

They Made Her a Frivola

The Story of a Film
Star Hostage in the
Spanish Revolution

Special to the "Record"

by

PHILIP CROSS



PASTORA SOLER.

... Hostage for her father in bomb-blasted City of Madrid.

SPECTRES of death, revolution, assassination and reprisal, stalked through Spain in the spring of 1936. The people were uneasy. Lootings and murder made everyone fearful of his neighbour. Even the holy week of Easter—the Lemana Santa—was robbed of its glory. In Seville, flower-city of the south, where the processions and ceremonies are more beautiful and magnificent than any in the world, people were frightened and anxious, wondering if their churches would be the next ones to be burnt.

The cathedral of Seville, built in 1401 on the site of an old Moorish mosque and of such dimensions that none other might equal it in the whole of Christendom, is the mecca of the devout, and at some time during Easter week everyone in Seville makes his or her devotions before its altars.

Depressed by business worries, I wandered to the Cathedral to spend a quiet hour in its peaceful sanctuary. I stood by the tomb of Christopher Columbus. My thoughts were of him and the glory he won for Spain. I thought of the "Tower of Gold," built on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, to house the gold and jewels he brought back from the Americas. I had done well in Spain, but now, when I was about to commence the third picture, "Sangre y Rosas," I could not find the actress I needed.

For the first time in my life I was in a position to please myself, to produce and direct a story in my own way. My producer's dreams were reality—except for the one thing. There was no girl to play opposite Maria Victoria, a wonderful Spanish actress, to be her perfect foil. Dolores del Rio could play the part, but I could not afford to pay her price.

THE immensity of the Cathedral, the beauty, the softly-lit, stained-glass windows, the glorious music of the Benediction sung by 100 boys left me hopeful of the future again.

I turned to go, but a solemn part of the service compelled me to stay kneeling with several others. While we were kneeling, the priest, accompanied by acolytes and

altar boys carrying candles, passed close to us. In the brilliant light of the procession, her face uplifted to receive the blessing of the priest, I saw a girl.

Her beauty amazed me—a true daughter of ancient Spain, the blood of old Castile evident in her olive skin, her brilliant lips uncarmined. Her eyes

were large and very dark. The kind of eyes that Greco loved to paint—lustrous and wonderful. There kneeling at her devotions I saw the girl I dreamt of, the only girl whose beauty was as great as Maria Victoria's, but whose modesty and gentleness was the perfect foil for the passionate, temperamental actress.

Both of them were necessary for "Sangre y Rosas." The procession passed and again we were in the gloom, I saw only exquisite black lace mantilla and high-jewelled comb. The girl's head was bowed in prayer. I stared at her wonder-

dering if I dared speak to her or find out who she was. In a little while she left, accompanied by her duenna. I, too, left the Cathedral and went out by the "Gualda" door.

THE night was softly cool, fresh with lately-fallen rain, dark and starry. I would climb the Giralda, I thought—the tower from which the Muezzin had called the faithful to prayer—only relic of the Moorish days. I wanted to watch the moon rise over the far hills and trace the Guadalquivir which ran like a ribbon of silver through the "tablada" flats. Funny, I thought, finding the girl—only to know that I could never, even if I was able to talk to her, ask her to play in. (Continued on page 27.)

THIS is a story of women and war. The things it relates are seemingly as remote from New Zealand as the moon itself. But next time you listen on shortwave to the clipped accents of that Madrid announcer giving you HIS version of the Spanish war, remember that behind every bald statement of an ideal are a hundred stories of human suffering as poignant and tragic as this story of the beautiful Pastora . . .