Mr. Fortescue eBook

Mr. Fortescue by William Westall

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CHAPTER I.

Matching green.

A quaint old Essex village of single-storied cottages, some ivy mantled, with dormer windows, thatched roofs, and miniature gardens, strewed with picturesque irregularity round as fine a green as you will find in the county. Its normal condition is rustic peace and sleepy beatitude; and it pursues the even tenor of its way undisturbed by anything more exciting than a meeting of the vestry, the parish dinner, the advent of a new curate, or the exit of one of the fathers of the hamlet.

But this morning the place is all agog, and so transformed that it hardly knows itself. The entire population, from the oldest gaffer to the last-born baby, is out-of-doors; the two inns are thronged with guests, and the road is lined with all sorts and conditions of carriages, from the four-in-hand of the wealthy swell to the donkey-cart of the local coster-monger. From every point of the compass are trooping horsemen, some resplendent in scarlet coats, their nether limbs clothed in immaculate white breeches and shining top-boots, others in pan hats and brown leggings; and all in high spirits and eager for the fray; for to-day, according to old custom, the Essex Hunt hold the first regular meet of the season on Matching's matchless Green.

The master is already to the fore, and now comes Tom Cuffe, the huntsman, followed by his hounds, whose sleek skins and bright coats show that they are "fit to go," and whose eager looks bode ill to the long-tailed denizens of copse and covert.

It still wants a few minutes to eleven, and the interval is occupied in the interchange of greetings between old companions of the chase, in desultory talk about horses and hounds; and while some of the older votaries of Diana fight their battles o'er again, and describe thrice-told historic runs, which grow longer with every repetition, others discuss the prospects of the coming season, and indulge in hopes of which, let us hope, neither Jack Frost, bad scent, nor accident by flood or field will mar the fruition.

Nearly all are talking, for there is a feeling of *camaraderie* in the hunting-field which dispenses with the formality of introductions, its frequenters sometimes becoming familiar friends before they have learned each other's names.

Yet there are exceptions; and one cavalier in particular appears to hold himself aloof, neither speaking to his neighbors nor mixing in the throng. As he does not look like a "sulky swell," rendered taciturn by an overweening sense of his own importance, he is probably either a new resident in the county or a "stranger from a distance"—which, none whom I ask seems to know. There is something about this man that especially attracts my attention; and not mine alone, for I perceive that he is being curiously regarded by several of my neighbors. His get-up is faultless, and he sits with the easy

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grace of a practiced horseman an animal of exceptional symmetry and strength. His well-knit figure is slim and almost youthful, and he holds himself as erect on his saddle as a dragoon on parade. But his closely cropped hair is turning gray, and his face that of a man far advanced in the fifties, if not past sixty. And a striking face it is—long and oval, with a straight nose and fine nostrils, a broad forehead, and a firm, resolute mouth. His complexion, though it bears traces of age, is clear, healthy, and deeply bronzed. Save for a heavy gray mustache, he is clean shaved; his dark, keenly observant eyes are overshadowed by black and all but straight brows, terminating in two little tufts, which give his countenance a strange and, as some might think, an almost sardonic expression. Altogether, it strikes me as being the face of a cynical yet not ill-natured or malicious Mephistopheles.

Behind him are two grooms in livery, nearly as well mounted as himself, and, greatly to my surprise, he is presently joined by Jim Rawlings, who last season held the post of first whipper-in.

What manner of man is this who brings out four horses on the same day, and what does he want with them all? Such horses, too! There is not one of them that has not the look of a two hundred-guinea hunter.

I was about to put the question to Keyworth, the hunt secretary, who had just come within speaking distance, and was likely to know if anybody did, when the master gave the signal for a move, and huntsman and hounds, followed by the entire field, went off at a sharp trot.

We had a rather long ride to covert, but a quick find, a fox being viewed away almost as soon as the hounds began to draw. It was a fast thing while it lasted, but, unfortunately, it did not last long; for, after a twenty minutes' gallop, the hounds threw up their heads, and cast as Cuffe might, he was unable to recover the line.

The country we had gone over was difficult and dangerous, full of blind fences and yawning ditches, deep enough and wide enough to swallow up any horse and his rider who might fail to clear them. Fortunately, however, I escaped disaster, and for the greater part of the run I was close to the gentleman with the Mephistophelian face and Tom Rawlings, who acted as his pilot. Tom rode well, of course—it was his business—-but no better than his master, whose horse, besides being a big jumper, was as clever as a cat, flying the ditches like a bird, and clearing the blindest fences without making a single mistake.

After the first run we drew two coverts blank, but eventually found a second fox, which gave us a slow hunting run of about an hour, interrupted by several checks, and saved his brush by taking refuge in an unstopped earth.

By this time it was nearly three o'clock, and being a long way from home, and thinking no more good would be done, I deemed it expedient to leave off. I went away as Mephistopheles and his man were mounting their second horses, which had just been brought up by the two grooms in livery.

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My way lay by Matching Green, and as I stopped at the village inn to refresh my horse with a pail of gruel and myself with a glass of ale, who should come up but old Tawney, Tom Cuffe's second horseman! Besides being an adept at his calling, familiar with every cross-road and almost every field in the county, he knew nearly as well as a hunted fox himself which way the creature meant to run. Tawney was a great gossip, and quite a mine of curious information about things equine and human—especially about things equine. Here was a chance not to be neglected of learning something about Mephistopheles; so after warming Tawney's heart and opening his lips with a glass of hot whiskey punch, I began:

"You've got a new first whip, I see."

"Yes, sir, name of Cobbe—Paul Cobbe. He comes from the Berkshire country, he do, sir."

"But how is it that Rawlings has left? and who is that gentleman he was with to-day?"

"What! haven't you heard!" exclaimed Tawney, as surprised at my ignorance as if I had asked him the name of the reigning sovereign.

"I have not heard, which, seeing that I spent the greater part of the summer at sea and returned only the other day, is perhaps not greatly to be wondered at."

"Well, the gentleman as Rawlings has gone to and as he was with to-day is Mr. Fortescue; him as has taken Kingscote."

Kingscote was a country-house of no extraordinary size, but with so large a park and gardens, conservatories and stables so extensive as to render its keeping up very costly; and the owner or mortgagee, I know not which, had for several years been vainly trying to let it at a nominal rent.

"He must be rich, then. Kingscote will want a lot of keeping up."

"Rich is not the word, sir. He has more money than he knows what to do with. Why, he has twenty horses now, and is building loose-boxes for ten more, and he won't look at one under a hundred pounds. Rawlings has got a fine place, he has that."

"I am surprised he should have left the kennels, though. He loses his chance of ever becoming huntsman."

"He is as good as that now, sir. He had a present of fifty pounds to start with, gets as many shillings a week and all found, and has the entire management of the stables, and with a gentleman like Mr. Fortescue there'll be some nice pickings."

“Very likely. But why does Mr. Fortescue want a pilot? He rides well, and his horses seem to know their business.”

“He won’t have any as doesn’t. Yes, he rides uncommon well for an aged man, does Mr. Fortescue. I suppose he wants somebody to show him the way and keep him from getting ridden over. It isn’t nice to get ridden over when you’re getting into years.”

“It isn’t nice whether you are getting into years or not. But you cannot call Mr. Fortescue an old man.”

“You cannot call him a young ’un. He has a good many gray hairs, and them puckers under his eyes hasn’t come in a day. But he has a young heart, I will say that for him. Did you see how he did that ‘double’ as pounded half the field?”

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“Yes, it was a very sporting jump. But who is Mr. Fortescue, and where does he come from?”

“That is what nobody seems to know. Mr. Keyworth—he was at the kennels only yesterday—asked me the very same question. He thought Jim Rawlings might ha’ told me something. But bless you, Jim knows no more than anybody else. All as he can tell is as Mr. Fortescue sometimes goes to London, that he is uncommon fond of hosses, and either rides or drives tandem nearly every day, and has ordered a slap-up four-in-hand drag. And he has got a ‘boratory and no end o’ chemicals and stuff, and electric machines, and all sorts o’ gimcracks.”

“Is there a Mrs. Fortescue?”

“Not as I knows on. There is not a woman in the house, except servants.”

“Who looks after things, then?”

“Well, there’s a housekeeper. But the head bottle-washer is a chap they call major-domo—a German he is. He looks after everything, and an uncommon sharp domo he is, too, Jim says. Nobody can do him a penny piece. And then there is Mr. Fortescue’s body-servant; he’s a dark man, with a big scar on one cheek, and rings in his ears. They call him Rumun.”

“Nonsense! There’s no such name as Rumun.”

“That’s what I told Jim. He said it was a rum ’un, but his name was Rumun, and no mistake.”

“Dark, and rings in his ears! The man is probably a Spaniard. You mean Ramon.”

“No, I don’t; I mean Rumun,” returned Tawney, doggedly. “I thought it was an uncommon rum name, and I asked Jim twice—he calls at the kennels sometimes—I asked him twice, and he said he was cock sure it was Rumun.”

“Rumun let it be then. Altogether, this Mr. Fortescue seems to be rather a mysterious personage.”

“You are right there, Mr. Bacon, he is. I only wish I was half as mysterious. Why, he must be worth thousands upon thousands. And he spends his money like a gentleman, he does—thinks less of a sovereign than you think of a bob. He sent Mr. Keyworth a hundred pounds for his hunt subscription, and said if they were any ways short at the end of the season they had only to tell him and he would send as much more.”

Having now got all the information out of Tawney he was able to give me, I stood him another whiskey, and after lighting a cigar I mounted my horse and jogged slowly

homeward, thinking much about Mr. Fortescue, and wondering who he could be. The study of physiognomy is one of my fads, and his face had deeply impressed me; in great wealth, moreover, there is always something that strikes the imagination, and this man was evidently very rich, and the mystery that surrounded him piqued my curiosity.

