a small, white Arab mare. Plainly the mare was purebred from her tiny, perfectly formed head,

her thick neck and her dainty hooves. In the Arab custom, her tail and mane had been left untrimmed and her tail swept the ground. The rider removed a brown hand from the rein to gesticulate wildly in the air.

"What does he want, Pepe?" I asked as we came close.

Pepe shook his head in obvious embarrassment. "Oh, it is *nada,* really—nothing."

"Tell me, Pepe," I insisted. "This man cannot be so agitated about *nada.*"

"He wants to race," Pepe blurted out.

I hesitated, and then answered. "It is not the best thing for your horse at the end of a long, hot day. But if you want to defend your reputation as the fastest rider in the valley, go ahead."

Pepe smiled slyly. "You don't understand, Señora Betty. It's not me he wants to race against. It's you."

"Me?" I echoed, startled. Why should this Arab want to race against me?

"Yes, you," insisted Pepe. "It's something about the honor of the Arab male—they cannot have a woman riding in their territory without knowing that they can better her."

The Arab jerked his mare closer to mine, his black eyes snapping wickedly. Did I detect a glint of laughter? Did he see the humor of his challenge?

I smiled at him politely. I had no intention of racing insanely across the plain over some vague point of honor. I spoke to Pepe in Spanish. "This is silly. Who wins such a race depends upon which mare is better and which rider is more adept, not upon whether the rider is male or female. Explain that to our visitor in his language, will you, Pepe?"

Now Marrón shook his head. "Trying to explain that point of view to any Arab is a waste of time. He would not understand it. He only understands that you are female and

that you have invaded male territory, therefore you should have to stand his challenge."

The shadow of the Riff had deepened so that our horses seemed to be standing breast-deep in some murky liquid. I was anxious to start toward the river. I had no interest in trying to prove that I could equal the Arab.

The Arab held his lively mare reined in tightly. She reared onto her hindfeet, plunging forward and back nervously, as the rider listened intently to every word we exchanged. I could not tell if he understood our Spanish.

Suddenly he loosened his rein and let his mare flash directly across the path past Quimera. At the same time, he flung one arm above his head, the jelab sleeve falling away gracefully, and let out a terrifying, high-pitched, enduring shriek—his challenge—which faded across the plain as he dashed away.

Before he was ten yards off, without realizing, I lashed Quimera with the loose ends of the reins, dug my heels into her belly and flattened my body along her neck.

"Go, go, go!" I yelled in her ear and instantly we were plunging after the Arab. He glanced back over his shoulder only once to make sure that I had accepted his challenge and then he, too, flattened himself along the neck of his mare and gave his full attention to winning. His little mare with her slim legs fairly skimmed over the rough ground but Quimera was right behind steadily gaining those few yards between us by right of her longer legs and more powerful body. I had to keep an eye on the ground for although it was not rocky, it was rough, having been cultivated by the Arabs only in the crudest possible way—scratched up with a wooden plow. This entire Mehasen Valley was chopped up into small plots, all individually worked by the Arab families,

and these plots were divided, one from the other, by shallow ditches.

One of these shallow ditches now slapped up in front of us. My Arab opponent was already over. Without breaking her stride, Quimera rose into the air and sailed across. Off balance for a moment, I clung to her mane, and she landed firmly on the other side, I clutched the reins again and slapped her neck.

"Go, go, go!"

She drew up, neck and neck, with the Arab horse. For a second or two, the mares raced along together, no sound on the air except their labored breathing, the creaking of our saddles and the clink of the metal bits. The two swerved even closer and my ankle was caught in a painful crush against the heavy stirrup of the Arab saddle. Suddenly the Arab let out another of his wild screams and surged out in front in a cloud of dirt lumps and dust, the winner.

I came to a less spectacular stop beside him, the loser. His mouth spread into a gleeful grin, his black eyes sparkled happily and, in his exuberance, he dropped his reins, stretched out both his hands and gripped my shoulders in brotherly fashion.

"You good, you very good," he said in broken Spanish and with no further communication, he yanked his mare around and raced back to his *kabila*—the local Arab village.

I sat there on Quimera, catching my breath and waiting for the Spaniards to come up. I looked off across the plain at the graceful billow of the white jelba whipping out behind the little Arab mare. He was content, that Arab; he could tell all the village that this new foreign woman was only a woman after all, with no superpowers. He had defeated her in fair combat.

And suddenly it struck me that this race against a challeng-

ing Arab on a desolate plain in Spanish Morocco was a long way from the leisurely, social life I led in Madrid and even farther away from the farm where I had been raised in Maryland.

The farm in Maryland was security and a warmly remembered childhood with my parents and my sisters; Madrid was a fine life with my husband and our four sons and countless friends and literally hundreds of acquaintances who want to be introduced to Spain and to be entertained. This primitive farmland in Spanish Morocco meant isolation and hard work and many moments of loneliness.

What had brought me to this lonely African valley?

What *am* I doing here, anyway? I asked myself.

2

MY YOUNG LIFE had led me into a number of different situations, but it never foretold farming in Morocco.

I was born in 1921 out on the prairie of western Canada in Medicine Hat, Alberta. "The Hat" has since discovered oil and gone quite rich and elegant, but in those days it was only another western cow town.

When I was three or four, my parents moved to Banff National Park, one of the most beautiful natural parks in all the world. There my father chauffeured a car for tourists and one of his fares was a Miss Borden, who owned a dairy farm in New York State. She took a great liking to my father and persuaded him to move his family down to New York and take over the management of her dairy farm. The farm was at Wallkill near Newburgh in Ulster County. It was one of the Borden Milk Company farms and had been set up as a model dairy with everything painted white and scrubbed twice a day. It operated on a frank deficit, to the horror of my father. But the living was gracious for us and I remember only happiness in New York State.

Those pleasant days came to an end when Miss Borden died. With her death, my father and mother lost interest in the progress of the model dairy farm.

Father took over the management of another farm on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland while he looked around for a likely farm to buy. He chose Maryland probably because it has such a pleasant year-round climate. The few years

that followed were ones of great family closeness. We girls were still too young to form fast ties in school so we centered our life in the family. I worked with my father, and I learned many things about farming and farm life most girls never know.

Father found the place he wanted for himself in 1934; a dairy farm near Rock Hall on the upper Chesapeake Bay, bearing the lovely name of Huntingfield and overflowing with Indian and early settler history.

This is the place we girls think of as "coming from" because we grew into our teens there and sort of took root. It was a bad time, though, to own a farm. The depression had gripped the whole United States a few years before, and this catastrophe reached us as we became landowners for the first time.

My sisters and I worked long, hard hours beside our father on Huntingfield, taking the place of the hired men we could not afford, or the sons he did not have. In winter we rose at four-thirty and stumbled out in the darkness to milk a whole stableful of cows. We attended our classes in the Rock Hall public school during the day and in the late afternoon we were back in the cow barn.

All summer long there were the crops to tend. My father had almost a hundred cows and we raised all their food on the farm. There was always a big corn crop; part of which went up into the silos as ensilage and part into the cribs as grain. And there were heavy crops of alfalfa and soybeans to put up. Besides this, we raised what the farmers call cash crops; produce that was sold for cash and helped pay the land taxes and the mortgage and buy shoes and coats in the fall.

Our cash crops usually were wheat and tomatoes. The wheat was planted in the cool of the fall, but it had to be

harvested in the cruel heat of July and the tomatoes demanded exacting labor from June right through August, so we were left with very little summer vacation. And always, at both ends of the long day, were those cows to be milked.

It was a good place, though, for children to grow up; a long tongue of land lying beside Chesapeake Bay with a safe, sandy beach for the summer and a marshy pond for duck shooting and muskrat trapping in the winter. We learned early the pleasures and pains of hard work, and the satisfaction of the harvest.

I went on to the University of Maryland with the firm idea of studying journalism and turning myself into a newspaperwoman.

But the war was shaping; I took it as a personal responsibility and it colored all my actions. I enrolled in the Civil Pilot Training course, although it meant rising at dawn every morning to put in the flying time and studying long hours into the night on the groundwork.

I was even envious of my father, I think, because as soon as Canada declared war on Germany he had enlisted in the Canadian Air Force, been given command of a wireless-training squadron and was flying up there in the sky every single day. He viewed my modest flying efforts with great tolerance and even ventured to advise me that if I felt I had to go to war, the air was the safest place for me.

My mother was more apprehensive. She had an understandable terror of all airplanes, having waited out the First World War for my father to come home and being now faced with the prospect of waiting out another one. She never tried to dissuade me from the air, though, and all the little fears she must have suffered for both my father and me, she kept to herself.

Just as I finished my course and was granted my first pilot's license, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Of course there was a boy, from Baltimore. I remember sitting with the boy in his car that Sunday and hearing this news on the radio. We looked into each other's eyes for a long moment. We both knew that I was deciding our futures. I would have to go.

That was really our good-by—although we never admitted it, for he became a pilot too, and planned firmly to follow me.

I was twenty then and, according to American law, too young to leave the country in time of war. I went to see everyone and tried everything, but there seemed to be nothing I could do about getting into the battle. I had one card left and I played that. My being born in Canada entitled me to a British passport and the British felt that anyone who was breathing could do some war duty, whatever the age. I applied for my British passport and this was quite a big moral concession for me because I have never considered myself anything except a raving American patriot.

So I rode over to England on a runty Norwegian coastal freighter, right through a net of German submarines, with a movie-script girl, a haberdashery salesman, and two loyal Britons for company. And all of us atop a cargo of war matériel.

When we landed in England, I announced to the proper authorities in London that I was a pilot. This was stretching the point a long way, but England was desperately in need of people who could get planes into the air.

They joined me to the Air Transport Auxiliary, attached to the Royal Air Force, and I did what is known as ferry service; the tedious job of flying new airplanes—the British call them aircraft—from the factories to the operational bases and nursing the old, beat-up planes back to the factories for

overhaul. I learned my new job very well and I preferred being in the air to being anywhere on earth. I suppose those months were the happiest of my life; for me there is no joy to compare with bolting through the air in control of so much power. The idea that I could do it and be of service, too, was overwhelming.

I flew with all kinds of illustrious people and I made an assortment of curious friends: a passionately patriotic Pole who had us all learning Polish, a wild, rich New Zealander with a racing car, two Australians with an endless fund of questionable practical jokes and a critical Cambridge law graduate who claimed he hated all Americans. He unbent so far as to lend me his motorcycle and the parts of England, Scotland and Wales that I did not see from the air, I covered with that motorcycle on the left-hand side of the road.

So often, after a period of great happiness in your life, a tragedy hits you. Nothing is ever the same again as long as you live and you look back upon that before-time as incredibly free from care and you try to recapture that feeling and you cannot. The boy from Baltimore was killed. He had become an Air Force pilot, not entirely because he wanted to be a pilot but because being one would bring us closer together, and he was killed on his airbase in an automobile accident just a month before he was to come to England with his squadron. It placed a terrible weight on me and a sense of irreplaceable loss that has not lessened with the years.

It was a shock when our service announced that they would not use female pilots on the Continent when the invasion was made. We were to be left behind in England. I was indignant, but there was nothing to change that decision. Reluctantly I resigned from flying aircraft and transferred my support to the American Intelligence service, known as the Office of Strategic Services.

Now, I built up a romantic picture of myself floating down into Occupied France some dark night on a parachute. In one hand I would be carrying a small radio set on which I would transmit all the secrets I found out and in the other hand would be my G.I. French phrase book, to help me on my way in difficult moments. You can excuse me, I was only twenty-one years old.

Needless to tell you, it did not quite turn out like that. I was spirited off, instead, to a series of hidden spots around England, crammed full of Secrets in general and Secret Codes in particular, flown out to Algiers and dumped into a dull office to go to work. I never did make that romantic parachute jump into Occupied France and the French can be thankful, but I saw radio sets until I felt they were running out of my ears and, more important, I met Ricardo, who is now my husband.

3

IF RICARDO DOES NOT figure much in this story, it is not because he's uninteresting, but only because he does not hold much with farming. To be fair to him, he thinks farming is fine when other people do it, but he likes to keep far away himself. However, he has charms that make up for this in other ways.

If someone were to ask me what the requisites are for a durable husband, I would answer that he has to have an absolutely unfailing sense of humor and that he has never to bore you. Ricardo not only meets these very difficult requirements, he leaps the bounds, and many a time, when I find myself caught in the trap of his idea of humor or being transported thousands of miles somewhere else "to alleviate the boredom," I have to remind myself firmly that this is what I asked for.

Ricardo's whole life is a fascinating adventure story and I expect when he has more time to think about it, he will tell it all himself in his own way. I will talk about him only briefly.

He was born in Catalonia. Catalonia is the northeastern corner of Spain, but if you think this is the same as saying he was born in Spain, let me assure you quickly that it is not. A Catalan is a Catalan, not a Spaniard; and no amount of geography, history or logic will ever make him see it differently. So Ricardo is a Catalan and, as his father was a doctor and he an only son, he set out to be a doctor too,

as is the custom in Catalan families. He began his education in a monastery and later went to the University of Barcelona. By the time he was sixteen, he was well on his way to becoming a doctor, but the Spanish Civil War interrupted his education and Ricardo went from Spain to France to England and ended up in the United States just before we entered the Second World War.

There he was recruited for work under the Co-ordinator of Information whose staff soon became the nucleus of the Office of Strategic Services, doing war duty. Ricardo was joined to the United States Army and shipped out to North Africa, where there was great trouble for us and the rest of our allies.

Ricardo came, eventually, to Algiers, where I was working also for the OSS, and we met. Nothing special happened—no electrical sparks. I remember thinking without interest that this Spanish-type young man could stand a good haircut.

In spite of constantly needing a haircut, Ricardo and I got to be very close friends, although we never went so far as to go out on a date. I had several military boy friends on tab and Ricardo had his own complications with more sophisticated women than I. We compared notes frequently, and criticized each other's choice, but that was all. Or so I thought.

Eventually, we were both sent to Italy with the Army and then on to France with the invasion forces. Before the war ended, we married each other, and when we were able to resign from the Office of Strategic Services, Ricardo started a modest import-export company. He took a partner to handle the American end of the company and we headed back to Europe to beat the bushes for business. We had at that time one son, one automobile and two hundred and fifty dollars in cash and we soon discovered that you need a lot

more money than this to make a success of the import-export business.

Our attempts took us from France to Casablanca in French Morocco, to Tangier in Spanish Morocco, and eventually to Spain, where Ricardo became associated with the company for which he now works.

His character has changed not at all with the years. When we first married, people said confidently, "Betty will be a fine influence. She will change Ricardo and improve his English."

On the contrary, each time I return to the States, my family and friends tell me that my English is getting more like Catalan all the time. And Ricardo's long, involved reports to his head office in New York City still read like chapters from a mystery novel. They tell me that these reports are passed from hand to hand and his curious co-workers are always looking for the next installment whether or not they are concerned with its subject matter.

And, alas, I have failed also with him on the social front: I never know what he is going to say next, or whom he will like sufficiently to be charming to or whom he will dislike enough to insult to his face. And there are his moments of just being his natural self, which are the most dangerous of all.

No, Ricardo has not changed.

He has lots of little manias. One of these is against drafts. He calls them "currents"; and he is always forgetting on purpose to open the bedroom window at night.

He has another mania about my dresses; he likes me to have enough of them. Clothes are not one of the things that interest me very much, but for Ricardo's sake I make a terrific effort to be well dressed. I am in some city, awaiting his arrival. It is to be a social few days so I have carefully selected

from my closet and brought with me a whole trunkful of dresses for all occasions. Ricardo arrives and he brings along several more dresses which he has picked out of my closet. "Just in case you need something more," as he explains it. I have satin dresses, silk dresses, dresses of brocade, velvet dresses, long ones, short ones, tight ones, full ones. The closets of the Madrid apartment are bursting. And twice a year, when the name-collections are shown, Ricardo rushes out and buys some more, "just in case."

Ricardo has one of the sharpest, tidiest minds in operation; it is like a steel trap. In another, less pressing age, he might have been a philosopher. Thrust into the twentieth century, he became a financial wizard, and out of bare sand he can dream up schemes that make money. So you see, it does not matter a whole lot that he is not interested in farming.

He has innumerable friends all over the world and has an earned reputation for integrity. He has made a fine life for his family and he is an excellent, easygoing father; our sons adore him.

The prevailing system of having just one baby at a time and nine long months to get used to the idea is pretty practical when you come to think of it; practical because if you were suddenly presented with your whole family at once, none but the very, very hardy could survive the shock. I look at our four sons, bursting with health and energy, overflowing any place they happen to be, seemingly several dozen in number, and I wonder to myself, "Are they all mine? And if they are, how did I get into this?"

Each of the boys was born in a different place: little Ricardo, who was eight years old when I went farming in Morocco, on a golf course in England; Emile, six, in a nice garden in France; Jay, who "has four" as he would say, in a

real hospital in Barcelona with my landlady looking over my shoulder; and Penn, two, and the youngest, in an old apartment that served for a hospital in Madrid. Physically, they all faintly resemble their father, a very good sign; except Penn, who has lovely blue eyes and red hair which he stubbornly maintains is blond, "like Betty's." In character, they are as different from one another as the countries they were born in.

Penn is having the most stable childhood of all the sons. The only home he has ever known is the apartment in Madrid, while the others have been moved from country to country. To two-year-old Penn, going to Morocco was a major event in his life, but to the other three, it was just one more adventure to add to the many.

4

FOR ME, one of the best features of life in Spain is the endless supply of household help.

We have one servant who does the cooking and one to do the washing and ironing and mending. A third servant does the housecleaning, answers the telephone and door and waits on the table at mealtime and upon the countless droppers-in-for-a-drink.

You might say, if you have absorbed this information, that I have cleverly eliminated myself entirely from the housekeeping setup in Spain and so what use am I? Well, I am not completely eliminated. You are forgetting the children. Their care is the job of another servant and nearly all households in Spain, foreign or native, have this extra governess-maid for the children. But just as much as I dislike housekeeping, I like taking care of the children, so in my household, I tend to the boys myself.

This entails rising in the morning when they do—always too early, no matter what—locating four suits of underwear, four pairs of socks, four pairs of shoes, four shirts and four trousers and stuffing the protesting little bodies into all this apparel. Next comes the supervision of the breakfast and after that the planning of the day. There are lessons to be chosen and taught in English or you may find yourself, as many an American mother has, with a houseful of children speaking only Spanish. When some of the charges are attending school, they have to be chauffeured there and back

while others are taken to the park. My Saturdays are spent being the pitcher on their baseball team, helping out in the basketball department or cooking hot dogs and hamburgers out on the trail some place. And Sundays the boys have to be escorted to church where they sing very proudly in the choir.

All this daytime activity keeps me from being looked upon as unnecessary in my little family group.

5

MY ORIGINAL INTEREST in Morocco was all mixed up with having in my possession many sacks of hybrid corn seed, enough to plant a thousand acres, and a large new tractor with many useful farming accessories. To put these into action, I certainly needed a farm.

It is rather a case of the chicken and the egg, as I look back on it now—which did come first?

During most of the years we had lived in Spain, while I went about my housewifely chores and my social duties, I had been threatening to go into farming in Morocco. I needed a change from this gay life in Madrid, I often said, and farming was something I knew so well, having always done it, so why not do what I was used to doing; why not farm?

Each time I advanced this argument, my husband, Ricardo, would agree wholeheartedly with me that I should have an outside interest, and that it might be a very good thing if I tried farming for a little while, if that was what I wanted.

That is a subtle way husbands have of discouraging insanities; once a man agrees with his wife, she will put any demand aside.

In that way my sporadic yearnings for a farm were always sidetracked.

But this time I found myself with a very large tractor and a very large consignment of the finest hybrid corn seed, and the only place I could make use of these things would be in Morocco.

At this point many may ask, as so many have, why I should want to farm in Morocco when I had so much that was dear to me in Madrid, and how I happened to have the tractor and all that corn seed anyway?

I have tried many times to explain the purchase of the tractor, which is what started off the entire Moroccan project. Anyone interested enough to wonder will simply have to accept the fact, as Ricardo and the rest of my family do, that there are women in the world who would rather own a tractor than diamonds. I might have gone to Cartier's, that day in New York, and paid the same amount for a diamond bracelet similar to those so many of my friends possess, and no one would have thought it an extravagance.

But I don't happen to care for diamonds, any more than I care for mink, and I own neither of these luxuries. While a tractor, which may seem a foolish luxury to some people, would certainly come in handy, if I had a farm! Besides, I like tractors. I practically cut my teeth on tractors. I can drive them, care for them, take them apart, and sometimes get them put together again, which is the sort of talent a girl acquires who has been brought up to work with her father on a farm.

Those early years had not been easy. Why then was I willing to exchange the luxuries of Madrid for a farm in Africa?

This, too, I find difficult to explain save to those who do not require explanation—those who have worked and know and love the land.

My immediate reason for needing a farm, of course, was the fact that the tractor and the seeds would arrive any day from America and spring was on its way, and seeds will not wait because they want to be planted in the spring.

But the real reason went deeper, and it is the fact that I was more or less born a farmer. Farming demands much of

the body and the mind and yields more satisfaction than any other occupation I know about.

Once one has farmed, one always misses a farm. One always knows it is there, somewhere, waiting, and needing you just as much as you need that particular farm.

Farmers have a way of setting aside their tools of trade for long periods and for various reasons—we get discouraged with the land, we get enthusiastic about something else, we get tired of being very poor. We go away from farming for all these reasons, but at some time or other, we come back. We come back sheepishly sometimes and we would rather not have to explain why, but we do come back.

I went away from farming for many of these same reasons: I was too poor; I was so discouraged with the land; I was enthusiastically involved with other things, such as a war, marriage, and four sons. I needed to go back to farming because of the too-comfortable life we led in Madrid. I had begun to feel—well, stale and somewhat useless. No, not exactly useless, because I did do a fairly good job with my household, but as if I were not doing all that I could do, not using my capacities to their fullest. I am sure that no one else noticed this inner slackness, but I felt it strongly. The empty, getting-nowhere idleness of our life in Madrid, or rather of *my* life in Madrid, weighed upon me. I wanted to do something with my hands and brains. I wanted to do something basic.

Farming is the most basic of all work and the work I knew best, and that is the real reason, under all the reasons I was to conjure up in my attempt to explain the Moroccan Adventure, why I wanted to farm again.

I had decided upon Spanish Morocco after a careful study of the agricultural possibilities there and in Spain. Spain itself I found was too tied up in governmental regulations and red

tape to permit a non-native such as myself to farm there. Moroccan agriculture under the Spanish Moroccan government was much more free, the Spanish Moroccan government, I learned, was much readier to help with problems concerning seed, machinery and the final sale of crops. It was easier for farmers there to establish closer relationships with all the government departments concerned with agricultural matters.

Having lived in Tangier I had some actual knowledge of the Moroccan farmlands. I knew there were rich areas watered by rivers (the Lukus where I was eventually to farm was one of these) that would be good for corn.

There were times in Madrid when I found myself longing beyond all reason for a section of that rich Moroccan farmland where, so I dreamed, I would plant hundreds of acres of the finest American hybrid corn.

I chose hybrid corn because it seemed to me that this was the one crop, hitherto untried in Morocco, that would most benefit that country. Hybrid corn yields twice as much grain as ordinary corn seed. I had helped my father plant many acres of hybrid corn and before its advent, I had helped him plant many acres of ordinary corn, so I had observed at first-hand the remarkable increase in yield that hybrid corn insures.

Hybrid corn has replaced ordinary corn seed almost one hundred per cent throughout the rest of the world and has aided tremendously in building up the economics of certain underdeveloped countries—in South America, for example—under the Rockefeller Institute program. But it had never been planted in Spanish Morocco.

So I longed to introduce hybrid corn there, and the farming urge came in the oddest times and places, and hit me hardest during one of the annual shopping trips to New York

City, when on a rainy day amid the shopping orgies, the shows and the new movies, the dream of that farm floated up again. I picked up the telephone and telephoned Mr. Henry Wallace in South Salem, New York, the man, more than any other in the world, responsible for the success of hybrid corn. He was only mildly surprised by a stranger's wanting to discuss the idea of planting American hybrid seed in Morocco because people call him from all over the world for advice on seeds. He advised me to think of the climate in Morocco as approximating that of our Texas and after sorting out his papers—I could hear them rustling over the phone—he recommended several types of seeds that he thought would grow in Morocco. There are so many varieties of hybrid corn seeds that they are designated only by number; for instance, Texas hybrid 26, 28 and 32 are all hybrids that will grow in a Texas-type climate.

I thanked him warmly for his advice and before we said good-by, he added, "Please let me know what happens. I shall be curious."

That same rainy day, fired with Mr. Wallace's suggestions, I sallied energetically forth from my hotel room and sought out a New York seed supplier. I leafed through his catalogue and under "Corn" I selected two of the types of hybrid seeds that Mr. Wallace had recommended.

"I'll take enough of those seeds to plant a thousand acres," I told the clerk, who was accustomed to supplying seeds in small paper bags for city terraces and backyard gardens.

"Where shall I send them?" he asked, successfully masking his astonishment.

Then it occurred to me that I had no land on which to plant these fine fat seeds. I told the clerk to ship them to our apartment in the center of Madrid and I left the store quickly, lest some difficulty arise about the shipping.

Having gone this far, it was easy, indeed it was inevitable, back in my hotel room, to again pick up the telephone and order a tractor.

"And where shall we send your tractor?" asked the clerk on the other end of the wire in Texas. My husband's company has a connection with a producer of tractors in Texas, and they gave me a very good price on an International. I was delighted with the price and thought of it as a very good bit of economizing.

I could visualize that clerk, way off in Texas, with pencil poised over his order pad, as I gave again our Madrid address, hoping he was not acquainted with that city and could not share the vision that had flashed into my mind of our modern apartment building and our Spanish maids toiling up eight flights of stairs with a tractor and all those bags of corn seeds that had been delivered at our door.

And that, for those who require an explanation, is the way I happened to buy the tractor and the corn.

Will it seem less of an extravagance if I explain that I borrowed the money to pay for the tractor and the seeds from Ricardo's boss? And that I bound myself by signature to repay this loan within two years, meanwhile to keep my own books balanced and my business affairs quite apart from Ricardo's? And also that none of this was the extravagance or the risk it may seem on paper, because I *knew* I could count on a very good profit with the increase of yield from the hybrid seed, for the same amount of expense, acreage and work that one would put into a crop of ordinary corn seed. The Moroccan corn yield was good, but I knew how to double that yield.

Nevertheless, after I hung up the phone I stared down into rain-driven Fifth Avenue and knew a few moments of sheer panic. That was when I realized I had to cut short my New

York visit, rush back to Spain, try to explain my purchases to Ricardo and ask his understanding aid in helping me to locate a thousand acres of farmland in Morocco, right away!

There was another, more personal, reason why I wanted a farm in Morocco. That was a Madrid cocktail party—my umpteenth of the season—at which, I remember distinctly, I was backed defenselessly into a smoky corner and jostled on both sides by elbows. Suddenly the thought came to me: "If I had a farm, I could get away from Madrid during the cocktail party season!"

That thought was in my mind in New York when I bought the tractor and the seeds, and it was still there, weeks later, back in Madrid with spring coming on, and the tractor and seeds on their way from New York, and another cocktail party season starting, and still—no land. I had to find a farm before tons of farming equipment were dumped at our door.

I spent days agitating around the apartment:

"My corn seeds will arrive any day and what will I do with them and where will I plant them and why, oh why, don't we know anyone who has a farm down in Morocco!"

When the noise became too much for him, Ricardo came out from behind his protective newspaper to defend himself.

"I do know someone who has a farm in Morocco," he said. "Let me introduce you to this friend of mine. You'll like him a lot; you two have so much in common."

Shortly afterwards, Ricardo took me into a pastry shop in Madrid, run by an English woman, to meet this man whom I was expected to like. He was sitting at one of those undersized, pastry-shop tables on an uncomfortable wooden chair, looking thoroughly out of place. Ricardo had told me that he was the major stockholder and the active director of a farming company called the Serra Agricultural Company, owning some twenty thousand acres of rich land along the Lukus River Valley in Spanish Morocco.

His name was Juan Costello, with another name or two attached before or after, as all the Spaniards have, but I shall just call him Costello.

I think we drank some tea and Costello and Ricardo discussed High Finance for half an hour, but they managed to sandwich in my problem; somehow it was arranged that I should go and see that farm of Costello's in Morocco and if it met the requirements of hybrid corn seed, I could make an arrangement to plant my seed there. Costello was not particularly enthusiastic about this invitation. In fact, that was his only saving grace in my eyes; I could tell he liked me even less than I liked him. Ours was an arrangement we just drifted into; enthusiastically sponsored by Ricardo who wanted to make me happy and who envisoned weeks of undisturbed reading time stretching out before him in my absence. I made a mental note to keep putting off the visit to Costello's farm —there must be other farms besides his.

But a day or two later I went to another cocktail party and the thought of a peaceful farm was so tempting that the very next day I decided to telephone that friend of Ricardo's— what was his name? Costello, that was it.

"Is your offer still open?" I asked him, after reminding him who I was. "May I plant corn on your farm this season?" It is slightly easier to ask such favors of strangers on the telephone than it is in person, but not much easier. I was acutely embarrassed.

There was a silence on the other end of the telephone line while Costello recovered from his surprise and then he answered that, yes, his offer was still open.

Well, he could hardly have said no.

He gave me an appointment and I went over to his private office in a building just off the Castellana that had once been an apartment. It seemed to be stuffed with furniture, some of it functional for officework and some of it antique, quite out

of place there. Costello, noticing my puzzled look, explained that the antiques were for the new house he was building in Madrid.

"Do you plan to live in Madrid, then?" I asked. "What about your farm in Morocco—the Serra?"

"From now on I'll be spending most of my time in Madrid on the business end of the Serra Company," he said. "As you will see when you get down to Morocco, I have competent managers."

We talked back and forth for a time about what would be the best arrangement for planting the corn. Alone and at close range, Costello seemed more natural and sympathetic. With very little formality we drafted a contract that would make us farming partners.

While his secretary was typing up the contract, I sent off a cable to have my tractor, the other machinery and the corn seed change course in mid-ocean, so to speak, and go to Tangier—the Serra farm was near the city.

I turned to Costello. "I must confess to you that I know almost nothing about that part of Spanish Morocco where you have the farm. I know that the Serra farm follows a river bed so that the soil must be rich, but in spite of the months I spent in French Morocco and in Tangier, I never learned much about the Spanish Zone."

"You are not alone in your ignorance," Costello said. "There is very little outside interest in Spanish Morocco. We are a pretty backward zone compared to the French Zone and unless you had business there, as I have, you wouldn't look twice at it."

"You sound very unenthusiastic," I ventured.

"Not at all," he insisted. "I am just realistic. You will see for yourself soon enough." And he picked up a pencil from his desk and rolled it rapidly between his fingers; a habit I was

to see him repeat often in Morocco when he was ill at ease.

The secretary appeared with the contract neatly typed and we sat at the desk, each reading a copy of it, line for line.

It went like this:

CONTRACT BETWEEN SEÑORA BETTY—AND THE SERRA AGRICULTURAL COMPANY

As a consequence of the conversations sustained with you, I have the pleasure to confirm to you the conditions upon which we have agreed for collaborating on a certain crop within our farms.

In principle, the extent of the cultivation will be as follows:

1,000 acres of hybrid corn,
planted in *parcelas* to be agreed
upon later.

You will contribute for your account the seeds and the insecticides and the Serra Agricultural Company will supply the land necessary for this crop.

All the additional expenses that will be produced are for the account of the Partnership and will be satisfied by halves between you and the Company. The produce will be divided also by half.

You will loan us equally your collaboration, indicating to us the best method to carry out the cultivation of this crop.

Asking your confirmation, the Company takes pleasure in reiterating itself to you very attentively. Your assured servants, who kiss your hand.

Signed for the Serra Agricultural Company
JUAN COSTELLO
The Director

Confirmed by: SEÑORA BETTY

It meant, in short, that the farming company supplied the land and I put up the seed and the supervision. The costs of production were to be paid from the income and the remaining money divided equally between the company and me. In a rash moment, I unwisely agreed to add my tractor and implements to the company's general machinery pool and accept for the use of it a credit on my account—the equivalent to renting it out, but without the privilege of not renting. It was a fair enough contract for us both.

Costello signed the contract in his illegible scrawl and I signed below in what I fondly think of as readable script.

Costello frowned at me through his cigarette smoke, and I could see he was trying to think how to tell me something. I waited until he spoke.

"I know you are enthusiastic about this venture, but don't be disappointed if it fails."

"Why should it fail?" I asked.

"Morocco is too tough for a woman—you won't last long down there—the heat, the boredom, the apathy of the people and the hard work. You won't like it compared to life in Madrid."

I drew in a breath. "Boredom is all in the mind," I told him gaily. "As for the heat, it can never get hot enough for me. The hard work? I look forward to it! And people reflect whatever treatment they get, don't they? I'll last in Morocco all right. If I leave, it will be because I am asked to leave."

"Asked to leave?" Costello widened his eyes in surprise. "That is not likely."

Neither of us said anything more on that subject, but later I was to remember that little exchange.

I picked up my contract and went home to the apartment on the eighth floor and put some blue jeans and shirts into a suitcase to take to Morocco.

6

RICARDO, MY HUSBAND, viewed all these maneuvers to move out of his life for a spring and summer with mixed feelings. His emotions as far as women are concerned have always been very Spanish; that is, he believes woman's place is in the home. He was raised to believe this and it would be difficult for him to change now. So he would have preferred me to stay quietly in the apartment and occupy myself with the running of his household and the raising of his children—it was not easy for him to be enthusiastic about my outside activity.

I suppose we can say that he loved me in spite of these independent manifestations; not because of them. And at any moment, he would have been delighted, secretly, if the whole new project had collapsed on my head. If I had accused him openly of harboring this wish, he would have denied it loudly, pointing out that he had introduced me to Costello in the first place.

On the other hand, he really wanted me to be happy, in the most unselfish way; he was aware that I needed some more active outlet than our life in Madrid offered and so he consented to my new interest in Morocco. It was a subtle way of keeping me happy by letting me go.

Our sons were joyful at the thought of living a different life for several months. They would have welcomed any change that took them out of the apartment, but going to Morocco was something special.

"Will we shoot lions?" Ric, the oldest, asked, brandishing his Hopalong Cassidy revolver.

And I patiently explained, "We are going to *North* Africa, Ric, where there are no lions."

He looked crestfallen for a moment and then brightened again. "But we will see lots of camels!"

As for myself, I was terribly torn between staying on in my routine housewife duties, thus probably doing a better job for my husband and sons, and going into this new project in Morocco—a challenge to all the powers I possessed. What finally decided me was the realization that even if I remained in Madrid, where my actual duty lay, I was only going to bore my husband and our sons to death with my constant yearnings for something more active and challenging.

In all our years of marriage, Ricardo and I had never been separated for more than ten days or two weeks at the most and this separation would be very strange. We arranged that whenever Ricardo's work permitted, he should fly to Tangier and spend a few days with us, and whenever my work permitted, I would return to Madrid to be with him. So, as always happens to us when we part for however short or long a time, we became a little sentimental; lumps came in our throats and the suggestion of tears to our eyes. I set out on the new adventure without thinking of turning back, but we already looked forward to being together again.

Pilar, my Spanish maid, agreed to go with us to Morocco. The year before she had been to America with me and the four boys and she had taken all its new wonders in stride. Now she was game to try Africa. She was fiercely loyal to our sons and devoted as much time to their well-being as I did, and I knew I could find no better assistant.

Emotionally, having Pilar around was like having a fifth

child, but when it came to work, nobody could equal her.

Pilar came to work for our family when she was only eighteen years old. She was a skinny, frightened little country girl who ducked if you shouted her name. Her eyes lit up enthusiastically when she saw the meals we ate. Our scandalized Spanish friends said that she would eat us into bankruptcy. But like people who work in a candy factory, she soon leveled off to a normal calorie intake. In the meantime, she got round and jolly and her nerves settled down; either from the proper nourishment or because they were deadened forever by a few weeks' contact with our noisy sons.

When you look at Pilar now, you are attracted by the sweeping black lashes that rival those of Elizabeth Taylor—I am told—and the big, dark eyes. Her black hair that once was straggly and unruly is clipped close to her head and looks chic in the French manner. When she is dressed for her Sunday afternoon outing, in a neat black suit and a simple string of pearls, or in a flowery, feminine dress, she could easily be mistaken for the lady of the house.

Pilar has learned to speak a quaint but understandable English and she runs our household as well as the highest paid Swiss housekeeper. She knows the names and telephone numbers of our friends all over the world and is just as much at ease placing a telephone call to Tokyo for Ricardo as she is ringing up the grocery store for another case of Pepsi-Cola. She mastered driving my car with no trouble at all, and though her mechanical knowledge is pretty hazy, she does have her driver's license. I suppose that makes her the only maid in all of Spain who has one.

In addition to her native dignity, Pilar has a sense of propriety that never deserts her. I left some guests in my apartment one afternoon while I took my sons on a picnic. They wanted beer, but could find no bottle opener, so they rang

for Pilar. She drew herself up in a most dignified manner and answered, "Señores, I regret that the bottle opener has gone to the country for this afternoon."

Those friends still carry on about my bottle opener that spent an afternoon in the country.

Also, Pilar has a strong spirit of adventure. Whatever lay ahead of us in Spanish Morocco, we were going to need Pilar.

7

MOROCCO IS A STRIP of territory in the northwestern corner of North Africa roughly as large as California.

It was split up into three zones in rather a haphazard way.

Through Conventions set up in the Twenties by England, France and Spain, and later agreed to by the other interested European countries, a chunk of land about 150 miles square was designated as an International Zone. The town of Tangier occupies a good part of this former zone and is the only important center of population.

The rest of the territory of Morocco was divided, as protectorates, between France and Spain in some treaty that those two countries got up between them as far back as 1912. They can both give you all kinds of reasons to explain why they had a right to do this. The Spaniards would say, "The French took all the good part of Morocco and left us with only the poor part."

The French used to shrug their shoulders, look a bit smug, and say, "The division of Morocco followed the natural dictates. It is purely accidental that ours is the richer zone."

It is not on official record what the Moroccans had to say at the time. Now, of course, all three zones have been united in the independent nation of Morocco.

The French Zone had about 151,000 square miles and some 8,500,000 inhabitants, while the Spanish Zone had only 7,500 square miles and about 1,000,000 inhabitants. This is to say that France had ninety-five per cent of the land and eighty per

cent of the people. It would certainly seem that what the Spaniards said was true. Just to complicate the situation, we Americans never recognized what we called the "conquest of Morocco." The French and the Spanish called it the "liberation of Morocco"; although the villains from whom they liberated the Moroccans seem to have been the Moroccans themselves.

However, for my purposes, I had to recognize the conquest-liberation of Morocco and had to acknowledge that there was a French-Spanish frontier across Morocco. The Serra farm, where I was to plant my hybrid corn, begins about fifty-three miles from Tangier at a town called Larache and borders the Lukus (or Lucus or Lukhos) River for thirteen miles, ending very near the French Moroccan border.

The name Lukus is left over from the days when there was a Roman colony, Lixus, near the present site of Larache at the mouth of the Lukus River, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

I flew to Tangier, early that spring, in March, together with the four sons, the Spanish maid, luggage enough to see us through the summer, and many a high hope. At almost the same time the tractor and corn seeds arrived, by boat, and vanished into the Tangier Customs shed in an impressive entanglement of red tape.

Tangier was not new ground to me and my two oldest sons. Ricardo and I had lived there for almost a year after Emile, our second son, was born. Also I knew French Morocco, because Ricardo and I had once lived in Casablanca for six or eight months. But the Spanish Morocco that lies between Casablanca and Tangier was unknown territory to me, and somewhere in that unfamiliar terrain lay the fields of the Serra, as we called the farm.

My first errand in Tangier was to find some sort of auto-

mobile to use on the farm. In Spanish Morocco, as well as in Spain, there was a tax of 150 per cent on any car purchased. While in Tangier, in contrast, one could buy almost any make of car and pay no more than the normal tax. Naturally, it was to my advantage to find the needed farm vehicle in Tangier, and added to this advantage was the fact that I would also be able to license the car there, since I had once resided in Tangier.

I knew exactly what I wanted, a war-surplus jeep with no frills or accessories. Any car I purchased would have to be paid for by me, and out of the profits of my future corn crop; this I had insisted upon doing in discussing the matter with Ricardo.

So I was determined to find a secondhand car, and the sturdiest and cheapest to be had.

This I explained firmly to the first car salesman I met, and by the time he was through with me, several hours later, I was the bewildered owner of a handsome, brightly new Ford station wagon for which I had paid only twice as much as I had said was every cent I could afford to pay. When I drove it out of his garage I was still protesting plaintively: "But this isn't what I need . . . please . . . "

The loudly voiced disappointment of my sons only made me feel worse. "Aw, this doesn't even *look* like a jeep!"

Still, it was a handsome vehicle, and was to become famous on the Serra as *La Rubia*—The Blonde.

A quick drive around Tangier helped erase this disappointment. Ric and Emile remembered a great deal about the North African city, or pretended to, but to the two younger boys, and to Pilar, Tangier, which was to become so familiar to them, opened up a strange and colorful new world—the world of Africa.

Costello materialized in Larache when I arrived in its

main street with my new Ford filled with children. His intention was to ease me into the Serra with as little stir as possible; a woman farmer is not an everyday sight in Morocco. He installed us all as guests in his own home, at the end of the main street in Larache, with a view of the Atlantic Ocean and of the fishing boats coming in and out of the harbor, and after lunch, over coffee in the living room, he and I began to discuss the details of our contract and my more permanent living quarters.

We had no trouble confirming the details of our contract, but there was a disagreement between us over what constituted appropriate living quarters. I had four or five days to wait for the delivery of the corn seed from the Customs in Tangier and these days I planned to devote to fixing up a house for myself on the farm.

When I brought up this subject, Costello wet his lips nervously and said, "There are many nice apartments here in Larache. I'll have someone from the office take you around to look at them this afternoon."

