

**THE DEAD COMMAND**  
*(LOS MUERTAS MANDAN)*  
**By VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ**

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— Translated by —  
**FRANCES DOUGLAS**



**T. FISHER UNWIN LTD.**  
**LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE**



# THE DEAD COMMAND



**NOVELS BY  
V. BLASCO IBÁÑEZ**

**ENEMIES OF WOMEN  
THE MAYFLOWER  
THE TORRENT  
THE DEAD COMMAND  
BLOOD AND SAND  
MARE NOSTRUM  
LA BODEGA  
THE SHADOW OF THE  
CATHEDRAL**

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# THE DEAD COMMAND

## PART FIRST

### CHAPTER I

#### A MAJORCAN PALACE

JAIME FEBRER arose at nine o'clock. Old Antonia, the faithful servant who cherished the memory of the past glories of the family, and who had attended upon Jaime from the day of his birth, had been bustling about the room since eight o'clock in the hope of awakening him. As the light filtering through the transom of a broad window seemed too dim, she flung open the worm-eaten blinds. Then she raised the gold-fringed, red, damask drapery which hung like an awning over the ample couch, the ancient, lordly, and majestic couch, in which many generations of Febrers had been born and in which they had died.

The night before, on returning from the Casino, Jaime had charged her most earnestly to arouse him early, as he was invited to breakfast at Valldemosa. Time to get up! It was the finest of spring mornings; in the garden birds were singing in the flowery branches swayed by the breeze that blew over the wall from the sea.

The old servant, seeing that her master had at last decided to get out of bed, retreated to the kitchen. Jaime Febrer strolled about the room before the open window almost nude. There was no danger of his being seen. The dwelling opposite was an old palace like his own, a great house with few windows. From his room

he could see a wall of indefinite colour, with deep scars, and faint traces of ancient frescoes. It was so near, the street being extremely narrow, that it seemed as if he might touch it with his hand.

Nervous on account of an important event which was to take place in the morning, he had passed a restless night, and the heaviness following the short and indifferent sleep led him to seek eagerly the invigorating effect of cold water. Febrer made a sorry grimace as he bathed in the primitive, narrow, and uncomfortable tub. Ah, poverty! His home was devoid of even the most essential conveniences despite its air of stately luxury, a stateliness which modern wealth can never emulate. Poverty with all its annoyances stalked forth to meet him at every turn in these halls which reminded him of splendidly decorated theatres he had seen in his European travels.

Febrer glanced over the grandiose room with its lofty ceiling as if he were a stranger entering the apartment for the first time. His powerful ancestors had built for giants. Each room in the palace was as large as a modern house. The windows were without glass all over the house, and in winter they had to be closed by wooden shutters which admitted no light except that entering through the transoms, and these were studded with crystals cracked and dimmed by time. Lack of carpets disclosed floors of soft Majorcan sandstone cut in small rectangles like wooden blocks. The rooms still boasted the old-time splendour of vaulted ceilings, some dark, with skilfully fitted panelling, others with a faded and venerable gilding forming a background for the coloured escutcheons which were emblazoned with the coat of arms of the house. In some rooms the high walls, simply whitewashed, were covered by rows of ancient paintings, and in others were concealed by rich hangings of gay colours which time had failed to destroy. The sleeping room was decorated with eight enormous tapestries of a shade of dull green leaves representing gardens, broad avenues of trees in autumnal foliage leading to a small

park where deer were frisking, or where solitary fountains dripped into triple basins. Above the doors hung old Italian paintings in soft brown tones, representing nude, amber-hued babes fondling curly lambs. The arch dividing the alcove from the rest of the apartment suggested the triumphal order, its fluted columns sustaining a scroll-work of carved foliage with the softened lustre of faded gilding, as if it were an ancient altar. Upon an eighteenth century table stood a polychrome statue of Saint George treading Moors beneath his charger; and beyond was the bed, the imposing bed, a venerable family monument. Antique chairs with curved arms, the red velvet so worn and threadbare as to disclose the white woof, jostled against modern cane-bottomed chairs and the wretched bath tub.

"Ah, poverty!" sighed the heir of the estate.

The old Febrer mansion, with its beautiful unglazed casements, its tapestry-filled halls, its carpetless floors, its venerable furniture jumbled with the meanest of chattels, reminded him of a poverty-stricken prince wearing his brilliant mantle and his glittering crown, but barefooted and destitute of underclothing.

Febrer himself was like this palace—this imposing and empty frame, which in happier times had sheltered the glory and wealth of his ancestors. Some had been merchants, others soldiers, navigators all. The Febrer arms had floated on pennants and flags over more than fifty full-rigged ships, the pride of the Majorcan marine, which, after clearing from Puerto Pi, used to sail away to sell the oil of the island in Alexandria, taking on cargoes of spices, silks, and perfumes of the Orient in the ports of Asia Minor, trading in Venice, Pisa, and Genoa, or, passing the Pillars of Hercules, plunging into the fogs of Northern seas to carry to Flanders and the Hanseatic Republics the pottery of the Valencian Moors called majolica by foreigners because of its Majorcan origin. These voyages over pirate-infested seas had converted this family of rich merchants into a tribe of valorous warriors. The Febrers had now fought, now