CHAPTER II.

Tickle-me-quick.

Being naturally of a retiring disposition, and in no sense the hero of the tale which I am about to tell, I shall say no more concerning myself than is absolutely necessary. At the same time, it is essential to a right comprehension of what follows that I say something about myself, and better that I should say it now than interrupt the even flow of my narrative later on.

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My name is Geoffrey Bacon, and I have reason to believe that I was born at a place in Essex called (appropriately enough) Dedham. My family is one of the oldest in the county, and (of course) highly respectable; but as the question is often put to me by friends, and will naturally suggest itself to my readers, I may as well observe, once for all, that I am *not* a descendent of the Lord Keeper Bacon, albeit, if he had had any children, I have no doubt I should have been.

My poor mother died in giving me birth; my father followed her when I was ten years old, leaving me with his blessing (nothing else), to the care of his aunt, Miss Ophelia Bacon, by whom I was brought up and educated. She was very good to me, but though I was far from being intentionally ungrateful, I fear that I did not repay her goodness as it deserved. The dear old lady had made up her mind that I should be a doctor, and though I would rather have been a farmer or a country gentleman (the latter for choice), I made no objection; and so long as I remained at school she had no reason to complain of my conduct. I satisfied my masters and passed my preliminary examination creditably and without difficulty, to my aunt's great delight. She protested that she was proud of me, and rewarded my diligence and cleverness with a five-pound note. But after I became a student at Guy's I gave her much trouble, and got myself into some sad scrapes. I spent her present, and something more, in hiring mounts, for I was passionately fond of riding, especially to hounds, and ran into debt with a neighboring livery-stable keeper to the tune of twenty pounds. I would sometimes borrow the greengrocer's pony, for I was not particular what I rode, so long as it had four legs. When I could obtain a mount neither for love nor on credit, I went after the harriers on foot. The result, as touching my health and growth, was all that could be desired. As touching my studies, however, it was less satisfactory. I was spun twice, both in my anatomy and physiology. Miss Ophelia, though sorely grieved, was very indulgent, and had she lived, I am afraid that I should never have got my diploma. But when I was twenty-one and she seventy-five, my dear aunt died, leaving me all her property (which made an income of about four hundred a year), with the proviso that unless, within three years of her death, I obtained the double qualification, the whole of her estate was to pass to Guy's Hospital. In the mean time the trustees were empowered to make me an allowance of two guineas a week and defray all my hospital expenses.

On this, partly because I was loath to lose so goodly a heritage, partly, I hope, from worthier motives, I buckled-to in real earnest, and before I was four-and-twenty I could write after my name the much coveted capitals M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. All this while I had not once crossed a horse or looked at a hound, yet the ruling passion was still strong, and being very much of Mr. Jorrock's opinion that all time not spent in hunting is lost, I resolved, before "settling down" or taking up any position which might be incompatible with indulgence in my favorite amusement, to devote a few years of my life to fox-hunting. At twenty-four a man does not give much thought to the future—at any rate I did not.

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The next question was how to hunt three or four days a week on four hundred a year, for though I was quite willing to spend my income, I was resolved not to touch my capital. To begin with, I sold my aunt's cottage and furniture and took a couple of rooms for the winter at Red Chimneys, a roomy farm-house in the neighborhood of Treydon. Then, acting on the great principle of co-operation, I joined at horse-keeping with my good friend and old school-fellow, Bertie Alston, a London solicitor. Being both of us light-weights, we could mount ourselves cheaply; the average cost of our stud of four horses did not exceed forty pounds apiece. Moreover, when opportunities offered, we did not disdain to turn an honest penny by buying an animal cheap and selling him dear, and as I looked after things myself, bought my own forage, and saw that I had full measure, our stable expenses were kept within moderate limits. Except when the weather was bad, or a horse *hors de combat*, I generally contrived to get four days' hunting a week—three with the fox-hounds and one with Mr. Vigne's harriers—for, owing to his professional engagements, Alston could not go out as often as I did. But as I took all the trouble and responsibility, it was only fair that I should have the lion's share of the riding.

At the end of the season we either sold the horses off or turned them into a straw-yard, and I went to sea as ship's surgeon. In this capacity I made voyages to Australia, to the Cape, and to the West Indies; and the summer before I first saw Mr. Fortescue I had been to the Arctic Ocean in a whaler. True, the pay did not amount to much, but it found me in pocket-money and clothes, and I saved my keep.

Having now, as I hope, done with digressions and placed myself *en rapport* with my readers, I will return to the principal personage of my story.

The next time I met Mr. Fortescue was at Harlow Bush. He was quite as well mounted as before, and accompanied, as usual, by Rawlings and two grooms with their second horses. On this occasion Mr. Fortescue did not hold himself nearly so much aloof as he had done at Matching Green, perhaps because he was more noticed; and he was doubtless more noticed because the fame of his wealth and the lavish use he made of it were becoming more widely known. The master gave him a friendly nod and a gracious smile, and expressed a hope that we should have good sport; the secretary engaged him in a lively conversation; the hunt servants touched their caps to him with profound respect, and he received greetings from most of the swells.

We drew Latton, found in a few minutes, and had a "real good thing," a grand run of nearly two hours, with only one or two trifling checks, which, as I am not writing a hunting story, I need not describe any further than to remark that we had plenty of fencing, a good deal of hard galloping, a kill in the open, and that of the sixty or seventy who were present at the start only about a score were up at the finish. Among the fortunate few were Mr. Fortescue and his pilot. During the latter part of the run we rode side by side, and pulled up at the same instant, just as the fox was rolled over.

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“A very fine run,” I took the liberty to observe, as I stepped from my saddle and slackened my horse’s girths. “It will be a long time before we have a better.”

“Two hours and two minutes,” shouted the secretary, looking at his watch, “and straight. We are in the heart of the Puckeridge country.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Fortescue, quietly, “it was a very enjoyable run. You like hunting, I think?”

“Like it! I should rather think I do. I regard fox-hunting as the very prince of sports. It is manly, health-giving, and exhilarating. There is no sport in which so many participate and so heartily enjoy. We enjoy it, the horses enjoy it, and the hounds enjoy it.”

“How about the fox?”

“Oh, the fox! Well, the fox is allowed to exist on condition of being occasionally hunted. If there were no hunting there would be no foxes. On the whole, I regard him as a fortunate and rather pampered individual; and I have even heard it said that he rather likes being hunted than otherwise.”

“As for the general question, I dare say you are right. But I don’t think the fox likes it much. It once happened to me to be hunted, and I know I did not like it.”

This was rather startling, and had Mr. Fortescue spoken less gravely and not been so obviously in earnest, I should have thought he was joking.

“You don’t mean—Was it a paper-chase?” I said, rather foolishly.

“No; it was not a paper-chase,” he answered, grimly. “There were no paper-chases in my time. I mean that I was once hunted, just as we have been hunting that fox.”

“With a pack of hounds?”

“Yes, with a pack of hounds.”

I was about to ask what sort of a chase it was, and how and where he was hunted, when Cuffe came up, and, on behalf of the master, offered Mr. Fortescue the brush.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Fortescue, taking the brush and handing it to Rawlings. “Here is something for you”—tipping the huntsman a sovereign, which he put in his pocket with a “Thank you kindly, sir,” and a gratified smile.

And then flasks were uncorked, sandwich-cases opened, cigars lighted, and the conversation becoming general, I had no other opportunity—at that time—of making further inquiry of Mr. Fortescue touching the singular episode in his career which he had

just mentioned. A few minutes later a move was made for our own country, and as we were jogging along I found myself near Jim Rawlings.

“That’s a fresh hoss you’ve got, I think, sir,” he said.

“Yes, I have ridden him two or three times with the harriers; but this is the first time I have had him out with fox-hounds.”

“He carried you very well in the run, sir.”

“You are quite right; he did. Very well.”

“Does he lay hold on you at all, Mr. Bacon?”

“Not a bit.”

“Light in the mouth, a clever jumper, and a free goer.”

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“All three.”

“Yes, he’s the right sort, he is, sir; and if ever you feel disposed to sell him, I could, may be, find you a customer.”

Accepting this as a delicate intimation that Mr. Fortescue had taken a fancy to the horse and would like to buy him, I told Jim that I was quite willing to sell at a fair price.

“And what might you consider a fair price, if it is a fair question?” asked the man.

“A hundred guineas,” I answered; for, as I knew that Mr. Fortescue would not “look at a horse,” as Tawney put it, under that figure, it would have been useless to ask less.

“Very well, sir. I will speak to my master, and let you know.”

Ranger, as I called the horse, was a purchase of Alston’s. Liking his looks (though Bertie was really a very indifferent judge), he had bought him out of a hansom-cab for forty pounds, and after a little “schooling,” the creature took to jumping as naturally as a duck takes to water. Sixty pounds may seem rather an unconscionable profit, but considering that Ranger was quite sound and up to weight, I don’t think a hundred guineas was too much. A dealer would have asked a hundred and fifty.

At any rate, Mr. Fortescue did not think it too much, for Rawlings presently brought me word that his master would take the horse at the price I had named, if I could warrant him sound.

“In that case it is a bargain,” I said, “for I can warrant him sound.”

“All right, sir. I’ll send one of the grooms over to your place for him to-morrow.”

Shortly afterward I fell in with Keyworth, and as a matter of course we talked about Mr. Fortescue.

“Do you know anything about him?” I asked.

“Not much. I believe he is rich—and respectable.”