I looked out at Costello's magnificent view of the harbor, and I could understand why Costello thought I should live in Larache, but I had come to Morocco to farm, not to admire the view.

As kindly as I could, I told him, "Thank you about the apartment, but I have planned to live right out on the farm. Larache is a good seven miles from where I shall be working," I reminded him, "and I can do so much more if I am as near as possible to the work."

Costello set down his coffee cup with a crash. "None of my managers lives on the farm. It is not the thing to do. They live here in the town and drive out to the farm every morning to attend to the work."

A thought of the loneliness I was bound to experience so

far out in the country came to me, but I knew there was no efficient way to manage a crop from a long distance.

"I plan to live on the farm," I repeated, as if he had not heard me the first time.

"But Spaniards don't do it that way," he exploded. "The managers live in the town—the laborers are living on the farm."

He hesitated a moment and I knew why. He was thinking that besides being contrary to custom for the managers to live on the farm, it was contrary to Spanish custom for any woman to live alone in the country. He had been determined from the start not to treat me any differently because I was a woman and now, so soon, he was forced into saying, "You are a woman. A woman cannot live out there alone. It is against our custom. There is also a certain amount of danger from the Arabs, you know. How can we tell if they will receive your presence amiably or if they will resent you as an intruder and perhaps do something unpleasant?"

"I am not a Spanish woman. It does not matter to me how the Spanish do it. I'm American and if we are going to farm, we live on our farms. It's as simple as that. The Arabs can be made to understand, I am sure."

We sat facing each other in a chilly silence, sipping our coffee grimly and ignoring the lovely view. We were two strong wills waiting it out, but in the silence I could feel Costello's defeat.

After the coffee, I borrowed Costello's jeep and joggled out to the Serra farm to see if I could find some sort of house. The Serra is some twenty thousand acres altogether. In order to facilitate the working of the land, it is divided into five large sections: Adir Bajo, Adir Alto, Palafito, Nemsah and Meruan. These last two are old Arab names, as is the word "Adir." *Bajo* means "low" in Spanish and *alto* means "high"—Low Adir and High Adir. "Palafito" is a kind of "little palace." On each of

these five areas there is a center of population, a *cortijo* which goes by the same name as the section.

I drove through these sections looking for something that would do for the months I would be spending on the Serra. Adir Bajo began almost at the mouth of the river Lukus.

To get down to Adir, at that time of year, one used the upper road that leads through the Palafito because the lower road was still deeply rutted from the winter rains. I was to take this trip almost every day through spring and summer, and always, coming up on the top of the rise which more or less separates the Palafito from the Adir lands, I would stop the car and wait there, overcome by the beauty of the great Lukus Valley spread at my feet. It is a spot where I should like to build a house some day, and I dreamed of it every time I stopped the car there, for from the windows of such a dream house one could look back on the civilized vistas of the Palafito orange groves with the main road running through their shining green, and forward and down over the seeming endlessness of the great Mehasen Valley, following the curves of the river Lukus across to the mountains looming hazily blue.

The hugeness of the valley, and of my own temerity in planning to put some of its vastness into cultivation, held me on that spot for many spellbound moments. The view would continue to do so, and it would work magic on my sons as well. If they were along, they would sit quietly, lost in admiration.

I joggled on down into Adir Bajo. It was lowland and there was a fair number of trees along the banks of the Lukus. However, it was too far from the parcels of land I would be planting. I imagined that it would be very hot in midsummer and that there would be malarial mosquitoes in the swamps.

I drove on, into Adir Alto. This valley settlement was the working headquarters of the Serra farm; the business offices

were in Larache. All the main farm buildings were located in Adir Alto and I looked with interest at the machine shops, carpenter shops, blacksmith shop, stables and warehouses. These were to be my workshops; Adir Alto my headquarters.

In the center of the establishment was a great, barren, sun-baked dirt square, which I was to learn was known as "the patio." Patio was a whimsical name to give this hideous square, wedged in between the Adir school, the head offices of the farm and two cavernous stables—one empty and the other crowded with horses and flies. It was in this patio that the men of the Serra gathered in their idle moments for rest and "relaxation," and I saw several squatting there this afternoon, and was shocked by their apathy, and dejection. But what was there for them to do, once their work was done that wrung for them their right to exist, save to lean back against the wall, ill-nourished and bored and without hope, with nothing more to look forward to than the next day's work? There was nothing to interest them, no other place for them to go. So they sat on the hot dusty earth in the sun, enlivening the monotony with an occasional quarrel, but even that sounded dejected and hardly worth while.

And the land around Adir Alto was equally depressing, for although its soil was the best river bottom and the best on the Serra farm and most of my *parcelas* of land would fall within its section, still the area was drab and absolutely treeless.

No, I would not live in Adir Alto.

My memory of the dejected men sitting in the patio continued to depress me as I drove back to the Palafito where life seemed brighter. This section of the Serra is of a rich, reddish sandy soil that, given water, will grow anything. The populated part of the Palafito had been turned into a garden of Moroccan flowers and lawns, set into the center

of forty-five thousand orange trees. I inquired about houses but there was only one huge mansion which the former owners of the Serra—members of the Rothschild family—had built for themselves. It was empty but it was pretentious and not for me.

I drove farther across the valley, to Nemsah, the fourth section of the Serra. This section of the farm has an entrance of its own off the main road from Larache to French Morocco, a mile length of sandy track lined with gigantic eucalyptus trees.

Nemsah gets its name from the little village of mud-walled, grass-roofed houses which the Arabs established on that spot many years ago and which is still there; the Arabs retaining title to these villages in the manner of our Indian reservations.

The soil of Nemsah is an extension of the Palafito soil—sandy-red. But someone took the trouble to plant hundreds of eucalyptus trees there many years ago and a large pond has been made, surrounded by willows; adding to these another few thousand orange, lemon and grapefruit trees, it makes a cool spot in which to be on a hot summer day. Without bothering to look at Meruan, the remaining section, which was still farther along, I decided to live in Nemsah. Nemsah was almost as far away as I could get from the town of Larache and the rest of the farm managers and their families.

I did not want to be social; I was in Morocco to work. I knew I could do a better farming job by living close to my work. And the Nemsah *cortijo* had quite a colony of Spanish laborers living in its buildings with their wives and children. My sons would certainly find many new playmates here and Pilar would have friends. I would be kept too busy to worry about being lonesome.

As it happened, there was an empty house in Nemsah. At the very end of the tree-lined entrance was a long building

in the shape of an L, with a house set a little apart facing the foot of the L. The instant I saw it I knew that house was right for our needs. It was a compact little whitewashed villa, almost square, with bright blue window frames. The L itself was made up of stables, warehouses and the Nemsah administration offices, with several dwellings interspersed in which lived some of the Spaniards who worked on the farm, and their families.

The house even had a miniature garden, and without bothering to look at the inside I made up my mind to ask Costello if I could have it.

Back in Larache, Costello wistfully mentioned again the apartment-in-Larache idea, but the shock of my living in the country had worn off and he agreed guardedly to my having the empty house in Nemsah.

I wondered if he were beginning to regret having offered me the use of his land, but I was sure I had chosen the right living quarters and sure that Costello would agree when he saw me installed there.

8

THAT FIRST WEEK at the Serra we followed the same routine every day. Just after daybreak we would pack a substantial lunch, pile into the station wagon and leave the Costello house in Larache. I would deposit my four sons and Pilar in the Nemsah house and drive down to Adir Alto alone to get under way the preliminary work of planting the hybrid corn; the preparation of the ground, the conditioning of the machinery and the choosing of the laborers.

When these tasks allowed, I would dash back to Nemsah and help Pilar in getting the house in shape so that we could start housekeeping in it. Living with four children in the Costello house in Larache was a big imposition on Señor Costello and I was anxious to have a place of my own.

As I had known she would, Pilar fitted into our odd new life on the farm as naturally as she had fitted into apartment life in Madrid and adjusted to America.

The planting activities I was starting, especially on such a large scale, baffled her completely, but she was as willing as the boys to help carry out the rest of our Moroccan adventure.

First there was the garden, very tiny, but with several fine orange trees and some small squares of the coarse, spreading plant we call Bermuda grass. When the orange trees were in blossom, the most heavenly scent hung over all Nemsah. The garden was walled in on all four sides, with a barred gate

that sealed us off from the rest of the Nemsah *cortijo.* One of the first things I did was to take the lock off the gate and prop it open. Nobody else living in Nemsah had gates and I hoped by doing this I would be more promptly accepted as a real member of the *cortijo.*

My open-gate policy in Nemsah brought in many more children than I had realized lived in the dwellings scattered among the Nemsah *cortijo* buildings. Their number rose from the cautious three or four who appeared to play with my sons in those first days, to an incautious, constant baker's dozen. "*La Banda,*" they called themselves.

Each morning when we arrived from Larache my four sons scattered like leaves to play with these new friends, and they returned only at lunchtime, and again in the evening. We would drive back, late at night, to Costello's house.

Much time was being wasted, driving to and fro, and I needed my days free for the land. We redoubled our efforts to get the Nemsah place in order.

Remaking the garden was easy, as I had known it would be. Several of the Spaniards who worked in the Nemsah citrus groves pruned the neglected orange trees for me and we added some fertilizer to the soil. Little by little, during the spring and later, we extended the green patches of grass until they covered the whole garden. To help the grass along, I sent for a plastic hose—it was green and shiny—the first of its kind to be seen on the farm. A marvel. The young Arab laborers fought for the right to water the struggling grass each evening. I felt like Tom Sawyer, getting that fence whitewashed. I placed several large, crude pottery pots, filled with geraniums, along the garden wall, painted the pots bright blues, reds, greens and yellows and, last of all, whitewashed the wall. When the geraniums grew up so that they cascaded down from their colored pots against the white wall, the garden

could pass the most critical inspection it would ever have to stand in Morocco.

The house presented a much harder problem. Although it was a charming, tall, white and blue-trim villa that rose to the height of most two-story houses, the rooms inside were not proportionately large. On the contrary, they were all on one floor and squeezed together and small, and went straight up in the air, like chimneys. If you wanted any sensation of spaciousness, you had to look up at the ceilings; as soon as you looked at the four walls, you felt closed in. My only intention was to make it reasonably inhabitable with the minimum of comfort, but nothing can ever be so simple in Morocco. Before many days had passed, I found myself involved in a great tangle of carpenters, painters, masons, plumbers, and several men whose contribution to good living still remains a mystery.

Before our advent, the house had been lived in by a succession of bachelors. Now, at best, bachelors anywhere in the world are seldom the neatest housekeepers, but bachelor farmers in Morocco evidently fall somewhere between magpies and pack rats. It took two whole days just to scoop the filth up off the tile floors and scrape the grease-covered walls reasonably clean. One of the bachelors had been the Serra Company's veterinarian and we kept coming across jars containing desiccated animal stomachs, diseased kidneys, and an occasional hairy ear. Another of the occupants had kept statistics on rainfall and crop production. There were piles and piles of papers filled with his fine, inky scrawl. I wondered why he had bothered and then left it all behind.

Then there was the matter of the tall, narrow, chimney-shaped rooms. I had a theory that if these rooms were laid down on their sides, we would all be more comfortable. Still, as Pilar pointed out cheerfully, they could have been even

smaller and we had to be resigned. As soon as she and I would finish scraping out a room, the painters would move in.

In Morocco, painting is not achieved just by a man with a can of paint and a brush or a roller. Dear, no. In the first place, we have nothing as practical as a can of paint. We have, instead, pots of colored powder, cans of oil, jars of turpentine, sticks with which to mix it all together, and more cans to mix it all into. Besides the master painter, there is always one painter of lesser category who does what the master tells him, and a boy of no category at all to do what the lesser painter tells him. When these and their equipment were fitted into one of the small rooms, you would not be exaggerating to describe the result as crowded.

Then there was the matter of what color to paint the walls. The usual practice in Morocco is to decide you want your interior blue or you want your interior green and paint the entire house that color. I thought I might like each room different and, to make matters worse, in some rooms I wanted two walls of one color and two walls of another. We took a practice swing in what was to be my sons' bedroom. I felt that if I had a clean dry place in which to park the four tired little bodies at night, they could fend for themselves outside during the day and we could move from the Costello house in Larache very soon. Since at the end of the day, Pilar and I were so tired that we could have slept standing up and leaning against a wall anywhere, there was no great hurry about our bedrooms.

So we started in the sons' room. I explained to the master painter that I wanted two walls painted maroon and the other two painted a dead-white. This painter had the usual dark Spanish face, liberally sprinkled with paint from his last week's job. He was horrified. Did I realize how odd such a room would look?

"Yes," I told him, I realized everything, but that was the way we did it in the United States and I had a yearning to do it here in my sons' bedroom.

"In any case," he said, "I don't have any of this maroon powder with me."

I was not so easily defeated.

"Suppose you begin on the white walls then," I suggested, "and we can send your errand boy down to Adir Alto for the maroon powder."

He gave up and painted the walls my way, but he brought in a succession of amused friends who remarked to a man that they had never seen anything quite so funny.

When the room was finally finished, my sons had only inhabited it a week or two before one of them wrote some very rude words in Spanish on the wall up almost at the ceiling. It was the sort of thing that called for dire punishment, but first I had to find out who had done it. In a family of four boys, morale collapses if the wrong boy is punished. I conducted several halfhearted interrogations to determine who was responsible and who must remove the writing, but with the corn to plant, I never got around to establishing the guilt, so the rude words stayed up there.

About this same time, Ric nailed up on another wall one of those half-naked harem cartoons that he had cut out of *Esquire* magazine. Before removing the naked cartoon, I felt I should explain carefully to Ric why I was doing it so as not to injure his feelings. Ric and the cartoon and I never got together at the right moment, so the cartoon stayed tacked on the wall.

It was my intention to hang some quaint old English animal prints on the walls, fill the bookcase with good children's books, and drape the huge windows with voluptuous white cotton curtains. As I never undid my sons' handiwork nor

added more than the skeleton furniture—bunk beds, table and chairs—casual sightseers who thrust their heads in through the doorway to take a peek at "how little American boys lived in Africa," were apt to get quite a jolt; like having a glimpse into the dormitory of an avant-garde seminary for precocious kids.

I had better luck with the living room. It, too, was small and went straight up. I never got to paint the living room in two tones, as I planned, because the painters beat me to it one morning and painted it all light green. There was a stopped-up fireplace in this room and I did get it unplugged and the bricks painted a dull red. We did the woodwork a pale gray because that was the only color of oil paint we had for woodwork. On the floor there were large alternating black and white tiles; easy to keep clean and always cool in the summer.

To this room I added two studio couches upholstered in black, crudely woven-by-hand Arab woolen material. I placed on a square black corner table the largest-sized Arab oil pot I could find, painted white and transformed into a lamp. That was all the furniture I ever put in the living room, except a scattering of *stormias*, the charming little ottomans the Arabs fashion by weaving dried reed around and around. They were easy to shove any place in the room and took care of surplus sitters. I decorated one wall with a row of bright Matisse prints in stark black frames and I was ready to receive.

That was the room we really lived in, although there were several other rooms in the house—my bedroom, Pilar's room, a kitchen, a dining room, and one bathroom that we all shared, and not only among ourselves, it would develop. I was not interested in decorating my dining room in a grand manner, eating as I did in front of the living-room fireplace most of the time, and my sons, eating as they did, at the little round

table in their bedroom. However, I sent to Tangier for a long pine table and benches and with some massive brass candlesticks in the center of the table, the room did look attractive. Later on, at the Arab market, I bought a large brass tray to hang on the wall and to use when we had guests for tea.

I had decided not to bother much about my bedroom and then I met the company carpenter. He had two or three old, dog-eared homemaker magazines and he explained to me how he was longing to "make something modern." His name was Vicente.

"Well, Vicente," I said, "let us do something daring with my bedroom."

Never had he been faced with constructing a modern headboard for a bed, but he set to work nobly and his result was fine—shelf for books and radio, space for a reading lamp, little drawers for belts and scarves, and an outjutting shelf for the clock and a morning cup of coffee. It was made out of pine boards with split-cane trimming all around the edges.

Emile, my second son, appointed himself to assist Vicente in the bedroom. I came in for lunch one day and heard so much banging in there that I paused in the hallway.

Emile appeared in the doorway like a flash, his blond hair hanging over his brow, waving a big hammer. He said, quite breathless, "Please don't come in your bedroom. This is to be a surprise for you."

No doubt about it, it was a surprise. That evening when I returned, I found that Emile had nailed a fancy flounce of imitation leopard-skin plastic all around the edge of my bed. The surprise was that he had also nailed down the sheets all the way around. I had no trouble with my sheets pulling out, at least not that night.

With an eye to the preservation of my beauty, Vicente made me a dressing table. It was a tiny wooden triangle, fit-

ting into a corner of my room. We put a plastic skirt around it to the floor, painted the top red, and placed an Arab ottoman before it. I saw myself seated on the ottoman every night, brushing my hair a hundred strokes and keeping beautiful. But we never did get around to putting up a mirror, so how could I brush my hair properly?

We put up a few more Matisse prints in black frames, added another reed ottoman, and that was all.

Our Nemsah house was as complete as it would ever be. We drove from Costello's house for the last time, and moved in.

9

I WAS TOO BUSY with farm duties by this time to properly "staff" our new home. Anyway, that was not necessary, because the house staffed itself. It seemed to me that every time I came home from the fields, we had a new helper of some kind, usually a volunteer.

Everyone we met on the Serra, Arab or Spanish, seemed interested in us and our novel household. My farm attire seemed to fascinate them more than anything else. At first the men and women stared like curious children at the slacks or blue jeans I wore, but as the days went by and they never saw me dressed in anything else, they stopped staring and seemed to take my mode of dress for granted. With the passing of even more time, the young Spanish girls took to wearing my cast-off slacks, and their families accepted this as being perfectly all right "because the Señora Betty wears them."

I chose Spanish girls to help Pilar with the housework because they were company for Pilar and because so few of the Arab women spoke Spanish that it was difficult to transmit orders to them; it had to be by sign language.

Our first was the teen-aged daughter of one of the Spanish citrus-grove laborers. It was her job to swab down the tile floors each day, make the beds, help prepare the vegetables for the meals and do the dishes. Pilar took care of the washing and the ironing and doubled as a cook.

We had various young Spanish girls during the time we

were at Nemsah. I was surprised to learn that these girls looked upon me only as the mistress of the house and treated me exactly as they would their own mothers or any other housewife for whom they worked. They showed no curiosity at all about the work I was doing on the farm; I cannot remember that any one of them ever came to see me drive a tractor or do field work. It was as though the me who worked on the farm were another person, not connected in any way with the woman of the house for whom they worked in Nemsah, and therefore of no concern to them.

The other Spanish-speaking households around us who could afford extra service hired the Arab women. They came up from the *kabila* early in the morning, bare feet padding on the sandy road, totally wrapped up in their white haiks and carefully veiled for their passage along a public highway. Once inside the house where they would be working, they unwound the haik, like taking a bandage from a finger, unpinned the little veil that covers all the face except the eyes, and worked clad only in the *sarooal*—the baggy pants—and a long-sleeved blouse.

In the business of the veil, Morocco, and indeed all of North Africa, was in a period of transition. Members of the Nationalist parties were exhorting all the Arab women to throw away their veils forever. The Nationalists felt that to discard the veil would be a big morale booster for freedom. The Arab household heads, who determined what their women would do, had two attitudes about it; they liked to see other Arab women unveil as a proclamation of freedom, but they preferred to keep their own close relatives veiled because it was more modest.

The women themselves were allowed little choice in the matter; they did what they were told. I think that the young girls adapted easily to going about unveiled, but the older

women felt very "undressed" without the veil. They felt as undressed, really, as we would feel going into the street naked to the waist.

So, most of the Arab women one saw in public places, along the road, in town, were veiled, but inside their own homes or inside the homes where they worked, they unveiled for convenience. The women who labored in the fields were also unveiled, considering the field their "home" for the time being. But if their passage back to the *kabila* took them along a public road, they usually pinned up the veil.

I left the organizing of our kitchen pretty much up to Pilar because one of the things I know the least about in the world is how to fix food.

I am saved from complete disgrace in the eyes of my ravenous family by appreciating good food so that I take the trouble of collecting fine recipes wherever I go and combine them with the usual American standbys. We had in Nemsah a wide choice of fruits, vegetables and staples and that, combined with Pilar's bounding enthusiasm, produced interesting fare.

Our stove was a wood-coal burner; coal came on a truck from Larache and the wood was eucalyptus from a grove planted especially for this purpose. Some of the other Nemsah households had this same arrangement, but the majority of them cooked complacently on those little charcoal grills that are all the rage in America.

My brother-in-law had remarked on one of my trips home: "Betty, you should take back one of these new charcoal grills. You'd enjoy broiling meat on it."

"Young man," I told him, "I spent months of my life in Casablanca with no other stove except one of those cursed toys."

Well, we did have that normal-type stove in our Nemsah kitchen, also running water, an icebox and sunshine. I, for one, do not ask for much more in a kitchen.

For our everyday meals I found the true Moroccan cooking a little too heavy, as all their dishes are planned around the couscous made from coarse wheat flour, large quantities of crude olive oil and strong, unsalted butter, liberally seasoned with salt, pepper and hot spices. For that reason Pilar prepared our daily food in the Spanish and Nemsah style, and the more elaborate Arab dishes were for guests.

All four of my sons had accepted their new life without a question and with no regrets for the confining apartment in Madrid. In Madrid they had worn gray flannel trousers, white shirts and navy flannel or corduroy jackets all the time. At Nemsah they lived in blue jeans, or cotton shorts on the hottest days, and polo shirts that needed no ironing. They had canvas tennis shoes, but as often as not they went barefoot.

They each had certain duties. To try to keep some order among them, I had them help with the garden and the outdoor work, and each had a special daily chore; one had to fill the coal scuttle, one to bring in wood for the fireplace, another emptied the garbage. When they were finished they were free to play with the other Nemsah children. As children often do with those they love, they took advantage of Pilar.

My sons meant to do their chores well, but the oldest was only eight so they did need some more adult supervision. For this, I turned to the younger Arab men who were employed as day laborers. "Adult" is not really a term to tag them with, being, as they were, all in their late teens, with the mentalities of children. They did eight hours of work for the Serra Company each day for about twenty-four cents a day. When they finished they would drift into my garden to help

out. They emptied the garbage when my sons forgot and watered the grass with the green plastic hose. When there was whitewashing to be done, they did it. They cleaned the ashes out of the stove and carried in the extra-heavy logs to fill the wood basket in the living room.

They loved children and any time Pilar and I wanted to be away from the house, they acted enthusiastically as baby-sitters. They played with my sons' toys and leafed throught their picture books with childish glee. The Arab attitude toward children is that they should be allowed to do whatever they want and never be punished. This suited my sons fine, as you can imagine, and it was with great energy that they would set about tearing up their bedroom while being baby-sat by two or three wide-eyed Arabs.

None of these young Arabs had much schooling. Some had learned to read and write at the few government schools that dotted Spanish Morocco, but when they reached the age of seven or eight, they were usually put to work by their families. Arab children of the towns worked at weaving cloth or other handcrafts and those of the country labored in the fields for a wage or around their own homes, according to whether the family needed the money or the labor more. They had no prospect at all of ever improving their lot, and yet these were the men who would be governing Morocco when she was free. It seemed to me that years were being wasted.

At first these Arab boys eyed me with a natural suspicion—I was a kind of magic witch who might do bad things if I chose. But through little, humane services—treating their frequent hurts, making them an occasional sandwich, giving them a cigarette—they very soon began to trust me and it was then they volunteered all the extra help around the house in Nemsah. Because I was of a foreign race, they could excuse

me the eccentricity of working on the farm and driving my own car and the tractors.

On my part, there was never any sensation at all of fear of these people; on the contrary it was a matter of trying to overcome their fear of me. Their reaction was one of either avoiding me completely out of fear, or else one of childish, idle curiosity about what I looked like and what I did all day and what I ate.

Later, as the older people, too, came to trust me, they showed mild surprise that I would take the trouble to do them any small favors. And after the surprise came a showing of gratitude—they could not do enough for me in return—and a greater sense of "protection" for me; protection against those Arabs who did not know me well and might invade my privacy out of curiosity or might not show me enough respect because I was only a woman.

The young Arabs came in and out of my house as if they were part of the family. They always knocked politely before entering, but they would have been astonished if anyone had said, "Do not come in." If they giggled too loudly when I was writing or reading, I could scold them as I did my own sons and they would not be offended. If I praised them for some work well done, they were proud.

And after I had been in Morocco a while and knew so many Arabs so well, they began to call me "The Little Mother"; little in the sense that I was not the real mother, but performed the same functions. Even from the first weeks, I could tell that both these Arabs and the Spaniards were going to accept me. It made my life so much easier; as if I were now a member of a team instead of an individual pulling against the rest of the team. Just the fact of my living on the farm instead of in Larache had given me a terrific psychological advantage; the laborers associated me more with them-

selves than with the managers of Larache. It was natural for them to think this way since I lived right next door and had about the same kind of daily routines as they did.

There was one unpleasant incident, a few days after we moved into the Nemsah house, when an Arab charwoman stole a matchbox filled with thumbtacks. The loss was nothing, but I knew an example must be made, and I told her to leave and not return.

She departed in a shamed silence and nothing else ever disappeared from that disorganized, never-locked house.

Right along with all this housekeeping in Nemsah, I had begun the actual farmwork. This necessitated getting acquainted with another confusion of new people and of reaching an accord with all of them, but I began eagerly, feeling as I did that I had support from all sides, both in the house and in the field.

10

THE CORN SEED came early in April, borne triumphantly in a Serra truck, having survived the mysterious rituals that go on in the Customs shed in Tangier.

Before we could actually put the seeds into the ground, it had to be decided what seeds went into which ground. This was a decision that Costello, as director of the farm company, his two original managers and I, his one new manager, had to make in unison. For this purpose, Costello called a first business meeting in the main office building of the Serra in Larache.

I went with many misgivings. As long as I was out in the country, confronting the new faces one at a time, I could keep a genuine nonchalance in my manner. But faced with these three men, bound to be critical of a woman moving into their sphere, I felt terribly embarrassed. My feet were all over the place. What should I do with my hands? How could I talk to them? Only with the most determined effort of will power did I get myself to the Serra office.

This building was in Larache, a sprawling, white, three-storied villa that sat overlooking the busy corner where the road comes up from Tangier. Inside were large rooms with high ceilings, drab mustard-colored walls and tile floors. Many people bustled about, filling in papers, adding up long columns of figures and putting everything away in file cabinets. I never knew exactly what all the figures meant, but I was

always telling Costello what a good, intelligent IBM machine would have done for his office.

On the second floor were more of the same offices and a large drafting room with new projects always on the boards and on the tile floor.

The third and last floor was occupied by a fascinating little radio room. Twice a day, you could hear wild clickings and dat-dat-dats coming from this room; it was the radio operator keeping in contact with a fishing fleet the Serra Company had somewhere off the Moroccan coast.

Costello had his private office at the end of the long hall downstairs. It was there that he presented me, this particular morning, to the other managers of the Serra. I was being designated "manager" for want of a more appropriate term. Costello was the controlling stockholder in this company, and for that reason he was also the active director-manager of the Serra, although, as I have said, he spent most of his time on the business affairs of the company in Madrid. To manage the farm itself, he had his brother-in-law, Arturo Urquijo, a huge, blond, Spanish teddybear, with snapping eyes and a comic mustache to which he clung stubbornly in the face of all female opposition. When he was nervous, he would pull his lips into a fine tight line so that only the mustache showed, and he would stroke his chin with one hand. He had never been outside of Spanish territory, consequently his knowledge of modern farming was limited, but he was devoted to the soil. Arturo—everyone called him by his first name instead of Urquijo—was so young and still had so much to learn that acting as his assistant and an expert in such crops as wheat and cotton there was a dark, dignified farmer from the south of Spain, called Marti.

And myself. I had farmed in the most modern country of all, so besides managing the corn crop, I was expected to place

at the disposal of the others whatever knowledge I had of modern American agricultural methods and equipment.

In short, Costello was the boss, Arturo was under Costello and over Marti and me, but we two were to have a free hand in those crops we knew best.

That first meeting was not only to look each other over, but to decide specifically in which parcels which crops were to be planted that spring. The wheat was already in, of course, some twenty-five hundred acres of it, but there remained to decide about the cotton, the rice, and my corn.

Facing Costello's giant-sized desk was a blackboard map of the farm that covered one whole wall of his office. It had all the sections marked and each *parcela* clearly numbered. A different color was designated to every crop. Corn, for instance, was yellow on the map; cotton, red. The *parcelas* allotted to a certain crop were striped in that color with chalk. Later, as the planting progressed, the *parcelas* were chalked solidly with their color. In this way, we could always tell at a glance what the actual work situation on the farm was; how much corn had already been planted and how much remained to plant.

Arturo was to occupy himself chiefly with the rice that year, Marti with the cotton, and I with my corn. Naturally, we all wanted the best *parcelas* possible. It made for some friction in the office that day. Costello, being "neutral," presided over our meeting.

It was hot and sticky and Costello had flung open the wide windows behind his desk. I could see a collection of Arab hovels near at hand and beyond them, an inviting glimpse of the harbor.

Costello was wetting his lips nervously. Arturo was hiding his lips under his mustache and pulling on his chin, and Marti

was sitting alone and motionless, like a dark saint. I was just sitting.

"Now, Betty," said Costello, "all these parcels in Adir Bajo are flat and well worked over and will be ideal corn land."

My embarrassment faded when Costello began talking. My feeling of awkwardness at being there dropped away and I was just one more farmer, seeking the very best place to plant the corn. I leaned forward in my chair.

"That land is too salty," I argued. "It has been too many years in rice. Thank you, but I wouldn't plant one grain of corn in Adir Bajo that I cared about seeing grow." I turned my eyes to the window and studied the view indifferently.

Marti and Arturo exchanged a startled look. (What I had said was true.) Adir Bajo had been planted into rice for so many consecutive seasons that logically the salt content had to be excessive for any crop except rice.

I set my face stubbornly and they could see I would not change my mind.

"Let us put it then to tomatoes and some rice again," ventured Marti in his gentle voice. "We do want the Señora Betty to be content with her *parcelas*." He smiled benignly at me.

I smiled carefully back at him.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Costello, taking a pencil from his desk and rolling it nervously between his fingers.

I got up from the chair, walked toward the big wall map and waved at Adir Alto. "All these Adir Alto *parcelas* are fine, just fine." I put my palm possessively over Adir Alto and turned my head toward the three men waiting around the desk. "If I could have my *parcelas* here, perhaps?"

I knew, of course, that there was no hope of getting all

this land for myself. It was the best soil in the company and both the other managers were clamoring for it, too. But sometimes if you ask for everything, you get at least a little of it, whereas if you ask for nothing, that is what you get—nothing.

"*Que no, hombre!*" Arturo leaped to his feet as if he had been shot. "No, that is not possible—not all the good land for one crop and an experimental one at that. Suppose she has a failure?"

"Compromise!" shouted Costello. "We shall work out a compromise—a little bit here, a little bit there." He was half-standing up behind his desk in the excitement, waggling the pencil first at Arturo, then at me.

"I don't care," I said. "None of that Adir Bajo is for me—I didn't fill it full of salt and I don't intend to suffer for it, thank you no—not even one parcel will I take." I was adamant.

Our meeting lasted all one day and part of the next morning, but with much shifting back and forth and bargaining, we reached an agreement that suited us all. I was assigned Parcel 31. It was in the Adir Bajo section but had never been cultivated before, so it could not be too affected by the rice planting in the rest of Adir Bajo. I was also assigned Parcels 412-422-432 in Adir Alto; magnificent land with which I expressed myself very happy. They threw in an annoying little parcel called "44" that had also never been cultivated. It had possibilities, admittedly, but it could also be a failure.

That was all the land I wanted to plant, but Arturo stuck a "condition" on those nice Adir Alto parcels. I could have them without further wrangling if I would agree to plant a parcel in the uncultivated, savage land on the other side of the river Lukus, known as the Mehasen.

"Or perhaps it would be too much work for the Señora?

Or too wild?" Arturo was baiting me carefully, keeping a poker face.

Part of the land in the Mehasen was held in concession by the Serra, but it had never been touched by machinery. The Arabs living there were hostile. They had scratched up the surface of the soil for hundreds of years and thrown in a little inbred seed. They thought of the land as theirs and they did not understand the concessions that their chiefs had made to the Spaniards. At that point there was no bridge over the river Lukus; I would have to take a boat across or swim a horse over or drive miles around the head of the river. Too much work? Too wild? Arturo was waiting for me to refuse. It would mean he could then think of me as a mere woman; that there were certain jobs I could not undertake and that he would. He was wanting me to refuse, I could feel it and I could not give him that advantage. I agreed to plant corn in a parcel of the Mehasen land.

I set to work right away to get my land into condition for planting and one of the very first things I did was to test a soil sample of each of my parcels to see what it lacked for growing fine corn.

While in the States, I had visited the laboratory in Maryland which is, in a large part, responsible for the popular development of effective soil testing. I had spent two days there with one of the professors learning to make the tests myself on various types of soil and learning to correct the few things that could go wrong in testing.

I had bought a complete soil-testing outfit for the Serra Company and I was full of enthusiasm for testing all the *parcelas* of the Serra to find out of what they were really composed and what they really needed added to them to insure better crops. This was a revolutionary innovation in Morocco, soil testing never having been practiced there be-

fore. The possibilities that soil testing opened up and the time it saved were incalculable. But, as with all new things, there were few men who could envision the advantages. The Serra chemist consented, grudgingly, to learn how to make the tests, but none of the managers was very convinced.

However, not long after, I arrived at the weekly managers' meeting in Costello's office, half-carrying, half-dragging the heavy soil-testing outfit in both hands. I left the case on the floor just inside the door and went over to Costello's desk, where Marti and Arturo were already waiting. They stepped aside patiently to see what I had to say this time.

I said it quite briefly, fishing some odds and ends of paper from my jacket pocket and referring to them frequently. "All of the Adir Bajo land is salty. You can read it here in the results of the soil-sample tests. There is too high a salt content for anything except rice. Even Parcel 31, that I am to plant, has a high salt content although it has never been planted in rice. There must be a waste water drainage into it from the other *parcelas*. Look."

I spread my pieces of paper out on the desk and the three closed in over them to look at the soil-test results and examine them in a studious silence.

Now Marti drew back from the desk and pronounced in his slow, grave voice, "The soil test is correct. It shows that Adir Bajo is very salty. This testing is a good idea."

The other two men broke into relaxed smiles. They, too, were discovering soil testing for themselves, all in a moment.

"Yes, yes," agreed Costello in his hearty way. "We shall test all the *parcelas*," waving his arms. "We shall have a new map which shows only the chemical content of the *parcelas*. We shall correct it each year." He loved maps. He reached over and pressed a button that brought in his

secretary. "Get the chemist for me and the topographer. You, Marti, explain this new idea to them."

I gathered up my dirty paper scraps from the desk, nodded good-by to everyone and started for the door, where I paused. "I'll keep Parcel 31 anyway," I said. "We can pile on the fertilizer and see what happens. I plan to start mixing the fertilizer formula today for all my *parcelas*."

"I'll be doing the same for my cotton," said Marti.

I closed the door behind me, but I left the soil-testing outfit on the floor where I had placed it. I knew it would be used now; it had found a home in Morocco.

11

To AID IN THE MANAGEMENT of the Serra, we had in the Larache office a sort of mechanized pool for allocating machinery and a labor pool for assigning the men on any particular job. This added to the efficiency of the farm system, but it had its flaws, at least in my eyes.

I found that out when my beautiful new tractor arrived from Tangier, complete with accessories. Because I had agreed to add it to the mechanized pool, Arturo pounced upon it as joyfully as a boy upon a new electric train. Should I want that tractor or the hydraulically controlled disk, I was told I might request it through the usual official channels. I was wistful about this. I had hoped to have that machinery at the exclusive disposal of my corn crop. But it was my own fault for agreeing so unthinkingly to put it in the mechanized pool.

"But that would be a flagrant example of favoritism," Costello told me kindly when I mentioned the matter to him. "It would set an undesirable precedent—everyone would want machinery permanently assigned."

I had to admit he was right, but I didn't like giving up that tractor. After all, its purchase in New York had sent me to Morocco in the first place.

With what I hope was better grace I prepared to meet the all-important foreman who would be allotted to me by the office labor pool. A foreman was selected to work on each special crop, and he would be claimed by that crop permanently. The number of laborers needed daily would be

decided between the crop manager and the foreman and formally requested each night in the farm office at Adir.

As Arturo was the general farm manager and knew the men, he wanted to choose my foreman himself and so he came by Nemsah one morning and picked me up in his jeep. We drove down to the Adir *cortijo* in silence and I waited in the patio beside Arturo's jeep while he went to fetch the foreman of his choice. I felt eyes upon me and tried not to appear anxious, but it was another of those acutely embarrassing times for me—this meeting a stranger with whom I would have to work so closely all season. I was sure that after I had known him a few days the feeling would wear itself out, and we would either be good friends or guarded acquaintances; but for these few bad moments I clasped my hands tightly behind my back and pretended to be examining the buildings that surrounded the patio.

The man who was to be my foreman came across the dirt patio at Arturo's side. He was walking slowly like the Andalusian he was, wearing an old felt hat pulled down over his eyes. He was so nervous that his hand was wet with perspiration when he offered it to me, and the knowledge that he was as apprehensive as I was put me more at ease with him.

He had kind brown eyes, crinkled in the corners from the sun and wind. "I am going to do everything you tell me, Señora," he said. "I know you do things different from how we do them in Spain, but I am ready to do what you say."

I was touched by his statement, blurted out with so much obvious difficulty. He was making a declaration of loyalty to me against all the criticism and opposition he would have to put up with through the year on my account: opposition from both directions, up from the labor and down from the management, because I was a woman and because I was a

foreigner doing the age-old operation of farming a different way. His name was Marrón—Antonio Marrón.

The *parcelas* of land assigned to me had all been winter plowed; that is to say, they had been plowed up the preceding fall by the big Caterpillar D6 tractors, pulling the great, round disk plows. All that remained for us to do this spring was to request one of the smaller tractors—the Caterpillar D4 would be best—and to disk the parcels in the opposite direction from the winter disking. This had to be done just before we were ready to begin spreading on the fertilizer and to plant.

We started in Parcel 31 and this was fairly simple because 31 is only a stone's throw from the Adir Alto *cortijo*, where all the machinery is stored, where the labor assembles and where the farm office is. We set the two D4s that were assigned to us at work in Parcel 31 and we went about mixing the formula for the fertilizer for that parcel and finishing the soil tests on the 400 parcels, the 44 parcel and the Mehasen land across the river.

Driving a tractor over the rough land was familiar work, but this vast expanse was not Maryland.

The first problem that Marrón and I tackled together was conditioning the land according to the soil tests. Parcel 31 was not only salty, but lacked the nitrogen that corn needs in abundance. Only several seasons of irrigating with fresh water could wash out the salt. On the other hand, the soil had an above-average nitrate content, so we had something in the corn's favor. We selected for Parcel 31 a fertilizer formula that contained percentages of superphosphate, potash and sulphate of ammonia.

We chose our first group of men from the labor pool and put them to work mixing this fertilizer by hand. The farm had no mixing machine to do this work. Up until that par-

ticular spring, the Spaniards had been used in supervisory capacities only and the Arabs, on a daily wage, had done all the actual physical labor, such as mixing fertilizer. However, the head office of the Serra was trying to cut expenses on the farm and it had been decided that starting this season we should use our salaried Spaniards for labor as much as we could. So, instead of seven Arabs earning twenty-four cents a day, we had seven Spaniards earning $1.16 daily. It made the account against the corn mount up, but we expected a better day's work from the Spaniard than we could ever ask from the Arab.

Morocco, as in so many other ways, was then going through a transition period between the old standard practice of hand labor for everything and the beginning of the use of more efficient machinery. It was the same type of labor revolution we Americans passed through some fifty years ago and about which I knew only from reading and talking to older people. It was rather a peculiar feeling to be caught up personally in such a change; rather like living something you knew only as a dream and being emotionally affected, to a degree one never is by a dream. Eventually, we hoped to pay larger wages to fewer men. In the meantime, we were hung up with too high a payroll and no machinery to speed our work.

The Spanish laborer I most relied upon was named Espejo —that means "mirror" in Spanish. He had wild dark eyes in an ugly, pockmarked face under a thatch of uncontrolled black hair. His body was thin and wasted, but he soon proved himself a loyal, tireless worker. Besides, he had a marvelous sense of humor and he could make any job into fun.

For this job of fertilizing and planting, I wanted Espejo more than any of the other available laborers. Arturo, however, disapproved strenuously of friendship developed between labor and management.

"Betty, you cannot allow yourself to be too friendly with these men," he would warn me, brushing at his big mustache. "You show them a smile and before you know it, they aren't doing the job any more."

"But, Arturo," I had protested, "they seem to make more of an effort and work harder when they like the person they work for."

"Just an illusion you let yourself fall into. Besides, if it is true, it won't last, it can't last," Arturo insisted. "Anyway, you are an American and that makes it different."

When Arturo could think of no other answer, he always fell back upon my being an American. In some mysterious way, that explained everything to him; even my good relations with labor. But to him, any improvement was a temporary situation that could not possibly last.

I knew how he felt and so I was careful to conceal my eagerness to have Espejo on my working team. Arturo and I fell into our usual exchange over which man would be best for this job. Arturo craftily brought up the name of Espejo first, watching for my reaction.

"Espejo?" I echoed vaguely. "He is kind of weak for lifting fertilizer sacks, no? Juan, on the other hand, is much stronger. What about giving me Juan and you keep Espejo for the rice? It is less strenuous work."

Arturo seemed satisfied that I was not too anxious to have Espejo and the next morning Espejo came trotting out at the head of my fertilizer group. We grinned at each other; he understood the little skirmish, as he hustled the men into the field.

