

The Spanish **Phalanx**

by Jean Lopez

PROLOGUE

Round eyed with amazement, Lara stared at the man in the crowd and began to walk towards him. Smiling, he nodded, then turned and hurried off. It was almost as if he was avoiding her. She followed and watched as he got into the Chevrolet and drove off. She shook her head and frowned. His behaviour was very odd, they had been good friends.

It was curious, to say the least. How could she bring herself to tell anyone that she had seen José Antonio. Who was going to believe her? And how was she to find out about José Antonio? Who would be in a position to tell her that he had actually cheated the firing squad? She realised that it could be dangerous to ask questions as very likely the Nationalists wanted the matter kept secret. That would explain the snub.

Perhaps I am going mad, thought Lara. Maybe the strain of the last few months has unbalanced my mind. Just the same, I'm sure it wasn't a figment of my imagination.

She had not had any news of her fiancé, Enrique, for two weeks. He was fighting on the Madrid front and so it was a relatively simple matter for him to get in touch either by telephone or a visit. Tormented by the thought that Enrique could turn up at any time, Lara neglected her work and spent hours upon hours at home waiting for him. And on those few occasions when she did go out, it was to comb the streets, cafés and bars. Many times she could have sworn she had seen him and hurried to catch up, but lost him as he vanished in the crowd that crossed over to the other side of the street.

Lucy became anxious for her friend and made her promise that she would do a story for her newspaper.

'Work is good therapy,' she told Lara.

Forthwith, Lara made arrangements to travel, in company with other war correspondents, to the Nationalist Zone in the north of Spain. They went to San Sebastian.

For Lara the Basque city was a new and very unpleasant experience. Already, Franco had begun to build up the martyr image of José Antonio. A principal street was named after him, there was a statue of him in a park, a banner bearing his name fluttered from the town hall building.

There were things in that city that shocked and outraged her. There was no shortage of food. An air of gaiety pervaded the crowded bars and restaurants where Nazi air force officers were made to feel very welcome indeed by the Spanish clientele.

On the beach, people luxuriated in the sun. Spanish army and air force officers took time off from fighting the Loyalists to lounge about in the tennis club with their Nazi allies. How stark was life in besieged Madrid by comparison but, Lara thought that she would rather put up with the bombardment and the shortages. At least the beautiful city was not overrun by Nationalists and Nazis.

But this fortunate circumstance would change because Spain had been betrayed by the powers who took great pride in calling themselves *the great democracies*.

The journey back to Madrid was uneventful. They stopped at the city of Burgos and over lunch, Lara decided to tell her companions that she had seen Jose Antonio.

'I know you'll all think my sanity is questionable, but I swear I didn't imagine it.'

'I'm told that we all have our double somewhere in the world,' said the *Colliers* correspondent. 'I've often gone up to talk to people only to find out they were the image

of the person I thought they were.'

'They could have got José Antonio out of prison and executed somebody else instead,' said the *London Times* correspondent.

'You mean a deal was done?' asked Lara.

'Possibly, something like that.'

'Well, I'd like to know,' began the *Colliers* man, 'what José Antonio is up to. If he is in fact alive and out of gaol, he'd have been free now for a few months and it seems to me that he is far too important a man on the Spanish scene to have kept quiet for so long.'

'Then you don't give me any credence,' said Lara.

'It's not that Lara. If he's out of gaol, he'll be preparing a big surprise. I'd be interested in seeing if he'd renounced fascism and thrown in his lot with the Loyalists.'