Matas. ¡Viva la Republica!

It was a long shot from the entrance of his cave. Despite advanced years his eyesight was still near perfect and his hand steady. He squeezed the trigger of the old Mauser. A puff of whitewash hung momentarily in the still morning air as the bullet stuck. The bullet flew true and hit the gable end of the church joining the other pockmarks which had accumulated over the years. Matas celebrated the declaration of the Second Republic in this way each year.

The women of the village saw the new crater as divinely created and prepared elaborate offerings to be left at the village shrine. The shrine happened to be below the cliff face where Matas lived as a recluse in his cave. He believed the Civil War to still be on and was hiding from imaginary foes. The offerings left at the shrine he took to be from Republican sympathizers in the village and carried them off to his lair. The women folk saw this to be yet another sign of divine intervention and duly gave thanks.

That was a week ago and Matas felt the need to commune with his peers. With an agility the belied his years Matas moved from rock to rock as he made his way down the cliff face. There was little moonlight just a thin crescent, the route was familiar so it was adequate. Across the Calle Huella Viejo then making his way through the olive trees between the Río Verde and the Avenida El Raro Matas soon caught sight of the Cypress Trees of the cemetery. Here he found the headstones of his friends. Although no more than a boy, he remembered the day the King left for Italy. He remembered his *compañeros* their faces, their voices, their sacrifices. Matas was lost in his own thoughts, of his youth, of the struggle. It was he alone carrying on the fight now.

Matas froze, footsteps. He made out the form of a young woman, long black hair flowing as she ran between the headstones. He recognised her as the girl who always seemed to have a policeman either following her, handcuffed to her or waiting for her. She was breathing heavily and carrying most of her clothes. He watched her pass, was

she in trouble? Did she need help? He erred on the side of discretion. At his age he would settle just for the memory of a half naked girl.

What was Manuela doing in the graveyard in the early hours? What did require so much energy and so few clothes? Perhaps something we should draw a veil over for the time being.