Our company had mounted fertilizer-spreading attachments on the John Deere tractors, but that week they were all busy in the cotton so we set our seven Spaniards to spreading the fertilizer by hand. In this case, it worked out cheaper by

hand than with the tractors anyway; the relatively low wage against the consumption of high-priced gasoline. We spread the twenty-five-pound bags of fertilizer down one side of the *parcela*, the seven men lined up in a row, each with a sack of fertilizer slung over one shoulder. They strode across the parcel together and rhythmically tossed the fertilizer before them onto the ground. Enough fertilizer was carried in the sack to take them over and back. Parcel 31 was cut into narrow, two-and-a-half-acre lots, for easiest coverage by the men.

After the fertilizer was spread, the Caterpillar D4 passed over the parcel once more, dragging a disk to turn under the fertilizer, and behind the disk an improvised "roller" to smooth down the ground again. In the absence of the steel roller we use in the States, I used a thick, wide beam with rocks tied on top for weight. When this operation was completed, we would be ready to begin planting. Marrón and I left Espejo hopping around as a subforeman in charge of the disk-fertilizer, disk-roll operation in Parcel 31, and we two ranged out to prepare the Adir Alto parcels 412, 422, 432, and little 44.

One morning I rode Quimera down to the Adir Alto *parcelas* where I was to meet Marrón, Pepe, and the tractor crew. This was the day we were to start preparing that section of earth.

I would be gone all morning from Nemsah, so a flat leather pouch was strapped to my saddle in which was packed the thermos of coffee, a sandwich or two, and the comb and lipstick I usually forgot to use. It was a long ride down from Nemsah to Adir, but not a lonely one, because in almost every *parcela* there were men preparing the land for planting. As I passed on my horse, they would come to the edge of their *parcelas*, greet me and say how their work was going.

They would ask after my sons and I would ask after theirs. It was a nice ride; a luxury I could not often afford because on horseback it consumed so much time.

We could see each other, Marrón and I, from miles away as we both rode toward Adir Alto. He approached from the Adir *cortijo* on an old white mare that had already seen many years of service.

The land of Adir Alto is like that of our great midwestern wheat farms. It is a stretch of flat land that extends from the bank of the river Lukus over to the rising sandy soil of Nemsah and Palafito. It has been arbitrarily divided into great oblong chunks, lending itself to that division because of its flatness. It is crossed by four dirt roads that run over the land without the slightest turn or bend; the longest of these roads is at least five miles, the shortest three miles. No trees have ever been planted beside these miles of roads and this bareness leaves the roads more than ever susceptible to whatever the weather brings. During the rainy winter months, they are a clinging muck of sticky mud, and during the dry heat of midsummer, they are six inches deep in choking, chalky dust. But on this mild spring day, the entire plain of Adir Alto lay there under the morning sun like a great bolt of brown cloth with white ribbons pinned meticulously across it: the mud period long past, the dust yet to come.

Finally Marrón and I neared each other and came together at the head of one of the four roads: the one on to which all of our Adir Alto parcels faced. On both sides of the road and as far as we could see in all directions, the parcels stretched away from us, the warmish brown color of worked-up soil. It gave me a sudden feeling of solitude, of being as alone in the world as it is possible to be and yet, too, a feeling of being more surrounded than ever by the element

that is truly the most life-giving element of all—the earth, ready to produce.

I was seeing all this and feeling all this, but Marrón was not. He looked back over his shoulder at the long road to Adir *cortijo*. "Where do you think that Pepe is?" he asked peevishly.

"I don't see him yet," I replied. "But knowing Pepe, he will come galloping along any minute."

Yes, Pepe would arrive at a gallop. Pepe was always late and always galloping, whether coming or going. He prided himself on being the fastest mounted tractor chief. He reminded me of some people I have met in New York, on Madison Avenue.

Pepe was the chief of a group of five Caterpillar D4 tractors. Two of his tractors had been assigned to me for this preparatory work in the Adir Alto *parcelas* and we had made this rendezvous, now, to begin the work. Pepe's two Caterpillar D4s were already on the scene, having rumbled up the road before us from their shed behind the Adir *cortijo*. They squatted beside the road, puffing away like great idle monsters, ready for action. Pepe allowed himself to be late, but he did not grant his tractors the same privilege.

The Serra had thirty-five tractors in all. To administer them more efficiently, they were divided into groups of five; each five tractors having what we call a *jefe* or chief. It was the chief's duty each morning to get his tractors into the parcels to which they had been assigned the night before and keep them rolling all day long. In addition, he had to boss the five tractorists who were assigned to drive his tractors and the five assistants who alternated driving the tractors on the easy stretches, helped gas, grease and oil them and acted as general errand-boys. For the obvious reason that it was simpler that way, the tractor groupings were all of one model

—five John Deeres in one group, five Caterpillar D4s in another, five German Manns in another.

Way, way back, almost at the Adir *cortijo,* a tiny speck appeared—coming our way fast.

"That must be Pepe just leaving the *cortijo,*" I said, pointing out the speck to Marrón.

Marrón looked, grunted once sourly and turned his attention to the *parcelas.* He saw none of the vast beauty that I had been admiring. He saw only the many big lumps that should not have been there in the soil. He bent half out of his saddle, his face red with the effort, peering from under his old felt hat at the *parcelas* on the right of the road. They were ours—Numbers 412, 422 and 432.

"Oh terrible, terrible," he lamented. "This land was so badly treated last fall. Look at those great lumps. Do you think a disk has a chance of breaking up such lumps?"

"The disk will have to," I asserted. "This is the best land the company has, Marrón. We are lucky to have it. We must not complain."

"And have you seen that *maldito* Parcel 44 they've given you? They call that winter-plowed, do they?" he snorted in disgust. "I had to fight my way through the weeds. Just because it is stuck off in that far corner, they think we will take no notice."

"Those are only spring weeds," I assured him. "They will melt like snow under the D4 disks."

"Señora," complained Marrón, "the fault begins by your not having been here to lay an eye upon the winter plowing."

"You have reason to complain," I concluded. "I should have been here for the winter plowing—all these lumps." I kicked one. "Like boulders."

Marrón appeared satisfied with this self-accusation.

"We could begin without Pepe," Marrón suggested.

"Since the tractors are already here," and he pointed toward the side of the road where the two Caterpillar D4s were still idling.

"Okay, send them in, Marrón. There's no use wasting fuel and everybody's time."

Marrón stood up in his stirrups and made a wide come-on sweep with his arm in the direction of the two waiting tractors. The first tractor swung into Parcel 412. The Arab tractor-jockey stopped long enough to hop off and engage the disks and then he climbed back into his seat and rolled off, cutting his marker down the center of the *parcela* as he went. The second tractor turned into Parcel 422 and soon we could follow the progress of our two D4s by the widening strips of moist soil chewing into the dry brown crust of the *parcelas.*

There was a galloping of horses' hooves and Pepe reined in sharply between Marrón and me, enveloping us all in an unnecessary cloud of dust. He had arrived. We all dismounted together and one of the tractor assistants came running to take the reins of the three horses while we walked out to the tractors.

"You see," I pointed out to Marrón, "the lumps are breaking up well. On the second, cross pass, it will come out as fine as sand."

Marrón nodded glumly. As a matter of fact, it was not coming out as well as I said, but, on the other hand, it was not so bad as Marrón said, either. Pepe spoke in his boyish voice: "I don't know anything about soil, but this looks like the best land in the company. It looks good enough to eat. It appears to me not to need any fertilizer at all."

"It doesn't this year," I said, glancing at him, impressed by his burning enthusiasm, a trait that was rare in this lethargic country.

Pepe was only nineteen years old, with skin burned almost black and jet hair falling carelessly over a sunburned forehead. He wore the blue coveralls pulled in at the waist with a leather belt that was the tractor *jefe's* uniform on the Serra. He spoke Spanish and Arabic equally well and was well liked and admired by everyone. He had two interests, speed, and all things American.

Pepe was one of the new generation of Spaniards in their late teens born right on the Serra and he had grown up knowing the Arabs like brothers and speaking their language as well as they do. Machinery had never been any mystery to him either, working with it as he had all his life.

These youngsters were in contrast to the adult Spaniards the Serra had brought over from the mainland of Spain—men who had farmed all their lives with one mule on one hectare of land. They were mystified by the machinery and although they eventually learned to accept it as part of the new way of farming, they never stopped thinking in terms of the one mule and the one hectare. Theirs was not the generation that would modernize Morocco; for that I was sure we had to look to the Moroccan-born Spaniards, like Pepe.

The two foremen and I stood a long time in companionable satisfaction, watching the huge Caterpillars making their slow noisy way over the flat valley land with the rich ribbons of new-turned soil stretching in their wake. Then we walked side by side back to the horses we had left at the roadside.

"Someone hoist me up on Quimera."

The oversized bay mare was so large I could not mount without aid.

Pepe made a cradle with his hands for my foot. I was lifted into the air and as my head came above the saddle, I looked down the miles of bare road in the direction of Adir.

Off in the distance, a burro was approaching in unhurried leisure with a mound of a man on top.

I let myself drop to the ground again beside the towering Quimera. "You men go along without me," I said hastily. "I see a friend coming. I want to talk to him."

The men mounted, whirled and rode off; Pepe galloping impatiently out in front, Marrón following at his methodical pace.

The friend I had seen coming on the burro was Larbi. Larbi is an Arab, but first he is a gentleman. He has never done an incorrect action nor permitted one to be done in his presence. He is a wise man, too. If you have a problem and you bring it to Larbi, he will pronounce the solution. If it turns out the way it should, you can thank Larbi. If it turns out wrong, it is because Allah has willed it so—Larbi is not to blame. Against the will of Allah, even Larbi is impotent. *Insh'Allah!*

The first time I had met him, I had been out in the middle of a field in a hot, beating sun and I was trying in some Spanish words and a very few Arab ones to explain to an Arab why he should not hop off and on a tractor when it was in motion. There was a neat sign on the tractor, saying: "Do not dismount while the tractor is in motion." But the sign was in English and this was Africa. It posed a problem.

Larbi was driving in a parallel furrow. He was a member of Pepe's group. He stopped his tractor opposite us, climbed slowly down with much dignity and came over. He took my dirty hand most formally, bowed over it and said in good French: "Madame, these natives are completely uneducated. You forgive this boy, please. I shall attempt to make him see your point of view."

And he gave the tractor-hopper a spatter of guttural Arabic that kept him glued to his tractor seat thereafter, at least when I was around.

Now his burro came close and stopped of its own accord beside my Quimera. Larbi had a majestic yellow-orange turban wound around his head. He sat easily upon his burro, balanced cross-legged between the two *alforjas*—those big woven baskets that serve as saddle and pack to the Arabs—his feet tucked up under his haunches, his arms folded loosely on his chest.

"*Labess?*" he asked.

"*Labess alek*," I replied, raising my hand.

"It reached my ears that you were here and I came this road to pay my respects. I usually go the other road." He unfolded his arms to gesture toward the road that he usually took.

"The health of your husband?"

"Well, thank you."

"The health of your children?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And the health of yourself, dear Madame?"

He always called me "Madame." It was another of his little affectations—to show off his touch of French culture.

"Excellent," I replied.

"It makes me joyful." With these formalities taken care of, he relaxed. "Many things have befallen me since." he said.

By "since," Larbi meant since the last time we had spoken—he and I.

"Yes. Pepe told me how you deserted his tractor group without warning, leaving him with a sleeping tractor," I said reproachfully.

"Ah. But you know not why." He began to dismount his burro. In the same fluid motion with which he dismounted, he sank into a heap upon the warm dirt of the road. He felt around inside his cummerbund that was yellow to match the turban and produced his leather tobacco pouch and the pieces

of his pipe—a long, curved stem of carved wood and a delicate miniature clay bowl. He fitted them meticulously together and tamped in a pinch of tobacco. As he was applying the match, I said impatiently, "Come, come, man, tell me what has passed. What adventure did you have?"

He was in no hurry to begin. He was enjoying the suspense.

As he puffed on his pipe the strong smell of *kief* came to my nostrils. I moved closer and squatted down on my heels in front of Larbi. He demanded full attention from his audience.

"It was no thought of deserting my friend, Pepe, that took me away from the tractor. The time had come to visit the family. As you know, I am not an Arab of the Spanish Zone. I come, instead, from the *superior* French Zone."

I nodded. Larbi and his French airs.

He withdrew the pipe from his mouth and held it to one side at arm's length, studying the effect of the gray bowl cupped in his brown hand and the long stem curving over his wrist. He bent forward and continued, swiftly now, in a lowered voice.

"I made my way illegally through the border, traveling only at night, without water, without food."

"Oh, Larbi, it only takes fifteen minutes to get across the frontier—even I know that. Tell what happened after—what really happened."

"I arrived at the village of my French Zone Arab ancestors," he continued, as though I had not spoken, "and they were all dead."

"All dead? All of them?" incredulously.

"Every single relative of Larbi's was dead and there were all these treasures and wealth waiting for me."

"What treasures?"

"Well, a little money, anyway. Enough so that I came back to Alcazarquivir a wealthy man."

Alcazarquivir was the small, almost pure Arab town on the Spanish side of the border in which Larbi lived when he was not with us.

"Making your way through the border at night? Not eating? Not drinking?" I teased him.

"And once in Alcazarquivir, I said to myself: Larbi, why do you drive the tractor of Pepe when you are now a wealthy man? So I bought a fishing boat and a net. In the morning I wake up just as the sun dawns. I look at the sky. If it is to be a fine day, I mount my burro, come down to the river and put out my net. If it is not to be a fine day, I go back to sleep. Not like with the tractor—every day, every day—rain or sun—out on the tractor." He drew in on his pipe contentedly.

"Something also has befallen the Señora." I like to drop my surpises, too.

"Oh?" Larbi reflected stolen thunder.

"Yes, I am going to plant corn in the Mehasen."

Larbi's jaw dropped open, his usual look of impassiveness faded. "Allah! Sheer folly, Madame."

"*Escucheme*, Larbi—listen to me. You know the Mehasen well. You know all those Mehasen Arabs like brothers. Suppose you just leave off fishing for a few weeks and come back to your tractor group? We could do a business. . . ."

"Agreed I know the Mehasen well—that is the reason why I won't work there. Those Arabs don't want you foreigners out there. It's their ground—has been for hundreds of years. Not *me* in the Mehasen."

"For Pepe. For me. To help us. We need help there."

"Why should I drink dust all day? Look at you, Madame." He indicated my entire person with one sweep of his pipe.

"Just look. Dusty and dirty and tired. Not Larbi. I am rich now."

He rose languidly to his feet, pulled the pipe apart and tucked the pieces back into his cummerbund. He had dismissed the Mehasen. There was no Mehasen.

Larbi mounted his burro with great dignity, inclined his turbaned head once more toward me and trotted off down the road toward his *kabila.*

I stood forlornly looking after him until Larbi was again no more than a mound of a man on top of a burro. Allah sends, and Allah taketh away. Before long I would have to venture into the hostile Mehasen and attempt to plant my corn there, and evidently without the aid of the invaluable Larbi.

During these days of preparing the soil, I rose with the sun in the morning. Sometimes one or more of my sons would awaken with me and when they did, we breakfasted together at the kitchen table. I would have some of the cold milk that had been brought to us the night before from Adir and whatever fruit Pilar had put in a plate for me. My sons were more demanding about breakfast and ate American cold cereal, which I had to purchase in enormous quantities every time I went to Tangier, and toast made over the electric plate, chocolate milk, and the fruit I did not eat.

If I were driving down to Adir, some two or three miles away, depending upon which *parcelas* we were working in, perhaps one of the sons would come along with me and mount a tractor for a few rounds or stop off at one of the laborers' houses to visit his children.

If, instead of driving, I rode down to Adir on Quimera, the boys did not go with me, but stayed behind in Nemsah. There was a great deal there to keep them amused.

I always tried to be back in Nemsah in time to lunch with them, but more often than not during these days of preparation, it would be closer to three o'clock when I reached home, and my sons would have eaten and would be taking a nap. I would hastily eat something while holding a domestic session with Pilar, then I would be off again by car or horse to spend the rest of the afternoon in the *parcelas*, or to the office in Larache, but I tried to get back to Nemsah in time to read the bedtime story and listen to each son as he gave me his special version of the day. For me, this was the nicest part of the day and when I was kept too long in the fields or the office and returned late to a sleeping house, I felt I had missed something important.

By mid-April most of my working team, headed by Marrón, Pepe and Espejo, had been assigned to me, and together we had decided upon our long-range program and the details of our immediate work plan. The plan was progressing in good order and although it required constant checking, I found a little more time for my household.

But spring was crowding us, the vast fields of the Serra were ready, and once again time was at our heels.

Parcel 31 had been disked up furiously by Pepe's D4 Caterpillars; it had been sprinkled by Espejo's fertilizer-tossing team of Spaniards; it had been smoothed down again by the Caterpillars. With Marrón, I tramped it from one end to the other—the whole two hundred acres, just to inspect it for roughness. It lay, for over a mile, a wide strip of rich brown corduroy, hugging the dikelike road that divided it from the rice fields of Adir Bajo. And few enough boulder lumps to please even Marrón. We were satisfied.

It was time to plant the corn.

12

MARRÓN DROVE WITH ME to Larache, but I went alone into Costello's office. I was still smarting from the loss of my tractor, and remembered it as we settled down with the big desk between us. I was also a trifle nervous.

Tomorrow was the day we would plant our first corn. Nothing dared go wrong.

My present mission was to present Costello with a list of what I thought was absolutely essential machinery for handling a corn crop of a thousand acres; the barest, boniest essentials; a most modest list, I told myself. I explained this to Costello, glancing from time to time at the list in my hand. He leaned over the desk and took the list from me rather apprehensively. The machinery was listed down the left-hand side of the paper with long rows of dots over to the right-hand side, where the prices were listed. I noticed that Costello glanced first at the prices and then at the machines. This was the list:

Corn planter	$ 535
Corn picker	1,700
Corn sheller	225

Costello moaned out loud, dramatically. "It is too much money!"

"What's too much money? You haven't even studied it yet," I hitched myself up on the end of the chair, prepared to fight for my rights. "The planter cost too much money?"

(The planter was for next year's crop.) "A measly five hundred bucks? Ridiculously low—it plants sixty acres a day—imagine that. The picker is too expensive? Have you ever seen a picker work? No, of ccurse not—you couldn't have—so then how can you judge so harshly? One picker replaces one hundred Arabs, at the very least. And the sheller!" I threw up both hands. "Given away, that's what. A *regalo*. *Por nada*—A gift. For nothing."

"The corn sheller," said Costello, his eyes glued to the $225. "This is what you can have."

"Only the corn sheller?" I demanded indignantly. "What do you expect me to plant with next year and to pick with this fall? A shovel and a basket?"

"You can pick with those one hundred Arabs you are babbling about," said Costello stonily. "And you can plant the stuff with the old *avantréns*."

The *avantrén* is a prehistoric agricultural implement of torture upon which four men sit astraddle four funneled tubes reaching to the ground, into which they shove the seeds, practically one at a time, while being pulled over the field backward by a tractor.

"Oh no, not that!" I protested, overacting it. "Shoot me—but not that. Why, they don't even plant cotton with those old things any more." A thought occurred to me. I brightened up. "If your last harsh word is no corn planter, what about letting me have two tractor-planters, like you do the cotton with?"

"Nothing doing—our cotton schedule is set up to employ the ten John Deere tractors equipped with planters. If you took away two of them, it would put us weeks behind. No and *no*."

"Just my own tractor, then, with its planters."

"No again. No!"

I stood up sadly, and held out my hand for the list. "But I can order a corn sheller, can't I?"

"*Bueno, bueno.* If you wish."

In the hall outside the office, Marrón was waiting for me, twisting his old felt hat nervously, feeling uncomfortable in the unaccustomed confinement of a town building. "Any luck, Señora?" he whispered, as he fell into step with me going down the hall.

"No. Just as I expected. We can have nothing except the sheller."

"But, no tractors to plant with?"

"*Sí.* No tractors."

"Mother of Jesus protect us! It means then the *avantréns.*"

We climbed into the station wagon and drove back to the Adir *cortijo* in a dejected silence. Once in Adir we sought for Montés, the company blacksmith. We looked first in the patio where the men gathered when they were idle. Montés was not in the patio. Perhaps he was still out in his machine shop.

We found him there, out behind the Adir patio, a brawny, black-browed but gentlehearted man, and we three set to work on the two old abandoned *avantréns.* Long after midnight, Marrón and I were still hunched over the machines under the powerful fluorescent lights of the machine shop and Montés was patiently attaching the plowshares which would cut a furrow in the earth for the seeds to drop into. We wanted the shares to have a radius of adjustment so that we could change the angle in the field, without bringing the machine back to Adir. Montés glanced suggestively at his watch.

"I suppose we'd better get some sleep if we are to start tomorrow," I admitted reluctantly and got up off the old iron wheel on which I had been sitting. I groaned. The iron

spokes had left what felt like permanent furrows in the backs of my legs.

"Let's get a cup of coffee at the canteen before we turn in," I suggested. I walked out of the machine shop with Marrón behind me.

Montés laid down his heavy mallet and caught up with us. We walked the few feet that separated us from the Adir patio and started across it. It was inadequately lighted by a single bare electric-light bulb that hung awkwardly from the top of what had once been a telephone pole, transplanted to the center of the patio and listing gently to one side. No one was about and the shadowy light on the deserted patio gave it a creepy aspect.

"This patio is a sea of mud in the winter," commented Montés.

"And chokes one with dust in the summer," added Marrón.

"Everyone says the same thing. We should do something about it—stone or brick or anything," I waved a hand vaguely. "Anything."

We passed out through the main gate of the patio and stumbled along in the dark to the dingy little cement lean-to that we called the *cantina*—the canteen. One part of it served as a general store, an *economato* selling at cost to the farm employees, not only those products produced by the farm—meat, fish, vegetables and butter—but also the staples and tobacco and beer or wine. The other part was arranged into a kitchen-dining room for the farm laborers who had no homes on the farm. I often stopped in early in the morning or late at night before going back to Nemsah, for a cup of coffee and a chat with the wizened-up little ex-marine cook, a Spaniard named Manuel.

I banged on the door of the dining room.

"Who comes to molest me during the hours of resting?" Manuel's voice squeaked from the rear of the kitchen.

We pushed through the dining room and into the kitchen. Manuel was squatted on the floor in the small cubicle that also served as his bedroom and he was shaping doughnuts from a mound of dough which he had balanced beside him on a chair. He jumped to his feet with a smile.

"It is coffee you have a wish for, I can tell. A little moment only," and he plugged in his electric plate with a flourish and plunked a battered black pot over the heating coil.

"*Pues, café.*"

I washed my hands in Manuel's stone kitchen sink and knelt on the floor to cut a few doughnuts for him.

"We start to plant our corn today when the sun comes up. You will have many early customers for these doughnuts."

"I make them to be eaten, in spite of not having a proper kitchen nor a decent dining room," he said pointedly. "One works better with better tools."

"Yes, yes, I know. Some day there will be such a building here in Adir."

"I shall be dead and buried and gone to the sky and not interested any more in where the doughnuts get made. Heaven is for tomorrow. Doughnuts are for today."

He stuck a spoon in each of four glasses—one for himself—and filled them with scalding coffee. We stood by the light of the one sickly electric bulb and we all raised our glasses of coffee to the prospect of a successful corn crop for Marrón and me, and a fine new kitchen for Manuel to make doughnuts in—a whole lot to ask from a cup of coffee.

I think it was there and then that I decided to try to do something about conditions in Adir—so abominable for the men forced to work and live under them. And they were such fine men, dignified and proud as Spaniards always seem

to be, and with a touching gallantry toward me, the woman who had entered their world of men to wear pants and shirts like theirs, and work side by side with them in dirt fields or on greasy machines. According to their poverty-stricken standards, I was incredibly rich, but this glass of coffee I drank—do you think I would be allowed to pay for that? Never!

In all my days at the Serra farm, I was continually being rebuffed if I offered to pay for anything extra and being outmaneuvered for the check, although I knew that often it meant some sort of sacrifice for my host, no tobacco that week, or no movie. That was why I carried a thermos filled with hot coffee with me whenever it was possible, to share with my fellow workers. Coffee from a thermos was accepted gratefully; coffee in the canteen must be paid for by the dominant male. I tried to make up to the men for such treats in ways that would not hurt their pride.

When I returned to my house everyone in Nemsah was asleep. Only a few hours remained until dawn.

During those hours I was like a race horse preparing for the starting shot. I kept twisting and turning in the bed and waking up to look at the clock, not trusting the alarm to rouse me. I had set it for six-thirty, intending to arrive in Adir around seven and it was a great point of honor with me not to be late—more than ever since this would be the first day of the sowing. It was also a matter of friendly rivalry between the various groups as to which one would get off to a start first. Would it be Marti with his group to plant cotton? Would it be the group that was to plant Arturo's rice? Or would we be first with our corn?

My team had worked rapidly and well all along, and we did get the first start. I could see through the window that the night was building up cold, black skies, promising at best a

gray day for the morrow. What if it should rain. Rain in April? It could happen.

The thought drove away the last hope of sleep.

Well, whatever the weather, we had set our date and we would begin. We would plant the first of our hybrid corn in the morning, on our appointed day.

2 The Sowing

1

AFTER WORRYING ALONG through the rest of the night with the alarm clock, I refused to let it crow, but leaped out of bed early and bundled into my gray Jaeger slacks and a new, black and white checked flannel shirt which I had saved for a very special occasion.

Pilar had left on the kitchen table a thermos of hot coffee which I fitted into one of the big patch pockets of my heavy navy jacket. As I was bending over the little icebox, collecting a handful of fruit, four-year-old Jay appeared behind me. His hair was tousled and his eyes were still half shut with sleep, but he was all dressed except for his tennis shoes. He held these in one hand. He needed assistance with the shoes.

"I have to go with you to plant the corn—Espejo says so," Jay announced from the doorway of the kitchen, throwing in Espejo's name as authority to ward off any protest I might possibly make.

Then to change the subject before I could protest, he pushed the shoes right under my nose. "Which one is for which foot?" he demanded.

It was always a puzzle to him and for what seemed to me like the ninety-ninth time, I patiently aligned the two little shoes on the kitchen floor and showed him how, if placed the wrong way, the toes would turn out and if placed the right way, the toes were straight.

"I got it now," he said, also for the ninety-ninth time, and

sat down and put them on quickly, before he forgot which was which.

"I better take along some breakfast," he volunteered. He pushed a chair over to the cupboard and, climbing upon it, he took a small box of cereal from the shelf, twisted around and tucked it into the hood of the miniature windbreaker he was wearing. I noticed as he turned that there was an orange and some hard candies already in the hood. They must have come from the private hoard he kept in a shoebox under his bunk. Jay believes in being prepared for a safari.

"Are you sure you won't starve?" I teased.

He giggled in his silly way and slipped his little hand into mine. Together we let ourselves out the front door, quietly in order not to waken the others.

We got into the station wagon which I had left before the garden gate and Jay obligingly pressed the starter for me.

The Lukus Valley was still washed with reds and yellows left from the dawn. Once more on the rise I stopped the car on the site of my dream house, overlooking the vastnesses of the Mehasen Valley—a feeling of peace pervaded everything and it was good to let it sink in before descending to down-to-earth Adir.

Espejo was waiting impatiently before the main gate of Adir. Together we went to the warehouse to collect the first bags of seed from the barrel of water in which they had been soaking for two days. I contend that it makes no difference whether you plant wet corn seed or dry corn seed—except that dry seed is easier to handle and less likely to be spoiled by being held over during a spell of bad weather, but Arturo likes his corn wet and it seemed a little enough concession to make him happy.

We had to rouse the warehouse clerk, who was not used to early morning visits from the Management. I had warned

him the night before we would be early, but he had not believed me. He dressed in an embarrassed rush and unlocked the warehouse. During all the remainder of the planting season, he was never again caught unprepared.

While we loaded the dripping, unwieldy sacks into the station wagon, Jay marched resolutely over to the canteen. From a low shelf in the kitchen, he chose a big cup and a bigger spoon. He sat down at a table with two Arab tractor drivers. After he had greeted them with the Arab *salem aleikum* and they had returned his greeting, he fished his packet of cereal out of his jacket hood. It was puffed wheat and the two men leaned forward to examine the grains curiously, although they did not care to taste anything so radical. Manuel appeared to pour milk over the cereal and to offer sugar. Jay ate without talking and his Arab friends sucked noisily, as is their custom, at the glasses of coffee and milk. The repast finished, Jay rode out to the field on a tractor driven by one of his breakfast companions.

In spite of having tortured our collective brains to remember everything, we had to make three trips from Parcel 31 back to Adir *cortijo*—long poles to act as row markers, more baskets to hold the seed, spare nuts and bolts and guards to protect the raising-lowering lever on the *avantrén*. I kept thinking it would not be so easy to run back from the Mehasen once we started work there, and I made a list of things to take along to that faraway place.

As we lined the first decrepit *avantrén* up on the first row, Marrón turned to me and remarked, "Señora, do you realize that Tuesday, the thirteenth, is a bad-luck day to begin planting a new crop?"

"But today is *Friday*, not Tuesday," I pointed out to him. He nodded, half-satisfied, and I could not bring myself to explain that in America, Friday the thirteenth—which this

chanced to be—is much more sinister than any European Tuesday. Each to his own superstitions.

It was gray and cold and windy—the promise of sunrise had not materialized—but it is hard to chill high spirits on the first day of any undertaking, whatever the weather.

The Arab tractor driver gunned his Caterpillar engine impatiently, looking over his shoulder at us.

"Would you like to make the first round aboard the *avantrén?*" I asked Marrón in an "after you, kind sir" voice.

"The honor should surely be yours, Señora," replied Marrón, bowing slightly.

"Why don't we both go?" I said, and we unseated Espejo, who already held a handful of seeds, and one other of the group.

"Espejo, you walk behind and watch how two experts plant corn," I called as I took my place on the *avantrén* and peered down into the tube to check its not being clogged with dirt.

In blissful silence we made the first round, stopping occasionally to make an adjustment—angling more the two plowshares which were opening the furrows, raising the machine so that it did not plow too deeply, shifting the baskets of seed into more convenient position and, occasionally, retrieving Jay when he lost his balance.

Jay, the agile one, was assisting us as best he knew how. His specialty is acrobatics, and his range was the entire length of the *avantrén.*

He maneuvered about on the plunging machine, teetering precariously on the sides to give himself a thrill, looking over our shoulders with his hand clutching our heads, now and then dropping a seed in the wrong place and finally going to sleep, his head pulled into his hood like a turtle and propped against a basket of corn seed.

At the end of the third round, Marrón and I relinquished our seats on the *avantrén* and put the second model into motion. For the rest of the day, the two old *avantréns* jerked up and down the parcel, our men straddling the tubes and dropping in seeds, for all the world like stuffing so many geese to make *foie-gras* livers.

The next day and the next, things went smoothly. Jay, having tested the pangs of hunger on the first day, now had taken to bringing more supplies—a thermos of hot milk, four ham sandwiches, two bananas, one orange, a handful of cookies and the inevitable box of breakfast cereal. He also had a battered package of Chesterfields which he had removed from the table in the living room. He could barely stagger along, leaning over backwards, with all this junk stuffed into his hood. Later, I saw him handing out the cigarettes, more battered than ever, one at a time, to his favorites on the *avantréns*. His favorites included everybody in the world, and the tractor drivers, too. I suspect about half of the food Jay packed was intended for his friends.

Things with Parcel 31 were going smoothly. Marrón looked at me and I looked at him and we said to each other bravely:

"The Mehasen?"

"Yes, the Mehasen."

Jay was torn between staying on the job in Parcel 31 with Espejo where he felt he was invaluable and joining us on our trip to the Mehasen Valley, where he expected to find new and different wonders, and we expected to find trouble. One morning, he took a good look at the swollen Lukus River—the river we would have to ford to get to the Mehasen Valley. Without hesitating any more, Jay decided that the men in Parcel 31 could not spare him. So he did not come to the Arab-held Mehasen with Marrón and me.

2

THERE IS A TIDE in the river Lukus because the waters rush in from the Atlantic Ocean at the Larache harbor. We were using one of Pepe's tractors in the Mehasen and he was coming over with Marrón and me to have a look at it. The tractor had crossed the river by being driven all the way to the next village, Alcazarquivir, and using the bridge there. But this involved the loss of half a day and we were planning to get across on the morning's lowest tide and to cross back on the afternoon's low tide.

At the hour Pepe had chosen, we met, the three of us, on a high bank in Meruan where the river is narrowest. To check on the work in progress there, I had ridden down to Parcel 31 first, with Jay astride Quimera's neck, just in front of my saddle. There Jay had stayed, in Parcel 31, supervising Espejo's supervision, not quite brave enough to ford that river with us.

We three dismounted for a few moments on our side of the river to fuss around with our gear, tightening cinches, securing our lunch packets on to the saddles, rolling up our slacks in case the water was deeper than Pepe thought.

Marrón looked across the river at the deserted landscape, humped here and there with huts of unfriendly Arabs, and shook his head sadly.

"Our enemies. We are about to offer ourselves into their hands."

"It isn't that drastic," I said as they hoisted me on top of

Quimera, and I added jokingly, "Pepe has already sent one of his D4s over and nobody has heard any shots."

"And no noise of the D4 is to be heard on the air, either," Marrón observed glumly.

"Couldn't hear this far away even if there were a wind carrying in the right direction," put in Pepe, always optimistic.

Then we were occupied with getting ourselves down the thirty feet of sharply steep, slippery clay bank. When we reached the water, slithering and sliding, I plunged in first because my mare had the advantage as far as size went; Quimera was at least two hands taller than Marrón's white mare or Pepe's gelding.

Pepe indicated a tree on either riverbank. "Keep those trees in line with each other because a short distance to the right there is a deep hole—good for fishing, not so good for horses."

The water was running swiftly and rose higher around the suspicious Quimera. She threw her head nervously from left to right. She would obviously have been happier returning to the shore, but I kept her headed toward the middle of the river. The water got deeper. I took my feet out of their stirrups and put them up on Quimera's neck to keep from getting my boots wet. I glanced back at Pepe for reassurance.

"You have reached the deepest part," he assured me. "It won't get any deeper. You won't get wet."

"I'm not worried about myself," I called back. "I am thinking of Quimera. She won't swim with me on her back. She's bound to panic."

Pepe proved to be right. Just as Quimera's eyes began to roll and the water touched her belly, we passed the center of the river. She seemed to sense her point of no return and lurched more enthusiastically toward the Mehasen side.

"I hope you have the afternoon tide calculated as well," I

said over my shoulder as I urged Quimera up another steep bank to gain the Mehasen flatland.

The two men touched the shore right behind me and clambered up the bank, to the sound of complaining grunts from the horses.

The parcel of corn land allotted to me was still a mile away and we set off in silence. The whole valley, as far as one could see in any direction, was cut into tiny plots. Some were twenty feet square, some were twenty yards, but none contained more than a quarter of an acre. The plots were in various stages of preparation—deep in winter-grown weeds, plowed in crooked rows, already sown. "Plowed" is just an expression. The plots had really been scratched up with crude, bent tree boughs fastened to handles. We crisscrossed the plots, single file, taking great pains to keep to the border and not to ride on any of the worked land. Here and there, an Arab was forcing down on the handle of one of the crude plows, pulled in slow motion by a team of heavy oxen. As we passed, he would let up on the handle and look into our faces and examine our mounts. His face would be impassive, expressionless. There was no hate reflected in it, neither was there any love. It was just a face.

We walked our horses for twenty minutes and from time to time I consulted the sketch that the topographer had given me. The Mehasen is one of the richest valleys in Spanish Morocco. It is a duplicate of the Lukus Valley except that instead of the ocean on one side, the Mehasen has mountains on the opposite side. This is an advantage because so much of the water has its sources in these mountains. A gigantic reservoir to conserve all this water would open up endless possibilities in the Mehasen Valley. The Serra Company was working on just such a plan.

I looked up at the Riff, looming black against the blue

sky; seeming even blacker because the sky was so blue. I looked down at the Arabs we were passing. How to explain to them that our presence here today was going to help them; that Costello had agreed that they should share equally with the Spaniards in the water rights and that half the resulting irrigated land would be theirs? How could these men with the bent-tree-branch plows be made to understand about dams and reservoirs and increased production from improved terrains and tractors? And were we doing it the best way, just arriving like this, in one day swimming the river and, with one tractor, beginning? I scanned the wonderful, wide valley with its dozens of antlike men and oxen shimmering in the hot reflected sun, and I wondered.

As we approached our parcel, we could see the outline of Pepe's Caterpillar D4 tractor and the wormlike tracing of the tractor's plow furrows.

"The tractor is stopped," observed Marrón.

"We can all see that," I answered crossly.

Pepe put in a cheerful word, "Maybe it has stopped to fuel up."

"You know it's too early in the morning for that," said Marrón.

"Or greasing up?" Pepe wanted to be optimistic. "That particular tractor needs plenty of greasing."

Marrón refused to be cheerful. "To me, it does not seem likely."

We rode up to the tractor at an angle so that until we were beside it, we could not see the driver. He sat cross-legged on the shady side of the tractor, his back against the great chain-lugs. As we reined in our horses, he raised his turbaned head and—it was Larbi—my friend Larbi of the fishing, the Larbi who had refused to join us in the Mehasen, abandoning us to our fates! And here he was, in the Mehasen.

My heart gave a glad leap and some of my nervousness left me. Larbi got to his feet and lifted his pipe away from his lips. Inclining his head slightly, he looked up and asked, "The health of your husband?"

"Well, thank you."

"The health of your sons?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And the health of yourself, dear Madame?"

"Excellent."

"It makes me joyful."

With the formalities out of the way, I was now free to dismount and I did so quickly, looping the bridle rein over a lug of the tractor's track.

Before I could say anything, Larbi launched into a speech that was meant to explain away his presence in the Mehasen.

"It is the fault of my wife, you know. I had no intention of coming." His dark little eyes flashed wickedly. "All women are unreasonable. Two days ago the wife of Larbi demanded much money and when I said no money, she mentioned the astonishing fact that she knew where I had spent Sunday night and that it was not on the fishing boat, as I had intended her to believe." He puffed on his pipe. "In cases such as this, I find it wise to leave the family property for a time. And what better excuse could there be than coming into the Mehasen with Madame?" He sighed sadly. "The extremes that women drive a man into!"

He seemed to have satisfied himself that I could not suspect him of sentimentality for me or for the Serra, so I spoke briskly.

"And what are you doing seated idly in the shade of your tractor when there is much work to be done?"

"Ah, Madame," he answered softly, "then you have noticed my idleness, as I feared. It has to do with the Arabs of the

Mehasen. As I warned you many days ago, they are unwilling to let us proceed."

"Don't be dramatic!" I burst out. "You have a tractor. How can an unarmed, unequipped Arab stop you from plowing with a tractor?"

"It is too simple, Madame. The Arab merely sits down upon the ground in the furrow of my tractor plow and there he stays. Am I to pass around him? No, it would be a crooked furrow. Am I to pass over him? No, he is as my brother. Shall I strike him? For that I go to prison. So he continues to sit there," Larbi indicated the other extreme of the *parcela*, "and I continue to sit here," he motioned to the shady side of the tractor and sat down there again, indicating that he had no more to say.

I looked down to where Larbi had pointed and, sure enough, there was a hump of jelab right in the furrow.

"Come with me while I talk to this 'brother' of yours."

"No, that would be indelicate. Better if I stay here. We are both in an embarrassing position. He is doing what he thinks is right and I am doing what I think is right and yet we are not doing the same thing. Someone is wrong—someone must give in. It is better if I stay here." His pipe had gone out during his long speech and he fished out a box of matches from his cummerbund and occupied himself with lighting it again.

"Let us tackle him" said Marrón glumly, jerking his head toward the other Arab. We started on foot down along the furrow, with Pepe following.

The other Arab was at first just a blob of white wool on the horizon and then he was a casual but determined Arab sitting right in the furrow which Larbi's tractor had left. There was no doubt about it, to make another round, Larbi would have to pass right over the top of the sitting man. It

was a completely efficient way of stopping our work. We approached, we stood in front of the offending man. He did not rise to confront us. He had no intention of deserting his post. Pepe, Marrón and I had to squat down in front of him to get a view of his face, half-hidden under his hood, and to enter into a conversation.

"*Sevalger*"—good day from my companions and me. "Are you a friend to us?"

The hood raised slowly and the face was visible. He was only thirty-five or forty years old, we learned later, but like most Arabs of the outdoor life, he looked like an old man. His face was parched and dried up and lined with dozens of tiny wrinkles. His hood fell away to his shoulders, revealing the shaved skull with its one long pigtail at the back, after the custom of these parts. His legs were tucked up underneath the jelab and his work-gnarled hands were folded peacefully in his lap. His eyes were dark and impersonal and, it seemed to me, without rancor toward the intruders that we were.

"*Sevalger*," he responded slowly and with great politeness.

"You are sitting exactly in the path of our tractor." I spoke in Spanish and looked directly into his quiet eyes. I pointed first to the tractor in the distance and, with my finger, drew a line in the air where he was sitting. "Pepe, say that to him in Arabic, will you?"

Pepe obligingly translated this piece of information for the Arab and his expression changed to one of surprise. You could see he had no idea that he was occupying our furrow. He responded, looking directly at me. He spoke Arabic, which Pepe translated almost as he spoke each word, so that I knew what he said as soon as he said it.

"Pardon me, Madame. It is not I who get into the tractor's path. It is the tractor who gets into my path. It is surely a

mistake." He inclined his head slightly to indicate that he recognized it was a mistake. "It is surely a mistake, but your tractor is passing directly over my piece of land."

"Except that it is not your piece of land any more, pardon me," I cut in.

"I have owned this land for my forty years and my father owned it before that. And before him it was my grandfather's —always in the family. So how can you come now, today, with this roaring *diablo* and say my land is yours?" His face grew darker and he glowered in the direction of the offending tractor. "It is a mistake."

I leaned over almost into his face. "Pardon me, but we have rented this land. We have paid money—*felous*," I rubbed my thumb and two fingers together, "to use this land. Your *bajá*—your chief—he is the one who was paid. He must pay you and you must move out of the furrow, please."

That was simplifying the problem considerably, but it seemed he should understand it better in those words.

At the mention of the *bajá*, the regional head of the Arabs, the little man flinched ever so slightly and then he resumed his impassive calm.