“That is pretty evident, I think.”

“I am not sure. A man who spends a good deal of money is presumably rich; but it by no means follows that he is respectable. There are such people in the world as successful rogues and wealthy swindlers. Not that I think Mr. Fortescue is either one or the other. I learned, from the check he sent me for his subscription, who his bankers are, and through a friend of mine, who is intimate with one of the directors, I got a

confidential report about him. It does not amount to much; but it is satisfactory so far as it goes. They say he is a man of large fortune, and, as they believe, highly respectable."

"Is that all?"

"All there was in the report. But Tomlinson—that's my friend—has heard that he has spent the greater part of his life abroad, and that he made his money in South America."

The mention of South America interested me, for I had made voyages both to Rio de Janeiro and several places on the Spanish Main.

"South America is rather vague," I observed. "You might almost as well say 'Southern Asia.' Have you any idea in what part of it?"

"Not the least. I have told you all I know. I should be glad to know more; but for the present it is quite enough for my purpose. I intend to call upon Mr. Fortescue."

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It is hardly necessary to say that I had no such intention, for having neither a “position in the county,” as the phrase goes, a house of my own, nor any official connection with the hunt, a call from me would probably have been regarded, and rightly so, as a piece of presumption. As it happened, however, I not only called on Mr. Fortescue before the secretary, but became his guest, greatly to my surprise, and, I have no doubt, to his, although he was the indirect cause; for had he not bought Ranger, it is very unlikely that I should have become an inmate of his house.

It came about in this way. Bertie was so pleased with the result of his first speculation in horseflesh (though so far as he was concerned it was a pure fluke) that he must needs make another. If he had picked up a second cab-horse at thirty or forty pounds he could not have gone far wrong; but instead of that he must needs go to Tattersall’s and give nearly fifty for a blood mare rejoicing in the name of “Tickle-me-Quick,” described as being “the property of a gentleman,” and said to have won several country steeple-chases.

The moment I set eyes on the beast I saw she was a screw, “and vicious at that,” as an American would have said. But as she had been bought (without warranty) and paid for, I had to make the best of her. Within an hour of the mare’s arrival at Red Chimneys, I was on her back, trying her paces. She galloped well and jumped splendidly, but I feared from her ways that she would be hot with hounds, and perhaps, kick in a crowd, one of the worst faults that a hunter can possess.

On the next non-hunting day I took Tickle-me-Quick out for a long ride in the country, to see how she shaped as a hack. I little thought, as we set off, that it would prove to be her last journey, and one of the most memorable events of my life.

For a while all went well. The mare wanted riding, yet she behaved no worse than I expected, although from the way she laid her ears back and the angry tossing of her head when I made her feel the bit, she was clearly not in the best of tempers. But I kept her going; and an hour after leaving Red Chimneys we turned into a narrow deep lane between high banks, which led to Kingscote entering the road on the west side of the park at right angles, and very near Mr. Fortescue’s lodge-gates.

In the field to my right several colts were grazing, and when they caught sight of Tickle-me-Quick trotting up the lane they took it into their heads to have an impromptu race among themselves. Neighing loudly, they set off at full gallop. Without asking my leave, Tickle-me-Quick followed suit. I tried to stop her. I might as well have tried to stop an avalanche. So, making a virtue of necessity, I let her go, thinking that before she reached the top of the lane she would have had quite enough, and I should be able to pull her up without difficulty.

The colts are soon left behind; but we can hear them galloping behind us, and on goes the mare like the wind. I can now see the end of the lane, and as the great park wall,

twelve feet high, looms in sight, the horrible thought flashes on my mind that unless I pull her up we shall both be dashed to pieces; for to turn a sharp corner at the speed we are going is quite out of the question.

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I make another effort, sawing the mare's mouth till it bleeds, and tightening the reins till they are fit to break.

All in vain; she puts her head down and gallops on, if possible more madly than before. Still larger looms that terrible wall; death stares me in the face, and for the first time in my life I undergo the intense agony of mortal terror.

We are now at the end of the lane. There is one chance only, and that the most desperate, of saving my life. I slip my feet from the stirrups, and when Tickle-me-Quick is within two or three strides of the wall, I drop the reins and throw myself from her back. Then all is darkness.

CHAPTER III.

MR. FORTESCUE'S PROPOSAL.

"Where am I?"

I feel as if I were in a strait-jacket. One of my arms is immovable, my head is bandaged, and when I try to turn I suffer excruciating pain.

"Where am I?"

"Oh, you have wakened up!" says somebody with a foreign accent, and a dark face bends over me. The light is dim and my sight weak, and but for his grizzled mustache I might have taken the speaker for a woman, his ears being adorned with large gold rings.

"Where are you? You are in the house of Senor Fortescue."

"And the mare?"

"The mare broke her wicked head against the park wall, and she has gone to the kennels to be eaten by the dogs."

"Already? How long is it since?"

"It was the day before yesterday zat it happened."

"God bless me! I must have been insensible ever since. That means concussion of the brain. Am I much damaged otherwise, do you know?"

"Pretty well. Your left shoulder is dislocated, one of your fingers and two of your ribs broken, and one of your ankles severely contused. But it might have been worse. If

you had not thrown yourself from your horse, as you did, you would just now be in a coffin instead of in this comfortable bed."

"Somebody saw me, then?"

"Yes, the lodge-keeper. He thought you were dead, and came up and told us; and we brought you here on a stretcher, and the Senor Coronel sent for a doctor—"

"The Senor Coronel! Do you mean Mr. Fortescue?"

"Yes, sir, I mean Mr. Fortescue."

"Then you are Ramon?"

"*Hijo de Dios!* You know my name."

"Yes, you are Mr. Fortescue's body-servant."

"Caramba! Somebody must have told you."

"You might have made a worse guess, Senor Ramon. Will you please tell Mr. Fortescue that I thank him with all my heart for his great kindness, and that I will not trespass on it more than I can possibly help. As soon as I can be moved I shall go to my own place."

"That will not be for a long time, and I do not think the Senor Coronel would like—But when he returns he will see you, and then you can tell him yourself."

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“He is away from home, then?”

“The Senor Coronel has gone to London. He will be back to-morrow.”

“Well, if I cannot thank him to-day, I can thank you. You are my nurse, are you not?”

“A little—Geist and I, and Mees Tomleenson, we relieve each other. But those two don’t know much about wounds.”

“And you do, I suppose?”

“*Hijo de Dios!* Do I know much about wounds? I have nursed men who have been cut to pieces. I have been cut to pieces myself. Look!”

And with that Ramon pointed to his neck, which was seamed all the way down with a tremendous scar; then to his left hand, which was minus two fingers; next to one of his arms, which appeared to have been plowed from wrist to elbow with a bullet; and lastly to his head, which was almost covered with cicatrices, great and small.

“And I have many more marks in other parts of my body, which it would not be convenient to show you just now,” he said, quietly.

“You are an old soldier, then, Ramon?”

“Very. And now I will light myself a cigarette, and you will no more talk. As an old soldier, I know that it is bad for a *caballero* with a broken head to talk so much as you are doing.”

“As a surgeon, I know you are right, and I will talk no more for the present.”

And then, feeling rather drowsy, I composed myself to sleep. The last thing I remembered before closing my eyes was the long, swarthy, quixotic-looking face of my singular nurse, veiled in a blue cloud of cigarette-smoke, which, as it rolled from the nostrils of his big, aquiline nose, made those orifices look like the twin craters of an active volcano, upside down.

When, after a short snooze, I woke a second time, my first sensation was one of intense surprise, and being unable, without considerable inconvenience, to rub my eyes, I winked several times in succession to make sure that I was not dreaming; for while I slept the swart visage, black eyes, and grizzled mustache of my nurse had, to all appearance, been turned into a fair countenance, with blue eyes and a tawny head, while the tiny cigarette had become a big meerschaum pipe.

“God bless me! You are surely not Ramon?” I exclaimed.

“No; I am Geist. It is my turn of duty as your nurse. Can I get you anything?”

“Thank you very much; you are all very kind. I feel rather faint, and perhaps if I had something to eat it might do me good.”

“Certainly. There is some beef-tea ready. Here it is. Shall I feed you?”

“Thank you. My left arm is tied up, and this broken finger is very painful. Bat I am giving you no end of trouble. I don’t know how I shall be able to repay you and Mr. Fortescue for all your kindness.”

“*Ach Gott!* Don’t mention it, my dear sir. Mr. Fortescue said you were to have every attention; and when a fellow-man has been broken all to pieces it is our duty to do for him what we can. Who knows? Perhaps some time I may be broken all to pieces myself. But I will not ride your fiery horses. My weight is seventeen stone, and if I was to throw myself off a galloping horse as you did, *ach Gott!* I should be broken past mending.”

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Mr. Geist made an attentive and genial nurse, discoursing so pleasantly and fluently that, greatly to my satisfaction (for I was very weak), my part in the conversation was limited to an occasional monosyllable; but he said nothing on the subject as to which I was most anxious for information—Mr. Fortescue—and, as he clearly desired to avoid it, I refrained from asking questions that might have put him in a difficulty and exposed me to a rebuff.

I found out afterward that neither he nor Ramon ever discussed their master, and though Mrs. Tomlinson, my third nurse (a buxom, healthy, middle-aged widow, whose position seemed to be something between that of housekeeper and upper servant), was less reticent, it was probably because she had so little to tell.

I learned, among other things, that the habits of the household were almost as regular as those of a regiment, and that the servants, albeit kindly treated and well paid, were strictly ruled, even comparatively slight breaches of discipline being punished with instant dismissal. At half-past ten everybody was supposed to be in bed, and up at six; for at seven Mr. Fortescue took his first breakfast of fruit and dry toast. According to Mrs. Tomlinson (and this I confess rather surprised me) he was an essentially busy man. His only idle time was that which he gave to sleep. During his waking hours he was always either working in his study, his laboratory, or his conservatories, riding and driving being his sole recreations.