entered into alliances with Turkish corsairs, with Greeks, and with Algerines ; they had sailed their fleets through Northern seas to face the English pirates, and, on one occasion, at the entrance of the Bosphorus, their galleys had rammed the vessels of Genoese merchants who were trying to monopolise the commerce of Byzantium. Finally, this family of soldiers of the sea, on retiring from maritime commerce, had rendered tribute of blood in the defence of Christian kingdoms and the Catholic faith by enlisting some of its scions in the holy Order of the Knights of Malta. The second sons of the house of Febrer, at the very moment of receiving the water of baptism, had the eight-pointed white cross, symbolising the eight beatitudes, sewed to their swaddling-bands, and on reaching manhood they became captains of galleys of the warlike Order, and ended their days as opulent knights commanders of Malta recounting their deeds of prowess to the children of their nieces, being tended in their illnesses and having their wounds dressed by the slave women with whom they lived despite their vows of chastity. Renowned monarchs passing through Majorca would leave their sumptuous quarters in the Almudaina to visit the Febrers in their palace. Some members of this great family had been admirals in the king's armada ; others governors of far distant lands ; some slept the eternal sleep in the Cathedral of La Valette beside other illustrious Majorcans, and Jaime had done homage at their tombs during one of his visits to Malta.

La Lonja, the graceful Gothic structure near the sea at Palma, had been for centuries a feudal possession of his forefathers. Everything was for the Febrers which was flung upon the mole from the high-forecastled galleons, from Oriental cocas with their massive hulls, from fragile lighters, lateen-sailed settees, flat-bottomed tafureas, and other vessels of the epoch ; and in the great columnar hall of La Lonja, near the Solomonic pillars which disappeared within the shadows of the vaulted ceilings, his ancestors in regal majesty used to receive

voyagers from the Orient who came clad in wide breeches and red fezzes ; Genoese and Provençals wearing capes with monkish hoods ; and the valiant native captains of the island covered with their red Catalonian helmets. Venetian merchants sent their Majorcan friends ebony furniture delicately inlaid with ivory and lapis lazuli, or enormous, heavy plate-glass mirrors with bevelled edges. Seafarers returning from Africa brought ostrich feathers and tusks of ivory ; and these treasures and countless others added to the decoration of the halls, perfumed by mysterious essences, the gifts of Asiatic correspondents.

For centuries the Febrers had been intermediaries between the Orient and the Occident, making of Majorca a depository for exotic products which their ships afterward scattered throughout Spain, France, and Holland. Riches flowed in fabulous abundance to the house. On some occasions the Febrers had made loans to their sovereigns, but this did not prevent Jaime, the last of the family, after losing in the Casino the night before everything which he possessed—some hundreds of pesetas—from borrowing money for a journey to Valldemosa on the following morning from Toni Clapés, the smuggler, a rough fellow of keen intelligence, the most faithful and disinterested of his friends.

While Jaime stood combing his hair he intently studied his image in an antique mirror, cracked and dimmed. Thirty-six ! He could not complain of his looks. He was ugly, but it was a grandiose ugliness, to adopt the expression of a woman who had exercised a peculiar influence over his life. This ugliness had yielded him some satisfactory adventures. Miss Mary Gordon, a blonde-haired idealist, daughter of the governor of an English archipelago in Oceania, travelling through Europe, accompanied only by a maid, had met him one summer in an hotel at Munich. She it was who first became impressed, and it was she who took the first steps. According to the young lady, the Spaniard was the living picture of Wagner in his youth. Smiling at



the pleasant memory, Febrer contemplated the prominent brow which seemed to oppress his imperious, small, ironic eyes. His nose was sharp and aquiline, the nose common to all the Febrers, those daring birds of prey who haunted the solitudes of the sea. His mouth was scornful and receding, his lips and chin prominent and covered by the soft growth of the beard and moustache, thin and fine.

Ah, delicious Miss Mary! Their happy pilgrimage through Europe had lasted almost a year. She was madly enamoured on account of his resemblance to a genius, and wished to marry him; she told him of the governor's millions, mingling her romantic enthusiasm with the practical tendencies of her race; but Febrer ran away at last, before the Englishwoman should in her turn leave him for some orchestra director or other who might be an even more striking double of her idol.

Ah, women! . . . Jaime straightened his figure which was manly, though the shoulders bent somewhat from his excessive stature. It had been some time since he had taken interest in women. A few grey hairs in his beard, a slight wrinkling around the eyes, revealed the fatigues of a life which, as he said, had whirled "at full speed." But even so he was popular, and it was love that should lift him out of his pressing situation.

Having finished his toilet he left the dormitory. He crossed a vast salon lighted by the sunshine filtering through shutters in the windows. The floor lay in shadow and the walls shone like a brilliant garden, covered as they were by interminable tapestries with figures of heroic size. They represented mythological and biblical scenes; arrogant dames with full pink flesh standing before red and green warriors; imposing colonnades; palaces hung with garlands; scimitars aloft, heads strewn over the ground, troops of big-bellied horses with one foot lifted; a whole world of ancient legends, but with colours fresh and vernal, despite their centuries, bordered with apples and foliage.