"I am here, not caring about the *bajá*. This is my land. It is not your land. I will stay." He settled more permanently than ever into the furrow, pulled his hood down over his head to indicate that our interview was at an end and refolded his weather-beaten old hands quietly into his lap.

I exchanged silent looks with the boys. "We have been dismissed," I observed.

It was a discouraging moment, but one which we had anticipated. We had hoped it would not arise like this, but we had known it would. The trouble was not in that field at that time. The trouble was not that Arab sitting in that furrow in front of our tractor. The real trouble started years

ago. It was a fight between the Moroccan Arabs and the Spaniards; the Arabs always jockeying for their right of independence, the Spaniards maneuvering to retain the hold they had won by arms over Morocco.

At the moment, it was not for us to take one side or the other. At the moment, it was only our job to get corn planted in the Mehasen.

I turned to the men. "What do we do now?"

"Let's look up the *jari* of the *kabila.* Sometimes they can put things right," said Pepe.

On the *kabila* or village level, it is the *jari,* or *cadí,* a sort of local judge, who has the immediate authority. We set out to find him.

The main *kabila* of the Mehasen Valley is built back toward the river Lukus. We had skirted it to reach our tractor. Now, we retraced our tracks part of the way, again threading in and out of the tiny, labored-over plots of land. Entering a *kabila* is like entering another, more foreign land. In the absence of metal or wooden fences, the Arabs have used cactus. As in most native establishments and, indeed, as in most Spanish villages even today, the garden plots are encountered first, somewhat far from the actual dwellings. The Arabs have these plots "fenced" off with cactus, leaving a general public pass meandering through to the village. The cactus, benefiting from the irrigation waters, grows upward and outward with wild abandon and once you enter between two cactus "fences," you are not likely to see any scenery until you arrive in the village—just high, prickly green walls and an occasional peek at a vegetable garden through a "door" in the cactus. And just try to break through one of those walls, supposing you were bent on stealing the potato crop! There is no better protection. At times, the pass became so narrow that we had to string out into a single file. Another

time we came around an abrupt curve to confront an old woman, muffled to the eyes in her haik, driving a skinny burro. We had to press our horses into the thorny fence to let her get by.

We arrived, finally, at a widening in the cactus rows and at what could pass for the village square. There were several half-naked children engaged at desultory games in the dust. There was a huddle of wrapped-up women, squatted on their haunches, muttering to each other. The gaps in the cactus showed, not garden plots, but bare, trampled yards at the end of which were the Arab huts—baked mud structures with thatched roofs, called *chozas.*

Pepe, who had been here many times before as a guest, led the way into the property of the *jari.* We rode right through the opening and after Pepe explained to an underling that we must speak to the *jari,* the servant took the three horses and led them away to a corner of the bare enclosure, out of the sun.

As we approached the *choza,* a statuesque Arab appeared, inclining his tall frame in order to pass through the low doorway. He greeted Pepe warmly in the Arab manner—touching the first two fingers of the right hand against Pepe's and then pressing them to his own lips. He turned to regard me with a reserved curiosity. Pepe explained in his fluent Arabic and motioned for me to give my hand. I stepped forward, smiling, and the *jari* shook my hand gingerly, in the European way. At the same time, he motioned us all inside, through the narrow, low doorway.

"What is going on? Did you ask him?"

"Don't be impatient," answered Pepe, half under his breath, for the *jari* understood Spanish and spoke a few words of it. "This is an Arab. We cannot discuss business so quickly. We must first take tea with him."

"Oh," I groaned. "As hot as it is and we must drink tea!"

Pepe scowled at me and raised his voice pleasantly. "Tea is an excellent habit—very cooling to all on these overly hot days." He smiled ingratiatingly at the *jari.*

We found ourselves in a low-ceilinged, white-plastered, windowless room with the floor completely covered in layer upon layer of richly patterned woolen rugs. The *jari* had already slid his feet out of his *babuchas* and was padding across the rugs to take a seat among the silk and satin cushions piled in disorder around three walls of the room. Pepe, who wore everything too big for him anyway, just walked gracefully out of his sloppy boots and joined the *jari* in the cushions. Marrón and I were obliged to sit down in the doorway and forcibly tug off our tight-fitting Cordovan boots. I, for some unexplainable reason, had on a pair of sheer nylon stockings under my boots. I saw the *jari* glance briefly at my feet as I found a place in the cushions and then look away with no expression at all.

He raised his two arms dramatically before him and when the wide sleeves of his jelab had fallen away, leaving his hands free, he clapped them twice in slow motion. Immediately a young woman appeared in the doorway with a large tray, placed it in front of the *jari* and silently withdrew from the room again, her face carefully veiled up to the eyes. The tray was round and brass with three little legs of its own. On it was set a metal teapot, a copper kettle, four small glasses, a large conical lump of sugar and a mound of green mint, freshly plucked. Our Arab host launched into the delicate process of making the mint tea, giving it his complete attention. First he dropped some green tea into the teapot, then he stuffed in some mint, lots of mint. Next he broke off a huge hunk of the sugar and put that on top. Finally, he poured in the water, steaming from the copper kettle, which

he held high above the table, letting the water fall with a loud gurgle into the pot. He flopped the teapot lid shut, folded his hands into the sleeves of his jelab, relaxed back against the cushions and surveyed us, his visitors. He would make us say for what we had come.

"Is now the moment?" I whispered to Pepe, and received a hidden jab in the ribs for my pains. He was saying something in Arabic which soon began to take on a familiar tone—something about "the health of your wives, the health of your children, the health of yourself." And the *jari* was replying in the same courteous tones, asking the same questions of Pepe.

After a moment, the *jari* broke off the talk about everyone's health, leaned forward and lifted the lid off the teapot. He seemed to consider the tea for an instant. He then put the lid back on and poured himself part of a glassful. He held this glass between his thumb and forefinger; thumb on the rim, forefinger on the bottom of the glass, tilted it to his lips and sucked the tea as noisily as possible into his mouth. He swilled it around inside, like a winetaster, and swallowed it. He nodded contentedly, poured the three remaining glasses full and replenished his own. He handed these around, leaning heavily over the tea tray and grunting aloud from the effort.

Pepe raised his glass between thumb and forefinger and slurped it even more noisily, it seemed, than had the *jari.*

"Excellent tea," he pronounced and motioned to me to do the same. I wished that my sons could be with me—they who like to make as much noise as allowable at all times. We all began sucking tea between our teeth and having our glasses refilled as soon as they were empty until we had done away with twelve glasses of tea among us.

"Now?" I whispered. I risked another jab in the ribs but I was full of mint tea. "Is now the moment?"

Pepe pulled himself together—all that tea and idle conversa-

tion had put him into a rather relaxed state, as it was intended to. He pulled himself together and bearded our friend, the *jari.*

He said, "With her most respectful respect, the Señora wants to point out that one of your subjects is sitting in front of the Señora's tractor, making it impossible to proceed further with the plowing, as you yourself can see, and pardon us for mentioning this, but the *jari* is aware of the agreement that exists beween Company Serra and the *bajá* which the *bajá* expects the *jari* to carry out the best way for all of us." He paused expectantly, looking first at me and then at the *jari.*

When the *jari* answered, he addressed himself directly to me although he spoke in Arabic, which he knew I could not understand. Pepe put in a translation every few words:

"The Señora will forgive the ignorant Arab. The Arab is of a savage race—little exposed to the refinement of civilization." He said this with a disdainful dignity, as if to indicate what he really thought of our civilization. "I know the *bajá* has sold the right to all our lands to the Spanish conquerors."

"Not sold," I put in hastily. "Just rented to us."

"Rented," he corrected himself without spirit, "rented away our livelihood." He fell to musing silently, his head lowered. Suddenly he raised his head. "I shall send to remove the man from in front of your tractor," he said firmly. He rose to his feet. "I am honored by your visit and you will remember, please, that we are little civilized and so would demonstrate our displeasure in uncivilized ways."

"Such as sitting in front of tractors?"

"Such as sitting in front of tractors," he inclined his head, his fine, brown hands shoved out of sight into the sleeves of his jelab. We could go.

We pulled on our boots and found our horses being held just outside the entrance to the *choza.* We mounted and,

single file, threaded our way through the cactus maze, back across the patchwork-quilt fields to our tractor.

Larbi was still in the same relaxed position as when we had left. You could trust him to conserve his energies wisely.

"You can move about a bit and pretend you are earning your money now," I told him from the saddle. "It is more or less settled and by the time you get back to the *parcela*, the obstacle will have gone home, leaving you a clean furrow."

"I am delighted to be back in business," Larbi said, not looking very delighted. He rose lazily to his feet and tucked the pieces of his pipe into his cummerbund.

"See that you are," I told him and we bowed slightly in each other's direction.

Walking our horses slowly back across the long stretch of the Mehasen, we simultaneously remembered our food packages. We had been all day with nothing except the *jari's* sweet mint tea and none of us had given it a thought. Now, we slid to the ground and, sitting in a little circle with each of our horses looking over our shoulders, we ate our sandwiches hastily. Pepe kept glancing off at the sun, fast sinking toward the horizon.

"You know, the tide rises again considerably in the late afternoon. I won't promise we won't have to swim for it," he said.

"Let's go then," I said, getting to my feet and using Marrón's proffered hand to mount Quimera.

Single file and pensive we made our way to the river. The Arabs had left their work and filtered back behind the cactus hedges, leaving the fields deserted and silent. There was an air of heavy solitude and it penetrated even to us on our horses. It is a moment I often recall—the immensity of the Mehasen plain, the blueness of the sky, the feeling of being

surrounded by unseen eyes and yet the completeness of the silence and peace.

"If you had only one wish, what would you want more than anything else in the world right now?" I asked into the still air. Both Marrón and Pepe turned slightly in their saddles to look at me. It is an idle question, one I often ask. It leads into the secret places of people's hearts and so often the wishes they express are so simple.

"I?" said Marrón, tugging his old felt hat down on his forehead. "I should wish for a tractor of my very own. I would marry Carmen right away and take her to Seville with the tractor and work there just for the two of us and our children for the rest of my life. I would see the *feria*—the annual fair—of Seville every spring until I died." He smiled happily; he was at the *feria* in his mind.

"And you, Pepe?" I said. "What would you wish for?"

Pepe looked toward the west, into the sun. "I would ask to go there, just once."

"There?"

"America. To see America and perhaps stay there for a time. But we could as well ask for sample pieces of the moon, Señora."

We were at the river and our attention was needed in full for the crossing. The river had indeed risen beyond the mark of the morning. But we had to chance it or spend the night in the Mehasen.

"We shall have to swim a few yards in midstream, but as we are headed stablewards, I don't think our horses will object," explained Pepe, the expert in these matters.

We entered the muddy, swirling waters and in midstream I felt Quimera's feet lose touch with the river bottom. She was swimming and the water slopped across the saddle until I was soaked almost to the waist. I did manage to keep my boots

dry by parking my feet athletically between Quimera's ears, but there was no solution for the bottom.

And when we scrambled up on the Serra side of the riverbank, the sun had set, leaving us to the mercies of a sharp breeze. As we rode along, we consulted briefly about the morrow's work and at the crossroads of the 400 *parcelas*, we separated; Marrón and Pepe headed for Adir and I headed for Nemsah, a hot bath, supper before the fireplace and bed.

The long-dreaded invasion of the Mehasen was over. We had won. A few days more and that contested area was neatly planted with hybrid corn.

It was in late evenings such as this that I felt the loneliness. When I arrived back in Nemsah, my sons had already bathed and supped and were tucked into bed, waiting for my arrival. Sitting on a little chair in the center of their bedroom, I would read to them for half an hour. The first story would be for the little fellows, Penn and Jay. At that time I was reading them *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*. I was expected to act out the "expotition" to the North Pole and the search for Eeyore's lost tail and the annoying way Tigger bounced all over everybody. Penn would give me lots of advice about how it was done. Sometimes, in his enthusiasm, he leaped out of bed to demonstrate his interpretation and Jay would giggle hysterically at most everything Pooh said—he secretly thought he was Pooh.

Emile and Ric were fascinated that year with King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table so I would read them a chapter of King Arthur's adventures. And they were all so tired at the end of their day that as soon as I finished reading the stories, heard them recite the Lord's Prayer in unison, kissed each of them in turn and put out the light, they were asleep.

I would take a leisurely bath, thinking again that the rough

life is fine if one can have that hot bath after the fields. Pilar then served me my dinner on a tray before the fireplace in the living room. On cool, spring evenings I always lit the fire for comfort; the spring air is decidedly cold when the sun goes down in Morocco. Later on in the summer, when it was no longer necessary, I still lit the fire at nights to keep me company.

Sitting there on one of the straw poufs with my dinner tray balanced on another, I would look into the flames and drowsily review what had happened that day. The house would be so quiet with all the boys asleep, and outside, only the lonesome night noises of the frogs and the crickets broke the velvet silence. I would think then of Ricardo in Madrid and all our friends, being joyously noisy and deciding where to go for dinner just as I was going to bed.

Almost before I finished my dessert, my head would be nodding ridiculously and in another few minutes, the whole house would be in darkness, except for the glow from the dying fire.

3

"WE SHOULD HAVE a kind of gratitude ceremony to Allah for holding off the rain," said Marrón, as a joke, one day. We were standing together at one end of Parcel 31, watching the *avantréns* make their slow way up and down, up and down the rows. We were close to finishing this *parcela*. Marrón took off his felt hat and gazed up with satisfaction at the cloudless blue April sky.

Rain was the one thing we did not want in the middle of the planting. When we had all the seeds in the ground, then it could rain and rain would be welcome, but until then, rain would only disrupt our planting schedule and put us behind. Every morning that we woke to dry skies was one more day ahead of the game for us. We seemed to have a friend in the rain maker.

"Paff!" I answered Marrón blatantly, also gazing at the cloudless sky. "It wouldn't *dare* rain until we finish planting our corn."

Marrón looked scandalized. "Oh, Señora Betty, don't say anything like that out loud—you'll bring us the bad luck."

Marrón was right; I did bring us the bad luck. Apparently, Allah was right on the job up there, watching for such displays of independence. The next morning, even before I opened my eyes, I was aware of the steady drumming of water on the roof. It had started two hours before dawn, but I had brushed it aside as a bad dream. When I finally sat up and stared out the window, I was looking into a solid

sheet of water. Morocco has a semi-tropical climate and when it rains, you might be in India because the water comes down in sheets, in bucketfuls, in tubfuls.

"Well," I thought philosophically, "today will just be a holiday for us corn planters."

I swung my feet out of bed and felt around with my toes on the cold tile floor for the Arab *babuchas* that I used as bedroom slippers. As I bent forward to extract them from under the bed, a dull ache stabbed through my jaw and neck, making me straighten up quickly.

"I've caught one of Ricardo's 'currents,' " I said to myself. This was easy enough to do in the sudden coolness that came with the Moroccan sunset. Many times I had found myself caught out in the fields, when the sun went down, in only a light cotton shirt and I had shivered with the cold as though it were midwinter.

Now I dressed in a hurry, calling over the top of my wardrobe to Pilar to light the fire and keep the boys inside until the rain stopped. "I'll make a hasty check of the *parcela* we are planting and the equipment before breakfast," I told her.

There was only my dilapidated old navy blue jacket to throw over my shoulders. I do not own a raincoat, on the theory that people should stay indoors during a rain. Such is the power of Moroccan rain that when I arrived at the garden gate where I had left the station wagon the night before, I was already soaked to my skin.

I pulled out the choke and stepped on the starter. Nothing happened. I ground away for a hopeless moment and then realized that three hours in such a downpour would dampen the spirits of any car. Damn! I gave it up and made another dash through the rain to the Nemsah *cortijo* office.

The Nemsah supervisor was sitting at his switchboard with

a look of mute terror all over his face. He had heard that you could get electrocuted handling a telephone during a storm.

"See if you can raise the *cortijo* in Adir," I told him.

With great reluctance and using only two fingers—he must have thought he would get less electrocuted with only two—the supervisor plugged in to Adir *cortijo* and turned the rusty old crank several times.

In a minute I was talking to the Adir office and they had summoned Marrón, who was standing around, waiting for orders. While the Nemsah supervisor backed off into a far corner so that at least one of us would be left alive in case of a lightning bolt, Marrón and I discussed the many important objects we probably had left out in the rain.

"One good thing," said Marrón. "Nothing can damage those lousy old *avantréns;* not even this rain."

"Well, I can't start my car. And there's no use my coming down there anyway. You make out the best you can today without me," I yelled into the mouthpiece of the phone.

"But what'll I *do?*" moaned Marrón.

"Do?" I echoed into the telephone. "Do? For one thing, you can go home and fix your roof. Ten to one it's leaking in six places by this time."

I banged down the receiver and ran back to my house, longing only for a cup of hot coffee.

Pilar met me at the door.

"Señora! The roof is leaking into the boys' room. The drain must be clogged on the roof. You better look before you come in."

It was Allah again, taking revenge for my cracks to Marrón about his roof. *Insh'Allah.*

I gave up any idea of trying to keep dry and trudged to the shed where the long ladder lived. There was not a human

in sight—why should there be? I dragged the ladder over to the house all alone and propped it up against the back wall. I kicked off my slippery boots to climb the shaky ladder. An hour went by while I fished out of the drain all the odds and ends that had "accidentally" found their way in; pine cones and last year's acorns, rotten oranges and grapefruit, one or two suspicious little tin automobiles—a whole host of things that had flown up there mysteriously, evidently aided by the angels. And all the time, I was soaking in cold rain water and it never ceased pouring down my stiff neck. I would tend to the angels later—my angels.

With a great gurgle and a rush, the water finally coursed away in the drain and I was free for breakfast. Except that it was nearer lunchtime by then.

The wonderful smell of a fine *paella* hit my nose as I opened the door and I went straight to the kitchen.

Pilar was leaning over the big pan with a loving air, stirring one of her masterpieces of chicken and rice.

"Can we eat it right away?" I asked Pilar greedily, shivering with cold, damp and hunger.

"She has to sit five small minutes more on top of the stove so that she drinks all the liquid and we have a dry rice—"

"Okay, I can waive five—"

There was a piercing scream from the boys' bedroom and almost at the same moment, Ric appeared, wide-eyed, lip-trembling, in the kitchen doorway.

"I didn't push him—he fell. We were playing together on the top bunk. . . ."

"How many times have I told you—is he bleeding? Which one is it . . . ?"

It was Emile and he was bleeding. He had fallen or been pushed from one of the top bunks and there was an inch-

long gash over one eye, with the "stuffing," as he called it, oozing out.

I stretched Emile out on the couch and Pilar held the cut closed with a towel while I made another dash to the office through the rain to call the company doctor—I could not manage Emile alone. But the telephone lines were already out of order, to the relief of the supervisor. I *could* manage Emile alone after all, with adhesive tape and iodine.

A hectic half-hour ensued and then Emile was resting quietly on one of the couches in the living room with his three solicitous brothers hanging over him and Ric reading everybody a story. We had the fire burning warmly in the *chimenea* and I was trying to dry out a little in front of the blaze while Pilar set a table for our lunch.

She made a last trip to the kitchen for the big pan of rice. Silence for a second and then a loud, agonized exclamation; "*Madre mía!*"

Nothing else can happen today, I told myself firmly, but I got myself out to the kitchen. A flood! A literal flood! The hot-water tank burst and gallons of water were pouring out.

The tank was directly over the cook stove and all those gallons of water were pouring down into Pilar's beautiful *paella.*

"The rice! Save the rice!" I yelled and waded across the watery kitchen. But the pan was still too hot to touch and by the time I found a pot holder, the water was all out of the tank and in the *paella* pan and the rice was everywhere, covering the top of the stove and floating greasily around on the floor.

Pilar waded out of her corner. "I'll scramble some eggs for lunch instead," she said in a dejected voice.

"Don't bother with any for me—I've lost my appetite."

I retreated from the messy kitchen to my bedroom and slammed the door. I flung myself across the bed; wet jacket, soaking blue jeans, sopping boots. My head ached violently and my jaw felt even stiffer. I won't admit I wept, but the pillow suddenly was wetter.

The house became quiet, with only sounds in the kitchen of Pilar fixing eggs over the electric burner and the murmur of Ric's voice as he read another adventure of King Arthur's.

Time passed. The door of my bedroom squeaked. It was Pilar. She poked her head in cautiously and then entered, a luncheon tray in her hands.

"Señora?"

"*Que sí.*"

"You haven't eaten all day. I think you should eat something," she said. She set her tray down on the shelf beside my bed. As she turned to leave the room, she glanced at me. She stopped and looked more closely, and the expression on her face changed to one of great astonishment.

"Señora," she said. "You look very funny."

I sat up on the bed. "Pilar, don't irritate me. What do you mean—I look funny? Have I turned green? Is my hair all white?"

"N-no," stammered Pilar. "But you—just—look—queer."

She fished a small mirror out of her apron pocket and shoved it into my hand. I held it up in the air and looked impatiently at the reflection.

Allah! My hair was a wet, matted mess, plastered around my face. My nose was red and shiny, but that was not what startled me; it was my jaw. Both sides of my face were swollen out like a squirrel's with his whole winter's supply of nuts stored away at once.

I had mumps and I had mumps good.

I sat there on the edge of the bed in a spreading spot of

dampness, resembling a stuffed squirrel, and now I bawled like one of my own sons, great tears spilling out of my eyes and rolling down my face.

Pilar rushed around the room in a tizzy. She could cope efficiently with small crybabies from the ages of two to eight, but adults were not supposed to behave like this and she was disconcerted.

"Señora, don't cry like that," she pleaded, coming back to the bed and patting me gingerly on my wet head. She then wiped her hand hurriedly on her apron. "What can I do?" she asked.

"I want to go back to Madrid," I wailed, wiping my runny nose with the back of my hand and sniffing loudly. "I need Ricardo." Another burst of tears made the rest of the words unintelligible.

If the telephone lines had not been down, I would have called Ricardo to come and get me instantly. The Arabs could have the Serra farm, all of it. They could have my wet cornfields, too. . . . This had come, of course, from not showing the proper respect for Allah in Allah's own country.

But tomorrow is always better.

I stayed in bed at Nemsah for a few days with my mumps. Only one of the boys, Emile, contracted the disease from me and his case was very light. All that extra rest and the sunshine that came as soon as the rainstorm was over combined to steady my nerves and I soon found myself in Larache, at Costello's office, and back in the fray.

I had another idea, another suggestion to make.

4

MY NEWEST IDEA had been born, as I have said, the night we found Manuel cutting out doughnuts on the canteen floor because there was no other place for him to roll out the dough, and it came of age, fully grown, in a moment of furious indignation. This time I was really angry, and I was in Larache to do something about it.

Several nights before my attack of the mumps, I had returned late to Adir from the 400 *parcelas*, so late that it was already dark and the patio, filled with the usual quota of Arab and Spanish workmen squatting dejectedly against the walls, was lighted only by the one dim bulb hung from the leaning telephone pole. Pepe had run his horse to exhaustion a few days before so he rode back into the Adir *cortijo* with me in the station wagon. He had a photograph he wanted to show me of the only car he had ever driven.

"It is in my suitcase," he said. "I'll get it for you," and he started across the patio where I had stopped the car.

I followed him. It was not in my mind to snoop, but I knew Pepe was as tired as I was and I thought I would save him the walk back to the car. We passed a group of the men squatted in a mute line along the stable wall—not talking, not doing anything, just squatting.

Pepe turned off the big patio into the smaller one, on to which the granaries face. He pushed open a door and a strong smell of gasoline drifted out. He disappeared into the dark interior and I stood in the doorway, peering around.

It was one of the storerooms, heaped high with drums of gasoline, fuel oil and engine oil. What windows there were had been jammed shut, making an airless, stagnant cavern.

"What is this place, Pepe?"

"It is really where the fuel and oil are stored, Señora," Pepe explained in an apologetic voice, "but we are sleeping here, too, for the moment—no other place."

In the semi-darkness I could make out Pepe crouched on the floor beside his bed, rummaging around inside his cardboard suitcase.

I stepped inside to see better. "Just for curiosity, what do you have for a bed—what *is* that pile of something?"

Pepe rocked back on his heels. "Mine is a packing case that I found. No one wanted it."

I said something and Pepe gave me a scared look. "Some of the men have real cots," he said hastily, waving an arm toward the darker part of the warehouse.

That was when I became angry. "We can't have this, Pepe. A man can't work all day and then come home to this hole—he can't do it. He needs a proper bed, a mattress and a decent sort of place to sleep."

Pepe had found the photograph. He snapped his suitcase shut and rose to his feet. "Now, Señora, suppose you keep your nose out of things like this." He maneuvered me firmly to the door. "We have been sleeping in places worse than this and we will go on doing it and anything you can say will only stir up trouble."

I interrupted him indignantly. "And above all, we must avoid trouble, is that it? Huh! I am sure Señor Costello does not know about this."

"Maybe he does. Maybe he doesn't," said Pepe. "You take my advice and keep out of it. Plant your corn, Señora, it is more amusing. Plant your corn!"

I was still muttering to myself when Pepe led me back past the sitting men and almost shoved me into my car.

That was what was in my mind when I mentioned an idea I wished to present to the round table in Costello's office. We were the usual four—Arturo, Marti and myself with Costello refereeing. As usual, we were arguing. Rather, we were each putting forth a different point of view at the same time and the result was a noise that would have passed for heated argument in any language other than Spanish.

"What is this thought that has occurred to you?" asked Arturo, expecting the worst and resigned to getting it over with as quickly as possible.

My argument began and it concerned the living conditions in Adir and the state of the men's quarters and the canteen and the patio. It seemed to me a good idea to drag all our evils into the open at the same time. Perhaps these managers could be maneuvered into one or two little concessions today, another one or two tomorrow and some day we would begin to approach what was needed.

"Take the canteen for an example," I argued, getting to my feet and pacing back and forth before Costello's huge desk. "None of you has been to the canteen at midnight and seen poor old Manuel trying to get some doughnuts made for breakfast—no light, insufficient water and certainly no space. Do you know that he has to spread things out on the floor to work? How can a cook do his best when he has to cut out doughnuts on the floor?"

No one answered.

"The dining quarters aren't much better; quarters is an exaggeration—one lousy little room, full of mud and flies in the summer and cold as the North Pole in the winter. Is that any place for workingmen without homes on the farm to eat?"

No one answered.

"And the patio! What a mess! What a disgrace! And it is the place that all your stockholders see first—have you looked at it lately? Ankle deep in dust—"

Silence.

"The only change the men can look forward to is mud."

Then I reached into my briefcase and took out a roll of plans. "I was introduced to one of the local Larache builders the other day and in talking idly with him, I suggested he draw up a simple plan for a domitory. That is what I have here."

I spread the plan out on the desk, holding it down on one end with Costello's crystal anchor paperweight and on the other with his fancy gold-trimmed German barometer-clock. It was not at all the simple plan I called it. It was a dream version of bachelors' quarters; a long, U-shaped building with individual bedrooms, a communal shower-bath-room on one side and a large, airy dining room-kitchen facing it. The middle part of the U was a spacious day room into which I had carefully lettered the words, "ping-pong table" and "library." All, for Adir, very far-fetched words.

Costello, Marti and Arturo studied it, frowning. Arturo broke the silence. "Ridiculous!"

"I even have the site picked out." I paused, but no one asked me where, so I continued evenly, "The *parcela* on which the present canteen is built—we could begin construc-tion immediately and go on using the old canteen until our new building is ready."

"Do you realize, Betty, what such a structure would cost the Serra Company?" This, of course, was Costello.

"Not any more than your two Cadillacs and one Mercedes-Benz cost." I was ready to use any argument, however unfair.

"Well, my dear, we can't ride around in this building of yours. But let me think about it."

"I don't see what there is to think about. Something has to be done and you should decide it now. If those men have to sleep another night with the gasoline drums, I'll move them all into my house. The horses get better care in Adir."

Costello glared at Arturo and Marti. Arturo said, "If that is all that worries you, Betty, suppose I give you the schoolroom. It is empty until September. You could move them in there for the time being and Costello could think about this other idea."

I was willing to accept anything if it meant getting the men away from the fuel drums. "That will do for tonight, thank you, but we won't leave the dormitory idea—all the thinking Costello will do, pardon me, is to shove the thing in a drawer."

A silence followed, everyone was in painful thought. I knew there was no chance of getting my new building, but I had another, lesser card to play. Alongside of my master design, it was a straw to be clutched at, or so I imagined, trying to put myself on the other side of the desk.

It had come to me when skirting the patio with Arturo one day. We walked in front of one of the two identical stables bordering the patio and facing each other. I had kicked belligerently at the stable door, sagging on its hinges. "This stable must have been empty for years," I had remarked accusingly.

"No!" Arturo had groaned. "Quick, run some cattle in here, somebody. Pigs, goats, anything at all, before this woman takes the building away."

He had looked toward me teasingly. "You intend to move it to Nemsah, maybe?"

I was already inside wandering up and down the dusty aisles. "No, not move it, *hombre*," I said to Arturo. "Just convert it into a large and airy dormitory for your men."

Arturo threw back his head and roared with laughter. "You have a lot of funny ideas, but this is the funniest of all—men living in this filthy stable? Really, *mujer*, come out of your daydreams."

The stable was my straw for Costello to clutch. The three men looked at me like trapped animals when I suggested, "If this seems like too much money, I have an idea that won't cost you anything—or hardly anything—not even the price of a jeep." They looked interested.

"The old dairy stable in the patio—the one that is empty. You remember it, Arturo. The heavy work is in tearing out the concrete and iron fixtures and we would do that ourselves, on our own time, before or after working hours."

"You think you could get the men to agree to that?" asked Arturo with interest.

"Yes. And all you would have to pay is a couple of masons and carpenters to do the skilled work of constructing an interior."

"We could study the idea," put in Marti, trying to be helpful, "and have someone draw up a plan."

"I happen to have a little plan all drawn up," and I produced it with a flourish from my briefcase. I had them backed into a corner now with no way out except through that stable. . . .

I got it. They gave it to me, thinking it would be the end, the finish of this home-improvement move. As I went out the door, I remarked, "You don't mind if we haul a few rocks for the patio while we are at it? To fill in the worst of the holes—on our own free time, of course."

"No," they said. "No, we don't mind." They would have said anything to get rid of me.

Back in the *cortijo* of Adir I was jubilant and my enthusiasm ran over on the men, sitting in the dust of the pa-

tio. I bounded into the office and asked for the key to the schoolroom.

"Are you touched with the sun?" asked sad-faced Juan, the chief keeper of the office. And I explained how we would use it temporarily for a dormitory.

"Turning these men into pampered sissies," he commented.

"First you have to turn them into human beings. Perhaps *you* would like to sleep with a gasoline drum for a pillow?" I retorted.

"Here's your key." He flung it across the desk.

Amid a confusion of men, kids and dogs, we hauled the cots, the mattresses and the makeshift beds out of the warehouse and into the schoolroom. When we had finished, you would have said it was a pretty scruffy dormitory, but we thought it was something out of Hollywood. It had windows, at least, and lights, and the floor was tile, not dirt, and the walls were plastered. And it did not smell of gasoline or fuel oil. There was even a modest chapel at the far end with shutters that were folded in front during the week and could be pushed open for a service on Sundays.

Pepe's battered old packing-case bed draped in blankets was set in the middle of the room and it rose above the squatty cots like a throne. And there, after working hours, Pepe presided like a king. It was a step better than crouching in the patio in the dark.

From the top of his bed, Pepe explained about the stable. I had been bluffing in Costello's office. I did not know if the men were willing to help with the destruction and new construction. I watched anxiously.

Pepe finished his explanation. Montés, the brawny blacksmith, turned to me. He was married and had his own house in the *cortijo*. It could not benefit him that the bachelors had a dormitory. "When does all this begin?" he said.

"I promised it would be in our spare time. Perhaps tomorrow night after working hours?"

"Why not tonight?" Montés said, and he got off the crate on which he had been balancing and lumbered off to his blacksmith shop, motioning a couple of the men to follow him. They came back with three sledge hammers and three giant crowbars. Montés handed these around to the boys and men in the schoolroom. We crossed the patio in a furor of excitement, like a gang of hoodlums intent upon assaulting the First National Bank. Someone pushed open the sagging door of the stable. Montés held out one of the sledge hammers to me. "Would you like to strike the first blow?"

Everyone stood back respectfully while I grasped the handle of the heavy sledge and went into the center of the stable. A row of iron stanchions for cows stood there. I raised the hammer over one shoulder, aimed low at the base of the stanchion and swung with all my might. The hammer struck with a ringing blow that sounded and resounded in the empty stable. The cement cracked open around the stanchion and, with a delighted roar, the men were all over the place and someone put a crowbar into the crack and was forcing out the first stanchion. Someone else snatched the hammer from my hands and the stable was a sudden madhouse of flying cement, chips, dust boiling up to the ceiling and shouts of laughter and joy.

Men like nothing so well as destruction—nor do they do anything else nearly so well. Take any successful constructor —he looks just normally satisfied. On the other hand—take a successful demolitions chief—you can detect on his face a look of fiendishly contented joy.

That first night was just a disorganized mess—men venting their energies in something novel—and we had to stop as soon as it was dark because we had no electric light in the

stable. We had made an impressive start, though, and in the following days we shifted the work on to a more organized basis. Pedro, the young electrician, ran in two electric wires from the leaning pole in the patio and we attached powerful light bulbs that allowed us to work until after midnight. Down the center of the stable was a set of tracks that had been used to run a feed car on. We cleared the track of all the refuse that had been piled over it through the years of disuse and resurrected an old dump car from the machinery graveyard. We used the car and track to haul out the rubble as quickly as we created it. And we dumped it right into the low spots of the main patio and into the two secondary patios to make a base for the someday-paving. We took the work in turns, so that there was someone hammering away at almost every hour. Those men who worked on the night plowing shift gave up an hour or two of their daytime sleep to fill a couple of dump cars with rubble. Those who worked in the fields in the daytime took a turn while they waited for dinner to be served in the canteen. And the men with homes in the *cortijo* came out after their dinners to bang away until sleep caught up with them.

My sons lent a hand now and then. Their best efforts were in the destruction department; if there was something to tear apart, they would volunteer. They were good also at riding around on top of the dump car. To give them some credit, they never took a ride without first helping to fill the car with rubble. To their minds, this was the first real work I had done on the farm; the other jobs were just farming to them.

When I started out for Adir in the morning, Emile would ask, "Are you going down to farm or to work today?"

And if I said I was going to work, he would come along and throw a bit of the rubbish around.

In the mornings, too, we worked. Spaniards love to catch an extra hour or two of sleep after the sun has risen—reprehensible behavior on a farm. So, as the days lengthened, I rose with the sun and drove down to the Adir patio. Banging noisily on the schoolroom door, I called, "Time to work at your dormitory—if you don't do it, no one will."

I waited a moment and banged again and, one by one, the sleepy men staggered out into the sunshine. They washed at the well in the center of the patio—the only water supply in the *cortijo*—and before breakfast was called, we had disposed of many carloads of rubble.

I remember one morning stumbling along behind a loaded car, singing merrily in my flat, off-key voice. I let the car roll to a stop right underneath an open window and hammered out the steel retaining-wedge. With a loud, explosive rumble and a cloud of dust, the car emptied itself.

"Who in the bloody hell had the audacity to awaken me at this inhuman hour?" The disheveled head of Juan, the office clerk, appeared at the window. "Ah," he remarked in a sad voice, visibly depressed. "It is the crazy Señora. Pardon me, Señora, I was only trying to sleep."

"As you are now awake, you could come out and help," I suggested brightly, leaning one elbow on the empty dump car.

"Young woman, getting me out of bed could not be accomplished by your noises, however brutal. It would take a regiment of Generalissimo Franco's troops, no less." The head disappeared with a groan.

But it did not take the Generalissimo's troops, after all. It was only a few mornings later when I was helping to shovel rubble into the dump car when I felt a shy tap on my shoulder. I turned and peered through the blinding dust into Juan's very own face.

"Juan! You are on your feet and it is only six-thirty of a morning!"

"*Sí*, Señora," he admitted sheepishly. "If you will give me your shovel, I, too, would like to help at this work."

I handed the shovel over to Juan and turned my back so that I should not see him begin work. It was the first time in his ten years with the Serra that he had offered to help the others and he was embarrassed.

The patio developed in the same way. Our idea was to cobble the surface of the patio with stones from a stone pit up in Meruan. As we needed the tractors to move the stones, we wrung permission out of Arturo to let us use them on the days when it was too wet to work the fields. We had to wait for such a day, but it finally came—a dull afternoon with a steady, cold downpour. Pepe and I stood shivering in the stable-dormitory doorway, with my eight-year-old Ric and his nine-year-old friend Manolo.

"Are you game for an expedition in this wet weather?" I asked Pepe. "You know, someone has to drive the tractor."

Pepe sighed. "I'd just as soon sling a sledge hammer around this afternoon, it'd be drier work, but I can't stand the thought of another winter of muddy patio."

"I can do it for you," offered Ric eagerly. He had recently mastered the art of tractor driving under the patient tutelage of Pepe and he was anxious to show it off to Manolo.

Manolo cast Ric an admiring glance; machines were out of his ken.

Pepe turned to Ric. "Now that is a nice offer. I'll tell you what, we can both sit on the seat and take turns. You can drive on the straight roads and I'll do the curves. Right?"

That satisfied Ric. Manolo added, "And I can help load the wagon."

We pulled our jackets around us and went out into the

rain to find a tractor and a wagon. Driving back through the patio on our way to the stone pit, the wagon silently filled with men. Some had raincoats, one or two had blankets, but most of them only had their old jackets with the collars turned up. We jolted out to the stone pit, huddled together in the beating rain, silent but determined. And we loaded the wagon full of stones with our bare hands, tearing the flesh and blackening the nails, and we hauled them back to the patio where one of the men, who worked in the cotton crop and who had made cobbled streets in his village in Spain, silently began to cobble in a wet corner of the patio. All the time, the rain continued to fall, cold and unpleasant. Our effort was a pathetic drop in the bucket. It looked somewhat as it would if one man should kneel in the corner of Times Square and begin to pave the place, one cobblestone at a time, all by himself. But everything has to have a beginning and the only way to begin is to take the first stone and put it in place. I knelt behind the first man for a time and handed him the stones, one by one. I stayed until I was too wet and too cold to stay any longer, but when I dropped out, someone took my place and from then on, that work never stopped. The cobbled patch in the patio spread out and out, each day farther, like an ink stain spreading out over a blotter.

5

THERE WERE INTERRUPTIONS, but we made progress. At the same time miles of rich valley land were being seeded with hybrid corn. Along toward the end of April we began to get well ahead of our corn-planting schedule and at the same time Marti's cotton planting began dropping behind. Arturo was casting covetous eyes at our antiquated *avantréns*. I could tell what was going on in his mind and I intended to foil him; he figured that if he put my two old machines on the cotton planting it would even up the work all around. That would, of course, leave us planting corn with our bare hands. No, I had no intention of letting Arturo hustle me out of my machines.

The morning came when Marrón and I were starting on our final lap, so to speak. We put our two machines into the last of the 400 parcels.

"There is nothing complicated left to do," I told Marrón, "just these long straight rows. We should finish up here by Saturday, don't you think? We can all take Sunday off for a change and on Monday we can tackle our bad little 44 parcel."

Marrón smiled with satisfaction. He took life so seriously it was seldom that he smiled. "I can see the end in sight," he said gleefully. "And we finish ahead of everyone, too, even with such inferior *avantréns*."

We were still cackling contentedly to each other when our doom jackrabbited up in the form of Arturo's Landover

jeep. It stopped in its usual cloud of dust and Arturo leaped out, leaving the motor running and the door ajar.

Striding purposefully toward us, he waved his hands at the struggling *avantréns*. "Getting along fine, aren't you, Betty?" His brown eyes were kind. He took off his straw hat and patted his blond hair where it was thinning.

"Yes, just fine. In fact, we hope to finish up next week."

"So soon as all that?" exclaimed Arturo in his eager, boyish way. "And how long would it take without the *avantréns?*" He was fishing.

Marrón and I both turned an icy look upon him. I spoke. "We have not even considered such a drastic circumstance. Both machines are limping along nicely with daily repairs, but we aren't complaining and neither are we planning on doing without them." I folded my arms.

Arturo looked crestfallen and glanced longingly once more at those *avantréns*.

Marrón put in, "I never thought I'd live to see the day when anyone else in the world would want these old machines that are practically falling apart."

Arturo whirled on him, looking injured. "Did I say I wanted your old machines? Why should I want them—we have all the tractor planters. I don't want them at all, I was only wondering. . . ."

I interrupted him. "Wonder no more, Don Arturo, these machines stay here in the corn until I am finished with them. I'll send you an official memorandum on that day."

Arturo was temporarily checked. He turned our attention elsewhere. "I almost forgot to tell you, Betty. Your husband is telephoning you from Madrid. You must go right into the *cortijo* and call him back—he's waiting. Marrón can sit on the *avantréns* while you are phoning."

"What does Ricardo want? Did he say?"

"Oh, something important he said—something about a big party." Arturo grinned wickedly. "Know you're going to enjoy that—now go and talk to him." He nodded to us both, leaped into his jeep and was gone, letting out the clutch abruptly enough for his forward jolt to slam the door, a labor-saving innovation of his own to keep from touching the door handle with the human hand.

When Arturo's jeep was again only a tell-tale ball of dust miles away, I turned to Marrón. "You do just what Arturo said—guard these old iron beasts with your life while I am on the phone. Imagine my going to Madrid this week! Why, I wouldn't think of it right now!"

It was a useless protest. Arturo had been correct. There was a party in Madrid the next night—our party, Ricardo's and mine—and I was expected to be hostess. There was nothing to argue against. After all, Ricardo had his rights. I would be there.

I drove my car into Tangier early the next morning, parked it in a garage and took the plane for Madrid. During the flight, my mind was still busy planting corn, but when we landed at the Madrid airport, and I saw Ricardo waiting for me, I was back in Spain with a rush. We embraced happily and went off to the car, arms linked together, both talking at once.

"You look so brown—almost like an Arab yourself!"