“He is the most active man I ever knew, young or old,” said Mrs. Tomlinson, “and a good master—I will say that for him. But I cannot make him out at all. He seems to have neither kith nor kin, and yet—This is quite between ourselves, Mr. Bacon—”

“Of course, Mrs. Tomlinson, quite.”

“Well, there is a picture in his room as he keeps veiled and locked up in a sort of shrine; but one day he forgot to turn the key, and I—I looked.”

“Naturally. And what did you see?”

“The picture of a woman, dark, but, oh, so beautiful—as beautiful as an angel.... I thought it was, may be, a sweetheart or something, but she is too young for the likes of him.”

“Portraits are always the same; that picture may have been painted ages ago. Always veiled is it? That seems very mysterious, does it not?”

“It does; and I am just dying to know what the mystery is. If you should happen to find out, and it’s no secret, would you mind telling me?”

At this point Herr Geist appeared, whereupon Mrs. Tomlinson, with true feminine tact, changed the subject without waiting for a reply.

During the time I was laid up Mr. Fortescue came into my room almost every day, but never stayed more than a few minutes. When I expressed my sense of his kindness and talked about going home, he would smile gravely, and say:

“Patience! You must be my guest until you have the full use of your limbs and are able to go about without help.”

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After this I protested no more, for there was an indescribable something about Mr. Fortescue which would have made it difficult to contradict him, even had I been disposed to take so ungrateful and ungracious a part.

At length, after a weary interval of inaction and pain, came a time when I could get up and move about without discomfort, and one fine frosty day, which seemed the brightest of my life, Geist and Ramon helped me down-stairs and led me into a pretty little morning-room, opening into one of the conservatories, where the plants and flowers had been so arranged as to look like a sort of tropical forest, in the midst of which was an aviary filled with parrots, cockatoos, and other birds of brilliant plumage.

Geist brought me an easy-chair, Ramon a box of cigarettes and the “Times,” and I was just settling down to a comfortable read and smoke, when Mr. Fortescue entered from the conservatory. He wore a Norfolk jacket and a broad-brimmed hat, and his step was so elastic, and his bearing so upright, and he seemed so strong and vigorous withal, that I began to think that in estimating his age at sixty I had made a mistake. He looked more like fifty or fifty-five.

“I am glad to see you down-stairs,” he said, helping himself to a cigarette. “How do you feel?”

“Very much better, thank you, and to-morrow or the next day I must really—”

“No, no, I cannot let you go yet. I shall keep you, at any rate, a few days longer. And while this frost lasts you can do no hunting. How is the shoulder?”

“Better. In a fortnight or so I shall be able to dispense with the sling, but my ankle is the worst. The contusion was very severe. I fear that I shall feel the effects of it for a long time.”

“That is very likely, I think. I would any time rather have a clean flesh wound than a severe contusion. I have had experience of both. At Salamanca my shoulder was laid open with a sabre-stroke at the very moment my horse was shot under me; and my leg, which was terribly bruised in the fall, was much longer in getting better than my shoulder.”

“At Salamanca! You surely don’t mean the battle of Salamanca?”

“Yes, the battle of Salamanca.”

“But, God bless me, that is ages ago! At the beginning of the century—1810 or 1812, or something like that.”

“The battle of Salamanca was fought on the 21st of July, 1812,” said my host, with a matter-of-fact air.

“But—why—how?” I stammered, staring at him in supreme surprise. “That is sixty years since, and you don’t look much more than fifty now.”

“All the same I am nearly fourscore,” said Mr. Fortescue, smiling as if the compliment pleased him.

“Fourscore, and so hale and strong! I have known men half your age not half so vigorous and alert. Why, you may live to be a hundred.”

“I think I shall, probably longer. Of course barring accidents, and if I continue to avoid a peril which has been hanging over me for half a century or so, and from which I have several times escaped only by the skin of my teeth.”

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“And what is the peril, Mr. Fortescue?”

“Assassination.”

“Assassination!”

“Yes, assassination. I told you a short time ago that I was once hunted by a pack of hounds. I am hunted now—have been hunted for two generations—by a family of murderers.”

The thought occurred to me—and not for the first time—that Mr. Fortescue was either mad or a Munchausen, and I looked at him curiously; but neither in that calm, powerful, self-possessed face, nor in the steady gaze of those keen dark eyes, could I detect the least sign of incipient insanity or a boastful spirit.

“You are quite mistaken,” he said, with one of his enigmatic smiles. “I am not mad; and I have lived too long either to cherish illusions or conjure up imaginary dangers.”

“I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Fortescue—I had no intention,” I stammered, quite taken aback by the accuracy with which he had read, or guessed, my thoughts—“I had no intention to cast a doubt on what you said. But who are these people that seek your life? and why don’t you inform the police?”

“The police! How could the police help me?” exclaimed Mr. Fortescue, with a gesture of disdain, “Besides, life would not be worth having at the price of being always under police protection, like an evicting Irish landlord. But let us change the subject; we have talked quite enough about myself. I want to talk about you.”

A very few minutes sufficed to put Mr. Fortescue in possession of all the information he desired. He already knew something about me, and as I had nothing to conceal, I answered all his questions without reserve.

“Don’t you think you are rather wasting your life?” he asked, after I had answered the last of them.

“I am enjoying it.”

“Very likely. People generally do enjoy life when they are young. Hunting is all very well as an amusement, but to have no other object in life seems—what shall we say?—just a little frivolous, don’t you think?”

“Well, perhaps it does; but I mean, after a while, to buy a practice and settle down.”

“But in the mean time your medical knowledge must be growing rather rusty. I have heard physicians say that it is only after they have obtained their degree that they begin

to learn their profession. And the practice you get on board these ships cannot amount to much."

"You are quite right," I said, frankly, for my conscience was touched. "I am, as you say, living too much for the present. I know less than I knew when I left Guy's. I could not pass my 'final' over again to save my life. You are quite right: I must turn over a new leaf."

"I am glad to hear you say so, the more especially as I have a proposal to make; and as I make it quite as much in my own interest as in yours, you will incur no obligation in accepting it. I want you to become an inmate of my house, help me in my laboratory, and act as my secretary and domestic physician, and when I am away from home, as my representative. You will have free quarters, of course; my stable will be at your disposal for hunting purposes, and you may go sometimes to London to attend lectures and do practical work at your hospital. As for salary—you can fix it yourself, when you have ascertained by actual experience the character of your work. What do you say?"

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Mr. Fortescue put this question as if he had no doubt about my answer, and I fulfilled his expectation by answering promptly in the affirmative. The proposal seemed in every way to my advantage, and was altogether to my liking; and even had it been less so I should have accepted it, for what I had just heard greatly whetted my curiosity, and made me more desirous than ever to know the history of the extraordinary man with whom I had so strangely come in contact, and ascertain the secret of his wealth.

The same day I wrote to Alston announcing the dissolution of our partnership, and leaving him to deal with the horses at Red Chimneys as he might think fit.

CHAPTER IV.

A *rescue*.

My curiosity was rather long in being gratified, and but for a very strange occurrence, which I shall presently describe, probably never would have been gratified. Even after I had been a member of Mr. Fortescue's household for several months, I knew little more of his antecedents and circumstances than on the day when he made me the proposal which I have just mentioned. If I attempted to lead up to the subject, he would either cleverly evade it or say bluntly that he preferred to talk about something else. Save as to matters that did not particularly interest me, Ramon was as reticent as his master; and as Geist had only been with Mr. Fortescue during the latter's residence at Kingscote, his knowledge, or, rather, his ignorance was on a par with my own.

Mr. Fortescue's character was as enigmatic as his history was obscure. He seemed to be destitute both of kinsfolk and friends, never made any allusion to his family, neither noticed women nor discussed them. Politics and religion he equally ignored, and, so far as might appear, had neither foibles nor fads. On the other hand, he had three passions—science, horses, and horticulture, and his knowledge was almost encyclopaedic. He was a great reader, master of many languages, and seemed to have been everywhere and seen all in the world that was worth seeing. His wealth appeared to be unlimited, but how he made it or where he kept it I had no idea. All I knew was that whenever money was wanted it was forthcoming, and that he signed a check for ten pounds and ten thousand with equal indifference. As he conducted his private correspondence himself, my position as secretary gave me no insight into his affairs. My duties consisted chiefly in corresponding with tradesmen, horse-dealers, and nursery gardeners, and noting the results of chemical experiments.

Mr. Fortescue was very abstemious, and took great care of his health, and if he was really verging on eighty (which I very much doubted), I thought he might not improbably live to be a hundred and ten and even a hundred and twenty. He drank nothing, whatever, neither tea, coffee, cocoa, nor any other beverage, neither water nor wine, always quenching his thirst with fruit, of which he ate largely. So far as I knew, the only

liquid that ever passed his lips was an occasional liquor-glass of a mysterious decoction which he prepared himself and kept always under lock and key. His breakfast, which he took every morning at seven, consisted of bread and fruit.

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He ate very little animal food, limiting himself for the most part to fish and fowl, and invariably spent eight or nine hours of the twenty-four in bed. We often discussed physiology, therapeutics, and kindred subjects, of which his knowledge was so extensive as to make me suspect that some time in his life he had belonged to the medical profession.

“The best physicians I ever met,” he once observed, “are the Callavayas of the Andes—if the preservation and prolongation of human life is the test of medical skill. Among the Callavayas the period of youth is thirty years; a man is not held to be a man until he reaches fifty, and he only begins to be old at a hundred.”