"Well, you look too pale—as if you were hiding from the sun all day."

Madrid had not changed, but I saw it with fresh eyes after my absence; I noticed anew the neat, modern buildings along the four-lane parkway from the airport to the city. All the trees that had only been budding when I went to Morocco were now in full, green leaf and the summer flowers were bright patches of color everywhere. The heat was colossal, but it

was a dry heat and one never felt damp. Our apartment was cool and dim and so quiet without our sons dashing from room to room.

The afternoon was spent in preparing the menu for the evening's dinner and in trying to put myself into some kind of presentable shape; my hair was sun-streaked and brittle, my hands were dark with soil stains. I gave my hair two shampoos and an oil treatment, rolled it on to some curlers and trusted that the results would pass inspection. It took me an hour to soak the stains from my hands and file my nails into a respectable shape.

For the party, I wore a long, full-skirted white satin ball dress designed by Dior. It was embroidered all over with thousands of tiny pearls and crystals and colored beads and it had its own matching white satin slippers. My sun-tanned shoulders were even darker against the white satin.

Ricardo and I stood together at the entrance of the apartment and greeted our guests. There was an oil man from Texas with his glamorous wife; a movie star from Hollywood, looking lovelier than ever in one of the new Italian dresses made of straw the color of a robin's egg; there was the Duchess who lives across the street from us, regal as always; and the bullfighter who was then number one in Spain.

Ricardo and I drifted around, talking with everyone and serving them lobster and turkey and homemade strawberry ice cream. Everyone drank lots of champagne and the evening wore on into the early morning. We had intended to transfer the party to a night club on the edge of town, but we all became so engrossed in our conversations that it was time to go to bed before we realized it.

The next afternoon, I took the plane out of Madrid and flew back to the African scene, eager to see the final planting of the corn. Or had the planting ended by this time?

And down in Adir Alto, standing on the edge of the 400 parcels, I found Marrón close to tears.

"What is the matter?" I asked in dismay.

"Señora, they came right out to the 400 parcels and took away our *avantréns*. I said to them, 'You can't do that, the Señora Betty won't like it.' And they just answered that it had been decided. What could I do?" Marrón was almost beside himself.

"Now, don't take it so hard," I told him. "We just have to round up some hand labor. It won't be so difficult. Send out the word and we'll see what turns up in the morning."

The "word" was sent up to the nearest *kabila* by way of an Arab boy who herded calves in and out of the ditches and stubble fields during the day and returned them to the folds in the late afternoon. When he went home to his *kabila* for his evening meal he carried along the information that we would be needing help in the morning.

As soon as the sun came up, I saddled big, bouncy Quimera and rode down to the 44 *parcela*. On the way, I stopped off in the *parcela* where Pepe had two Caterpillars at work and I "borrowed" one for the day. We were not allowed to do this without consulting Arturo first, but I needed the tractor urgently if we were to plant that morning and I knew it would be half a day before I could locate Arturo. I assured the tractor driver that everything was legal and he came along without protest.

As I cantered into the 44, I could see the six Spaniards who were assigned to fertilizer, working industriously to unload it, sack by sack across the *parcela*. But the eight Spaniards who had had the *avantréns* removed from under them were sitting motionless along the top of an irrigation ditch. I was furious. I whacked Quimera over the rump with my straw hat and galloped up to the idle men. While Quimera plunged

nervously up and down, I lectured the men severely about sitting around when there was any work at all to be done.

"All this work is the same," I said between lunges. "I work as hard as any of you so I have a right to tell you that the one thing I won't stand is to have you all sitting beside the field while the others work!"

One old grizzled hand rose to his feet and caught the reins to steady Quimera. "You mean we should help with the fertilizer, Señora?" he suggested helpfully.

"Yes," I answered lamely. "Go help with the fertilizer."

None of the men seemed very upset, but the incident spoiled my whole morning. I was sorry I had shouted. The men had so little to begin with and scolding them is a form of destroying their dignity—one of the few things allowed them.

By that time, our new help had begun to turn up. They came straggling along the dusty road in unkempt disorder—"Betty's girls" as they came to be known. These are the Arab women who do ninety-five per cent of all the physical labor that gets done in the Arab households. They tend the skinny cattle and the sheep, they plant the meager gardens, they carry the firewood and prepare the meals. When there is a call for work in the Serra, the Arab men will consent to drive the tractors or count the sacks, but if there are crops to be planted or picked, they prefer to send their women.

The women who came were of all ages—pathetic little thin ones of ten or twelve years, husky Amazons in the late teens or twenties, and old wizened grandmothers of God knows what age. They were dressed in a startling array of old rags. Their habit of toilette demands that when their garment gets dirty, they add another garment on top. They repeat this until their wardrobe is all upon their backs and then they take it all off, launder it, and start over. By this time, six months at least have gone by—they smell quite strong,

and the garments are pretty ragged. They wore the ordinary Arab pantaloon, the *saroual*, and a sheetlike haik over the top, but they loved bright colors—orange, purple, red—and they preferred shiny satin and rayon to anything practical. They came to work in all their adornments, too, rather than leave them home where they would not be safe—clanging armfuls of metal bracelets, long dangling earrings and ropes of colored beads around their necks. Some of them had good jewelry and thus we were privileged to see some beautiful pieces: huge, solid silver bracelets, heavy neck-chains of gold coins, emeralds and rubies on the ears.

If they had babies, they brought them right along, wrapped up somewhere in their jumble of old clothes. So shapeless were they that sometimes you wouldn't notice the baby until late in the day when it got hungry and began to whimper.

The Arab women received no education at all and they always remained pretty infantile. With these adult children, we had to finish our planting.

Marrón herded them disgustedly into a long row across the end of the parcel. Each one carried her own *zapa*, a most impractical, short-handled, head-heavy hoe. We gave each "girl" a handful of corn seed and indicated that we wanted three seeds dropped into each hole. And, with more giggling, they started off across the field.

"*Mujeres!*" groaned Marrón, grabbing his head with both hands.

"Oh, cheer up, we are on the last lap. Suppose we had all the *parcelas* to do like this."

Just as we were finishing for the day, one of the smallest Arab girls chopped a slice out of her big toe with her *zapa*. I patched her up temporarily from the first-aid kit I always kept in the station wagon—I had traded Quimera for the car at noon in Nemsah—and I indicated that she had to wait and

come to the *cortijo* with me so that Emilio, the practical nurse, could repair the toe properly.

We were delayed even later than usual because Costello drove out and Marrón and I walked over the *parcela* with him. The little hurt Arab had to wait beside the road for about fifteen minutes while the other Arabs passed her by on their way to the *kabila,* two miles away. It was beginning to get dark and the thought of being left alone must have been too much for her. She jumped to her feet in a panic and started hobbling frantically after the other women. I shouted after her and she sat down again immediately—content because she figured that someone had her interests in mind, after all.

At the *cortijo,* I found Emilio, who cleaned, salved and bandaged the cut.

I was just turning away from the first-aid room when Pepe caught hold of my shoulder. "What have you done to me, Señora?" he complained.

"What do you mean?" I asked, searching my mind for any wrongdoings I might have indulged in that day.

"You know what I mean—that tractor of mine you practically kidnaped from the field this morning."

"Ah-h, of course—that tractor. I'm glad you reminded me, I had forgotten all about it. Never mind though, I'll put things right with Arturo now." I started toward the office where I knew Arturo was talking to Juan.

Pepe put out his hand to stop me and shook his head. "It is already too late. Arturo gave me the devil and placed a fine against me for letting you have that tractor without consulting him first."

My face clouded over, my fists clenched together and I started for the office, angry. Pepe put his hand on my shoulder again.

"Don't. It is only thirty cents—half a day's pay. You'll

make it worse for having told you. You still don't understand the Spaniard, Señora. He is very jealous of his authority, and regardless of whether it's more efficient or whether the work gets done faster your way, you must never make him feel unimportant."

Pepe was right. If there are women around, the Spaniard must feel important, and through bypassing Arturo's control over the tractor movements, I had reduced him in size. And he had one sure way to get even. The Serra employed a feudal system of fines, against which I had argued vainly. The Serra felt that if a man made an error in judgment or committed any kind of a mistake, he should have to pay for it with money. My feeling was that every man has the right to his fixed earned wages without having to worry from day to day about whether he was going to have his bread taken away from his family as punishment for an unintentional wrong. Arturo knew that by fining the tractor chief, he cut at me in the hardest way. He had me. It was one of those days that had started out in the wrong direction and kept going that way.

On my way back to Nemsah I left the little Arab worker on the edge of her *kabila.* She was overwhelmed all of a sudden and reached back into the car to grab my hand and kiss it with swift gratitude—a gesture Arabs rarely make toward foreigners. It somehow did not seem like such a bad day after all.

6

TRAGEDY CAUGHT UP with us before we finished all the spring planting. Spaniards are prone to tragedy, anyway. You might say that they invite it; as a man who has been told he comes from an alcoholic family will begin to drink too much. The Spaniards have been told that they are an impoverished, tragic nation; if they have a little money they make an effort to spend it, explaining that they are an impoverished people; if there is a possiblity for tragedy, they seek it, explaining that they are a tragic people.

In meeting tragedy halfway and either surmounting it heroically or dying before it gloriously, they somehow feel they have fulfilled their destinies. This begins to explain for me the Spanish attitude toward bullfighting. To us Anglo-Saxons, it is an insane tomfoolery for a man to pit himself against a bull when there is a chance that he may lose his life; to us the man's life is too valuable. To the Spaniard, however, the whole idea of man facing bull is a heroic meeting head-on with his destiny and if he has to die for it, why he has died in the most glorious, worthwhile way possible.

I saw the same attitude on a less glamorous, but none the less vital level, with the men on the farm and their attitude toward safety. I spent hours drilling into them the basic safety principles: never get off a moving tractor, never walk in front of machinery moving forward or behind machinery backing up, never use poisonous sprays without the prescribed masks and gloves. I might as well have been trying to explain the theory

of relativity; it just did not get through to the men. They exhibited their bravery by jumping off moving tractors and jumping on again without stumbling and being mutilated by the following disk.

In dusting the crops, we use a deadly poison spray called parathion. One does not have to breathe it to be poisoned, it will penetrate any unprotected skin area; enough of it and you can die. Of course we provide elaborate rubber suits, masks and gloves, but I have seen some of the men remove their gloves or even their masks, just to demonstrate to the others how brave they are.

I have seen a machinist soberly stand before an electric metal punch or a lathe and flick the metal chip away with his forefinger each time the punch passed; a quarter of a second's misjudgment and he loses his finger. That tractorist, that sprayer and that machinist are all bullfighting in the only way they can.

So we had, on the farm, a continual series of accidents which I felt could have been avoided, but which the Spaniards shrugged off as inevitable. And these accidents involved the Arabs as often as not because they strove to imitate the Spaniards as nearly as possible.

We were working at a fever pitch to get all the crops in while the ground was right and the weather was stable. Besides the usual day shift, we had most of the tractors on an extra night shift. When one tractor driver tired, we cast around for another, switching back and forth, anything to keep the tractors running. In this manner, a group of John Deeres was disking in an Adir Bajo parcel and this particular tractor pulled out about midnight to refuel back at the *cortijo*. The regular driver was sick and Pepe had been called upon to loan one of his Caterpillar drivers; a sober, experienced Arab but a man more accustomed to the heavy, slow-respond-

ing Caterpillar than to the light, maneuverable John Deere. The moon threw off enough light to give the driver a false sense of confidence and he was hightailing it along the road to the *cortijo,* with his assistant standing on the machinery hitch behind him and clinging precariously to the tractor seat.

There was a sudden turn in the road and the driver swung his tractor around to make it without first changing gear or at least slowing down. On a Caterpillar this might not have been disastrous, but the John Deere's outside wheel slipped off the road and into the ditch. When the driver felt his tractor sliding from beneath him, he leaped off in a panic, slightly ahead, but on the same side to which the tractor was falling. He was pinned firmly underneath the tractor with the steering post cutting across his throat and he died instantly with his neck broken. Meanwhile, his assistant, petrified with fear, had continued to cling to the seat and he, too, was pinned underneath the tractor.

There they lay, the one dead and the other helpless, with the engine still running and the up wheel spinning grotesquely in the moonlight, until the next John Deere tractor came along on its way to refuel at the *cortijo.* Both the driver of this second tractor and his assistant were young, highly excitable Spaniards. Their idea was good; they would put a chain around the up wheel of the overturned tractor, attach the chain to the second tractor and try to haul it off the trapped man. However, they drafted as driver a farmer who happened along at this moment and the two of them got behind the upset tractor to help shove. When they had lifted the tractor a foot or so off the ground, the trapped Arab leaped to his feet and finding himself unhurt went bounding off across the fields without so much as a backward look. At this point the pulling tractor stalled in the inexpert farmer's hands and the upset tractor slowly slid back, pinning under-

neath it the two Spaniards with the corpse and leaving no one around capable of starting the tractor again.

Twenty more minutes passed before competent help arrived and all the men were freed and all the tractors back at work.

There was a big Arab funeral with feasting and none of our Arabs coming to work for two days. All the tractor drivers drove cautiously for many weeks and a general air of sadness hung over us all; sadness for a useless death. But the pace of work remained as demanding and, gradually, as spring deepened and the earth warmed, and with the many new problems coming up, the tractor accident was put aside in our minds.

7

THERE WAS ALSO ROMANCE, that springtime in the Serra.

Marrón had talked so much about his girl, Carmen—the one he wanted to take to Seville with the tractor he had wished for—that I was anxious to meet her. One morning when the work was fairly well in shape, we placed the burden of responsibility upon Espejo's shoulders—with four-year-old Jay to help him—and we went to visit Carmen. She lived down in Adir Bajo with her parents and a couple of sisters. As we drove there in the station wagon, Marrón explained that they expected to get married before too long.

"Padre Tomás is in charge of things. He wants everything to be absolutely correct and there are so many things to do." Marrón shook his head in a troubled way. Then, lest I read into his tone a note of disloyalty to his church, he added hastily, "Of course the Padre is right. It should be that way; a marriage that is not correct in the eyes of the Church is no marriage at all."

Padre Tomás was one of the priests who lived in Larache, but who served the people out on the Serra farm because, as yet, we had no priest living there.

For several months we had been working on this problem. At the time, Father Tomás came out from Larache each Sunday to say Mass in the little improvised chapel inside the schoolroom, but the population of the farm felt more and more the need of a priest standing by all the time. The women, especially, liked to know that there was someone to

whom they could talk frankly about their personal problems. Most of them had come, fairly recently, from small Spanish villages where the priest is like a kindly member of each family, and here in Morocco, they missed that companionship and counsel.

A small house that stood next to our stable-dormitory was being enlarged and put into condition for occupancy. When it was ready, one of the priests from the Order in Larache was to be sent out to live there permanently. After he had taken up residence, this priest could not only tend to the spiritual needs of the adults, he could provide a badly needed supervision in our Adir school.

Marrón went on with his story. "When I first went to Padre Tomás with this idea of getting married, he said I should think it over carefully. 'You are both young,' he said. 'Why don't you wait a few years?'"

And Marrón had assured the padre that they had been thinking it over for several years already and felt they had made up their minds.

"Then bring me your own baptismal paper and that of your fiancée," Padre Tomás had said, "and we can get on with the marriage."

"This is my problem now, Señora. I don't have those baptismal papers. You see, Carmen and I were both born in Seville and baptized there, but our fathers never had enough money to pay for copies of the baptismal paper."

"Well, Marrón, that doesn't sound like too much of a problem—just save the money you need and send for the papers. Isn't that easy?" I looked sideways at him, riding so solemnly on the seat beside me.

He sighed heavily. "I suppose so, Señora, but it all takes such a long time."

We were arriving in Adir Bajo. My original fears about this

part of the farm as a place to live in turned out to be justified. Although there were many more trees here than on the rest of the *finca*—farm—and fine old ones, the land was so low that it was stickily, humidly hot all day long.

Marrón's bride-to-be must have been forewarned by mental telepathy or, more likely, by the high column of dust that arose behind the car as we came from Adir Alto *cortijo*, miles away.

Carmen was a sweet, gentle-voiced young girl, with a petite, attractive figure and lovely white-blond hair that was all out of character with her southern Spain background; the people of southern Spain had to be olive-skinned and black-haired. She had a saintly quality about her and a maturity beyond her twenty-three-or-so years. She introduced me to her pretty sisters and to her mother. We sat, all of us, in the kitchen-living room, dimmed to keep it cool, around the bare wooden table and sipped cups of black coffee, liberally mixed with chicory.

When I later started back to Nemsah for lunch, Marrón came along with me to stop off at the Nemsah pumphouse and show me where he and Carmen would live when they were finally married. It was only three rooms attached to the big engine room of the pumphouse; a modest dwelling, but clean and light. Marrón had already finished the painting and what furniture he had purchased during the years of the engagement was in place. He proudly showed me his new bedroom suite and his living-room table. There were no doors for the bedroom or living room and I suggested that curtains in these two spaces would add a lot and solve the problem of privacy.

"Yes, I agree, but they are so expensive, Señora, that they will have to wait."

"Don't do anything," I said suddenly. "I think I have just

the thing for you in Madrid—some curtains from our first house that won't fit into the apartment where we are now. I shall write for them immediately."

"There is time, Señora, there is time," said Marrón, thinking morosely of the baptismal papers.

We were standing in the doorway of the house looking out into the bare yard which Marrón would have to fill with trees and flowers for his blond wife. I turned to him and said, "Marrón, would you be offended if I sort of loaned you that money you need and you could pay me back when you have it? I think you ought to get married this summer while the weather is still nice."

It required courage for me to make such a suggestion. Marrón was as prideful as all Spaniards are, and money is a very touchy subject, particularly between women and men.

Apparently, love was stronger than Spanish pride because Marrón broke into a smile. "Would you do that, Señora? And consider it a temporary loan just between you and me?"

"It's a contract," I said, offering my hand. "And you will do me a big favor if you don't mention it to a soul. You know how Don Arturo hates me to interfere with the company affairs. Come on, we'll get the money right now and you can write for those famous papers tonight."

Ten days later, Marrón hissed me into a corner of the patio and brought me up to date on the wedding situation. The baptismal papers, promptly paid for, had duly arrived, both his and Carmen's. He had borne them happily to Padre Tomás and the wheels of the Catholic Church had begun to turn—the bans were posted and the church reserved for some vague date away into the winter.

More days passed and Marrón did not speak about his wedding. We were busy trying to beat down the weeds in Parcel

44 and I did not think to ask him what progress was being made.

And then one morning we stopped in a ditch down beyond Parcel 44. We sat down on two big rocks and I poured two cups of hot coffee from my thermos bottle. We were out of sight of the two Caterpillar tractors that were disking in 44, but we could hear the rumble go louder and then fade as they turned away to the other end of the parcel. I turned to hand Marrón his cup of coffee and suddenly he put his face down into both his hands.

I set the cup carefully on the ground and knelt down in front of him. "Will you tell me what is the matter and perhaps there is something I can do to help? You know by now that I would never tell anyone about your personal affairs." The farm men all had a dread of being ridiculed in front of the others. I spoke in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice and I waited patiently in the silence that followed.

After a moment, Marrón's shoulders stopped shaking and he looked at me unhappily through his fingers. "I believe you are my friend, Señora," he said, taking his hands away from his face altogether and accepting the cup of coffee I still held out to him. "And I am sorry not to have spoken to you before, but I was so ashamed and I thought that maybe the Señora, with her fine background, would not like me so much when she knew the truth."

"Never mind the background, Marrón, and tell me what you have to say."

"I am *desesperado* about this wedding. We still have not been given a definite date and well, the truth is we cannot wait very much longer. Carmen is going to have our baby very soon." He looked down at the coffee cup and his breath came too quickly, as he waited to be censored.

I moved closer to put my arm around his shoulder. "Why, that is not so serious, Marrón. Your intentions have always been honest. You really should have married years ago when you first made up your minds."

"Maybe. But our people expect us to be engaged five or six years before we marry."

"There, there, Marrón, suppose you take the rest of today off and go on home and prepare to get married next week—the first of the week. And here," I fished around inside the leather pouch that was attached to my belt, drew out some money and shoved it into Marrón's lap. "You will need a decent suit and a pair of shoes," I said.

Marrón got to his feet and smiled for the first time in many days.

I added: "Don't worry about the church—that part will be all right, too."

That same evening, after my sons had dropped off to sleep, I drove into Larache and sought out Costello, still behind his desk in the office. "Suppose you have a word with Padre Tomás and arrange the wedding for next week? The poor young man is going crazy and Carmen's family are all upset—to say nothing of what Carmen herself must be suffering."

It was arranged and Marrón was married to Carmen in his new suit and shiny shoes. Carmen wore a pretty suit that her mother had helped her make. There was no time for a honeymoon then, because Marrón was needed in the corn. We agreed that they could go to Spain when the work eased up in the fall—to Granada and Seville and even all the way up to Madrid, if they wished.

They did move down into their three rooms at the Nemsah pumphouse and the green and yellow curtains came from Madrid and we hung one in the doorway of the living room

and one in the doorway of the bedroom, where they looked very smart.

They settled into their new life, perfectly thrilled with each other as partners. It was good to see their happiness together; the way their eyes lit up whenever they met; the pride they took in their three rooms; the industrious way they tackled the barren dirt yard, trying to turn it into a garden.

Marrón and his Carmen were one of the nicest and happiest couples on the Serra.

April was ending, and, some way or other, all the crops were planted; my corn, Arturo's rice, Marti's cotton, the pepper and castor and tomato plants—all were in the ground. The old *avantréns* were both put away for another year—Marrón and I went out to the cotton parcel where they had been cast aside and we hauled them tenderly into the machine shop, greased them gently and stored them away. Because by now we were fond of those decrepit machines in the way one grows fond of a helpless dog or the failure of a man who sells shoestrings on the corner.

The mechanical planters were taken off all the John Deere tractors and the cultivator blades were put on instead. And all of us *jefes* went around digging up our seeds to see if they had sprouted yet; "to see if the seed has moved," as the Spaniards say. The Spaniard gives personality to everything that grows. "He doesn't like his feet wet," they say of corn, or "Cotton, he adores lot of sun," or "Rice will eat that fertilizer with much pleasure." It livens up agriculture in the imagination. I could picture Rice out there gobbling a delicious lunch of phosphate fertilizer or Cotton stretching wide his arms to receive the sun, or my Corn trying gingerly to keep his feet dry.

At such times I realized how supremely happy I was with my share of life on the Serra, and how well my luck had held—

so far. Carmen and Marrón were married, the men at Adir had a place to sleep, and every kernel of hybrid corn I had bought in a mood of wild impulse in New York was safely bedded in one thousand acres of rich Morocco soil.

It had been a wonderful spring.

3 The Growing

1

MAY FOLDED WARM WINGS over the Serra. We lost the energy of spring that had gone into the planting.

With the corn actually in the ground I really had more freedom in which to enjoy my family and life in our Nemsah house.

"Weren't you lonely?" people always ask me first about life on the Moroccan farm. And the answer is no, because I was never really alone.

There were first of all my four sons, and their friends in *la Banda*, and Pilar, and the friends she made, and our neighbors in the Nemsah *cortijo*, and the friends and visiting strangers that came from Larache, and Tangier, and Madrid, and finally, from every part of the world.

Interrupting the turmoil of our days would be my own visits and hasty business trips to Larache and Tangier, and even to Casablanca in French Morocco, and my flying visits to Ricardo in Madrid. These meetings were always wonderful but far too brief, but they helped us to remember that my venture in the Serra was only a temporary detour from my life as homemaker, and that once this necessary business of a thousand African acres of corn and the reaping were over, we would again be a happy family, all together, in Madrid.

But, in any case, it would have been impossible to feel lonely in Nemsah with *la Banda* sharing our daily lives.

The Nemsah children were nearly all boys and this I regretted because with four boys of my own, I am always seek-

ing female company for them, to offset the hundred per cent male view toward life a family of all boys is bound to develop.

We had only two girls there: a miniature, doll-like, reticent child of five who ate like a canary bird, and a hulking, simple-minded girl of eleven. The boys ranged in ages from four to nine. Ric, my oldest, was only eight, so the one nine-year-old was the natural leader of the Band.

His name was Manolo. He was the son of the Serra Company's chief sheepherder and his mother was dead. His father's job demanded that he live wherever the sheep were grazing at the time; one month it might be on the sands of Nemsah, another month it would be on the wheat stubble of Meruan. The herder, Manolo's father, set up housekeeping in whatever straw-roofed hovel he happened across. Many times, lacking even a shack, he would construct a crude lean-to of woven cane stalks. And that was Manolo's home. He slept stretched out on the dirt floor of his father's various shacks, one blanket under him, another on top. His clothes were exactly what he had on his person at the moment; discarded, cut-down trousers of his father's, tattered shirt, canvas sandals in the winter and in summer no shoes at all.

Manolo was brown-haired and dark-eyed, with his fair skin burned leathery. Yet he kept about him a poise, an air of quiet dignity and a wisdom beyond his years; an adulthood that the children of the fields often have.

I would open my eyes in my bedroom in those delicious, orange-blossom-fragrant first hours of the morning and hear the children out in the garden. They would be gathered under the orange trees and Manolo would be deciding gravely what they would do that day.

There were so many choices. If the morning was not too hot, they would saddle up the old horse known as "107" and take turns riding around the *cortijo* until they tired, or "107"

did, and bucked them harmlessly off into the sand. Another early morning favorite game was to scout down to where the burros were grazing. Along with the sheep, the burros were under the care of Manolo's father, which gave Manolo a certain vague authority over them. Most of the older boys would scramble onto the backs of the burros. With short sticks they prodded their animals around in slow, wide circles. The littler boys were allowed to take hold of a burro's tail and follow the parade on foot. There was always much conversation from burro to burro, many intricate patterns to be traced out. From a distance it looked for all the world like a circus troupe training in winter quarters.

When the sun came up, hot in the sky, Manolo would indicate that there had been enough horse or burro riding for that day. *La Banda* would slither back to the house, stopping on the way at some half-hidden irrigation canal to wet its feet up to the knees and dunk its heads. They would then, like as not, congregate in the playground out behind the house. There was a clump of eucalyptus trees that gave shade to a good-sized patch of ground where we had set up a swing, a pair of trapeze rings and parallel bars for a start. Someone was always adding something new and interesting. One day, I rolled in a length of cement pipe from a near-by irrigation project. It was useful to crawl through, or to push up on its end and use as a fortress. I went with the children one morning to the swampy part of Meruan and cut dozens of canes and built a little lean-to. Manolo was the expert on this construction job because he was the only one who had actually lived in such a house. There were seldom any toys bought in a store, except those few things that my sons had carried down from Madrid. Yet *la Banda* never seemed to miss toys or to be bored.

Manolo gradually came to sleep in our house and to have

his meals with my sons. I do not remember if there was ever one day when we said, "Manolo, why don't you sleep here and have your meals with us?" It just happened. He had to be at the house so early in the morning anyway to direct the Band's activities and very often his "home" would be miles and miles away that week—too far to go for meals—too far back at night. His father never objected.

It was like that with the rest of *la Banda* and the baths. There was never actually a day when I said, "You boys are very dirty and should take a bath." My sons are allowed to accumulate from head to toe whatever dirt they wish during the day, so long as they consent to soak in a good hot tub of water each night and to be scrubbed and scrutinized for bugs, scratches, infections or strange maladies. This ritual took place in Nemsah each evening before dinner. The tub was big and all four boys plunged in at once. As none of the other houses in Nemsah had bathtubs—and I don't know by what whim one had been installed in my house—many of the Band had never seen one, so they came into the bathroom first out of natural curiosity and lined up along the wall to watch my sons having their baths. There were rubber ducks too, and boats that moved along the water surface with elastic-band motors. Of course, all the Band would be very dirty and it seemed quite natural that they, too, should get clean. Before long, when my sons got out of the tub, the rest of the Band would strip and hop in. Peals of laughter, water all over the bathroom floor and flowing out into the hall, shrieks of agony from soap in unaccustomed eyes! Some of the boys took to bringing their clean clothes with them once a week and changing after their baths.

Our unique possession, that bathroom, was patronized not only by members of *la Banda.* Older members of the local citizenry came to observe, to wonder and, finally, to use.

Espejo was a steady customer, but was it the remarkable tub that drew him, or the presence of Pilar? All the Arabs respected Pilar, but Espejo's feelings went deeper than respect. He was always appearing at our house in Nemsah, ostensibly to have a bath, but how many baths can you take a day, especially if you are a laborer and needed on a farm in Morocco?

As for Pilar, she liked Espejo's company, but fortunately for us, she was not promising her heart to anyone.

As the Band had by way of events fallen into the habit of bathing, so we fell into the haircutting the same way. I noticed in the earlier bath sessions that the Band all inclined to be more or less long-haired, a fashion that made it difficult to wash their heads and even more difficult to get them dry. There was a traveling barber who wandered through Nemsah at irregular intervals; a lean and hungry-looking individual with shabby clothes. He bore out the old saying about barbers by having his own hair curling up the back of his neck. I signaled him one day from my garden wall as he went by and he came loping over, like a wolf, to see what I wanted. Leaning over the wall among the red geraniums, we contracted for a little business. Thereafter, once every ten days, he ranged into Nemsah with his battered black bag full of scissors, clipper and brushes. He would set up a chair under an orange tree and would cut all the "heads" that presented themselves. He gave me a flat rate that covered the whole Band and kept him eating more regularly than was his custom.

The Band gradually took to wearing blue jeans, polo shirts and sneakers, which I begged from understanding mothers in the States, obtained from the American PX in French Morocco, or bought on the Tangier black market at atrocious prices. The day arrived when the boys were all dressed so much alike that it was hard to tell one from another. Some

stranger to Nemsah was apt to ask, "But which ones are yours, Señora?"

I would look around at the boys dashing by, but they shifted from place to place so fast and were dressed so alike that I would have to reply, "I don't know right now, but they do sort themselves out at nights and mine are the four who come home for dinner."

To the consternation of the Band, I woke up one morning and resolved that the time had come for Education. The night before, a workman had left his ladder against this house of ours that rose so alarmingly into the air. The Band had discovered the ladder and that morning they were up on the roof in force, galloping back and forth and shouting something about "Hi-ho, Silver." Suppose one of them should fall off, I thought in panic. Really they should be occupied in some more enlightening way! Such as school.

There was an empty room attached to the foot of the long L that formed the Nemsah buildings. It opened on to our house garden, which would be ideal for the purpose of supervision. I caught Arturo one day as he tore by in his Landover jeep.

"There is an empty room next to my house, Arturo," I began, leaning in the window.

He raced his motor impatiently and frowned at this delay. "What would you want it for—to start a hospital?"

"No, not quite a hospital. I want to make a school."

"A school!" he snorted. "This is summertime." He tucked his lips out of sight behind his big mustache and pulled at his chin.

"I won't be here in the winter and these children need some teaching, and besides . . ." I was prepared to dally much time away, leaning against Arturo's jeep.

Arturo saw that I was in no hurry. He threw up his hands. "Take the room. Do what you want with it. Would you step aside now and let me proceed? You can see I'm in a hurry?"

I stepped aside and Arturo raced away, hunched over his wheel like a potential winner on the Indianapolis Speedway.

"*Gracias*," I called to the dust swirl he left behind.

That very morning I rounded up the Band from the burro circuit, herded them into the empty room, and informed them that they were about to be educated. There were loud groans from all the boys and Ric informed the little citizens of Nemsah that this was unfair because he served nine months of that kind of torture in Madrid and whose idea was it anyway, to climb up the ladder and gallop around the roof? Emile was perfectly willing to volunteer the unlucky name, but a grimy hand was clapped over his mouth and he was drawn back into the crowd, and disappeared for the time being.

I said it no longer mattered who had galloped over my bedroom ceiling, my mind was made up, and I asked the two little girls of the Band if they would be in charge of the cleaning. They giggled hysterically, poked each other in the ribs and nodded their heads up and down. Some ducks had been living in the room recently and there were loud arguments about who had to scrape up the duck reminders.

Said Emile, "You haven't watered the lawn for three days, you do it."

Answered Jay, "I emptied the garbage this morning, so *you* do it."

Some small boy with too little local political influence to decline the job eventually had to do it.

I got the town carpenter to build me four child-sized tables for the older children and one long, low table for the kindergarten tykes. He built also a bookcase and a blackboard and

a desk for "teacher," although as yet we had no teacher. We painted each piece of furniture a different color—red, blue, yellow, green. When it was finished and the ducks had been discouraged from resuming residence, it was a gay schoolroom and the Serra carpenter, Vicente, came around to see his rival's work.

He examined all the pieces in silence, looking critically at the joints. Later, stepping to the doorway and running a hand through his red hair he asked me reproachfully, "Why didn't you ask me to do this?"

"You are so busy with company jobs that I was afraid to bother you with this trifle," I explained, closing the door behind to keep out the ducks.

"Señora, there is always time for your work, even if we must do it at night. Another time do not call in these outsiders." He looked away in embarrassment. It had been a big speech for him to make.

I was a little embarrassed myself by this display of affection. "Next time, then, Vicente, you will do the work," I said. "And *gracias*."

I always had so much to say *gracias* for to these people.

The teacher we found was the young girl who taught in the Adir school during the winter months. She came out from Larache on a bus every morning and the boys gave her a rough time until we instituted the after-class snack. Only the children who had behaved themselves could have the snack which consisted of a big glass of orange juice or chocolate milk, a handful of cookies or a thick sandwich, and always a couple of hard candies twisted up in colored paper. It helped the boys remember to go easy on the teacher and it filled in on the meager menus they ate in their houses.

For the classes, we bought our instruction books from a local store, but we had piles of magazines, crayons and color-

ing books from America and the children made lots of cut-out pictures to take home to their parents.

The cutout picture class was a free-lance thing and we usually left the children on their own to select whatever cut-outs appealed to them and to arrange the composition as they wanted. There was not always time enough to pass on the results after class ended and sometimes the pupils burst from the classroom, clutching unsupervised pictures in their little hands. So I was rather shaken one day to find Emile nailing the results of his composed-picture class firmly to the wall beside his bunk. He had chosen a nude, a really nude nude, but finding her a trifle pale, he had touched up her highlights with his red crayon. He had her pasted artistically on a piece of green paper and underneath was printed in his laborious, six-year-old hand, "Merry Xmas To All." Starting the next day, all the cutouts were teacher-advised.

School was only three hours of the day so there were still many hours left for the burros and the playground. They forgave me, the Band, for setting them at the schoolwork and even went back to liking me a little. All except José María. He held out for a long time.

One evening Costello was coming in through the garden gate on his way to my house and he collided with the Band, which was making a hasty exit, all twelve of them at once. He stepped aside to avoid being knocked down.

"Who are all those children?" he gasped, grabbing at his straw hat.

"Yours and mine," I told him, catching the hat before it fell to the ground.

"Yours and *mine?*"

"Yes, Costello," I insisted. "All the children of the Serra are yours and mine to take care of, don't you know that?"

"Those little savages? You're crazy," he said shortly and pushed on into the house where Pilar made him the drink he needed by then.

Well, in those first weeks, José María gave me many moments to reflect upon Costello's judgment. José María was only five years old. He had a head too big for his emaciated body and a great, protruding belly that seemed to be set directly on top of his spindly, rickety little legs. His dark eyes also bulged and his mouth was always in the shape of the letter O. He never voiced an opinion in the gatherings of the Band. Indeed, he was never asked for one. It was hard to find out what he was thinking and why he did the things he did. It got so when anything naughty was done, the boys automatically chorused, "José María did it," and whether he really had done it or not, he never failed to take the credit. Perhaps it was because he thought this was what society expected of him or, just possibly, he liked it that way.

There was the business of the screens for the school windows. There were flies in the schoolroom and they were bothering the students, so I took the window measurements, bought some wire screening in Larache and nailed it up over the windows. The children even helped; two of them braced the insecure ladder, one held the nails. I remember distinctly that José María handed me the hammer, his face solemn; his eyes wide. Later in the same morning when I was down in Parcel 31, José María climbed up the ladder and deliberately pushed his fist through both of the screens.

I returned at lunchtime from the *parcelas* to find José María sitting on my porch, a prisoner of his fellow men. Manolo came forward and hurriedly explained that the screens on the schoolroom were pushed in, the room was full of flies again, and nobody was guilty except José María.

Everyone stepped back respectfully against the garden wall

while I confronted José María, who remained seated on the step.

"Why did you do that?" I cried down into his serious little face.

"*No sé*—I dunno," he answered placidly.

I picked him up by the back of his shirt—the poor child did not weigh very much—and I spanked him hard and sent him home for the rest of the day.

Another time I was cleaning out the schoolroom. The children buzzed around picking up the loose wastepaper and I swept the floor. We all burned the debris outside in a pile. While we were burning paper, José María was urinating in patterns all over our clean floor.

"Why did you do that?" I yelled down into his solemn face.

"*No sé*—I dunno," he answered and he took his spanking in the usual silence.

There was a kitten he killed, holding it in front of his face and squeezing it around its neck until it ceased breathing, an Arab he stoned with a collection of pebbles from his pocket while hiding behind one of my colored flower pots, and a gentle old horse he kicked while it was asleep.

And the answer was always "*No sé*—I dunno."

But he got better and better. Although he never broke down and said so, I could tell it was agony for him when he was sent home to be alone the rest of the day. And the time it became his turn to receive the brand-new blue jeans and jacket and Hopalong Cassidy socks that my mother sent periodically from the States, he actually smiled shyly at me and said, "My mother says to thank you."

"*No sé*," and this time I was the one who said it.

2

ALL OUR FRIENDS had standing invitations to visit Nemsah whenever they felt inclined, with the understanding that no special treatment would be extended to them; they could fit in with our routine or they could make plans of their own around the farm. Everyone was pleased with this arrangement and most of the time, there were occupants in our extra beds. Besides many genuine friends who came just to be with me, I played hostess to a constant stream of characters. Sometimes I felt that I must be listed in the Moroccan guide books under "unusual sights." There were bearded journalists looking for newspaper and magazine stories, smooth-shaven photographers laden down with cameras, lenses and film, curious tourists with letters of introduction that began, "I would appreciate anything you can do for my dear friend So-and-So," and even some agronomists who were honestly interested in this huge agricultural operation.

As Tangier was so close and Ricardo and I had made such good friends there during our year's residence, many of our guests came from Tangier. These friends were of all nationalities, indiscriminately; somehow in Tangier, one never thinks of noticing the accent or the color of the skin. So, along with the Americans, the English, the French, and the Spaniards, came a number of Arabs. They preferred to be called Moroccans. However, the French and the Spanish colonials in Morocco also gave themselves this name, so I continued to refer to my real Moroccan friends as "Arabs."

These Arabs were all as well or better educated than I am. Two of them were graduates of the difficult French *lycée* in Tangier; one of these was a good schoolteacher and another worked in a travel agency and spoke fluently four or five languages. Naturally, some of these educated Arabs belonged secretly to one or the other of the Moroccan Nationalist parties, but so careful were they that unless you knew them, you would never guess. At my house and in my presence they always discussed their efforts toward the freedom of Morocco with the utmost casualness and although I never took any active part in their discussions, I respected their confidence.

These Arab visitors rather worried the Spanish authorities, ever on the lookout for possible Arab uprisings in their zone. More than once when one of them crossed over the Tangier border into Spanish Morocco, there would be a flurried telephone call ahead to Larache to check if these potential threats to Spain's position in Morocco were really visiting at Nemsah. It made me uncomfortable to be so closely checked, but in another way I was flattered that the authorities trusted that my guest would not make any political trouble.

All these people, acquainted and unacquainted, would drift up our eucalyptus-shaded lane, and if they were pleasant they would have a bed, if a bed were empty at the time. They would stay around a few days, sharing our life, and then move on.

3

IT WOULD SOON be summer, and no rain had fallen since the planting; and how desperately our seeds needed rain. There were several days late in May when long layers of gray clouds formed in the east, but the west stayed bright and blue. Marrón and I walked the entire length of Parcel 31 with Pepe trailing along behind, anxiously peering in hopes of seeing the first little green sprout. There were none to be seen that day above the ground, but we stopped in midfield and dug around and finally we had in our hands several kernels of corn, all "moved." The first pale sprouts showed. We replaced the kernels, careful not to break their shoots; from now on, each shoot represented money.

We talked of many things as we tramped along. Marrón and Pepe wanted to know if Texas oil men are truly as fabulous as all the stories say. Pepe explained how the latest model of the German Mercedes-Benz automobile could be greased from stem to stern by pressing a single button. Marrón said that that was nothing, the Americans had perfected an adaptation of radar in cars which enabled them to drive around at night without headlights!

"It sees in the dark automatically," he explained. He knew this because his cousin in Seville had seen the American Consul's car being driven in this way. I ventured to say that it was more likely the American Consul had just neglected to turn on his lights. Marrón turned a scornful look upon me

which was meant to indicate that I did not know everything in the world.

We went toward the far ends of Parcel 31 to examine a wonderful spring of clear cold water that Marrón had stumbled across during the spring planting. It was in a low-lying marshy patch. The spring itself started about three yards under the surface. At that level, while digging to clear out the spring pool, Marrón had found an interesting old Moorish millstone. It was a strange object to find in this sector which has been marshland as long as anyone can recall. Marrón said the Arab who accompanied him had refused to lift out the stone, explaining, "Underneath will be living the Devil and we should be freeing him into the world."

When Marrón had reached down and lifted it out himself and no Devil had appeared, the Arab merely shrugged his shoulders and said, "Perhaps, after all, it covers a whole treasure of gold."

To the Arab one thing was about the same as the other, and best left undisturbed.

I examined the ancient millstone with such curiosity, running my fingers over its smooth surface.

"I should like to have this for my fireplace hearth in Nemsah," I said.

Marrón shook his head. "I don't think the Arabs would like it so much if we moved it."

"No," agreed Pepe. "Especially taking it inside a house—a Christian house—they wouldn't understand that."

We slid the stone carefully back inside the hole, on one edge of the spring. And surely it is still there.

That night I went to sleep with the hot, dust-filled air hanging heavily over the whole length of the Lukus Valley. But in those last hours before dawn, it began to rain; a thick-dropped, pounding sheet of water that lasted two hours and

brought steam from the earth. After the sun had risen, rosy and warm-looking over the damp farm, I took Jay by the hand and Penn, the littlest son, and we walked joyously across the road into the citrus groves. We went barefooted and the wet, cold sand felt glorious between our toes. We took a reed basket and once we were underneath the black-green foliage, we each found a big yellow grapefruit for our breakfast. We went farther into the next grove and we picked oranges until there was no more room in the basket.

When we came out of the grove, the Arabs were streaming up the road from their *kabila*, ready to work, invigorated by the cooling rain, and Pilar was leaning over the whitewashed wall, flapping her apron at us to attract attention and yelling, "Breakfast is ready; breakfast is ready."

Jay let go of my hand and planted his little bare feet in the sand. "Let's have a race back to the house," he said.

Penn immediately crouched almost to the ground, like a boxer getting ready to deliver an uppercut and began to count, "One, two, three, four . . ."

"That's enough numbers," I told him. "I'll carry the basket of fruit and it will be a fair handicap."

Penn was up to number ten and we took off across the sand, the two little boys plowing along ahead of me, blond heads shining, shrieking with happiness and good health.

After that first welcome rain, there were others and before long, everybody's seeds had "moved" and the once-bare, brown fields were furred with neat rows of tiny green sprouts.

June was a time for everyone to be happy and we hurried about, arranging to have the John Deere tractors cultivate in Parcel 31 or Parcel 422 and mixing insecticide formula and dusting it onto the baby plants. We weeded by hand the edges of our *parcelas*, too, and burned the undergrowth in

the irrigation ditches to give the Serra a more tidy look. June was a waiting period, a relaxation, and we caught up on all our repairs and those odd jobs on a farm for which there is never time during the hurried days of the spring planting.

With the coming of the really heavy summer heat, we filled the big swimming pool at the Palafito and whenever I had time, I drove all the Nemsah children and my sons over there for a splash. Emile and Ric, my two oldest, and little Manolo and one of the others could swim fairly well. They even leaped off the diving board into the deep end of the pool. The smaller boys contented themselves with dunking into the shallow part of the pool and then tearing off, screeching and leaping, all through the big deserted house and among the formal flower beds and grass plots over which Pedro, the Palafito's gardener, toiled. I would swim, too, but lazily, up and down a few times and then stretch out in the shade of one of the mimosa trees, my eyes closed, listening to the noises of the boys. I was always tired and this was one of the few times during the busy day when I stopped to rest. In a moment or two I would be fast asleep.

One of these lovely, tranquil siestas of mine was interrupted by the terrified screams of the smallest female member of the Nemsah *Banda.* I leaped automatically to my feet and dashed over to the shrubbery from which the screams were coming. All sorts of horror-images passed through my sleepy mind: a scorpion had stung the child, she had fallen and broken an arm. . . . I rounded the concealing shrub and found the little girl tied expertly, her hands behind her back, to a fence post. All around her feet and up to her knees the boys had piled dried grass and small twigs. My son Ric was kneeling before this modern Joan of Arc, brandishing a folder of matches.

"Ric!" I shouted.

Ric got to his feet and grinned sheepishly. "Aw, can't you see it's just a joke? We wouldn't burn her up for anything. Really we wouldn't."

Manolo silently began to untie the binding thongs and Emile kicked the firewood away. The would-be victim fled like a rabbit as soon as she was free. I suppose that, grown to womanhood someday, she will still look back upon her narrow escape.

Westerns, again! How *la Banda* loved them!

One lazy afternoon, we trailed into the village of Larache. While I took care of my business in Costello's big, cool office, Pilar herded all the children into one of the two local movies; something about cowboys surely, it always was. The Band must have occupied two rows in the theater, by the time you counted all the brothers and sisters and cousins that came along, too. After the movie, they would accept one of innumerable invitations to take chocolate milk and cookies at the family house of one of the men from the farm.

I wandered from one store to another, buying here a new hammer to replace one the children had lost, and there a length of rope to make a new swing in the playground, and somewhere else a half-dozen sturdy clothes-hangers.

Everywhere I went, people nodded cordially at me where several months ago they had only turned and stared at the rolled-up blue jeans and wrinkled gabardine jacket, the unshined boots and the big straw hat. On the street, one of the women from Nemsah stopped to ask me for a ride back to the *cortijo*. Yes, there would be room to squeeze one more into the station wagon. A man came up to say he would not be at work in the morning, a touch of fever. He was anxious that I understand he had a legitimate excuse and was not just taking an extra day off.

Espejo appeared, dragging himself down the street, hold-

ing a handkerchief to his mouth and looking more disheveled than usual.

"What is the matter with you, my boy?" I asked, taking him affectionately by the shoulder as he came opposite me.

"Visit to the dentist," he mumbled, removing the handkerchief long enough to talk. "He pulled out an old tooth, but the roots were so deep I'm bleeding to death, I think." He clapped the wadded, bloody handkerchief back over his mouth, prepared to suffer nobly.

"Here, that is no way to stop the blood flow," I said. I steered him over to the station wagon, fished my first-aid box out of the door pocket and spread it open on top of the car hood.

"Now open your mouth real wide," I instructed him.

And right there in the main street of Larache I painted the wound with iodine and made a little gauze compress to fit into the big hole left by the extracted tooth.

"Bite down on that compress for a couple of hours," I told him, "and the bleeding will stop."

Espejo went on his way down the sidewalk, still moaning through his clenched teeth.

It was such little incidents that gave me a real sense of fellowship with the people of Morocco. I needed these people and they made me feel that they needed me.

On the whole, Larache was a dull, dreary town, with droves of bored Spanish soldiers, who were serving out their compulsory military service, wandering aimlessly around the narrow streets, lots of shiftless Arabs and a few modest, single-minded families running the businesses of the town. The architecture was uninspired, the plumbing bad and the lighting poor. There was no entertainment to speak of, if you do not count those two dingy motion-picture halls playing incessant cowboy films, and very little sport, apart from the

soccer team. I looked around the town and I tried to understand how the Spaniards who worked in the Serra could prefer to live here in their cramped apartments when they had the whole mighty Lukus Valley to spread into.

In turn, they thought I was peculiar, preferring life on the farm.

4

BESIDES CATCHING UP on our repairs and odd jobs, this growing period allowed us to devote more time to our live-better projects. The dormitory at Adir was coming along faster than any of us had expected. Our early-morning, late-at-night sessions had continued and the destructive work had long since been finished. As he had promised, Costello gave us a mason with two assistants and let the company carpenter devote part of each day to the dormitory. The ceiling girders had been set and a kind of cane lathing nailed on and plastered over. The rooms were beginning to take shape, too. We decided to keep the wide stable-door effect, replacing the sliding wooden panels with large, attractive iron grille gates. These led into an ample reception hall where we planned to put a couch and a couple of chairs. Off to the right and to the left were to run two passageways and the bedrooms gave on to these; small rooms to be sure, with just enough space for double-decker bunks on one side and a table and chair on the other. The clothes lockers were to be out in the hall. Each man would have one with his own key. On the other side of the passageway, a large communal shower-toilet was being built.

On one end of the dormitory we built a small room and bath that was more opulent. This would serve as a guestroom for any visiting technicians. On the other end we constructed a room we planned to outfit as a new first-aid station. Emilio, the company's male nurse, was especially enthusiastic about

it and spent much of his spare time hovering about that room, making suggestions.

The men and I argued about what color the bedrooms should be. We spent endless hours deciding which tiles should go on the floor and laying them in all the possible patterns and ripping them up again. We drove the carpenter wild designing one clothes locker and then redesigning it and then, after he got one into production, switching back to the original design.

Everyone had ideas and everyone participated according to how much time he had to spare.

We were able to give the patio more time, too. Occasional days of summer rain allowed us to collect a splendid big pile of stones. Costello, seeing evidence of our industry, softened up enough to assign us two full-time stone masons. These, aided by as many volunteers, soon had the cobbled part of the patio fairly chewing into the old dirt area. It became possible to walk on stone all the way from the office to the dormitory building, a feeling of positive luxury.

The idea of some kind of garden in our patio had long been lurking in the back of my mind. On several occasions, I had mentioned it to Arturo. He, in turn, had laughed heartily, pounded me on the back and said jovially, "A good idea, Betty—we'll think about it for another year."

But I managed to crowd him into a corner on the garden and, grudgingly, he granted us permission to see what we could do. In the very center of the patio, near where the old leaning telephone pole with the dim light bulb stood, was a well. Shooting out from this well, like the points of a crudely drawn star, were five cement drinking troughs, waist-high, out of which the horses and cows drank and at which the bachelors washed and shaved. As the bachelors would soon be washing and shaving in their new dormitory

and the stock was to be banished to one of the smaller patios, we squeezed permission from Arturo to let us make our garden around the well.

"Keep it masculine," Arturo muttered darkly. "Remember, this is a man's territory!"

It was a long, tedious job we faced. We sought out a rich, black soil down at the Nemsah pumphouse and finagled a truck that was working down there into hauling up several loads a day. With this dirt, we filled four of the troughs, leaving one temporarily open for the use of the boys and the horses. The ground between the starlike troughs was hard trodden and poor. It all had to be dug up, the rocks removed and a better grade of soil mixed in. It took weeks and weeks and we pressed all the stray schoolchildren into service. And any unfortunate laborer, Arab or Spanish, who sat down in the patio to rest for a moment would suddenly find a shovel or a pick in his hands.

When the ground was finally in shape, I drove up to the Palafito and went into a huddle with Pedro, the gardener. He was a placid, bronzed man who lived only for his plants. He loved gardening so much that his face was a sunbeam whenever he had a chance to discuss it. We wandered around and around the Palafito gardens, planning what we could steal for the Adir patio and what would look best where. We finally decided that the small circular bed around the well should be put into *uña de gato*—cats' fingernails—a delicious name for the small, low, green, spreading plant with brilliant purple flowers that last for many weeks. We set one of the Arabs to pulling up *uña* and later I drove him down to Adir while he transplanted it.

We agreed to have a small green hedge all the way around the circle and interrupt it between each trough with two cypress trees. Pedro explained that these would some day

be tall enough for a man to walk under. He suggested two palm trees in each section and for these we had to drive into Larache and talk the head of the Moroccan Forestry Department out of several of his. He also donated a number of mimosa trees. Four of these we planted in front of the dormitory, making quite a ceremony of the planting. When you plant a tree, you create a memory.

We planted several more mimosas in our patio plot and some arbutus and then filled the troughs themselves with bright red and pink geraniums, the kind that fall over and hang downward, covering the cement with a profusion of green leaves and bright flowers.

Before we finished, one of the old grandmothers of the *cortijo* came shuffling out and thrust upon us a prize plant from her own garden. I transplanted it into a very prominent place so that she could see it always as she went by on her way to the *economato* for the groceries.

5

IT WAS MIDSUMMER.

Our dormitory was getting along so well that we began looking greedily at the stable on the other side of the patio. I pestered Arturo about it.

"It is an eyesore," I said. "The horses can go into the smaller patio. What's the use of our cobbling this patio and making a garden if we still have to share it with the horses?"

We won. Arturo stopped protesting and we were soon tearing the second stable apart and planning a wonderful big dining room-café with a fine new kitchen just for Manuel, the cook, and a separate section for the company store.

And all the time, the corn was getting higher so that when we walked through it, Marrón and I, it began to slap across our knees and there were some places where it came up to the waist with its thick, juicy stalks and its healthy, drab-green leaves.

Another gnawing problem for which we found more time during midsummer was that of keeping everyone in clothes. The company salaries—for that matter, all the salaries in Morocco—were so small that after food had been bought and shoes and the inevitable medicines, there was never much left for clothing. What clothing a family had was handed down from member to member until the garments were only patched rags. When it was absolutely necessary to have a new dress or new trousers or a new shirt, it meant a consider-

able sacrifice to the whole family, a skimping for weeks on food.

The new babies concerned me almost more than the young children or the adults. There never seemed to be enough little shirts and dresses in our old-clothes' cartons, and never any diapers at all. I cornered Costello in his big office one day and explained this problem to him in serious detail. He looked interested.

"As you can imagine, it is a subject that I have never gone into very deeply. What would you suggest we do?"

He and I came to an agreement whereby the Serra would pay for the material if the women would make up the baby clothes themselves. We worked out a very satisfactory layette: six cotton diapers, two flannel shirts, two long dresses, two cotton shirts, two woolen sweaters, two pairs of bootees, two binders, four sheets, a crib mattress and pillow, a rubber crib sheet and a woolen shawl. We divided the work among all the women, whether they were expecting babies or not, and they helped out cheerfully. The girls in the school classes embroidered the little sheets in pink or blue. Some young girls knitted sweaters and bootees. Women with sewing machines ran up the shirts and dresses. We tried to keep one or two layettes made in advance, and most of the time we were successful, but sometimes we got behind when several new babies were expected and then there was a mad clicking of knitting needles and sewing machines. When the little one finally arrived, we presented him proudly with his hastily assembled layette and clucked over him like any bunch of women, foolish over a newborn baby.

I began to ask all our friends in the States to save me their old clothes. These contributions were sent to my parents, in Maryland. My mother acted as a collection depot, receiving all the clothes, sorting them, and packing them in trans-

portable cartons. A friend of my husband's, who has a shipping agency, took care of transporting the cartons to Madrid and thence they came to me.

Once the system got going we had a carton of old clothes to distribute almost every month. All around the farm, men began to pop up in blue jeans and loudly colored flannel shirts and small children wore American shorts and polo shirts. Near where my mother lived in Maryland, was a whole row of houses whose housewife-occupants conscientiously saved every outgrown dress and trouser, every scrap, for these people four thousand miles away, none of whom they would ever see. It was a display of neighborliness that touched these people of Morocco deeply. They would wait anxiously while I sorted over the contents of the boxes and decided for myself who had the most pressing needs. They were anxious, of course, for the clothes they badly needed, but even more, they were curious about the materials, the styles and the unknown friends who had sent the gifts.

There was a scratching at the window screen of my bedroom window and a soft whispering of my name, "Señora Betty."

My bedroom had one large window which in America we would call a picture window. It had heavy wooden shutters to bolt after dark, but I never did. I left them flung wide open, with the glass windowpanes open also, an unheard-of practice among the Spaniards. The window faced the sun as it rose and this awakened me each morning.

But the sun was not even up when this call came; the horizon only faintly showed the difference between sky and earth. It had become a farm custom for everyone bearing an urgent message to deliver it that way—a discreet scratch on the screen and a calling of my name. The caller would

then step back out of sight to allow me to dress, more or less in private.

I replied to the first call, "*Sí?*"

"Señora, I feel much to awaken you so early, but it is about my wife, María."

Then I recognized the voice of José María's father.

"The new baby?" I asked. "It's coming?"

"That is what is happening," he said. "And there seems not to be so much time left and you know the bus does not leave for town until the sixth hour."

I leaped out of bed with the first sentence and jumped into a pair of rumpled blue jeans; no time to find clean ones. I shoved my arms into the sleeves of an old army shirt. At the same time I got into my boots. The belt of my jeans did not seem to be anywhere. A gypsy curse upon whichever son borrowed my belt! I would deal with him later—with the same belt.

"Is she having her pains very close together?" I wrapped the shirttails around my waist, tied them in a knot and hoped, for modesty's sake, that things would hold together.

"Yes and no. But she never has much pain and all the others came very quickly. Yes, very quickly."

"Fine time to be telling me now! Where did I leave the car keys?"

"Car keys? Keys to the car?" The father peered through the dark screen, puzzled, but trying to be helpful.

"No, no, not you. I was talking to myself."

I grabbed the keys which turned up under the clock on my night stand and clattered out the front door, not taking the time to explain my early departure to Pilar. As I went out, I snatched a straw hat off the wall and hung it around my neck, as I always did in the morning; a pure reflex which was not going to help José María's new sister or brother much.

We leaped into the Ford and roared the half-mile that separated Nemsah from José María's house.

"Do you know anything about delivering babies?" I asked, as we jolted along, glancing at the father out of the corner of my eye. He seemed so serene about this coming ordeal.

"Nothing at all. I have three children and wasn't present for the birth of any of them."

This in itself is extraordinary for a Spaniard. Usually the father is standing right in there beside the delivery table along with half-a-dozen relatives and an interested friend or two. I should have been warned by that admission. "Oh," I said. "This will be a new experience, then."

He smiled and nodded. He meant new for me, I suppose, because when we drew up in front of his shack—the other half of Marrón's pumphouse dwelling—he jumped out, helped María, his wife, into the front seat and slammed the door behind her.

"Well, hurry up. Get in!" I called to him. "We haven't a moment to lose."

"*Adiós*," said José María's father calmly, waving his hand. He was still smiling serenely.

"You mean you are not coming with us?" My voice rose in a wail: "You mean I am going to take her all alone? And if it happens on the road?"

"Hurry up, you haven't a moment to lose," José María's father reminded me.

"I have some scissors and alcohol," said María, patting the package on her knees to console me. "My husband must remain with the other children."

I threw the car into gear and roared away again, in the direction of Larache and the local hospital.

Besides the scissors and the alcohol, the package on María's knees held a layette put together through community effort.

The plans I had imported from Madrid. There was a sweater knitted by the daughter of the bus driver. There were sheets that the girl pupils had embroidered in school. There were dresses and shirts that María had sewn on her own machine and there were diapers that Pilar and I had cut out on the dining-room floor in Nemsah. The baby's shawl, the binders and the rubber pad had been bought on my last trip to Tangier, barely in time.

María was not yet thirty years old, but in the general manner of Spanish women, she had allowed herself, after bearing children, to get fat and flabby until she looked ten years more than her age. Yet she had a pretty face, with all the features rounded and soft beneath a mass of jet-black hair. She was placid by nature and she sat on the edge of the seat with her hands folded over the package of baby clothes in perfect repose.

"Which do you want this time?" I asked María, just to ease my tension. I clutched the wheel until my knuckles showed white and I had the accelerator pressed flat to the floor.

She thought a moment. "A girl would be nice, don't you think, after our three boys?" And then her face convulsed with pain. She groaned loudly, and I held on to the steering wheel.

After she composed herself, I said sharply, "Why didn't you go into town yesterday, like I told you?" I am a splendid one to give advice on these matters, having produced one child in my mother-in-law's garden, but María did not need to know that. I remember that my mother-in-law used somewhat the same tone on me when she found me among the flowers with the newest boy.

"Only yesterday I said to you, 'María, it may come at

night and you should go into the clinic ahead of time. It would be much better.'"

"And pay those extra days? The company only pays for the room in the clinic from the day of the birth. And who would fix the meals at home?" Another pain seized María and I groaned this time. We were going to have to stop.

No, we did not have to stop. The pain passed and we were entering the outskirts of town.

"The road is rougher here, María, hang on to the door. We won't be much longer."

We sped into town, careened around the sharp To-Tangier corner, rocketed down the hill, and turned into the clinic gate. It was open, fortunately, because I would have gone through it anyway.

"We made it. We are here! Nothing to worry about." I jumped out of the car, ran up the steps and pounded hard on the great wooden portal that was the clinic entrance. I ran back down to the car and helped María ease out her ponderous body. She was still clinging to the bundle of baby clothes.

As we came up the steps, the massive door swung slowly open and a wizened, bent old woman blinked sleepily into our faces.

"Maternity case," I said hastily. "Show me a bed and call the *Madre*—the Mother Superior—quick, *pronto, en seguida!*"

"It is very early," the old guardian of the door said, uncertainly, not moving. "The *Madre* will not be awake."

"Then you must rouse her, but quickly, quickly! And please show me a bed."

Leading María by the arm, I brushed inside, past the complaining old woman, and stood in the hallway, looking first to the left, into the open men's ward and then to the right, down a long hall containing many doors, all shut.

"The *Madre* must say which bed. How can I know which

bed? And the *Madre* is asleep. She would not like to be awakened so early." The old woman shifted from one foot to the other.

"What about this room?" I said, striding over to just any door and yanking it open. It was empty.

The old woman gasped, "The *Madre*—"

"Suppose you go call the *Madre* now, or shall I do that myself, too?"

She gasped again and shuffled off down the hall a little way. Then she stopped and returned, looking relieved. "I can call *la Hermana*—the Sister—she will be stirring soon anyway." And again she shuffled off.

María was standing patiently in the middle of the room at the foot of the bed, ready to do whatever she was told.

"Put your bundle there on the chair," I said as I took a pair of sheets out of the wooden armory and quickly threw one across the bed.

I helped María get out of her sad, flimsy cotton dress and into an equally sad, flimsy cotton nightgown that she produced from her package. She hoisted herself with great effort onto the sheet and I finished making the bed on top of her, carefully squaring the corners without realizing it.

A very few minutes passed during which I washed the grime from the steering wheel of the car off my hands at a basin in the corner of the room, conversing with María all the time over my shoulder.

"How do you feel now? You are lucky that we arrived in time. I am not much help at things like this. Tractors, yes. *Niños*, no!"

"Tired, I feel tired. I know that you like those great noisy yellow machines, smelling of oil." She paused suddenly and shrieked in a piercing voice that ended in a hoarse whisper: "Señora!"

Without even drying my hands I hurried over to the door and stuck my head out. The old woman was shuffling in our direction again.

"Is she coming?" I demanded. "Did you call someone?"

"Yes, yes, she comes." The old woman, still approaching, raised and lowered her head like a nodding puppet. "But all those robes to put on, you know. It takes time."

"You must help me, then. The time has arrived. We cannot wait for the Sister." I held the door open and stepped aside for the old woman to enter. She hesitated on the threshold and peeked in like a curious bird. Her eyes grew wild. "*Madre mía!*" she shouted in a squeaky voice.

Something told me she was going to leave. "Stay here!" I yelled, grabbing her shoulder. "Don't you dare leave this room! I need someone. I never did this before."

Two patients in the men's ward sat up and began to listen with casual interest. They surely thought I was the mother-to-be.

Without so much as a backward glance, the old woman twisted free from my hand, threw her dirty apron over her head and dashed off down the hall, faster than she had moved all morning. She was muttering to herself: "I am no deliverer-of-babies." And over and over again, "*Madre mía! Madre mía!*"

"Come back here," I begged. "You've got to help." But I knew it was useless and I was already turning back to María.

"Don't be nervous, Señora. There is nothing to worry about. We shall do it alone."

"Nervous? Who's nervous?" I demanded in a falsetto voice. And I was instantly ashamed of this display of nerves. "Oh, María, forgive all this arguing. You need all your strength. . . ."

I never finished the sentence. The baby began to come.

Pulling back the sheet, I pressed down in what I thought were the right places. The small, round head appeared.

"So far, everything is all right, *mujer*. It is going to be a normal birth."

María rested a moment. "Can you not help the head just a little?"

I tried, and in that moment the shoulders appeared and then the rest of the body.

María closed her eyes and was still. After a moment, "Tell me, what is it, Señora?" she whispered.

I held the baby up in the air by the ankles, as I had seen in all the pictures of all the doctors delivering babies and I patted it lightly on the behind. It opened its tiny mouth, gulped in air, let out a sigh of protest and began to breathe. "It appears to be a baby girl, just as you asked."

I began to tie the umbilical cord very clumsily. María had lost interest and was not helping any more.

The door swung open and the Sister swept in majestically. She was completely and immaculately dressed in all her robes, even to the great white thing on her head. I could understand then what the old woman meant—it would take quite some time to get into this costume. As she approached the bed, she raised her eyebrows and said, "What are you doing in here?"

"We came to have a baby," I said. "We couldn't wait. The baby couldn't wait. We have already had the baby."

The Sister was carefully turning her starched white cuffs back from her hands. She paused and turned to look at us. Her gaze took in María's closed eyes, her crumpled body and her bare feet which I had pushed aside to make room for the baby. The Sister's eyes came to rest upon my person. She observed the boots, the blue jeans and the shirt, which had come unknotted and just hung losely down over my hips. She saw the straw hat and my disheveled hair. I turned away,

embarrassed by the inspection. I had a sudden impulse to explain to her that the boys had misplaced my belt, otherwise I would be properly tied together in the middle.

The Sister came suddenly to life. "And what are you doing to that child now? Let me see!"

I obediently held the baby up—in one fist, somewhat as if she were a sack of marbles the teacher had caught me playing with during class. "Well—huh—I was sort of trying to tie this umbilical cord, but the baby is so slippery and I never . . ."

"Put it down, please." The Sister moved forward with an air of authority. I replaced the baby on the bed with great alacrity.

"The scissors first. Now the alcohol. A little cotton. Now the hot water. Bring the basin closer."

The Sister and I were tying the little one up in a new flannel nightgown with pink ribbons when the midwife herself arrived in a fresh burst of authority. She was a hearty, dynamic soul, accustomed to going to out-of-the-way shacks at odd hours, accustomed to strange sights. She took me in her stride.

"I know about you," she said, waggling her head in a friendly fashion. After looking at María and the baby, she added, "You seem to have done as well as anyone." It was one of the nicest things anybody ever said to me.

There was an air of joviality in the room; one that always follows birth. One of those moments when it is good that a baby has been born well, that the mother has survived, that the midwife is doing well too, and before the new problems are thought of.

I felt tired all at once. I got up from the chair and left the room quietly. Driving back to Nemsah with the sun just flooding the flatlands in its hot, red rays, I wanted to stop all the downhearted-looking people I passed and tell them: "A

new baby has just been born. Her life has just started. Think of the wonders she will see in her lifetime, think of the height she may achieve, and raise your own heads for a moment, for her."

6

IN JULY the corn stretched so tall that we could no longer see over it. And the ears began to form—two long, slender ears on each stalk. You came down the irrigation ditch, you plunged in between two rows and you were lost to the world, the green leaves folding in behind you and before and overhead. Those corn rows were the one cool place on the farm; the heat had become that oppressive. The stalks were now too tall to cultivate any more. We sprayed once again. We crossed the river and rode through the Mehasen corn. We examined the 31, all the 400 parcels and that unwanted child, Parcel 44. And then we settled down to let those slender ears plump up. It would still take time.

The permanent pasture I had talked Costello into experimenting with had sprung up, rich and green. We had planted it in the *parcela* right behind the dingy old canteen. It looked homelike and familiar to me, with horses, mules and their colts standing knee deep in young oats that would soon be supplemented with clover and then later on with timothy grass, but this permanent pasture land, pasture that is constantly replacing itself, was unheard-of in Morocco and the Spaniards were suspicious of the idea. Arturo kept saying it could not work.

One of the basic problems in Morocco and over in Spain, also, is the almost complete lack of nutritious pasture lands. The Spaniards are reluctant to spend money on anything from which they cannot see an immediate result. Pasture is one of

these things—it takes several years of expensive seeding before you begin to reap results in fatter cattle and sheep and pigs. Arturo shrugged off the obvious solution and pointed out that all the ditches on the Serra were "full of pasture" for the stock. "Those are weeds, with little food value," I always corrected him.

In this direction, I was trying two varieties of dry-land grasses. Both these new varieties had been developed on the King Ranch in Texas, which has a comparable climate. Both can live with very little water once their astonishing ten-foot roots have penetrated into the earth. One is named buffel grass and the other, Weeping-love grass—a wonderful, romantic name, especially when it is translated into Spanish—*yerba de amor llorando*. To help me with these pasture experiments, I sought out José María's father. "They have to be watched over carefully and watered abundantly in the first weeks," I told him.

"You are leaving them in good hands, Señora," he answered. "It is my opportunity to repay you for the baby."

We found a strip of land beside a clover patch I was nursing along and there we planted these new seeds, making a shallow line in the earth with our fingers, spilling the seeds in and gently brushing the dirt back over them.

I had planted a small patch of kudzu grass, another richly nutritious plant that I visualized taking over all of Arturo's ditches once I could get it under way. It is a grass that has been widely used in the States along public highways for just that purpose: taking over ditches and replacing the weeds. On my way out of the pasture, I plucked a handful of the kudzu leaves and another handful of white clover stalks. I wanted Costello to see these at close range and so far he had only viewed them from his moving jeep.

Somehow I was always trying to convince Costello that everything I was attempting in the Serra was worth while.

The Arabs were busy about this time with their annual observance of Ramadan. The Ramadan consists of a full month's fasting between sunup and sundown; nothing must pass the Arab's lips during that period, not even water. This is not so hard on the rich Arab families who can stay up eating and drinking all night and drowse through the daylight hours, but it is hell on those Arabs who are working for a living. During this period, the Arabs at the Serra dragged themselves through the day doing about half a day's work, moaning and groaning and even fainting when it was convenient. But if they were true Mohammedans, nothing would persuade them to give it up or sneak a drink of water, and they lost pounds of weight.

Finally the whole period came to an end—the occasion for a terrific huge feast in all the Arab *kabilas*.

Larbi hurried to me one day toward the end of Ramadan and announced, flush-cheeked, that I was invited to his house for the elaborate feast. We went in the waning light of the late afternoon, when our work had been completed. You could feel the excitement in the air, hear the Arabs calling to one another all over the farm, laughing and hurrying with their brass-tray tea tables balanced securely upon their heads. And off in the distance sounded the thud of a *darabukha*, the small Arab drum, and the high, questioning note of a *ghaita*, the Arab flute.

We drove up to the *kabila* in a jeep. There were several of us—Pepe, myself, Marrón and gaunt Espejo—all looking forward to a good meal. Larbi's *kabila* was easily the most fascinating of the four on the Serra farm, at the highest point of the property. We had to leave the jeep at the bottom of a

hill and walk up because there was only a crude footpath winding through the brush and rock. As we came to the top, there was Larbi wearing a new yellow silk turban and pantaloons of deep purple satin. He had on a mauve blouse and an orange cummerbund. With his shining black skin and white teeth, Larbi was a Technicolor picture.

And the view—it made one jealous of the Arabs who could live up here all their lives and look out every day all the way down the valley as far as Larache, and across the Mehasen to the dark blue mountains!

This was a double celebration for Larbi. Besides being his feast to end the Ramadan, he was having the feast for the baptism of his newest baby son. "Baptism," they call it when they speak to our race, but actually it is the circumcision ceremony that takes place two or three days after the birth of the son. We were expected to visit the little patient first thing. For this purely female function, Larbi handed us over to his wife, who looked years older than he, bent and shrouded in her cumbersome white cotton haik. She was glad of this rare opportunity to get into the picture; the Arab woman is usually called only to serve the *emal* to her master and his guests, and never introduced as Larbi had just introduced her to me. She led us halfway across the hard-packed dirt yard to the *chabola* which was the women's quarters. Then, glancing curiously over her shoulder at me, she motioned for me to pass in front of her.

I could hear her behind me asking rapid questions of Pepe in Arabic: "Does the *Señora Americana* always wear trousers, like an Arab?"

Pepe answered, "Yes, she wears them all the time when she is working on the land."

That pleased the woman and she caught up with me again, gently nudged my arm and with timid signs showed me that

we both wore trousers of a sort. It was a way of finding some common ground.

To enter the *chabola*, we all had to stoop to the waist and, once inside, we still had to half crouch to keep from striking our heads on the ceiling. The floor was hard-packed earth. In the center there was a small charcoal fire, going full blast and tended by another old woman, surely some leftover relative of Larbi's or his wife's. The fire gave off an enormous amount of smoke; it hung in thick blue clouds and our eyes began to smart and then to stream from its strength. Strings of drying red and green peppers and herbs were suspended from the ceiling, and there were mounds of potatoes and tomatoes and melons on the floor. In a miniature hammock of woven hemp, swaying gently, was the new baby. The old fire-tending crone hastily brought a crude oil lamp that was belching off more and blacker smoke and this she thrust into the poor baby's face.

He could not possibly have been sleeping anyway. I leaned over and peered into the wizened face, and noticed his puffed eyes, squeezed tightly shut against the smoke and his pain, but leaking tears out of the edges. Still, he was not crying and my heart went out to him, learning so young this lesson that he would have so much chance to practice in the life ahead of him. I looked up into the brown faces of the women, staring at me so fixedly, waiting for a verdict, and I quickly pronounced him, with extravagant gestures of my hands, absolutely the finest baby I had seen in a long time. The ladies relaxed gratefully and giggled. Until I had spoken, they seemed afraid that I would not like their child. I called Pepe over and through him I said, "I have four babies in Nemsah." I showed them how tall with my hands. "They would like to come and see you and bring some clothes to your new son."

This delighted both the women and they patted me affectionately on the arm and bobbed their heads up and down.

It was getting darker now and the old relative lighted our way across the yard to Larbi's main *chabola.* This was a larger hut, rectangular in shape, with higher walls. Once inside the anteroom, we were able to stand up straight. We removed our boots, stepped across the second threshold onto Larbi's fine collection of woolen rugs and arranged ourselves along the wall against the many satin cushions. Larbi sat solemnly in the exact center of the room, cushions heaped behind him to help maintain his erect posture. An outsider would never have guessed that just the day before we had all been crawling over a tractor together; and Larbi would have been offended had someone mentioned the harsh word "tractor" in this, his social setting. We Americans who continually cut across social talk with remarks about "the flier I took on the market today" or "if the union would just let me increase production" could take a lesson in deportment from Larbi.

We were no sooner seated than the tea ceremony began, Larbi's wife bearing in the tray and kettle and silently retiring again. In spite of the intimate converastion we had engaged in such a few minutes before, Larbi's wife never even looked at me; she might have been any servant impersonally serving her master.

When we had all been served tea, a large, round wooden table on squat legs was brought in and placed in front of Larbi. He motioned us to surround it, and as we did, his wife put a huge pottery bowl in the center. It was the traditional Arab dish, a whole baby lamb, stewed and served with the couscous meal and rich with raisins and almonds. We ate this with our fingers, as we were expected to do, rolling up the sleeve on the right arm, dipping three fingers into the couscous and taking a large pinch which we bounced onto the palm of the

same hand, rolled up smoothly into a small ball and tossed into our mouths. The other hand is never used. In between balls of couscous, we tore sections of the lamb from the bones and ate them with relish.

We were all leaning back from the table, groaning from the quantities of couscous, when Larbi's wife set before us an oversized platter of small roasted chickens. These had been done with raisins and almonds, also, and were cooked to a crisp golden brown. We pulled ourselves closer to the table and began again on the chicken. Through the open doorway we could see the women and the children gathered around the couscous bowl, eating hungrily of what remained.

Our tea glasses were constantly being refilled, and when the chicken platter was borne away it was replaced by a kind of Arab pancake, sweet and syrupy, called *galets*, with which we terminated our feast.

"My hands, Larbi, is there something to wipe them on?"

They were so sticky that I could not possibly lick them clean, as Marrón was doing in correct Arab custom. Larbi looked distressed for a moment and then his face lit up. He turned behind him and from a colorfully painted wooden chest he drew a length of fine white satin and handed it to me happily.

"Use this, Señora."

"No, I wouldn't do that. It is much too fine." But I saw from his eyes that he would be hurt if I did not, so I took it and carefully cleaned my hands.

"It is my wife's wedding petticoat," he explained proudly.

As we were lounging back on the cushions, a weird sound started up outside. It began as an indistinct noise in the distance and gradually, as it came closer, it separated into the Arab drum, the *darabukha* and the high-noted, wailing flute, the *ghaita*.

Larbi smiled again. "The dancers," he explained. "I have paid the most and they will dance in my very yard tonight."

We put our boots back on and staggered out into the yard. While nobody was watching, I slipped over to where the women were finishing up the sticky pancakes, and in those few Arab phrases which I can manage, I told Larbi's wife that it was a magnificent feast we had eaten and how thankful all of us were.

We stood there in the pale light of the moon, like two conspirators, she glancing continually over at her husband to be sure he did not see us, but reluctant to have me leave. We assured each other, with much arm waving, that we would get together again soon.

The rising moon had flooded the whole hilltop with an unreal bluish light. And the dancers had indeed come into Larbi's very yard, only the tops of their bobbing heads visible above the milling, jostling crowd of admirers that came along with them and pushed into the yard.

In deference to the fact that Larbi had paid the most, the ragged crowd of men and women and youngsters fell back a bit and left us who were standing in the door of the *chabola* a clear view of the night's entertainment. There were only two dancers, a man and a woman, and they were engaged in the classic Arab dance—facing each other across an imaginary ring and coming slowly together in a circular motion, with nervous, mincing steps in time to the mounting music. When they finally met in the center of the ring, the music was frenzied and the dancers bobbed their heads at each other's faces frantically, their bodies never touching. The audience apparently considered this scandalously sexy and they went into screams of ecstasy. Upon closer inspection, I realized that the "woman" dancer was not a woman at all but a female impersonator. When I questioned Larbi, he told me that women

were never allowed to participate directly in these risqué dances. Each time the dance ran its course and the wild climax was reached, the audience screamed for more, flapping the sleeves of their jelabs, throwing back their hoods to howl their approval at the moon.

It was very late and we told Larbi good night, telling him not to come with us, that we would find our way along the path and down the hill.

"As you will it, *El Oum.* Allah go with you." Larbi bowed his head once and returned to the dancers.

"What is that name they always call me?" I asked Pepe curiously. "That name in Arabic, *El Oum.*"

Pepe and Marrón exchanged amused glances over my head. "Don't you know? It's the name the Arabs have given to you. It means The Little Mother." And then they were suddenly embarrassed by this sentimentality and Pepe shouted back to Espejo, "Hurry up and we can all race down the hill and see how the Señora runs!"

I recalled the Arab plunging up and down in front of me on his horse, longing for a race. It is an urge that all males seem to have—an almost physical need to establish their superiority over the female.

"Give me a head start," I pleaded, breaking into a trot.

"*Nada de eso*—nothing doing!"

I broke into a run and was off down the hill. The hill was so steep that the faster I ran, the faster I had to run. The three young men passed me effortlessly on either side, running easily and emitting piercing, happy war whoops. A wispy cloud passed between us and the full moon, obscuring the winding path among the stunted trees. And then it was as bright as day again and I was arriving, still running headlong, at the foot of the hill in the little valley. The men were already there, sprawled around on the ground, catching their breath. I

brought myself to a grateful stop and dropped down onto a handy rock, huffing and puffing. Said one young man to the others—could it have been nineteen-year-old Pepe?—"The Little Mother doesn't run so badly, considering her age!"

With the men I worked beside day after day, whether Arab or Spanish, I was at ease. They did not disapprove of anything I might say, wear or do. If at times they found me unreasonable, they hid their feelings under the mask of unfailing courtesy. Or they might even try to explain to me how they felt. They accepted me as fellow workman and friend.

This was not always true of my fellow farm managers. There were times during our weekly business meetings in Larache when I sensed their disapproval as a tangible force filling the room. Even on a "farm factory" in the United States comparable to the Serra the "woman boss" can find herself being resented. Here there was added the subtle resentment of a woman who was daring to voice opinions and introduce innovations in an Arab-Spanish world where women are supposed to be subservient. It made no difference that most of my demands were based on the needs of poorer, less privileged men of their own race.

7

FROM THE FIRST DAY I had peered into the dusty patio at Adir I had been troubled by the apathy of the men squatting there, images of despair muffled in heat and wool, sunk in the silence of complete, utter boredom. While talking with several of these men, the idea of a club began to form in my mind.

I stopped Arturo on his rapid way through the patio one day.

"Trouble?" he inquired, glancing swiftly from face to face and turning his eyes finally to me.

"Quite the contrary." I began cheerily. "We only want to borrow a building for—"

"No! You have borrowed enough buildings. We cannot afford it. You are spoiling the men."

"But, Arturo, this building is empty!"

I had almost been telling the truth. It was practically an empty building: an ample, rectangular room attached to the end of the largest granary. It did contain a few dozen scattered sacks of chemical fertilizer, but these were easily spirited off to another warehouse and we were left with our lovely empty building.

We needed first an organization to run this club, and just as urgently we needed money. So we called everyone together to elect officers. The men crowded into the room, hot and dusty from their day's work. Lacking a chair, I sat on an upturned tomato basket. They made a serious thing of founding their club and elected Montés, the blacksmith, as president. A young man called Luis was elected treasurer-secretary. Fair,

sallow, with a serious, never-smiling expression, he was the nearest we could produce to an intellectual. With Montés to lend us an aura of respectability, Luis would do nicely to keep us on a businesslike basis.

We levied a dues fee of five pestas (about ten cents then) a month against each member and that included all his family too; his wife and children were then eligible to enter the club. We had intended the club originally for the Spanish personnel, but the more enlightened Arab men who were interested could and did use the club facilities. There was no question of the Arab women's participating, simply because all their tradition was against their taking part in such a public project.

The day after our first meeting Arturo was doleful. He shook his head discouragingly: "It won't work, Betty, it smells too much like a union."

"Don't be silly, *hombre*. We are out to amuse ourselves. The last thing in our minds is to create any political significance. Leave us in peace, man, leave us in peace."

And he did. He watched carefully from the side lines, but he made no move to interfere.

We got on with the decorating details. One of our main ambitions was to achieve a movie, so Vicente built us a very adequate projection booth out of plywood boards, set up on stilts at the far end of the room. On either side, he built a set of bleachers to hold the audience. The painter who had done my house wandered in. We asked him to paint us a white "movie screen" opposite the projection booth. He outdid himself and added elaborate floral decorations in colors on both sides of the finished screen.

Besides providing the diversions that were so badly needed, the club sparked that flame of brotherhood that had been lit so hesitatingly by our building of the dormitory. The men had their quarrels, of course; but they were all working for

the same results and ultimately, for the first time, they were working for themselves. They realized this and it was important enough to make them settle their differences and pull together. In the long run, the newborn feeling of teamwork among the company laborers was much more important than whether my corn crop failed or succeeded.

Arturo gave us permission to build six card tables and chairs, and these we enameled glossy forest-green. We nailed a bulletin board to the wall. I contributed my oversized dining table. In no time at all we had the basic requirements for the first club that the Serra had ever seen.

I had an old Telefunken radio, left over from the war, and this we sent to be overhauled. I had dozens upon dozens of American magazines, and these all went to fill the reading table and to be added to each month as I finished with the new magazines that came from my parents in Maryland.

These magazines inspired the first notice on our bulletin board. I came in one evening and Luis had laboriously written out on the office typewriter a notice which said very sharply:

"These magazines are the property of the Señora and out of respect to her you are hereby ordered to take good care of them!"