“Was it among the Callavayas that you learned the secret of long life, Mr. Fortescue?” I asked.

“Perhaps,” he answered, with one of his peculiar smiles; and then he started me by saying that he would never be a “lean and slippered pantaloon.” When health and strength failed him he should cease to live.

“You surely don’t mean that you will commit suicide?” I exclaimed, in dismay.

“You may call it what you like. I shall do as the Fiji Islanders and some tribes of Indians do, in similar circumstances—retire to a corner and still the beatings of my heart by an effort of will.”

“But is that possible?”

“I have seen it done, and I have done it myself—not, of course, to the point of death, but so far as to simulate death. I once saved my life in that way.”

“Was that when you were hunted, Mr. Fortescue?”

“No, it was not. Let us go to the stables. I want to see you ride Regina over the jumps.”

Mr. Fortescue had caused to be arranged in the park a miniature steeple-chase course about a mile round, on which newly-acquired hunters were always tried, and the old ones regularly exercised. He generally made a point of being present on these occasions, sometimes riding over the course himself. If a horse, bought as a hunter, failed to justify its character by its performance it was invariably returned.

Sometimes Ramon gave us an exhibition of his skill as a gaucho. One of the wildest of the horses would be let loose in the park, and the old soldier, armed with a lasso and mounted on an animal trained by himself, and equipped with a South American saddle, would follow and try to “rope” the runaway, Mr. Fortescue, Rawlings, and myself riding after him. It was “good fun,” but I fancy Mr. Fortescue regarded this sport, as he

regarded hunting, less as an amusement than as a means of keeping him in good health and condition.

Regina (a recent purchase) was tried and, I think, found wanting. I recall the instance merely because it is associated in my mind with an event which, besides affecting a momentous change in my relations with Mr. Fortescue and greatly influencing my own fortune, rendered possible the writing of this book.

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The trial over, Mr. Fortescue told me, somewhat abruptly, that he intended to leave home in an hour, and should be away for several days. As he walked toward the house, I inquired if there was anything he would like me to look after during his absence, whereupon he mentioned several chemical and electrical experiments, which he wished me to continue and note the results. He requested me, further, to open all letters—save such as were marked private or bore foreign postmarks—and answer so many of them as, without his instructions, I might be able to do. For the rest, I was to exercise a general supervision, especially over the stables and gardens. As for purely domestic concerns, Geist was so excellent a manager that his master trusted him without reserve.

When Mr. Fortescue came down-stairs, equipped for his journey, I inquired when he expected to return, and on what day he would like the carriage to meet him at the station. I thought he might tell me where he was going; but he did not take the hint.

“If it rains I will telegraph,” he said; “if fine, I shall probably walk; it is only a couple of miles.”

Mr. Fortescue, as he always did when he went outside his park (unless he was mounted), took with him a sword-stick, a habit which I thought rather ridiculous, for, though he was an essentially sane man, I had quite made up my mind that his fear of assassination was either a fancy or a fad.

After my patron’s departure I worked for a while in the laboratory; and an hour before dinner I went for a stroll in the park, making, for no reason in particular, toward the principal entrance. As I neared it I heard voices in dispute, and on reaching the gates I found the lodge-keeper engaged in a somewhat warm altercation with an Italian organ-grinder and another fellow of the same kidney, who seemed to be his companion.

The lodge-keepers had strict orders to exclude from the park all beggars without exception, and all and sundry who produced music by turning a handle. Real musicians, however, were freely admitted, and often generously rewarded.

The lodge-keeper in question (an old fellow with a wooden leg) had not been able to make the two vagabonds in question understand this. They insisted on coming in, and the lodge-keeper said that if I had not appeared he verily believed they would have entered in spite of him. They seemed to know very little English; but as I knew a little Italian, which I eked out with a few significant gestures, I speedily enlightened them, and they sheered off, looking daggers, and muttering what sounded like curses.

The man who carried the organ was of the usual type—short, thick-set, hairy, and unwashed. His companion, rather to my surprise, was just the reverse—tall, shapely, well set up, and comparatively well clad; and with his dark eyes, black mustache, broad-

brimmed hat, and red tie loosely knotted round his brawny throat, he looked decidedly picturesque.

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On the following day, as I was going to the stables (which were a few hundred yards below the house) I found my picturesque Italian in the back garden, singing a barcarole to the accompaniment of a guitar. But as he had complied with the condition of which I had informed him, I made no objection. So far from that I gave him a shilling, and as the maids (who were greatly taken with his appearance) got up a collection for him and gave him a feed, he did not do badly.

A few days later, while out riding, I called at the station for an evening paper, and there he was again, “touching his guitar,” and singing something that sounded very sentimental.

“That fellow is like a bad shilling,” I said to one of the porters—“always turning up.”

“He is never away. I think he must have taken it into his head to live here.”

“What does he do?”

“Oh, he just hangs about, and watches the trains, as if he had never seen any before. I suppose there are none in the country he comes from. Between whiles he sometimes plays on his banjo and sings a bit for us. I cannot quite make him out; but as he is very quiet and well-behaved, and never interferes with nobody, it is no business of mine.”

Neither was it any business of mine; so after buying my paper I dismissed the subject from my mind and rode on to Kingscote.

As a rule, I found the morning papers quite as much as I could struggle with; but at this time a poisoning case was being tried which interested me so much that while it lasted I sent for or fetched an evening paper every afternoon. The day after my conversation with the porter I adopted the former course, the day after that I adopted the latter, and, contrary to my usual practice, I walked.

There were two ways from Kingscote to the station; one by the road, the other by a little-used footpath. I went by the road, and as I was buying my paper at Smith’s bookstall the station-master told me that Mr. Fortescue had returned by a train which came in about ten minutes previously.

“He must be walking home by the fields, then, or we should have met,” I said; and pocketing my paper, I set off with the intention of overtaking him.

As I have already observed, the field way was little frequented, most people preferring the high-road as being equally direct and, except in the height of summer, both dryer and less lonesome.

After traversing two or three fields the foot-path ran through a thick wood, once part of the great forest of Essex, then descending into a deep hollow, it made a sudden bend and crossed a rambling old brook by a dilapidated bridge.

As I reached the bend I heard a shout, and looking down I saw what at first sight (the day being on the wane and the wood gloomy) I took to be three men amusing themselves with a little cudgel-play. But a second glance showed me that something much more like murder than cudgel-play was going on; and shortening my Irish blackthorn, I rushed at breakneck speed down the hollow.

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I was just in time. Mr. Fortescue, with his back against the tree, was defending himself with his sword-stick against the two Italians, each of whom, armed with a long dagger, was doing his best to get at him without falling foul of the sword.

The rascals were so intent on their murderous business that they neither heard nor saw me, and, taking them in the rear, I fetched the guitar-player a crack on his skull that stretched him senseless on the ground, whereupon the other villain, without more ado, took to his heels.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Fortescue, quietly, as he put up his weapon. “I don’t think I could have kept the brigands at bay much longer. A sword-stick is no match for a pair of Corsican daggers. The next time I take a walk I must have a revolver. Is that fellow dead, do you think? If he is, I shall be still more in your debt.”

I looked at the prostrate man’s face, then at his head. “No,” I said, “there is no fracture. He is only stunned.” My diagnosis was verified almost as soon as it was spoken. The next moment the Italian opened his eyes and sat up, and had I not threatened him with my blackthorn would have sprung to his feet.

“You have to thank this gentleman for saving your life,” said Mr. Fortescue, in French.

“How?” asked the fellow in the same language.

“If you had killed me you would have been hanged. If I hand you over to the police you will get twenty years at the hulks for attempted murder, and unless you answer my questions truly I shall hand you over to the police. You are a Griscelli.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Which of them?”

“I am Giuseppe, the son of Giuseppe.”

“In that case you are *his* grandson. How did you find me out?”

“You were at Paris last summer.”

“But you did not see me there.”

“No, but Giacomo did; and from your name and appearance we felt sure you were the same.”

“Who is Giacomo—your brother?”

“No, my cousin, the son of Luigi.”

“What is he?”

“He belongs to the secret police.”

“So Giacomo put you on the scent?”

“Yes, sir. He ascertained that you were living in England. The rest was easy.”

“Oh, it was, was it? You don’t find yourself very much at ease just now, I fancy. And now, my young friend, I am going to treat you better than you deserve. I can afford to do so, for, as you see, and, as your grandfather and your father discovered to their cost, I bear a charmed life. You cannot kill me. You may go. And I advise you to return to France or Corsica, or wherever may be your home, with all speed, for to-morrow I shall denounce you to the police, and if you are caught you know what to expect. Who is your accomplice—a kinsman?”

“No, only compatriot, whose acquaintance I made in London. He is a coward.”

“Evidently. One more question and I have done. Have you any brothers?”

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“Yes, sir; two.”

“And about a dozen cousins, I suppose, all of whom would be delighted to murder me—if they could. Now, give that gentleman your dagger, and march, *au pas gymnastique*.”

With a very ill grace, Giuseppe Griscelli did as he was bid, and then, rising to his feet, he marched, not, however, at the *pas gymnastique*, but slowly and deliberately; and as he reached a bend in the path a few yards farther on, he turned round and cast at Mr. Fortescue the most diabolically ferocious glance I ever saw on a human countenance.

CHAPTER V.

THEREBY HANGS A TALE.

“You believe now, I hope,” said Mr. Fortescue, as we walked homeward.

“Believe what, sir?”

“That I have relentless enemies who seek my life. When I first told you of this you did not believe me. You thought I was the victim of an hallucination, else had I been more frank with you.”