"Oh, no, no, Luis," I protested, "that isn't the right idea at all. In the first place, they are not my magazines any more. Anything that enters that door belongs to the club. Now let's work out a kindlier notice about the magazines."

Luis regarded me with his solemn, unsmiling face. "Señora, they won't listen to gentle notices. They are all tough guys and we gotta treat them tough; but we will do what you say!"

Our notice finally read something like this:

"Magazines are for the enjoyment of all. Please return them to the table when finished."

In spite of Luis' predictions, the notice worked. Gnarled,

work-roughened hands leafed through the magazines hundreds of times. The Spanish wives took them home to look at in the privacy of their own houses. The magazines were always returned respectfully to the table. We got such a backlog that we were at last able to hand them around, for wrapping paper, always scarce in Morocco, or to the children for cutouts.

We were now accumulating a modest little mound of money and Luis and I made a trip into Larache one day and bought several packs of cards, a couple of sets of checkers and dominoes and a set of chess. It was a pleasure in the evenings to drive through the patio and see the light streaming out of the building, to hear the radio blaring too loudly and the raucous voices of the game players outshouting the radio.

One morning when I pulled up to the gasoline pump to fill the station wagon, Luis came running out of his little hut, full of excitement.

"Señora, a great opportunity has presented itself! One of the army officers' clubs in Larache is moving quarters. They have a brand-new billiard table, but no room for it in their new club. They will sell for below what it cost them, just to be rid of it. It is made for us, Señora; what do you say?"

"I say it will be awfully expensive."

Luis persisted. "We'll never find one so cheap again. If you ask the Serra to put up the money, we can repay something each month. Please."

So Luis and I paid a formal call on army headquarters. We were led into a large room by a captain. Two orderlies uncovered the billiard table and everyone turned toward me, expecting a professional appraisal. I studied the table seriously from all angles, running my hand over the green felt. I really had no idea at all what to look for. Persuaded by a vigorous nod of Luis's head, I turned to the captain and announced, "We'll buy it."

Luis, arranging to have it transported to the club that very afternoon, was as joyful as a child with a new toy, and it did turn out to be our most popular plaything. I was even told later by a billiard expert that we had made a good buy; the angel was still watching over well-meaning fools.

The United States Information service in Tangier possessed several fine movie projectors; they offered us the loan of one, provided we could assure them a maximum audience. They also lent us a selection of their own films—educational films on life in the States, Disney cartoons, and newsreels. Everyone was satisfied with the arrangement, but we also wanted to show a feature film every second week. This was harder to arrange, but there were companies in Madrid that did rent features. They were a sorry list of titles, all ancient and mostly horse operas and whodunits, but I comforted myself that this was what the Serra people would prefer. And, sitting on one of those hard bleachers, surrounded by the rowdy children and the sweaty men and the tidied-up women waiting for the first projection to start, it seemed as exciting to me as any Hollywood *premiére.*

The educational films of life in the United States interested everyone; more so than did the Hollywood films. The Spanish wife could see in what surroundings and with what equipment an American woman kept house. The mechanic could follow the day of an American mechanic from the time he got up until he went to bed. To a man, the audience was astonished at how hard American people worked, at how much of our money goes to taxes and, obviously, at the amount of material wealth a modest laborer is able to accumulate.

The service came to our rescue also in getting our club library started. They made us a gift of one hundred good titles translated into Spanish: *Gone With the Wind* and Mark Twain and John Steinbeck. Each month they thoughtfully

added one or two. We took money from our dues fund to buy a whole series of paper-backed Western and detective stories. Whenever I happened into someone's library in Madrid, I managed to beg a volume or two, and in this way our collection grew satisfactorily. We also subscribed to several monthly magazines and a daily paper.

One day Padre Tomás happened to be turning the pages of a volume and suddenly he put it back and turned to Luis, who was near by.

"Tell me, boy," he said rather impatiently. "Why is it that all the good books in this collection are by American authors? There are many fine Spanish writers, you know."

Luis faced the padre squarely. "It has something to do with generosity, Padre. I agree with you that we have lots of good Spanish writers, but somehow we Spaniards lack the spirit of giving to those poorer than ourselves. The Americans may not have the best writers, but, Padre, they give and give and give until it makes me ashamed."

On one of my Tangier trips I bought a three-speed phonograph and a handful of long-playing records—all Spanish music: rumbas, tangos and flamencos, rhythms to which they could all dance. The evening we installed the machine was one of wonder all across the patio. A few of the men were familiar with the old, hand-wound machines, but not one of them had ever seen, or imagined, a long-player with an automatic record changer. They pushed one another to get close enough to see the arm draw back and the record drop in place. There was a hush over the room. The melody of *Tres Veces Guapa (Three Times Beautiful)*, everybody's current favorite, floated out into the patio. Couples drifted together and the dancing began. By and by the only sounds were the music from the new phonograph and the scrape-scrape of

clumsy country shoes against cement, broken by an occasional giggle or a hardy, masculine guffaw.

It was not Beethoven in Carnegie Hall or Tommy Dorsey in the Empire Room, but it was better than that line of bored, tired, discontented men sitting on their heels along the patio wall each evening.

8

THE ARAB WITH WHOM I had become the most friendly was Lahcen. Our friendship developed after we had started off very badly with one of those shouting arguments in which I did all the shouting and he did all the listening. The argument had something to do with moving the furniture around in the house at Nemsah, but it was put behind us very quickly. After the younger Arabs had tired of the novelty of watering the grass with the wonderful green plastic hose, it was always Lahcen who appeared as the sun was sinking and quietly unrolled the hose and sprinkled everything in the garden.

His position in Nemsah was that of unofficial foreman over all the other Arabs. He was the Arab in whom the Spaniards put complete confidence; the only one, besides the Spanish supervisor of the *cortijo*, who had the keys to all the warehouses, toolsheds and storage rooms. Supervisors would come and go every few years, but Lahcen stayed on. He had come to work in Nemsah when he was nine years old and when I met him, he was already thirty, as nearly as I could reckon. The Arabs count their years differently and are very vague about making an estimated comparison.

Lahcen lived in the Nemsah *kabila*. He walked over from there each morning early, worked steadily all day long in any kind of weather at whatever job there was to do and, after dark, trudged home again. For this devotion, he was paid only a few pesetas a day. He owned land in his *kabila* and he actually lost money by giving his time away to us instead of

staying home and working his land. I often chided him about this and he would agree and smile shyly, inclining his head to one side, and saying that someday he would change. But the habit of the years was too strong for him.

He was so intelligent that he would have made an excellent manager. He was one of those bets that the Serra Company missed, or overlooked on purpose, because his skin was brown. In Arabs like Lahcen was the key, the partial answer to the Moroccan problem.

He looked exactly as everyone wants an Arab to look. He was tall and gaunt of frame and his skin was *café au lait.* When he was dressed in his best cinnamon brown jelab, with a pure white turban wound around his head and his yellow *babuchas* on his feet, he could easily have been a Hollywood hero.

In the evenings, when he had finished his little watering chore, he would shuffle into the kitchen by the back door and I, by tacit agreement, would come out to the kitchen from my living room. He would have been uncomfortable sitting in the living room. He would sit down on one of the hard wooden chairs beside the table and I would pull up another chair opposite him, offering him a cigarette. Pilar always made him a big sandwich and he took a single glass of wine—strictly forbidden by his religion, but he shrugged his shoulders at that. I always found Mohammedans ready with a shrug in face of practicality. In this, they are not alone.

On these occasions we discussed what everyone had done that day in Nemsah and how his family were and about his land. We even made some preliminary plans for finding and buying a little secondhand gasoline engine in Tangier to raise the water up from the river, Smid el Maa, to his plot of land. But even as I talked, I knew what view the Serra would take of that project. The Serra used the water from the Smid el

Maa and, they were not likely to encourage an Arab who made plans to use the same water.

Lahcen's younger brother usually came under discussion, too. Brother had the same good, open face with the addition of wide, dark eyes under heavy, curling lashes. Lahcen felt that Brother was old enough to be getting married—he must have been seventeen or eighteen—and Lahcen was busy trying to decide upon a suitable wife. As the oldest male in the family, Lahcen reserved the right to make his personal choice of a proper mate for his younger brother and Brother seemed to have nothing to say about it. The fact was, Brother demonstrated little apparent interest in the negotiations. Often I tried to find out how he felt about the matter and he always shrugged his shoulders and explained that Lahcen would see to it when the time came.

I relied on Lahcen for most of my Arab shopping. Except for business, I went very little to Larache which I considered a depressing, spoiled town. Instead, I made excursions into the near-by town of Alcazarquivir, which had remained nearly all Arab and where there were still old Arab things to be bought. For these trips, I looked to Lahcen as my guide. I might find him in a dirty, torn jelab, a round, woven cap on his head, crouched behind a mountain of orange crates, counting them one by one as they were loaded on a truck, or standing over a large group of women who were mixing fertilizer formula. And he would give his pencil and paper and his authority to someone else and disappear into a warehouse for a few moments.

When he appeared again, he was the other Lahcen; the city-slicker Lahcen; clean brown jelab, white turban, and bright yellow *babuchas* on his feet.

Alcazarquivir, which means "big fortress" in Arabic, *El Ksar el Kebir*, was interesting on any day of the week, but on

Wednesday, the market day, it was positively fascinating. On the main road, right in front of the one-room cement railroad station was the spot where the burro traders gathered. There were little donkeys and big donkeys and medium-sized donkeys. The Arabs who had donkeys wanted to sell them, and the Arabs who did not have donkeys wanted to buy them. Buyers, sellers and lookers-on shuffled among the donkeys, back and forth, back and forth, until a fine, choking dust was lifted off the ground and hung, if there was no breeze to bear it away, on the still, hot air. An odor of oil and dung mixed with *kief* and dust would lead you right to the donkey market. The dust cloud could be seen while we were approaching from the Serra, and Lahcen would remark to me, "Trade is brisk today in the donkey market."

Directly across the highway from the donkey ground was the charcoal market. The vegetables were sold in the adjoining square. Some of the Arab venders of long standing had permanent thatch-roofed huts here, beaten by the weather to an almost black color and covered with green vines that sprang right out of the thatch when it was dampened by the spring rains. In front of these huts would be piled mountains of rich, green melons, sweeter than any melons I had ever tasted before, other mountains of oranges and watermelons and lesser piles of figs, apricots, artichokes, beans and potatoes. We took along a large basket and went back to Nemsah loaded down with enough fresh truck to last the household all the week.

You could locate the candy-vendors by the thick swarms of bees that hovered over the uncovered, sticky piles of sweets. There would be *chetakiya,* a ghastly pink candy made of honey, and *rribiya,* made from butter, almonds, sugar, milk and semolina, sickly sweet. You just picked from the pile whatever piece appealed to you, paid the necessary centimos

to the attendant and went away, scraping off the bees that were stuck to the candy.

Then there were the herb sellers. In Morocco herbs are not packaged in neat little cans. Instead, an Arab who has studied these matters all his years, will spread a cloth out on the street and on separate little bits of dirty paper, he will place pinches of bright yellow sulphur, red pepper and saffron and piles of all the kinds of herbs the Arabs use in their cooking and medicine. The Arab is sure to offer you lots of confident advice and you will go away with something extra-smelly folded up in a piece of newspaper.

Among the things Lahcen and I bought in Alcazarquivir were the reed seats—the *stormias*—with which I had furnished my living room in Nemsah. These would have been a decorator's coup in the United States for television stools and they made fine presents for my friends.

Apparently there was only one Arab left in all our part of the country who still made these poufs by the old secret method. He was old and gnarled with a weather-lined face the color of tanned leather. He would sit at his customary corner of the market upon one of his poufs and he would have one more, or two at the most, in front of him. He had worked all week on these poufs and he would stay in town until he sold them, as he always did. Then he would purchase some tea and sugar and walk back up to his hill home, some six or eight miles away.

I always tried to get to him early so that I could have all of his poufs and he would try to outwit me and sell them to someone else. When he saw that I was always there first, he tried another tactic: he raised his price. The first poufs I bought from him were ten cents apiece. The later ones were twelve cents and finally they soared bullishly to eighteen cents a piece. Lahcen was scandalized and scolded the old man

roundly for being so dishonest. He just shrugged his shoulders and said we could take our trade somewhere else. He knew he had an exclusive and he knew also that no matter to what extremes he pushed me, I would always come back. Such is big business.

One evening, sympathetic because he had such a long walk home, we gave him a ride in the station wagon right up to the door of his *kabila.* He had never taken a ride in an automobile in his whole long life and he sat on the very edge of the back seat, his little packages of tea and sugar clutched tightly in his hands, his eyes wildly taking in the scenery as it flashed past. When he arrived at the *kabila* and he got out of the car, instead of saying thank you, he turned around and demanded that we pay him for the honor of bringing him home. When we said no, he should pay us for the service, he shrugged his shoulders again and said anyway he would get even by raising his price once more next Wednesday. But we knew he was highly pleased with his ride and he must still talk about how he arrived home in the big American "taxi."

Once I tried to talk him into making great quantities of poufs. I talked about doing twenty each week—even twenty-five. "Teach your children," I told him. "Get several people to work and you just supervise."

He looked at me from his wise old eyes and they twinkled. "All I need is what I can get from selling two or three *stornias* a week," he said. "Why should I bother making more?"

And Lahcen, who was standing silently by, watching me high-pressure this compatriot of his, could not hide his smile.

When you come to think about it, why should he make more?

The old jewelry dealer was exactly the opposite of the pouf man. He had his eye cocked for money all the time. He had a sharp nose, and a brain to match. You never got a bargain

from him. Everything he sold was the best you could find and he knew it. He owned one of the oblong, windowless cubicles that lined the market street, putting him in a higher social and commercial category than the Arabs who just spread their wares out on the sidewalk. During the day, the stall itself was empty, because all the goods were arranged out front, the bulky copper and brass articles on the floor and the silver and gold jewelry hung on both sides and above the doorway.

This gentleman spoke excellent Spanish and I spent many hot afternoons standing in front of his stall haggling over heavy silver bracelets, heaped high in seemingly abandoned fashion on a brass tray. When it got too hot, he would take me by the arm and led me inside where it was cooler. We would sit down on two poufs in the dark, airless room and continue to argue, with Lahcen's help, until we reached a compromise on the price of the bracelets. In this manner I bought a pair made from gold and silver, enameled in blue by a process known to the Arabs centuries before the French started their enamelwork. Hidden on one of his jewelry trays, I once found a pair of heavy silver earrings set with old emeralds which I cut up into two very smart-looking clips. In addition, I separated him from a great number of tall, graceful brass candlesticks, brass trays and useful little copper bowls.

Another artisan of Alcazarquivir I greatly admired was the man who wove articles in cane. He had his combination house and workshop right in the center of the square that was devoted to junk, the "flea market" of the Arabs—old bent nails, twisted bits of iron fence, worn-out tools. But when you stooped down and entered the low door, you found yourself in a private garden—lush cane, red geraniums and tomato plants. The walls were made of hardened mud and the roof of cane slates, overlaid with straw. The artisan was

an old man, dignified, polite and above any argument about the price of his wares.

He made a great variety of fascinating articles: sweet little egg baskets with ingenious reed handles, reed vessels, higher than a man, destined to be filled with wheat, mats to cover the dirt floors of the other *chozas*. He fashioned a wonderful reed hut with a tiny door for an entrance. Its true use was a portable guardhouse for the Arabs that watched over the stock and moved from place to place, but I put one to work as a playhouse. The boys passed hour after hour playing in and around the hut.

Finally, both Lahcen and I would be weighed down with brass candlesticks and baskets and fruit and we would find our way along the clotted main street to where we had left the station wagon. After stacking all our loot into the back of the car, I would ask, "Shall we have a glass of tea?" Lahcen would reply, "*Sí*, if the Señora wishes"—we always said the same words.

And we would thread a path back along the main street to our favorite café on the square. I think it was called the Granada. Here, seated at a little marble-topped, iron-legged table, we would order our mint tea and while we waited to be served we would discuss our purchases.

"I think we could have had that bracelet for fifty pesetas less if we had talked patiently for a little longer," Lahcen would tell me, a serious frown on his handsome brown face.

"But it is worth what we paid," I protested.

"No matter," Lahcen would insist. "The price in this town is lower. That jeweler must learn not to cheat the foreigners."

If the little Arab boy selling cigarettes passed by the café while we were there, I called him over and bought two packages of black market cigarettes—worth about two days of Lahcen's salary—and these I would place diplomatically be-

side Lahcen's glass of tea. He allowed me to pay for the tea and when we left the café, he casually picked up the cigarettes. It was the only way he would permit me to repay him for steering me around Alcazarquivir.

4 The Harvest

1

AUGUST WAS PASSING, but its heat still hung over the Serra, withering and drying our fine tall stalks of corn. The swollen ears were heavy with golden kernels, and when one pushed the drying silk aside it could be seen that these, too, were drying and turning hard and more golden in the heat of summer's end.

Only a few weeks more, we kept saying, and we could begin the harvesting.

There was one annoying worry. The corn sheller I had asked three months before to have sent to us in all haste from Spain was still undelivered.

After our "machinery conference" in which Costello had given me permission to buy a corn sheller for my own use, I had ordered one from a factory in Seville. This Sevillian sheller is an exact copy, part for part, of a certain make of English corn sheller. The Spanish company had dodged the patent difficulties by giving their machine a different name and painting it another color. Beyond that, they just shrugged their shoulders and refused to discuss the resemblance. The steel that went into this Spanish corn sheller was not as durable as the steel in the English model, but as Costello pointed out, although it was no cheaper, at least the factory was closer to us and we would need no import license.

"The machine can be loaded on one of our boats in Seville and unloaded in Larache," Costello had explained. "Nothing can be simpler. On the other hand, if we try ordering

one from England, granting it would be a better machine, we will have all kinds of complications with the import papers and God knows when we would get delivery."

Well, God knows about the Spaniards and their delivery dates, too. I had ordered the sheller from Seville immediately and after the usual exchange of pointless letters with the company, in which we both expressed the wish that God would guard over the other and remained at each other's feet with servitude, I settled down to wait.

And wait I did, although not with patience, for two months and then another month—ninety days—while our corn needed only one hundred and fifty-two days, or thereabouts, to go to maturity.

As the corn stalks began to rustle with dryness, I began to get more and more nervous about being stuck with the whole crop ripe and no corn sheller. It is the custom in Morocco to sell corn already shelled and not on the cob, as is done much of the time in the States.

I pestered Costello. Together we wrote more letters to our friends in Seville. They wrote back very politely, imploring God to guard over us and incidentally informing us that our machine was being put together that very day and that *en seguida*—immediately—we would have it in our hands. And they stretched out their hands to us and remained at our feet in servitude.

But they were lying. The machine being put together that very day was not for us—it was for someone else. We waited more anxious weeks. I complained to Arturo. I complained to Arturo so much that he, too, began to doubt those letters from Seville. With my help, he visualized mountains of corn in all his warehouses, spilling out into his few and precious cement drying areas. He visualized himself without

space for drying the pepper crop. Arturo got panicky and then he thought of an answer.

One morning in the Adir patio, he came up to me in a mysterious way and pulled me to one side. He glanced around furtively to be sure no one could hear.

"Your problem has a solution, Betty," he hissed into my ear. "The French Zone!"

I looked at him, startled. "You mean we should buy a sheller in French Morocco?"

"Exactly," he answered smugly.

Of course corn shellers were available in French Morocco. Everything under the sun was available there because the French colonials had working trade treaties with England and the United States and plenty of foreign money to pay for whatever machinery they cared to import. Their display windows were jammed with the latest models; they had machinery running out their ears. All this was only twenty-five miles away from where Arturo and I were standing, but it might as well have been twenty-five hundred. There were rigid laws against any machinery being bought in French Morocco and transported across the border for use in Spanish Morocco. It was very much like the penniless, hungry beggars standing outside the bakery shop window looking in at all the goodies on display.

We were desperate, however, and we made a furtive trip to Casablanca, taking along Arturo's wife, the Serra lawyer and his wife as unwitting cover for our designs. They spent the day shopping for French Zone luxuries such as good coffee while Arturo and I bought a sheller and arranged to have it smuggled back across the border on donkey-back.

Two days later, Arturo found me in the carpenter shop and said, with a mischievous grin on his face, "I have a surprise for you out in the granary."

I thought I knew what it was, and trotted along enthusiastically. Outside the granary door, Arturo stepped aside and motioned me to enter. I took one look in the door and let out a heart-rending groan.

There stood our corn sheller, all right, somewhat battered from its trans-border voyage on the donkey, but bolted together again and ready to go to work. But I groaned because right beside it stood a duplicate corn sheller, also shiny with new paint and ready to go!

The unreliable, at-your-feet-in-servitude Spanish company in Seville had come through after all.

2

SEPTEMBER, the time of harvest, came to Morocco so abruptly that it took my breath away. After waiting so long, so impatiently, it came as a sort of surprise, catching me off guard. It seemed that only yesterday it had been spring and I was worrying with Marrón about getting all the corn seed into the ground before Arturo snatched away our *avantréns* for the other crops. One day the fields were all green—the corn, the rice, the cotton—with the sun blazing hot in the sky from early morning until late at night. And we were cultivating out the weeds and combating the insects with sprays and saying to each other, "Will this corn never grow high enough to stop worrying us?"

Now—the very next day, it seemed—I was looking out over the Lukus Valley and the whole scene had changed. Its color was no longer green, it had changed to brown. The fields were all brown, the leaves on the trees, the ribbons of roads through the parcels. Even the river was brown, with its sluggish water running muddy. And although the days were still as hot as ever, with the unblinking sun overhead, the nights began to be colder, forecasting the autumn.

I asked Marrón, "Where did all the days go? How could these corn stalks spring up so fast?" It might have been only last week that we had gathered for the first time in Parcel 31 to start dropping yellow kernels of corn into the ground. Now it was one hundred and fifty-odd days later and it was

time to harvest our crop. We had come out to Parcel 31 together to have one last, determining look at the corn.

Marrón was striding ahead of me down the rows of dried, rustling, crackling stalks, hitching up his blue jeans with one hand and with the other pulling nervously at his old felt hat. He had not changed that hat during the whole season. When I had tried to interest him in some cooler headgear of straw, he had said, "This old wreck brings me luck. I'll get a new one, when we finish the work, for my trip to Spain with Carmen."

Now he was jubilant; his face, usually an unemotional mask, was wreathed in smiles. "The corn is as dry as we can expect, Señora. It is ready to be picked." He had stopped in the middle of a row, plucked a yellow ear of corn from its stalk and he was breaking off the grains one at a time and rattling them around in the palm of one hand. "We can start whenever you say."

He was so eager that I had to tease him a bit. "What about starting right now?" I asked him. "You take that row over there and I'll take this one. The two of us should be all finished by Christmas Day."

Marrón took off his hat and rubbed his head. "Well, if not today, shall we plan to start tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow it shall be," I said. "Tomorrow is our official first day of harvest."

We looked through all the other corn *parcelas* that day and in the afternoon we sent word out to the Arab *kabilas* that many hands would be needed in Parcel 31 on the next morning to begin the corn harvest. I went to bed early that night, "to put myself strong" as the Spaniards express it, for the grueling next day.

Actually, we did not anticipate much of a labor turnout on the first day of harvest because the *Aid el Kebir* had just

ended. The *Aid el Kebir* is the big Arab *fiesta* of killing the sheep—representing the sacrifice of a mutton instead of Abraham's son. It is celebrated only once a year and the Arab families save all year long so that they can buy a sheep for their celebration. On the first day of the festivities, the sheep is killed and its "innards," liver, heart, kidneys, make up the midday meal. In the evening of that first day, the head is eaten along with huge bowls of couscous. There is much gaiety and slurping down of mint tea and, among the more daring Arabs, some nipping at the wine bottle to increase the hilarity. The next day the meat itself makes up the feast in stupor-producing quantities. Some of the extra meat is dutifully dried and stored in jars of grease for leaner days in the future. But as long as there was anything at all around to eat, the Arabs were not likely to come back to work.

So, for our first day of harvest, Marrón and I counted on having only a few of the Arab women show up. But even fewer than we expected came down from their *kabilas*, and we began with only fifteen well-fed, slow-moving ladies. Later on in the month, when we were working furiously against the impending rains with one hundred and thirty hands each day, we looked back upon that first morning as a miracle of calm organization.

At the time and even with only fifteen Arabs to control, it did not seem calm at all. Such large quantities of corn as ours had never been raised before in Morocco and there was no precedent to tell us how we could harvest it without machinery. In America I would not even have attempted such acrobatics, but Costello had continued to resist the purchase of a mechanical picker. He had stuck resolutely to his original decision that no more company money was to go into machinery for this corn crop, although I had described the corn picker we had seen in the Casablanca show window in what

I felt were mouth-watering terms. Short of buying a mechanical picker with my own money, there was nothing I could do except make out with hand labor.

Our problem, then, was to pick by hand one thousand acres of corn, transport it from the scattered *parcelas* to some central point, shell it through our English-Spanish corn shellers and get it sewn neatly into sacks in time to ship it off to whichever customer paid the highest price. And all this before the autumn rains set in.

Like a trainer giving his fighter a pep talk, Arturo had a word or two to say: "I don't want to tell you how you should carry out your own operation, Betty," he said. "You can do it any way you wish. All I ask—my only request—is that you please keep it all up at Nemsah, away from Adir, and out of my hair."

This had been my intention all along and I was grateful to find Arturo agreed with me. As I had told him before, I always tried to do what he wanted, provided it coincided with what I wanted. I intended to have the picked corn as closely under my personal vigilance as possible.

While we were hunting around Nemsah for a likely work site, Marrón suggested maliciously, "Perhaps the Señora Betty would find it most convenient to shell the corn in her kitchen? Or in the dining room?"

This made me suspect that under his dirty old felt hat, Marrón was hiding a sense of humor.

We decided upon the largest *era* in Nemsah; an *era* is a large, square, outdoor cement floor that can be used for keeping stock overnight, drying or just storing crops. This one had previously been used for holding stock. It was out behind the last stable. It stood at the top of the L which the Nemsah buildings formed, between my house and the road to the Palafito.

We worked feverishly on it, scraping from its cement floor the caked, hard-packed manure which remained from countless herds of cows and sheep. We washed it down with water and when it was dry, we moved our two shelling machines out onto its hard expanse.

A view of the *era* from my front terrace was blocked by the stable, but as Arturo pointed out with a leer, apart from having the work done in my kitchen as Marrón suggested, it was hardly possible to get it any closer. The *era* was surrounded by thick-trunked, tall eucalyptus trees which cast a most welcome shade on the hottest days, but there was no provision for electric lighting. When our Nemsah inhabitants found me out there with Manolo, the electrician, erecting two poles, stringing up rolls of cable and installing huge electric-light bulbs, they were baffled.

"This will look like Larache main street," they commented. "What is your idea?"

"Night work," I told them. "What corn we do not get shelled during the day, we shall have to get shelled at night."

"The Señora means business," they said to each other. "Perhaps after all she can do this great work before the rains."

3

WE GAVE EACH of our fifteen Arab starters a basket, placed them at the beginning of fifteen rows of corn in Parcel 31, and told them that the object was to break off the ear of corn, husk it, and drop it into the basket and proceed to the next stalk where they repeated the performance. The "girls" all nodded wisely, their silver earrings jangling and their colored beads tinkling and they set upon the corn stalks with as much delight as if this were a new game.

In Morocco, and in Spain for that matter, there is no such instrument as our corn husker—that useful little steel spike one straps to the hand and uses to rip into the tightly rolled husks at the top of the ear of corn. Instead, the Arab women just use their work-hardened fingers and they never seem to suffer from sore finger tips.

Our idea had been to let these fine ladies husk their baskets full of corn and dump the ears into a center pile every two hundred yards or so along the edge of the field. As we moved in, we could cut paths the length of the field into which the baskets could be dumped in the same way. We soon found the corn was so dry that a vast quantity of it was being involuntarily shelled off onto the ground, from where it was impossible to retrieve it.

We solved that slight difficulty by rushing to the granary and detaching several piles of old sacks from the protesting granary clerk. He was sure that we should have some kind of permission for those sacks; but as we pointed out patiently,

What was he going to do with old sacks anyway? We picked out the oldest, most decrepit Arab we had on the payroll and set him to work making large sack-blankets on which to dump the corn. About twenty sacks sewn together made a satisfactory, leakproof dumping ground. Our Arab needleman sat on the edge of Parcel 31 with his legs crossed under him, his needle in hand, surrounded by sacks. He sat absolutely still in the blazing hot sun and sewed without interruption. although it appeared at times that he could not survive. I walked past him at midday and he seemed ready to go shimmering skyward, so hot it was, but he sewed on, unaffected. Only when night fell did he put down his needle and we had enough sack-blankets for a long siege of corn husking.

With the mutton from the *Aid el Kebir* feast lasting so nicely, it was several days before we got enough corn collected to start our shellers whirling. Once we started, we did not want to stop again until the job was finished and so we waited for the mutton to run out and the Arabs to become hungry and to wander down to Parcel 31.

By the time we had one hundred or more fairly interested pickers—women, old men and young boys—we were able to keep one truck occupied all day in transporting the corn heaps from the *parcela* to the Nemsah *era.*

I put Espejo in charge of the work at the *era* because we found that Marrón was needed all day long in the *parcela.* Our scatter-brained Arab girls were not to be trusted. If we left them alone for half an hour, they began to rush up and down their rows, racing each other and leaving ear after ear of corn hanging in plain view upon the stalks. Their approach was that what we did not actually see them in the act of leaving could not be counted against them. In some vague way, they felt that ours was too complicated a system to follow their movements. They were quite astonished to discover

that all the left-behind ears of corn could be traced directly to the culprit merely by walking back down her row of corn. So Marrón spent his time in the *parcelas*—first Parcel 31 and later the 400's. He kept the Arabs divided into malleable teams and kept these teams more or less together—at least within shouting distance. He supervised the loading of the trucks, assigning the weak children to the filling of the baskets and the strongest of the men to the heavier work of lifting the loaded baskets into the truck. If left alone, the truck driver was apt to come chugging into Nemsah grossly overloaded, having scattered ears of corn all along the road from the *parcela* to the *era*. Or he was just as likely to come zooming in with only half a load of corn. Either way wasted time and money and energy for us. For these reasons, Marrón stayed in the *parcelas*. Occasionally he would leap up on top of a loaded truck and ride to Nemsah just to see the rest of the operation, just from curiosity, just from bursting interest.

And if the *parcela*, with its hundred-odd milling, chanting, sweating bodies presented an aspect of chaos, well, the work in the Nemsah *era* presented the same chaos, concentrated into a much smaller area. We had only half as many workers, but thrown together as they were upon a table of cement only twenty yards square, it appeared that there were twice as many of them, their voices seemed louder, their problems more immediate, more pressing.

As I have said, I put Espejo in charge of the *era* and I gave him two serious, hard-working Spaniards to help with the specialized work. What we call specialized work was weighing each sack of corn, for instance, and sewing it closed afterward. The weighing, certainly, was no speciality, but it was next to impossible to get the Arabs to put the same amount of grain into each sack. The sewing, though, that was indeed special and required special workmen. These men had come

from Seville where they had closed thousands of sacks of wheat with their needles and cord. Each man reminded me of the *Little Tailor*, sitting, as they did, cross-legged on an already-sewn sack and then moving slowly on down a line of sacks. Another of their skills was that of aerating the corn. We found that in spite of putting the corn through the shellers bone-dry, a certain amount of moisture still remained in the kernels and we had to turn the shelled corn over a time or two to dry it completely before it went into the sacks. The men from Seville would attack a pile of corn with two long, flat, wooden paddle-like shovels and, very like circus jugglers, keep a stream of gleaming yellow kernels constantly in mid-air.

During the first week, we asked for a mechanic to stand by full time and help us with the actual operation of our two corn shellers and with the dozen-odd, minute adjustments that always must be affected when new machinery goes into action for the first time. Manolo, the youthful electrician, first hooked up our machines because they were driven by small electric motors. Then one of the mechanics was sent up to baby-sit with the machines for the opening week. We made the many minor adjustments, starting and then stopping, starting and stopping again with infinite patience and at the end of four days, the shellers were running smoothly and I knew pretty well how to cope with the few things that could go wrong. The mechanic shook hands with us solemnly, packed up his wrenches and went back to Adir.

We chose two separate crews to man the two shellers and tried to create between them some feeling of competition—who would shell the most corn, whose machine stopped the least, which general area was kept the neatest. And I selected Lahcen's good-looking young brother as a kind of spokesman, leader of the Arabs.

"Why him?" complained Marrón. "If anything, he has had less experience than the others. Besides, he is younger, too young."

"Because he is Lahcen's brother," I explained. "Only because of that. We cannot have Lahcen here—he has too many other responsibilities, but having his brother is almost as good. Indirect control. Anything goes wrong, I can drop a discreet word in the kitchen that evening and you see if the trouble is not adjusted by the following day."

"The Señora is not so crazy," said Marrón. "She thinks around the corner."

We fell easily into our new routine of starting the picking in the *parcelas* as soon as our hands appeared, and of sewing up bags from the day before until the first load of corn arrived. Then we started the machines and for the rest of the day, we stopped only for lunch and occasionally to grease the shellers.

We tried each day to shell all the corn we had picked and that often meant working long after dark, sometimes until after midnight. And then there were arguments with protesting Arabs and those discreet words in the kitchen with Lahcen and more co-operation on the following day.

We fell into this routine that held nothing else for us but corn on the stalk, then ears of corn, then mighty piles of shelled corn and finally stately rows of sacks filled with corn, and piles of bare, stripped cobs. We arose in the morning to the corn, we dropped into bed late at night, still breathing the heavy odor of corn. There was nothing else in our world.

During these weeks of the harvesting we saw very little of Jay. The four-year-old who had set out with me on the first day of the spring planting was still spending much of his time in the fields. For two or three days at a time he would be out with the threshing crews, sleeping with the men in a

tent on the field, never changing his clothes or washing his ears. He ate what his tentmates ate—stewed goat, cactus fruit or figs—and communicated with them in understandable Arabic. When he did come back to Nemsah, sun-burned and bursting with field reports, it was almost as if my second-from-the-youngest son was one of the visitors that came in larger numbers, for some reason, as our season on the Serra neared its end.

4

THE PROBLEM OF ROBBERY in the corn crop hardly existed while the corn was still on the stalk. Marrón and Espejo and myself were so continually wandering up and down the rows that we would have spotted instantly any loss, no matter how small. Ears of corn torn at random from their stalks leave bare white husks behind that stand out as sharply as a thickly bandaged thumb.

However, once we had started picking the corn and were working in several *parcelas* at the same time, the picture changed. It was then much easier for a thief to slip into a *parcela* in the night and, continuing the picking from where we had stopped that day, make off with a few bushels of grain. If this were allowed to happen every night or even for several nights, the loss would be considerable by the end of the season.

The best way to deal with robbery by the Arabs is by the same plan that applies to any poor people; that of never placing temptation in their way. Arabs are always hungry, they are always poor, and it is only human of them, that if there is any relief in sight, other than working, to seek that relief. So the best means of defense is not to tempt them. In cases where this is impossible, as in these one thousand acres of ripe corn sprawled out temptingly under their very noses, the next best plan is to make it impossible for them to steal without being detected immediately, and to punish so severely those who are caught stealing they will figure out by

themselves the small chance of success is not worth the overwhelming risk.

In guarding our corn, we were greatly aided by the special guard department which the Serra Company, of necessity, maintains the whole year around. The guard system has its chief guard, who lives in Adir Alto *cortijo*, and it has a subordinate guard living in each of the other *cortijos*—Adir Bajo, Nemsah, Meruan and Palafito. Each of these men is mounted and armed and is responsible for the security of his *cortijo* and its surrounding *parcelas* twenty-four hours a day. As it is not physically possible for the guard to be awake during all the hours of the day and night, he is allowed to select helpers whom he personally trusts.

For many reasons, these trustworthies are nearly always Arabs. It is something like using fire to fight fire—only the Arabs can apprehend the Arabs; a practical application of the ancient law—Divide and Rule. It sounds cold-blooded, this technique, and a little incredible—why should Arabs spy upon brothers? Well, it is cold-blooded, and however much one becomes accustomed to it from constant association, it continues to be cold-blooded. And, incredible as it is, the Arab will work against the Arab. It was, in a way, the basis of the whole Spanish operation in Morocco. Without having a percentage of the Arab population on their side, the Spaniards could never have maintained their grip upon Morocco because they were so outnumbered. To divide the Arabs among themselves is certainly no difficult task; they stand divided practically all the time with no instigation. In the early days it was easy to persuade a proportion of them to fight alongside the Spanish troops against their brothers. A large part of the troops in Spanish Morocco were Arab. You asked a friendly Arab soldier why this was and he would shrug his shoulders indifferently and explain: "An easier life than

sweating out in a wheat field," or, "A guaranteed roof over my head and meals the rest of my life."

You might have pressed the matter closer with, "But doesn't it hurt to be taking up arms against your brothers—don't you feel that Morocco belongs to you and that by aiding the Spaniard you are working against yourself?"

And he might have answered: "Naturally, Morocco belongs to us—it takes no student of history to see that. Naturally, it is evil to take up arms against our brothers. But it is more evil to die of starvation, and the Spaniards have defeated us. The only decent life now is working for them." And he would look down at his khaki-colored uniform with its jaunty gold and red trimming and there would be no love in his eyes.

What he said in short, was, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em. *Insh'Allah.*"

Which brings us to our Arab guards of the corn crop. In a way they, too, felt that as they couldn't lick us, they had better join us. And just to have all the angles covered, almost every Arab guard had at least one acknowledged thief in the same family. I have tried to find a parallel in our American way of life and the nearest answer I can come up with is that it resembles somewhat a storekeeper's approach to politics—to insure success it is always wise to have a son who is a member of the Republican party and another son who is a member of the Democratic party.

The Arabs figured that with one guard in the family, they were assured a steady income. The thief-member, the Robin Hood, brought them more spectacular if irregular gains and also added a bit of glamour. I noticed that the brother who was the guard took on the air of the martyr in the family, while the thief was considered to be the *valiente*—the brave one.

My particular Arab guard for the *era* in Nemsah was a fine example of all the traits I have been explaining. He was one hundred per cent a Moorish subject of Morocco, he was proud of being Moroccan, in fact rather superior about it, as everyone should be about his own country. He would not have been Spanish even if he had been given his choice. In his heart of hearts, he cherished a vision of Morocco for the Moroccans and yet he worked wholeheartedly for the Serra —this is to say, for the Spaniards against his own Arab kind— and he thought this was just.

His name was Hamid. He was tall. He was husky for an Arab, and had a broad face with a square jaw and stern brown eyes which he never lowered before anyone. His skin was creamy brown without a blemish or a scar and he had delicate, pink cheeks. The pink cheeks were a decided novelty in the Arab realm of diet deficiencies. I could only assume that his guard duties permitted him to partake of sufficient quantities of green vegetables and fruit—oranges likely.

Hamid's duty with me only began when our corn operation had reached the Nemsah *era* state. I do not remember ever sending for him. He seemed to know when the moment had come. The very first night that we had corn lying out in the *era* overnight, he appeared. He would leave whatever task he had been performing for any other *jefe* in any other part of the farm and he would come to guard my corn.

His hours of duty were from sundown, or when my working crews went home, until sunup, presumably, when one of us appeared to relieve him. I respected Hamid enormously because from the dozens of guards with whom I worked, he was the only one I never found asleep. I did catch him one morning, squatted on top of a heap of grain, his jelab hood pulled down over his face, his head nodding imperceptibly. I climbed up the corn mound and put my hand upon his shoul-

der—it was like the child game "Run Rover Run"—if you could walk up without being detected, he was "out." But the sun had risen already, a dull red smudge along the eastern horizon, and Hamid vehemently claimed that this did not count and that the guilt was mine because I was late.

"The sun is up, Señora, and no one comes to steal corn at the rise of the sun."

Perhaps Hamid was right. It was a matter of what time he thought his responsibility ended and what time I thought it ended.

He wore as a trademark an impressive white turban with heavy, expensive yellow embroidery, bound high upon his head. Hamid was never without it. He wore a simple white blouse and brown pantaloons with a woolen vest of bright green, embroidered with black silk, and a brown jelab on top of everything. I admired his vest one night, with its pert, stand-up collar and its straight, casual line. A few nights later, he thrust a dirty parcel rolled up in newspaper into my hands and when I carried it over and opened it under the powerful electric bulb of the *era* it turned out to be a vest like his in raw wool with mother-of-pearl buttons and a handsome blue and white striped cotton lining.

Later, in America, fashion magazine editors exclaimed over that vest for its understated good taste. At the time, I was touched. I thanked Hamid and changed the subject quickly. But I made a note to buy him something terribly modern made of plastic next time I went to Tangier.

The Arab guards did not carry guns and so they devised themselves various weapons of authority. Hamid's was a heavy club with a large, knotty club-head. He had nailed a strip of metal across the head to give it even more authority.

When Hamid came loping up to the *era* on an evening, mounted upon his own burro and wielding his fearsome

club, he looked like a young Wise Man and if he had been content to keep his mouth closed, I might never have known otherwise. But young Hamid had only to open his lips and he revealed himself as a good-natured, simple-minded child.

Sometimes he would have already taken up his post in the *era* when I arrived, late, from the *parcelas* of Adir. One time I came upon him as he was making his toilette. He had filled with water my scrub bucket which the day crew borrowed for a water pail and he had set it down in the middle of the *era*. He stood over the bucket, declined his head and unwound the stupendous turban, exposing a most amazing hair-do. Hamid's hair was clipped close all over his head except across the front of the forehead where it was about six inches long. Hamid dampened this mass thoroughly in the water bucket and, peering solemnly into a bit of cracked mirror, he combed it straight up in the air. He wore his hair this way while on duty at night for reasons that he never explained to me. It gave him an insane appearance. Maybe he hoped his appearanc would scare any would-be robbers away.