“I am really very sorry.”

“Don’t protest! I cannot blame you. It is hard for people who have led uneventful lives and seen little of the seamy side of human nature to believe that under the veneer of civilization and the mask of convention, hatreds are still as fierce, men still as revengeful as ever they were in olden times.... I hope I did not make a mistake in sparing young Griscelli’s life.”

“Sparing his life! How?”

“He sought my life, and I had a perfect right to take his.”

“That is not a very Christian sentiment, Mr. Fortescue.”

“I did not say it was. Do you always repay good for evil and turn your check to the smiter, Mr. Bacon?”

“If you put it in that way, I fear I don’t.”

“Do you know anybody who does?”

After a moment's reflection I was again compelled to answer in the negative. I could not call to mind a single individual of my acquaintance who acted on the principle of returning good for evil.

"Well, then, if I am no better than other people, I am no worse. Yet, after all, I think I did well to let him go. Had I killed the brigand, there would have been a coroner's inquest, and questions asked which might have been troublesome to answer, and he has brothers and cousins. If I could destroy the entire brood! Did you see the look he gave me as he went away? It meant murder. We have not seen the last of Giuseppe Griscelli, Mr. Bacon."

"I am afraid we have not. I never saw such an expression of intense hatred in my life! Has he cause for it?"

"I dare say he thinks so. I killed his father and his grand-father."

This, uttered as indifferently as if it were a question of killing hares and foxes, was more than I could stand. I am not strait-laced, but I draw the line at murder.

"You did what?" I exclaimed, as, horror-struck and indignant, I stopped in the path and looked him full in the face.

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I thought I had never seen him so Mephistopheles-like. A sinister smile parted his lips, showing his small white teeth gleaming under his gray mustache, and he regarded me with a look of cynical amusement, in which there was perhaps a slight touch of contempt.

“You are a young man, Mr. Bacon,” he observed, gently, “and, like most young men, and a great many old men, you make false deductions. Killing is not always murder. If it were, we should consign our conquerors to everlasting infamy, instead of crowning them with laurels and erecting statues to their memory. I am no murderer, Mr. Bacon. At the same time I do not cherish illusions. Unpremeditated murder is by no means the worst of crimes. Taking a life is only anticipating the inevitable; and of all murderers, Nature is the greatest and the cruellest. I have—if I could only tell you—make you see what I have seen—Even now, O God! though half a century has run its course—”

Here Mr. Fortescue’s voice failed him; he turned deadly pale, and his countenance took an expression of the keenest anguish. But the signs of emotion passed away as quickly as they had appeared. Another moment and he had fully regained his composure, and he added, in his usual self-possessed manner:

“All this must seem very strange to you, Mr. Bacon. I suppose you consider me somewhat of a mystery.”

“Not somewhat, but very much.”

Mr. Fortescue smiled (he never laughed) and reflected a moment.

“I am thinking,” he said, “how strangely things come about, and, so to speak, hang together. The greatest of all mysteries is fate. If that horse had not run away with you, these rascals would almost certainly have made away with me; and the incident of to-day is one of the consequences of that which I mentioned at our first interview.”

“When we had that good run from Latton. I remember it very well. You said you had been hunted yourself.”

“Yes.”

“How was it, Mr. Fortescue?”

“Ah! Thereby hangs a tale.”

“Tell it me, Mr. Fortescue,” I said, eagerly.

“And a very long tale.”

“So much the better; it is sure to be interesting.”

“Ah, yes, I dare say you would find it interesting. My life has been stirring and stormy enough, in all conscience—except for the ten years I spent in heaven,” said Mr. Fortescue, in a voice and with a look of intense sadness.

“Ten years in heaven!” I exclaimed, as much astonished as I had just been horrified. Was the man mad, after all, or did he speak in paradoxes? “Ten years in heaven!”

Mr. Fortescue smiled again, and then it occurred to me that his ten years of heaven might have some connection with the veiled portrait and the shrine in his room up-stairs.

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“You take me too literally,” he said. “I spoke metaphorically. I did not mean that, like Swedenborg and Mohammed, I have made excursions to Paradise. I merely meant that I once spent ten years of such serene happiness as it seldom falls to the lot of man to enjoy. But to return to our subject. You would like to know more of my past; but as it would not be satisfactory to tell you an incomplete history, and to tell you all—Yet why not? I have done nothing that I am ashamed of; and it is well you should know something of the man whose life you have saved once, and may possibly save again. You are trustworthy, straightforward, and vigilant, and albeit you are not overburdened with intelligence—”

Here Mr. Fortescue paused, as if to reflect; and, though the observation was not very flattering—hardly civil, indeed—I was so anxious to hear this story that I took it in good part, and waited patiently for his decision.

“To relate it *viva voce*” he went on, thoughtfully, “would be troublesome to both of us.”

“I am sure I should find it anything but troublesome.”

“Well, I should. It would take too much time, and I hate travelling over old ground. But that is a difficulty which I think we can get over. For many years I have made a record of the principal events of my life, in the form of a personal narrative; and though I have sometimes let it run behind for a while, I have always written it up.”

“That is exactly the thing. As you say, telling a long story is troublesome. I can read it.”

“I am afraid not. It is written in a sort of stenographic cipher of my own invention.”

“That is very awkward,” I said, despondently. “I know no more of shorthand than of Sanskrit, and though I once tried to make out a cipher, the only tangible result was a splitting headache.”

“With the key, which I will give you, a little instruction and practice, you should have no difficulty in making out my cipher. It will be an exercise for your intelligence”—smiling. “Will you try?”

“My very best.”

“And now for the conditions. In the first place, you must, in stenographic phrase, ‘extend’ my notes, write out the narrative in a legible hand and good English. If there be any blanks, I will fill them up; if you require explanations, I will give them. Do you agree?”

“I agree.”

“The second condition is that you neither make use of the narrative for any purpose of your own, nor disclose the whole or any part of it to anybody until and unless I give you leave. What say you?”

“I say yes.”

“The third and last condition is, that you engage to stay with me in your present capacity until it pleases me to give you your *conge*. Again what say you?”

This was rather a “big order,” and very one-sided. It bound me to remain with Mr. Fortescue for an indefinite period, yet left him at liberty to dismiss me at a moment’s notice; and if he went on living, I might have to stay at Kingscote till I was old and gray. All the same, the position was a good one. I had four hundred a year (the price at which I had modestly appraised my services), free quarters, a pleasant life, and lots of hunting—all I could wish for, in fact; and what can a man have more? So again I said, “Yes.”

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“We are agreed in all points, then. If you will come into my room “—we were by this time arrived at the house—“you shall have your first lesson in cryptography.”

I assented with eagerness, for I was burning to begin, and, from what Mr. Fortescue had said, I did not anticipate any great difficulty in making out the cipher.

But when he produced a specimen page of his manuscript, my confidence, like Bob Acre’s courage, oozed out at my finger-ends, or rather, all over me, for I broke out into a cold sweat.

The first few lines resembled a confused array of algebraic formula. (I detest algebra.) Then came several lines that seemed to have been made by the crawlings of tipsy flies with inky legs, followed by half a dozen or so that looked like the ravings of a lunatic done into Welsh, while the remainder consisted of Roman numerals and ordinary figures mixed up, higgledy-piggledy.

“This is nothing less than appalling,” I almost groaned. “It will take me longer to learn than two or three languages.”

“Oh, no! When you have got the clew, and learned the signs, you will read the cipher with ease.”

“Very likely; but when will that be?”

“Soon. The system is not nearly so complicated as it looks, and the language being English—”

“English! It looks like a mixture of ancient Mexican and modern Chinese.”

“The language being English, nothing could be easier for a man of ordinary intelligence. If I had expected that my manuscript would fall into the hands of a cryptographist, I should have contrived something much more complicated and written it in several languages; and you have the key ready to your hand. Come, let us begin.”

After half an hour’s instruction I began to see daylight, and to feel that with patience and practice I should be able to write out the story in legible English. The little I had read with Mr. Fortescue made me keen to know more; but as the cryptographic narrative did not begin at the beginning, he proposed that I should write this, as also any other missing parts, to his dictation.

“Who knows that you may not make a book of it?” he said.

“Do you think I am intelligent Enough?” I asked, resentfully; for his uncomplimentary references to my mental capacity were still rankling in my mind.

“I should hope so. Everybody writes in these days. Don’t worry yourself on that score, my dear Mr. Bacon. Even though you may write a book, nobody will accuse you of being exceptionally intelligent.”

“But I cannot make a book of your narrative without your leave,” I observed, with a painful sense of having gained nothing by my motion.

“And that leave may be sooner or later forthcoming, on conditions.”

As the reader will find in the sequel, the leave has been given and the conditions have been fulfilled, and Mr. Fortescue’s personal narrative—partly taken down from his own dictation, but for the most part extended from his manuscript—begins with the following chapter.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE TALE BEGINS.

The morning after the battle of Salamanca (through which I passed unscathed) the regiment of dragoons to which I belonged (forming part of Anson's brigade), together with Bock's Germans, was ordered to follow on the traces of the flying French, who had retired across the River Tormes. Though we started at daylight, we did not come up with their rear-guard until noon. It consisted of a strong force of horse and foot, and made a stand near La Serna; but the cavalry, who had received a severe lesson on the previous day, bolted before we could cross swords with them. The infantry, however, remained firm, and forming square, faced us like men. The order was then given to charge; and when the two brigades broke into a gallop and thundered down the slope, they raised so thick a cloud of dust that all we could see of the enemy was the glitter of their bayonets and the flash of their musket-fire. Saddles were emptied both to the right and left of me, and one of the riderless horses, maddened by a wound in the head, dashed wildly forward, and leaping among the bayonets and lashing out furiously with his hind-legs, opened a way into the square. I was the first man through the gap, and engaged the French colonel in a hand-to-hand combat. At the very moment just as I gave him the point in his throat he cut open my shoulder, my horse, mortally hurt by a bayonet thrust, fell, half rolling over me and crushing my leg.

As I lay on the ground, faint with the loss of blood and unable to rise, some of our fellows rode over me, and being hit on the head by one of their horses, I lost consciousness. When I came to myself the skirmish was over, nearly the whole of the French rear-guard had been taken prisoners or cut to pieces, and a surgeon was dressing my wounds. This done, I was removed in an ambulance to Salamanca.

The historic old city, with its steep, narrow streets, numerous convents, and famous university, had been well-nigh ruined by the French, who had pulled down half the convents and nearly all the colleges, and used the stones for the building of forts, which, a few weeks previously, Wellington had bombarded with red-hot shot.

The hospitals being crowded with sick and wounded, I was billeted in the house of a certain Senor Don Alberto Zamorra, which (probably owing to the fact of its having been the quarters of a French colonel) had not taken much harm, either during the French occupation of the town or the subsequent siege of the forts.

Don Alberto gave me a hearty, albeit a dignified welcome, and being a Spanish gentleman of the old school, he naturally placed his house, and all that it contained, at my disposal. I did not, of course, take this assurance literally, and had I not been on the right side, I should doubtless have met with a very different reception. All the same, he

made a very agreeable host, and before I had been his guest many days we became fast friends.

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Don Zamorra was old, nearly as old as I am now; and as I speedily discovered, he had passed the greater part of his life in Spanish America, where he had held high office under the crown. He could hardly talk about anything else, in fact, and once he began to discourse about his former greatness and the marvels of the Indies (as South and Central America were then sometimes called) he never knew when to stop. He had crossed the Andes and seen the Amazon, sailed down the Orinoco and visited the mines of Potosi and Guanajuata, beheld the fiery summit of Cotopaxi, and peeped down the smoky crater of Acatenango. He told of fights with Indians and wild animals, of being lost in the forest, and of perilous expeditions in search of gold and precious stones. When Zamorra spoke of gold his whole attitude changed, the fires of his youth blazed up afresh, his face glowed with excitement, and his eyes sparkled with greed. At these times I saw in him a true type of the old Spanish Conquestadores, who would baptize a cacique to save him from hell one day, and kill him and loot his treasure the next.

Don Alberto had, moreover, a firm belief in the existence of the fabled El Dorado, and of the city of Manoa, with its resplendent house of the sun, its hoards of silver and gold, and its gilded king. Thousands of adventurers had gone forth in search of these wonders, and thousands had perished in the attempt to find them. Senor Zamorra had sought El Dorado on the banks of the Orinoco and the Rio Negro; others, near the source of the Rio Grande and the Maranon; others, again, among the volcanoes of Salvador and the canons of the Cordilleras. Zamorra believed that it lay either in the wilds of Guiana, or the unexplored confines of Peru and the Brazils.

He had heard of and believed even greater wonders—of a stream on the Pacific coast of Mexico, whose pebbles were silver, and whose sand was gold; of a volcano in the Peruvian Cordillera, whose crater was lined with the noblest of metals, and which once in every hundred years ejected, for days together, diamonds, and rubies, and dust of gold.

“If that volcano could only be found,” said the don, with a convulsive clutching of his bony fingers, and a greedy glare in his aged eyes. “If that volcano could only be found! Why, it must be made of gold, and covered with precious stones! The man who found it would be the richest in all the world—richer than all the people in the world put together!”

“Did you ever see it, Don Alberto?” I asked.

“Did I ever see it?” he cried, uplifting his withered hands. “If I had seen that volcano you would never have seen me, but you would have heard of me. I had it from an Indio whose father once saw it with his own eyes; but I was too old, too old”—sighing—“to go on the quest. To undertake such an enterprise a man should be in the prime of life and go alone. A single companion, even though he were your own brother, might be fatal;

for what virtue could be proof against so great a temptation—millions of diamonds and a mountain of gold?”

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All this roused my curiosity and fired my imagination—not that I believed it all, for Zamorra was evidently a visionary with a fixed idea, and as touching his craze, credulous as a child; but in those days South America had been very little written about and not half explored; for me it had all the charm and fascination of the unknown—a land of romance and adventure, abounding in grand scenery, peopled by strange races, and containing the mightiest rivers, the greatest forests, and highest mountains in the world.

When my host dismounted from his hobby he was an intelligent talker, and told me much that was interesting about Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, and the Spanish Main. He had several books on the subject which I greedily devoured. The expedition of Piedro de Ursua and Lope de Aguirre in search of El Dorado and Omagua; "History of the Conquest of Mexico," by Don Antonio de Solis; Piedrolieta's "General History of the Conquest of the New Kingdom of Grenada," and others; and before we parted I had resolved that, so soon as the war was over, I would make a voyage to the land of the setting sun, and see for myself the wonders of which I had heard.

"You are right," said Senor Zamorra, when I told him of my intention. "America is the country of the future. Ah, if I were only fifty years younger! You will, of course, visit Venezuela; and if you visit Venezuela you are sure to go to Caracas. I will give you a letter of introduction to a friend of mine there. He is a man in authority, and may be of use to you. I should much like you to see him and greet him on my behalf."

I thanked my host, and promised to see his friend and present the letter. It was addressed to Don Simon de Ulloa. Little did I think how much trouble that letter would give me, and how near it would come to being my death-warrant.

Zamorra then besought me, with tears in his eyes, to go in search of the Golden Volcano.

"If you could give me a more definite idea of its whereabouts I might possibly make the attempt," I answered, with intentional vagueness; for though I no more believed in the objective existence of the Golden Volcano than in Aladdin's lamp, I did not wish to hurt the old man's feelings by an avowal of my skepticism.

"Ah, my dear sir," he said, with a gesture of despair, "if I knew the whereabouts of the Golden Volcano, I should go thither myself, old as I am. I should have gone long ago, and returned with a hoard of wealth that would make me the master of Europe—wealth that would buy kingdoms. I can tell you no more than that it is somewhere in the region of the Peruvian Andes. It may be that by cautious inquiry you may light on an Indio who will lead you to the very spot. It is worth the attempt, and if by the help of St. Peter and the Holy Virgin you succeed, and I am still alive, send me out of your abundance a few arrobas (twenty-five pounds) of gold and a handful of diamonds. It is all I ask."

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It was all he asked.

“When I find that volcano, Don Alberto,” I said, “not a mere handful of diamonds, but a bucketful.”

This was almost our last talk, for the very same day news was brought that Lord Wellington, having been forced to raise the siege of Burgos, was retreating toward the Portuguese frontier, and that Salamanca would almost inevitably be recaptured by the French. Orders were given for the removal of the wounded to the Coa, where the army was to take up its winter quarters, and Zamorra and I had to part. We parted with mutual expressions of good-will, and in the hope, destined never to be realized, that we might soon meet again. I had seen Don Alberto for the last time.

A few weeks later I was sufficiently recovered from my hurts to use my bridle-arm, and before the opening of the next campaign I was fit for the field and eager for the fray. It was the campaign of Vittoria, one of the most brilliant episodes in the military history of England. Even now my heart beats faster and the blood tingles in my veins when I think of that time, so full of excitement, adventure, and glory—the forcing of the Pyrenees, the invasion of France, the battles of Bayonne, Orthes, and Toulouse, and the march to Paris.

But as I am not relating a history of the war, I shall mention only one incident in which I was concerned at this period—an incident that brought me in contact with a man who was destined to exercise a fateful influence on my career.

It occurred after the battle of Vittoria. The French were making for the Pyrenees, laden with the loot of a kingdom and encumbered with a motley crowd of non-combatants—-the wives and families of French officers, fair senoritas flying with their lovers, and traitorous Spaniards, who, by taking sides with the invaders, had exposed themselves to the vengeance of the patriots. So overwhelming was the defeat of the French, that they were forced to abandon nearly the whole of their plunder and the greater part of their baggage, and leave the fugitives and camp-followers to their fate.

Never was witnessed so strange a sight as the valley of Vittoria presented at the close of that eventful day. The broken remains of the French army hurrying toward the Pamplona road, eighty pieces of artillery, served with frantic haste, covering their retreat; thousands of wagons and carriages jammed together and unable to move; the red-coated infantry of England, marching steadily across the plain; the boom of the cannon, the rattle of musketry, the scream of women as the bullets whistled through the air and shells burst over their heads—all this made up a scene, dramatic and picturesque, it is true, yet full of dire confusion and Dantesque horror; for death had reaped a rich harvest, and thousands of wounded lay writhing on the blood-stained field.

Owing to the bursting of packages, the overturning of wagons, and the havoc wrought by shot and shell, valuable effects, coin, gems, gold and silver candlesticks and vessels, priceless paintings, the spoil of Spanish churches and convents, were strewed over the ground. There was no need to plunder; our men picked up money as they matched, and it was computed that a sum equal to a million sterling found its way into their knapsacks and pockets.

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Our Spanish allies, officers as well as privates, were less scrupulous. They robbed like highwaymen, and protested that they were only taking their own.

While riding toward Vittoria to execute an order of the colonel's, I passed a carriage which a moment or two previously had been overtaken by several of Longa's dragoons, with the evident intention of overhauling it. In the carriage were two ladies, one young and pretty the other good-looking and mature; and, as I judged from their appearance, both being well dressed, the daughter and wife of a French officer of rank. They appealed to me for help.