After I had made the ritualistic count of the sacks of corn and we had circled the *era*, peering at all the details of the machines, the piles of unbagged corn, shovels, empty bags and odd tools, with what Hamid thought of as my all-seeing eyes, we would seat ourselves in a shadowy corner away from the harsh guard light and drink the coffee I had brought and discuss whatever was on our minds. We talked at length about property. I would insist that Hamid was a rich young man because he owned the fat burro on which he came to work, a house in the *kabila*, a goat and a good strong wife to do all his work.

Hamid would watch my face as I told him how lucky he was and then he would grin broadly, showing, even in the

dark, all his fine, white teeth against his brown skin, and he would tell me that he was willing to trade it all for my station wagon.

With his eyes opened wide and flinging out his arms, he would shout, "You ride the burro back to Madrid, Señora, and leave me your taxi."

The Arabs call any nice-looking car a "taxi." It is supposed to be a compliment—akin to calling some ordinary woman a movie star.

Then I would try to explain to Hamid that the possession of material things was all relative to one's situation: that there was, naturally, a certain minimum that made for comfortable living, but that beyond this minimum the owning of more and more things did not necessarily mean more happiness.

"It would cost all the money you earn in one night, Hamid, just for enough *gasolina* to drive yourself from the *kabila* to work here in Nemsah and back again in the morning, not to think of what repairs would cost if you broke some part on these bad roads. No, you are better off with a burro."

Hamid would nod and grin, but I could tell from his open face that he was only tolerating me, a hopelessly confused woman, on the subject of possessions, and that at the drop of a hat he would trade his burro for my "taxi."

Toward the end of the harvest, Hamid began to get thinner and his rosy cheeks paled noticeably. I thought at first that the sleepless nights were beginning to mark him and I suggested that he could switch with one of the day guards and take a rest, if he wished.

"Understand, I would not be as tranquil with another guard, Hamid, but your health comes first."

And then he confessed that his work had nothing to do with his condition. It turned out to be old, classic wife trouble. Hamid had become dissatisfied with the way his

wife was doing the work and had returned her abruptly to her mother and father. This, in Morocco, is almost equivalent to a divorce. When she arrived home, her father sent word that he expected Hamid to provide an ample *pensión* for the rejected wife. But, as Hamid explained, "She is not working for me any more so why should I pay for her keep?" He had refused the father's request.

The indignant father took his case straightway to the *bajá* who sent for Hamid. Hamid had sent word to me on the day of his interview that he would be late for work.

"I had to get on the Valenciana [the local bus] and go," he said, his wild hair bending crazily with the sway of his head. "And her brother came to get on the Valenciana with me!"

The results of all this fuss never did get through to me very clearly. I gathered vaguely that the wife remained with her parents, but who finally had to pay that *pensión* was lost to me in a maze of complicated Moorish explanations which seem to center around the fact that if Hamid had my "taxi," everything would be different. The long-lasting effect was that Hamid complained nightly about the unsewn state of his woolen vest. And, as we were both well aware, no self-respecting Arab guard would mend his own vest.

All this time, Hamid's oldest brother was giving more trouble than anyone else in the oranges. He was an orange thief—a crafty, chronic stealer of oranges. He could steal more oranges, more cleverly, than all the other thieves together. He knew where there were well-hidden breaks in the heavily grown thorn thickets that protected the orange *parcelas* and he came slithering through unscratched, dragging a stolen empty sack behind him. With infinite patience, he would wait all the hours of darkness for a chance to fill the

sack and before the sun came up he would slither out undetected.

I spoke sharply to Hamid about his erring brother and Hamid sighed a sigh of the troubled. "I am a guard, Señora," he stated. "And brother is a thief."

So Allah would have it. *Insh'Allah.*

5

THE WORK IN the *era* was humming along; two trucks were delivering the ears of corn from the last 400 *parcelas;* both of our corn shellers were working at full speed with their two crews of Arabs constantly moving; the two Spaniards were heaving golden shovelfuls of shelled corn high into the air and several Arabs were whisking the cleaned kernels into the jute bags. Every so often, one of the Spaniards tossed his shovel aside to stitch closed the full jute bags which had accumulated.

The corncobs came through the shellers with a few grains still attached to them and, as labor was what we had the most of, we set a team of Arab women to stripping the cobs clean. When the trucks had been unloaded of their cargoes of corn, we would load them with cobs which they would deliver back to Adir. The cobs, once aged and dried out, made excellent fuel for the brick kiln.

Along about midmorning one Saturday Marrón rode into the *era* atop a loaded truck. His mission was to argue some point of technique. He did this at least once a day during the harvest period. He would motion to me, high on the platform of one of the shellers, and I would crawl down, slowly. We would stand in the center of the *era,* noise rising all around us, hats in hand, wiping our brows, and we would argue earnestly whatever point had come up. Sometimes we would decide it his way and he would mount his truck and ride triumphantly back to the *parcela.* Sometimes we would

decide it in my favor and Marrón would pull his hat down over his eyes, climb into the cab of the truck and sourly slam the door behind him without saying *adiós.*

At the height of the activity, there was a piercing, blood-curdling scream and an Arab from the crew at the first sheller went hopping crazily across the *era* on one foot while he clutched the other in both hands. As suddenly as it had begun, his screaming ceased and he collapsed in a ragged heap.

I leaped down from the platform of the sheller, pulled the switch to stop the machine and ran over to the suffering man. The others gathered into little knots and muttered in puzzled voices until one of their number suddenly shouted, "Scorpion!" and emerged from behind the sheller with a dead scorpion skewered on the end of a stick.

We half-carried the victim into the office where we did what we could for him before sending him on into the hospital clinic with a jeep that happened to be going to Larache. Scorpion bites are among the most painful there are, but they are not fatal in Morocco and, if treated promptly, the pain will subside. Our Arab victim would be in working shape within a day or two.

Back in the *era* the Arabs were vengefully burning up the evil scorpion which must have ridden in from the fields with a load of corn. It was only the second scorpion I had seen in Morocco, although they are said to be quite numerous.

I rushed back to the *era* and to counting the full jute sacks. On our sale to the British Food Ministry, we had made an estimate only and I was worried that I had overestimated and sold more shelled corn than we were going to produce. However, by early afternoon, it was well apparent that we would have a small but comfortable margin; corn to spill on the loading and to send to friends as an excellent example of what could be raised in Morocco.

Shortly afterwards, Marrón made an entry into the *era* with a truck and announced in a voice of pride that this represented the last load of corn in the 400 *parcelas*. There remained the 44, which we could finish up on Sunday morning. We all cheered him gaily and in a jeep borrowed from Arturo, who was hovering near by, I set out to take a last, long look at all our *parcelas;* looking for nothing special, just looking.

6

I SHOULD NOT HAVE been in the cotton section in the first place because it was not my job. But sometimes, especially toward the end of the harvest, I got so sick and tired of corn that I just took off in the morning and went somewhere else, anywhere, so long as there was no corn. Like a busman on a holiday, I usually ended up on one of the other managers' jobs.

So, this day, I drove my car out into a cotton parcel that Marti had planted near the border town of Alcazarquivir, where the Serra has more landholdings. I stayed around all day, eating a little food from Pepe's lunch basket, and it was as hot as it ever gets in the world, I guess. Even the Arabs were moaning about the heat, wrapped up tight in their woolen jelabs as insulation—a theory upon which opinion is divided, even in Morocco. The air so still that time itself seemed to be suspended there.

The cotton was being picked by hand, much as they used to down in our Southern States. Each Arab had a sack dragging along behind him and when he filled it, he presented it to the Spaniard who was installed at the end of the rows. This Spaniard weighed the sack, made a notation on the Arab's work card and the sack was dumped onto a heap of other sacks, to be carted away later to the storage sheds. Several tractors, pulling rubber-tired wagons, were shuttling back and forth.

In the late afternoon, I was sitting with Pepe on the ground beside my car trying to manipulate a drink of cold water

from a *botija*. The *botija* is a large pottery jar in which water is kept cool. It has only a small hole in the top and to get a drink, one must hold the *botija* up in the air, open the mouth wide and direct a tiny jet of water into the mouth. It sounds easier than it is. Usually you get a stream of water in your eye or on your chin the first time you try it. Constant practice makes experts and while I was no expert, I could manage to get a reasonable amount of the water into my mouth.

As I put the *botija* down again in the shade of the empty sacks, a Serra truck drew up and stopped. It contained two or three drums of gasoline for refueling the tractors and Pepe called out that one drum would be enough for this place. The two Arabs in the back of the truck set about unloading the drum while Pepe sauntered leisurely toward them. The Arabs were hoisting the drum straight up over the truck tailgate. The thought crosed my mind fleetingly that they should have lowered the tailgate first and rolled the drum out, and then I was on my feet shouting because I could see that the drum was not going to fall out of the truck, it was teetering back onto the two Arabs. One of them looked up at the drum with his face frozen in fright and then he leaped back out of the way. The other poor man, his head bent under the weight, failed to see the danger. The drum crashed back onto him with an ominous sound. Drum and man disappeared from view into the bottom of the truck.

Pepe reached the truck first. He hitched himself up, looked over the side and dropped back to the ground again, covering his face with his hands and moaning. I caught hold of his shoulder, digging in my fingernails. "What is the matter? Get on your feet!"

"Can't," he babbled. "Blood all over the place—makes me sick to my stomach."

The victim in the bottom of the truck was screaming now

and his companion had jumped over the side and fled. I looked around hastily for something that could be a bandage or at least could stanch the flow of blood. "Give me your shirt, Pepe." He was wearing an American T-shirt. "And get the tailgate down as fast as you can."

He continued to moan like a hurt child and I shook him by the shoulders with all my might. He seemed to come back to his senses, and gave me the shirt. I climbed up into the truck. The hurt Arab was curled up in a ball, clutching his ankle with both hands and holding what was left of his foot up in the air. The flange of the heavy gasoline drum had dropped full force across the bare toes of his right foot; the little toe was gone completely, the adjoining three were dangling grotesquely and the big toe was smashed to a pulp. There was nothing I could do there in the truck except cover the wound and stop the blood flow. The man had to be got to a hospital as quickly as possible. The T-shirt was pitifully inadequate, but I gathered the foot together as well as I could and wrapped the shirt around and around. The old man was dressed mostly in rags and I yanked two or three strips off his own tattered shirt. One, I bound around his leg above the knee, not remembering where it should go to stop the flow of blood, although I had studied First Aid; with the others, I secured the makeshift bandage.

By this time, Pepe had released the big cotter pins and the tailgate of the truck dropped open. Now the wound was hidden, Pepe was willing to help, and between us we carried the man the short distance to my car. The frail old man weighed hardly as much as a good, robust first-grade pupil and his bones stuck out all over his body.

Pepe snatched up a handful of sacks as we went by the pile. "Keep the upholstery clean," he explained. He had gotten completely over his hysteria, and the victim, too, had

ceased to scream and was only groaning softly to himself.

We arranged him in the back seat of the station wagon and Pepe sat beside him while I drove full speed into Alcazarquivir. Fortunately, the village had a hospital. We pulled up in front of it and began unloading our Arab. A crowd of loitering Arabs gathered immediately and followed us up the walk to the hospital door.

"It is the American Señora," explained one Arab. "She was driving too fast, as they all do, and she has struck down this poor old man. He will die!"

"That's a lie," barked Pepe in Arabic. "Better keep your mouth shut." And the crowd fell back more respectfully.

We brought the old man into the emergency room and I hoisted him up onto the examination table while Pepe went to find an attendant. I found a towel, wet it under the faucet and wiped the old man's face, smiling at him, saying it would be all right, trying to give him some confidence.

In a few minutes the attendant came in the door. He was an Arab himself, with dark, close-cropped hair, a little mustache and a pale, olive skin. He was smoking a cigarette and he took it out of his mouth long enough to ask in perfect Spanish, "What is your trouble?" Then he replaced it.

"Field accident—man has cut his toes across—has to be sewn up right away."

The attendant looked at me for a long moment, trying to decide to himself where I belonged. "I guess I can do the diagnosing myself," he informed me, and with one hand he began to undo my crude bandage. In the other hand he held his cigarette.

"Just a minute," I cut in. "This man is in a bad state of shock. He should have a shot of something—morphine or whatever you have."

"Morphine!" snorted the attendant. "That stuff costs money, Señora. We don't just give it to everybody."

I was angry. "He is a Serra employee and you can assume that the company will pay for it," I snapped.

"*Sí?*" he said, looking up from the wound. "Well, let me enlighten you. The first thing the Serra would ask me is why I had wasted morphine on this case!" He had reached for a bottle of alcohol and poured it over the wound and wrapped it up again hurriedly in a surgical dressing. I winced for the patient.

"Is that all you are going to do?" I demanded indignantly. "If the toes are to be saved, it has to be done immediately."

The attendant had finished his cigarette. He dropped it on the floor beside the table and ground it out with his heel. "The doctor comes in to make his calls in an hour. He'll fix it up then. The toes? He won't even try to save them—too long a job—too messy. He'll just take them off. These beasts of the fields never know the difference."

We stood looking at each other from opposite sides of the examination table, with the old man lying between us, staring mutely from one face to the other, trying through his haze of pain to understand what was going on.

I folded my hands together behind my back, noticing that they were trembling, and I began again in a quieter, lower voice, "I should think your being one of them would make a difference. Except for some twist of luck, you could have been a 'beast of the fields' yourself today. I should think you would want to use your superior education to better your own race in any little way you can. I would be ashamed, if I were you."

His dark eyes narrowed to slits and a half-smile passed over his mouth. "One can see you have not been long in Morocco, Señora. The first law of Morocco is every man for himself

and dog eat dog. If I were to give this scum the morphine you talk of, which I know he needs as well as you know it, if I were to spend three hours sweating to save those toes of his, and I know they could be saved, why, tomorrow I would be looking for another job. It wouldn't be a job in any hospital, either. You see, the word would have gotten around that I was a little bit too much interested in the Arabs. Do you understand now?" He spoke almost kindly.

"It's an inhuman attitude."

"On the contrary, it is only too human. The Spaniards want to preserve their position in Morocco; why not? And they cannot do that by giving in to the Arabs even in these little things. And as for my particular position, the Spaniards hand out these jobs. So I do exactly what you see here." He turned his back quickly and began to fumble around in a wall cabinet. In a moment he turned again and he was holding a hypodermic needle. As he held it up to test it, he smiled at me. "I can say he was screaming so loudly that he disturbed the other patients!"

I left the hospital and found Pepe waiting patiently in the car. The sun was low in the sky and the heat was beginning to lift.

As I climbed behind the steering wheel, Pepe said, "Permit me to buy you a *granizada de café*—coffee in chipped ice—at the café, Señora?" I nodded silently and we drove down the main street, into the big square where the café was.

7

MARRÓN WAS WALKING around on clouds. We could see already that our corn crop was to be a success; that mattered very much to Marrón. There was also his complete personal happiness. He and Carmen had settled so happily into their married life in the Nemsah pumphouse.

"This is the best life there is, Señora," Marrón would tell me. "I didn't know how lonely I was until I got married."

The two continued to take great pride in their three rooms, and Carmen, being clever with her needle, was able to make lots of new things, such as a bright cotton bedspread and a dressing-table skirt to match.

They worked on their yard, too, and it was no longer so barren. Carmen planted flowers that, no doubt, were given her by her Andalusian mother who had a love for color and who raised many varieties of flowers around the house in Adir Bajo. I sent some young trees over from Nemsah to be started at one side of the house. It would be years before they gave any shade, but it was a beginning.

Both Carmen and Marrón were looking forward to the postponed honeymoon. With the corn looking so prosperous, it was bound to be a triumphant one; the new Marrón couple would arrive in the old home town of Seville, dressed in their newly bought wedding finery, with money to allow them a leisurely two or three weeks of visiting friends and family.

Then one night, Carmen's labor pains began and Marrón

rushed her in to the local clinic, where I had taken José María's mother. Apparently Carmen's baby was to come sooner than she expected it, but the doctor who attended the Serra Company patients did not seem unduly worried. He checked Carmen into the hospital, put her to bed and sent Marrón home, promising to telephone him when the baby was born.

The baby was born all right, a girl, normal in all respects, but Carmen died there in the hospital. The doctor offered some sort of explanation, but Carmen had been in good health, the delivery had been normal, and I could not help but feel bitterly that if she had gone to a hospital in her own Seville or in Madrid, she would not have died.

How can we decide whose fault it was? Or if it was anyone's fault.

The few hospitals in Spanish Morocco are of modest means. This particular hospital clinic in Larache where Carmen died had the most inadequate equipment. The nursing was done by well-meaning but inadequately trained nuns and there was not even a resident doctor in the place. All the doctoring was done by two or three Larache doctors who each had his own more profitable private practice to attend to at the same time.

None of that changes what happened.

We closed the little house attached to the pumphouse station; Marrón did not want to live there alone, reminded as he would be of those few happy weeks. Instead, he took his tiny new daughter and moved with her back into his parents' house. There were many children already in that house, but as happens in big families, one more is always welcome.

Carmen's mother and father took her death very hard. All their ambitions to make a life for themselves in Morocco seemed to have died with her. They gave up and made plans

to move back to Spain; to Andalusia, of which they had happier memories.

And what will become of Marrón in the future?

Well, Marrón is young and surely he will find another girl and marry again. This new wife will be a mother to his first daughter and give him other children besides. But if he keeps just a little corner of his heart for Carmen and always remembers their short, happy time together, I cannot think of it as wrong.

The harvesting went on, but the triumph of it was gone for Marrón.

8

IT WAS NEAR THE END of our corn harvest. I was tired and exhilarated and proud of the success of my crop. The corn planted on the one thousand Serra acres was yielding us fifty bushels of corn to the acre. Nothing like that yield had ever been harvested before in Spanish Morocco. And while I was proud, and happy, I was also a little sad because it was late October and I would soon be closing the house in Nemsah and taking my sons back to Madrid for the winter. And much as I wanted to return to home and Ricardo again, I knew how I would miss the Serra. I felt a great surge of loyalty toward this land and its people that may have had something to do with the sense of fulfillment that comes to everyone, everywhere, in the fall.

One of my last missions in the autumn was to make Pepe's big wish come true. He wanted to go to America more than anything else. It obsessed him. He was always talking about it. And I had racked my brains to find a way. In the course of my investigations, I discovered that the American 4-H Clubs had a division called the International 4-H Foundation and that they were exchanging agricultural students with nearly all the countries of Europe. One of the difficulties was that the country in question was expected to pay for the voyage of its candidate. Once in the United States, he was taken care of beautifully, but the transportation alone was an expensive proposition. I established communication with these kind people and arranged to have the Serra invite the first

American 4-H student, who would be arriving that fall. He was destined for other parts of Africa, but as an experiment they would be glad to send him to Spanish Morocco. All this was arranged by letter. I learned, however, that Spain and, logically, Spanish Morocco had never been included officially as one of the countries of the program and that their inclusion would only begin during the following year. The Foundation said they would be glad to accept a Serra candidate for the following year and I committed myself to choose one and teach him a smidgen, at least, of English. All this did not help Pepe.

Then I remembered that my father was always having difficulty finding labor for his farm and I wrote to him. He answered with an enthusiastic yes, he would take the young man for a year. I made a hasty trip to Tangier to wangle a visa for Pepe from the American Legation and buy him a boat ticket. The visa was easily obtained when I explained the idea of a private exchange of farmers, pending the commencement of the official program, and guaranteed, for the Spanish government, the boy's eventual return to Morocco. The boat ticket was only a matter of shoving the cash across the counter.

It all happened so fast that I had no time to consult Pepe along the way and so when I finally went to see him, there was no way of his turning back from the trip.

I found Pepe in the men's dormitory, in bed and miserable with malaria, the occupational disease of Morocco. He alternated between bouts of fever and chill, but he was feeling well enough to be propped up in bed. The room was filled with other young men flopping about on the floor, and Pepe was entertaining them all with one of his stories. He had lost a lot of weight and was looking drawn and haggard underneath his sun tan. The room hushed when my footsteps

sounded, but when the men ascertained that it was "only the Señora Betty," Pepe went back to telling his story. I sat down on the foot of the bed and listened. When he finished, the room vibrated with the loud chattering of carefree men and we were able to speak in that complete privacy which only crowds and noise can offer.

"Are you feeling well enough to travel?" I asked.

Pepe smiled, thinking I was teasing him. He pushed his rumpled hair back from his damp forehead. "You know I am always ready to travel. Where am I going? To America, perhaps?"

"Yes," I said quietly. "Your ship leaves the day after tomorrow."

A look of astonishment and joy colored his wan face. He pushed his covers back and swung his feet out of bed onto the floor. "Suddenly I don't have malaria any more!" he announced. "And there are a hundred things I must do before Wednesday!"

On Wednesday I drove to the southern extreme of the farm to get Pepe. His home was with his parents in a house with a thatched roof, mud walls and a dirt floor. His father tended a big herd of goats that he had in partnership with someone from Larache. At the parting, Pepe's grandmother wept and told us all that she would never see him again. His father was mute with the agony of this long voyage his son was taking. His mother took it all with great dignity and until the last minute kept patting Pepe's arm and telling him, "Be a good boy."

We drove in silence into Tangier. What is there to say to a youngster who is going to America for the first time? So many things and yet no matter how you describe it, he will find it completely different in his own eyes. The ship I had found was one belonging to a Yugoslav shipping line; a

line that had just recently added Tangier as a port of call and its schedule was rather more hapazard than not. When we inquired at the shipping office if the ship had arrived, the clerk went to the window that overlooked the bay of Tangier, whipped up a pair of binoculars and peered out, gyrating slowly to take in the full sweep of the bay.

"Nope, don't see any sign of her, but you can't be sure—better go down to the dock and take a closer look."

He wrote the name of the ship on a piece of scrap paper and Pepe and I went down to the dock. We asked several loiterers if they had seen our ship, describing it to them as "This long, and painted battleship gray." No one had seen her. I was anxious.

"We don't want to miss her, Pepe, after all the trouble. We can't afford to miss her—not now."

We hired one of the grubby little rowboats that scuttle beside the Tangier docks looking for tourists. Pepe threw his bulging duffel bag into the bow and we scuffled awkwardly into the stern. I showed the bit of paper, which I still had clutched in my hand, to the rowboat owner and we went slowly rowing around the harbor among the ships which were anchored there, looking from close range at all their names.

Pepe began to laugh. "It seems a funny way to go to America, doesn't it? Rowing around the harbor trying to find your ship."

There was the loud hoot of a new arrival and we turned to see our ship steam slowly into the bay. As soon as her ladder was down, we climbed aboard and settled Pepe into his cabin.

As we were leaving the cabin, Pepe clapped a hand over his mouth. "The police! *Dios mío!* I have forgotten to

notify them that I am leaving. We were rowing about in that little boat and I forgot the authorities completely."

"Well, never mind now. I shall do it when I get back to shore," I told him.

The steward of the ship spoke Spanish, which assured Pepe, at least, of getting his meals. His cabin-mate was an American. "Try to learn a few words of English on the boat," I advised him. There had been no time for lessons on the farm during the summer. "And learn everything else you possibly can—Morocco needs it."

We shook hands briefly. I climbed down the ladder and the patient Arab rowboat owner rowed me to shore again. When the ship pulled out of the bay, bound for America, I could see Pepe standing at the rail, a lone figure, setting out on a big adventure, and I waved to him for courage. Pepe waved back. I am not sure, still, who was encouraging whom.

Another piece of unfinished business that was settled before I left was the matter of little motherless Manolo's education. It did not depend upon me, as Pepe's trip had, so much as it depended upon the Mother Superior in the hospital clinic in Larache. With my time grown short, I had sent word that it was now or never and she, not wanting to discourage me completely, had asked that I come to see her. She had not, however, gone so far as to commit herself to help me with Manolo.

We sat together in her parlor, dimmed from the sun's hot beat by drawn curtains and I found her as formidable as I always had. We discussed the small Manolo's future education. As I saw it, the Mother Superior held the key and I had been pecking away at her indirectly all summer. On her part, she had been sparring for position all summer with a whole string of "ifs" and "buts" and "maybes."

Manolo had continued to develop well during the summer. He had learned to read very capably and he often read the nightly bedtime story in my stead. His writing improved remarkably and he worked hard at his drawing, which he liked most, and even painted some. His patience with the littler boys was endless as he helped Jay carefully with his Arabic vocabulary. He ceased swearing altogether; not only just in front of me, but for all occasions. His face filled out and he added an inch to his height. All round, I considered that Manolo was making progress and I felt that the progress should be continued on through the winter when I had gone away.

Some of these things I did not explain to the Mother Superior. What I did stress was the part about his education and how much he needed regular meals, which his roving shepherd father was unable to provide for him.

The reason that the Mother Superior held the key to Manolo's future was because she chose the candidates for a free school which the Catholic Church operated in Spanish Morocco. It was really only for orphans, but in extreme cases, they would accept boys with a parent still living. I wanted the Mother Superior to choose Manolo, but she had vacillated all summer; she had so many other commitments.

"His reading and writing have improved in a remarkable way," I pointed out to her, hitching myself forward on the chair.

"He has always written well," she answered. "We were the first to teach him, you know."

Manolo had suffered a bout of malaria in the hospital clinic and the Sisters had kept him for some weeks, taking special interest in his instruction.

"That is all the more reason why you should continue," I hastened to say, slipping in any little persuader that I could.

Well, we tilted back and forth and mostly the Mother Superior asked questions about me and my sons and I answered politely and then tried to lead her back to Manolo.

Suddenly she tired of the whole thing and stood up, her gray skirts swishing gracefully around her ankles, one waxlike hand clasping her crucifix. "There will be a place for Manolo in the school this fall," she announced. "Send his father in to talk to me and see that the boy has some clothes to bring with him."

I was so pleased that I couldn't find the words to thank her, so I sat stupidly with my mouth half open as she turned and swept out of the room.

I knew that I would not be back in Morocco during the long winter season and I had dreaded leaving Manolo on his own. It was the same feeling I had toward all the things I had fostered on the Serra farm; the dormitory, the dining room, the club, the layettes, the distribution of used clothing, the student farmer exchange program; not only these material improvements, but the indefinable spirit of good will that had sprung up among the people. I felt that we had gained some hard-fought ground through the summer months and that, in my winter's absence, there was the danger that it might be lost again. A spirit, a feeling, is so intangible that the least unpleasant incident can upset it. I felt that as long as I was there, I could hold the ground. I felt that having shown these people the way, it was almost my duty to help them stay on that course, and in going away as I had to, I was deserting them.

In order to show them all that I was not really deserting, that my absence was only temporary and that, soon enough, I would be there again to continue our battles, I went around those last days saying, "I'll be back in the spring"—to the

timid ones it was a promise and to others, to Arturo, for instance, it was meant to be a threat.

And about my failures: the many things I had attempted and been refused, like having the system of fines abolished and the new machinery I wanted, I felt temporarily set back, but not defeated. Spring would come soon and I would be back to try again. And I would start with so much gained ground in the spring, that everything would be easier than it had been this summer.

9

ON ONE OF THE LAST of the harvest days I opened my eyes to see Costello towering over me, legs apart, hands on hips, with an astonished look on his face.

"What are you doing asleep here in this ditch? I have been driving all over the *parcela* in my jeep looking for you and just as I am about to give up, here you are, sound asleep in a ditch, as if it had an inner spring mattress."

I sat up slowly, retrieved my blue jacket which had been serving as a pillow and began brushing the grass out of it.

"No wind down here," I explained, looking up into his face. "I was tired from being out in this field since dawn. And cold." I shivered a little. Now that I was awake, I felt the cold again.

"Now look, it's late and the men have gone home and left you sleeping. What must they think of you?" he scolded. "What would they think of you in Madrid?"

"The men are oblivious to anything I do by now and Madrid will never know." I took his proffered hand and pulled myself up to the road level. "Is there by some chance a new company fine against napping in ditches?" I said maliciously.

Costello was silent with what I mistook for pique because of my dig about fines. I put my arms into the sleeves of the jacket, zipped it up the front and pulled the collar around my ears. "Cold for October, isn't it?" I said, to change the subject. "What can I do for you, anyway? Do you want to

see the remains of the corn in the field—in *Parcela* 44? Remember when you assigned me that nasty little parcel? It gave us lots of trouble—Marrón and me—but the results have not been too bad. Shall we look at it?"

Costello hesitated. "I want to talk to you alone."

I looked at the sweep of fields bare in all four directions, bare of rice, bare of cotton and almost bare of corn.

"We couldn't be more alone," I offered cheerfully, "except in the Sahara. Let's look at 44. I need to know where they stopped work this evening." I climbed into the jeep and Costello took the wheel. We jounced past a mile or two of broken corn stalks. I studied them avidly.

"You never get tired of the corn, do you?" Costello said, watching me from the corner of his eye, but he plainly had something more to say, and it was hard for him to begin. His hands moved nervously up and down the steering wheel. He cleared his throat several times.

"You will make a lot of money this year, Betty," he began brightly.

"So will you," I rejoined quickly. "Everybody will be rich."

It was true. We had a lot of corn between us. The British Food Ministry had been so impressed with the sample we had sent them they had cabled their acceptance of the entire crop at a good price. We would both make a considerable profit.

"Yes," added Costello lamely. "It has been a good year for all the crops."

"Is that bad? Was that what you drove out to discuss with me, Costello? The condition of the crops? The price of corn?"

"No. No, of course it wasn't." He jammed on the brakes impatiently, stopping the jeep with an abrupt jerk. "Damn

you, Betty. You make it so hard for a man to talk to you."

"And why is that?" I asked. "Unless it is something you are afraid to talk about?"

He yanked open the door of the jeep and stepped out onto the narrow road. I opened the door on my side and stepped down into the road, too. I was determined to co-operate.

Costello had turned and was leaning over the fender of the jeep, his hands folded together on the hood. The corn rose up behind him, dwarfing his bulky height. Corn does that to anyone, no matter how tall he may be. I faced him, folding my hands on the jeep hood, also.

"Now tell me, Costello, just what it is you have to say to me. It certainly can't have to do with the price of corn."

He looked across the jeep into my eyes for a moment, sadly, and then he lowered his eyes to study his hands.

"There is no easy way to tell you anything, Betty. You always want it hard, square between the eyes. I had hoped you would understand my mission, had hoped you would meet me halfway."

"That is the way I prefer things—straight," I said quietly. "Talk to me straight, please."

Costello took off his hat and placed it carefully on the hood of the jeep. The wind ruffled his thinning hair.

"Very well," he said slowly but firmly. "What I have to say is simply this: We don't want you on the Serra farm any more." He stopped, but he did not raise his eyes.

I put my hand up to my throat instinctively with his first words. It was as if he had reached across the jeep and struck me on the cheek with the full strength of his hand. I withdrew my fingers quickly and composed my face.

Still, he did not look up. He was waiting for me to speak.

"Who is 'we'? The Board of Directors?"

"No, Betty, not the Board of Directors—the people here."

"You mean the men I work with? Their wives? The little children?" I tried to smile. Costello glanced up impatiently and looked away again.

"Of course not. You know who I mean. The Spanish women in town, for example; they feel you have taken over too much. They feel . . ."

"The women in town don't know if I am here or in Madrid," I interrupted sharply. "They don't care, either. No, it is not the women."

"Well, the rest of us, then," Costello began again.

"You mean Arturo wants me to leave?" I asked.

"No, not Arturo alone."

"Then it is you, Costello. You want me to leave. Yes?"

"All right, Betty," he burst out crossly. "If you want all the details, I want you to leave, yes."

"Why? Why? Why? What have I done wrong? Who have I hurt?" I waved my arms helplessly and my voice rose.

"It is not exactly that you have done anything wrong, Betty, it is that you want to do things differently. You want to do everything the way you do it in America; all these democratic ideas of yours—they just won't work here in the long run because the people are not educated enough. Besides that, you attract too much attention. All of Morocco is watching you, commenting on every new thing you do. You want to change everything around. You upset everyone. You . . ."

I slammed my fist down on the hood of the jeep. "That's not fair! Many times I am right and you are wrong, only you don't have to admit it because you are the boss."

But Costello had started and he intended to finish. "That is another thing. It is like Ricardo says: You are too stubborn!"

"Stubborn? Me?"

"Let me explain. Your worst fault is that you won't make any compromise. You could stay here, Betty, and do approximately what you want in a small, unobtrusive way; you could have things like your dormitory, the people would be happy and no harm would be caused. But no, for you that is not good enough—you take the dormitory today, but it is only a steppingstone for you; your eye is on tomorrow and tomorrow you want something more and the next day more until every laborer in the Serra has the same material things and the same rights as I have and you prove finally that we are all equal.

"Well, I don't happen to believe that, Betty. You can't tell me that some black-skinned Arab squatting on his haunches in a *choza* is as good as I am and deserves to have the same rights, because I'll just laugh in your face. I don't believe it and as long as you do believe it and keep insisting on proving it here, we can never agree. One of us is wrong and I think you are and because you are so stubborn and won't make any compromise at all, you are the one who has to go, Betty."

"Be practical, Costello. What I want is only a way of life that is bound to come to Morocco some day, as surely as we are standing here—if not today, then tomorrow. And I am not insisting that I have to be the one to do it. In fact, I prefer if you do it yourself—I want you to do it."

Costello shook his head hopelessly. "Don't you see? Collaboration with you has to be all the way or nothing at all. What you want is a miniature United States of America here in the heart of Morocco and that is the only thing you will settle for. You will go hammering away until you get what you want."

"Well, all right, Costello, make a little America here in Morocco. What have you got to lose? Time? You have

lived your life already. You are fifty years old and at the rate you drink and eat and the way you fly all over Europe, every year that you live is a gift. Money? You have more money than you could spend in three lifetimes. Why don't you do this for Morocco—help to start a new kind of life where the Spanish laborers live a little more like humans and the Arabs have some rights, too? Of all the Spaniards in Morocco, you are the one with a chance to be remembered for something worth while, and you stand there telling me to go away!"

Costello stopped looking at his hands. He raised his eyes and they were troubled. Troubled, and very sad.

"Every word you say may be true, Betty. Morocco will probably be free the way India is finally free. Someday. But there are still some years of exploitation left. Have you ever looked at it from my point of view? I am a Spaniard. Suppose I do what you say in a great burst of democracy? Suppose the Spaniards who control Morocco do not want it that way at all—and you know that they certainly do not—where would I be? Have you thought? I'll tell you—I'd be an old man with no place to go and all my life's work a ruin. And don't think the Arabs would thank me either."

"Ah—fear," I said. "It is something else—if you are afraid. What are you afraid of? Your reputation? What people will say? Your money? Don't you have enough yet? Or is it your precious neck again? You haven't lived long enough —you want some more years and peaceful ones."

Costello's face clouded over with anger. "I should slap you across the face! It is all true, what you say, but you make it sound dishonest and cowardly and somehow unclean. What I am doing is what any Spaniard would do in my place."

"That's right," I nodded my head vigorously. "It is exactly what any Spaniard would do in your place and you are

exactly that—just any Spaniard—not a great man with great potentials—just a little man playing it safe—any Spaniard."

He rejected all this as coldly as he could. He changed the subject. "Don't talk about necks, either. Do you think you will get any special consideration if the Arabs take over? Why, you would be strung up right alongside of me! The Arabs make a great show af admiring you, Betty, but wait for their freedom day and you will be just one more person with a white skin."

"I know that and I don't expect to be an exception. Long ago I got over wanting people to be grateful for what I could do for them. I learned that the privilege is in the doing, not in receiving thanks."

"We are a thousand miles apart in the way we think. We could stand here forever arguing and neither of us would change. You have not been here long enough to change and it is too late for me to change. Twenty years ago I might have listened to what you are saying, might have tried it even, I don't know. Now I know it is too late.

"The Serra is mine, Betty. It belongs to Costello, not to you. You just came in the door yesterday and you act as if it were all yours; everyone is calling it 'The Señora Betty's farm,' 'The farm of the American Señora.' Well, it is damned well not yours!" His voice rose strongly, "It's mine!"

Costello looked out over the acres that had recently bulged with their offerings of corn and cotton and rice. His snapping eyes softened a little and he made a motion with his hands as if he were caressing the land.

"I know every inch of this land, Betty. Since I was a young man I have tramped these swamps, driven the machines that have shaped these parcels, seen luxurious growth rise up out of nothing."

"I know the parcels, too, Costello," I put in. "I have

walked them myself, foot by foot. It seems like there would be enough land for both of us . . ."

He dismissed this with a wave of his hand. "All my hopes, all my aspirations begin here. True, I am older now and I don't go galloping through the ditches the way you do, but I don't need to either. I have served my time. I want a peaceful old age, and a quiet one. It is my right for the years I have worked. With you there is nothing but change and more change and too much action. And who knows if the end will be good?"

Costello put his straw hat back on his head. It was all over. Already the sun had touched the horizon, spreading dull red, and the corn was throwing a long, gray eerie shadow. Costello climbed into the jeep, leaned across the seat and wrenched open the door at my side.

I got in. There was nothing else to do. As we jostled over the dirt road toward Nemsah I tried to strangle a sob. I didn't quite succeed. Costello's knuckles whitened around the steering wheel.

"I have never seen you cry, Betty. I like to think to myself that you never cry. I describe you always to all my friends as a pillar of strength, meeting whatever comes imperturbably. The Serra means more to me than it does to you: remember that. I am going to keep on looking straight ahead and when we arrive at Nemsah, I hope I can go on thinking that you never cry. . . ."

In Nemsah I got out of the jeep without waiting for Costello to open the door, but he hurried out and blocked the way as I entered my gate.

"Will you shake hands with me, please?" he asked solemnly.

I hesitated a moment and answered just as solemnly, "No,

not tonight. I don't know if we are still friends. Perhaps you've betrayed me. I'll have to have some time to think."

I recognized that Costello was right when he said I could not compromise. I realized that he was sincere when he said I could have continued working on the Serra farm in a modest way, if I had been willing not to interfere with the established methods of doing things and with the way of life. When I thought this over carefully, I realized, too, that I could never accept those conditions. If I did accept them, it would mean I had given my tacit consent to them and this I would never be willing to do. I could never agree to go along year after year with old-fashioned methods because they are impractical all around and stifling to energetic new talent. I would never agree to a way of life based upon classes of people because this, too, is old-fashioned in the twentieth century and completely contrary to everything I believe in and live for. So I would be working in a way I disapproved of and living a life I did not believe in; an impossible situation. This made Costello right; I could not compromise on these essentials.

So I would leave, as Costello had asked me, without any protest. And I would shake hands with him and we would remain social friends. It would be an empty, pointless friendship. I would leave, but I would not be leaving entirely, something of me would stay behind in Morocco and spread itself out, I felt, over the years to come.

To begin with, there was the hybrid corn. Everyone had seen what a tremendous improvement hybrid corn seed was over ordinary seed; it had resulted in almost doubling the grain they could expect to harvest from each hectare of land in Morocco. I had the satisfaction of knowing that never again would ordinary corn seed be planted on the Serra farm

and eventually this practice would spread through all of Spanish Morocco. In that manner, even the most remote Arab would feel the difference, for every ear of corn he had harvested previously, he could now harvest two. He could raise twice as much stock on that grain or he would have twice as much grain to sell in the market on Wednesdays. The possibilities stretched out.

The soil-testing practices and year-round pastures were also there in Morocco to stay and to grow into custom.

The idea, at least, of permanent pasture and of rich grasslands had been accepted on the Serra and in other years it would be developed with success; it would take more time than the corn to catch on because the results could not be seen in one or even in two seasons.

In Adir, the dormitory would remain standing in spite of my absence and the new dining room-kitchen would be completed and occupied with pleasure, although I would never go there again to see it. I regretted missing the smile that would wreath Manuel's face when he could cut his doughnuts on an ample, white marble counter.

All my new friendships would have to be ended; for Marrón was no man to write letters. He would write to me occasionally, I knew, but he could never put into words what he was feeling, and what would he have to say to me, a Señora living in gay, worldly Madrid? And what would I have, then, to say to him?

Lahcen would have nobody to guide around the market in Alcazarquivir, and surely the old man with the straw poufs would notice my absence.

Would even José María miss me, perhaps, just once in a while, when he was very bad and nobody was there to send him home as a punishment?

There were a hundred things; they slid through my mind,

one after the other. Some of them brought a smile, some of them made me sad. I felt I would never have the spirit to enter such an overwhelming project again; I would have to find, instead, some gentler outlet.

But in the final sum, I could not be discouraged nor feel that I had given my heart and my energy in vain because I was leaving so much that was good behind me.

Yet it was finished: my life in Morocco was finished.

When you say good-by to a place for the last time, you remember everything clearly; all the details stand out. I remember waiting in Naples during the war for the invasion of southern France to begin. I sat on the edge of my sagging brass bed with the olive-colored duffel bag packed and at my feet. I still see vividly that dingy room in the dreary hotel and feel myself walking down the rickety wooden steps, the duffel balanced on my shoulder, and climbing into the jeep. And all the sights we passed on the way to the airport are alive in my mind. I was saying to myself: "Perhaps this time I really won't come back; perhaps this is the last look."

And so with the Serra; the last impressions stand. Such as pushing open the tired screen door of my house that last morning and remembering the way it still stuck at the bottom. It will always stick at the bottom. And thinking idly as I had a hundred times before, that I must get Vicente to plane it down a little. He never will plane it down a little. The cool feel through my boots of the red tiles that make up the porch floor, cool still from the quiet morning shower, although the sun was already warm on my face. The look of an Arab woman, padding gracefully down the sandy road, her spotless haik hiding everything except her black eyes and her broad bare feet; she with a two-foot-long monkey wrench balanced absurdly across the top of her head, on her leisurely,

timeless way to a tractor miles away. The feel of the saddle under me and of gawky, bony Quimera under the saddle. The way the sand crumbled away from her hooves and the glistening darkness of the orange leaves with the raindrops not yet evaporated in the sun. The last look of the yellow Caterpillar tractors crawling down their long brown rows, involved already in next season's problems. And the men, Arabs and Spaniards; the good ones and the bad ones, all saying *adiós* until next season and all of us knowing that there would not be a next season for me.

When I came back to Nemsah from my last ride, my sons were tumbling out of the house and Pilar's shrill, far-carrying voice was demanding that they help get the luggage loaded into the station wagon. And my sons already were looking forward to celebrating Christmas with their friends in Madrid.