"You are an English officer," said the elder in French; "all the world knows that your nation is as chivalrous as it is brave. Protect us, I pray you, from these ruffians."

I bowed, and turning to the Spaniards, one of whom was an officer, spoke them fair; for my business was pressing, and I had no wish to be mixed up in a quarrel.

"Caballeros," I said, "we do not make war on women. You will let these ladies go."

"*Carambo!* We shall do nothing of the sort," returned the officer, insolently. "These ladies are our prisoners, and their carriage and all it contains our prize."

"I beg your pardon, Senor Capitan, but you are, perhaps not aware that Lord Wellington has given strict orders that private property is to be respected; and no true caballero molests women."

"*Hijo de Dios!* Dare you say that I am no true caballero? Begone this instant, or—"

The Spaniard drew his sword; I drew mine; his men began to look to the priming of their pistols, and had General Anson not chanced to come by just in the nick of time, it might have gone ill with me. On learning what had happened, he said I had acted very properly and told the Spaniards that if they did not promptly depart he would hand them over to the provost-marshal.

"We shall meet again, I hope, you and I," said the officer, defiantly, as he gathered up his reins.

"So do I, if only that I may have an opportunity of chastising you for your insolence," was my equally defiant answer.

"A thousand thanks, monsieur! You have done me and my daughter a great service," said the elder of the ladies. "Do me the pleasure to accept this ring as a slight souvenir of our gratitude, and I trust that in happier times we may meet again."

I accepted the souvenir without looking at it; reciprocated the wish in my best French, made my best bow, and rode off on my errand. By the same act I had made one enemy

and two friends; therefore, as I thought, the balance was in my favor. But I was wrong, for a wider experience of the world than I then possessed has taught me that it is better to miss making a hundred ordinary friends than to make one inveterate enemy.

CHAPTER VII.

IN QUEST OF FORTUNE.

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When the war came to an end my occupation was gone, for both circumstances and my own will compelled me to leave the army. My allowance could no longer be continued. At the best, the life of a lieutenant of dragoons in peace time would have been little to my liking; with no other resource than my pay, it would have been intolerable. So I sent in my papers, and resolved to seek my fortune in South America. After the payment of my debts (incurred partly in the purchase of my first commission) and the provision of my outfit, the sum left at my disposal was comparatively trifling. But I possessed a valuable asset in the ring given me by the French lady on the field of Vittoria. It was heavy, of antique make, curiously wrought, and set with a large sapphire of incomparable beauty. A jeweler, to whom I showed it, said he had never seen a finer. I could have sold it for a hundred guineas. But as the gem was property in a portable shape and more convertible than a bill of exchange, I preferred to keep it, taking, however, the precaution to have the sapphire covered with a composition, in order that its value might not be too readily apparent to covetous eyes.

At this time the Spanish colonies of Colombia (including the countries now known as Venezuela, New Granada, and Ecuador, as also the present republic of southern Central America) were in full revolt against the mother country. The war had been going on for several years with varying fortunes; but latterly the Spaniards had been getting decidedly the best of it. Caracas and all the seaport towns were in their possession, and the patriot cause was only maintained by a few bands of irregulars, who were waging a desperate and almost hopeless contest in the forests and on the llanos of the interior.

My sympathies were on the popular side, and I might have joined the volunteer force which was being raised in England for service with the insurgents. But this did not suit my purpose. If I accepted a commission in the Legion I should have to go where I was ordered. I preferred to go where I listed. I had no objection to fighting, but I wanted to do it in my own way and at my own time, and rather in the ranks of the rebels themselves than as officer in a foreign force.

This view of the case I represented to Senor Morena, one of the “patriot” agents in London, and asked his advice.

“Why not go to Caracas?” he said.

“What would be the use of that? Caracas is in the hands of the Spaniards.”

“You could get from Caracas into the interior, and do the cause an important service.”

“How?”

Senor Morena explained that the patriots of the capital, being sorely oppressed by the Spaniards, were losing courage, and he wished greatly to send them a message of

hope and the assurance that help was at hand. It was also most desirable that the insurgent leaders on the field should be informed of the organization of a British liberating Legion, and of other measures which were being taken to afford them relief and turn the tide of victory in their favor.

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But to communicate these tidings to the parties concerned was by no means easy. The post was obviously quite out of the question, and no Spanish creole could land at any port held by the Royalists without the almost certainty of being promptly strangled or shot. “An Englishman, however—especially an Englishman who had fought under Wellington in Spain—might undertake the mission with comparative impunity,” said Senor Morena.

“I understand perfectly,” I answered. “I have to go in the character of an ordinary travelling Englishman, and act as an emissary of the insurgent junta. But if my true character is detected, what then?”

“That is not at all likely, Mr. Fortescue.”

“Yet the unlikely happens sometimes—happens generally, in fact. Suppose it does in the present instance?”

“In that case I am very much afraid that you would be shot.”

“I have not a doubt of it. Nevertheless, your proposal pleases me, and I shall do my best to carry out your wishes.”

Whereupon Senor Morena expressed his thanks in sonorous Castilian, protested that my courage and devotion would earn me the eternal gratitude of every patriot, and promised to have everything ready for me in the course of the week, a promise which he faithfully kept.

Three days later Morena brought me a packet of letters and a memorandum containing minute instructions for my guidance. Nothing could be more harmless looking than the letters. They contained merely a few items of general news and the recommendation of the bearer to the good offices of the recipient. But this was only a blind; the real letters were written in cipher, with sympathetic ink. They were, moreover, addressed to secret friends of the revolutionary cause, who, as Senor Morena believed and hoped, were, as yet, unsuspected by the Spanish authorities, and at large.

“To give you letters to known patriots would be simply to insure your destruction,” said the senor, “even if you were to find them alive and at liberty.”

I had also Don Alberto’s letter, and as the old gentleman had once been president of the *Audiencia Real* (Royal Council), Morena thought it would be of great use to me, and serve to ward off suspicion, even though some of the friends to whom he had himself written should have meanwhile got into trouble.

But as if he had not complete confidence in the efficacy of these elaborate precautions, Senor Morena strongly advised me to stay no longer in Caracas than I could possibly help.

“Spies more vigilant than those of the Inquisition are continually on the lookout for victims,” he said. “An inadvertent word, a look even, might betray you; the only law is the will of the military and police, and they make very short work of those whom they suspect. Yes, leave Caracas the moment you have delivered your letters; our friends will smuggle you through the Spanish line and lead you to one of the patriot camps.”

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This was not very encouraging; but I was at an adventurous age and in an enterprising mood, and the creole's warnings had rather the effect of increasing my desire to go forward with the undertaking in which I had engaged than causing me to falter in my resolve. Like Napoleon, I believed in my star, and I had faced death too often on the field of battle to fear the rather remote dangers Morena had foreshadowed, and in whose existence I only half believed.

The die being cast, the next question was how I should reach my destination. The Spaniards of that age kept the trade with their colonies in their own hands, and it was seldom, indeed, that a ship sailed from the Thames for La Guayra or any other port on the Main. I was, however, lucky enough to find a vessel in the river taking in cargo for the island of Curacoa, which had just been ceded by England to the Dutch, from whom it was captured in 1807, and for a reasonable consideration the master agreed to fit me up a cabin and give me a passage.

The voyage was rather long—something like fifty days—yet not altogether uneventful; for in the course of it we were chased by an American privateer, overhauled by a Spanish cruiser, nearly caught by a pirate, and almost swamped in a hurricane; but we fortunately escaped these and all other dangers, and eventually reached our haven in safety.

I had brought with me letters of credit on a Dutch merchant at Curacoa, of the name of Van Voorst, from whom I obtained as much coin as I thought would cover my expenses for a few months, and left the balance in his hands on deposit. With the help of this gentleman, moreover, I chartered a *falucha* for the voyage to La Guayra. Also at his suggestion, moreover, I stitched several gold pieces in the lining of my vest and the waistband of my trousers, as a reserve in case of accident.

We made the run in twenty-four hours, and as the *falucha* let go in the roadstead I tore up my memorandum of instructions (which I had carefully committed to memory) and threw the fragments into the sea.

A little later we were boarded by two revenue officers, who seemed more surprised than pleased to see me; as, however, my papers were in perfect order, and nothing either compromising or contraband was found in my possession, they allowed me to land, and I thought that my troubles (for the present) were over. But I had not been ashore many minutes when I was met by a sergeant and a file of soldiers, who asked me politely, yet firmly, to accompany them to the commandant of the garrison.

I complied, of course, and was conducted to the barracks, where I found the gentleman in question lolling in a *chinchura* (hammock) and smoking a cigar. He eyed me with great suspicion, and after examining my passport, demanded my business, and wanted to know why I had taken it into my head to visit Colombia at a time when the country was being convulsed with civil war.

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Thinking it best to answer frankly (with one or two reservations), I said that, having heard much of South America while campaigning in Spain, I had made up my mind to voyage thither on the first opportunity.

“What! you have served in Spain, in the army of Lord Wellington!” interposed the commandant with great vivacity.

“Yes; I joined shortly before the battle of Salamanca, where I was wounded. I was also at Vittoria, and—”

“So was I. I commanded a regiment in Murillo’s *corps d’armee*, and have come out with him to Colombia. We are brothers in arms. We have both bled in the sacred cause of Spanish independence. Let me embrace you.”

Whereupon the commandant, springing from his hammock, put his arms round my neck and his head on my shoulders, patted me on the back, and kissed me on both cheeks, a salute which I thought it expedient to return, though his face was not overclean and he smelled abominably of garlic and stale tobacco.

“So you have come to see South America—only to see it!” he said. “But perhaps you are scientific; you have the intention to explore the country and write a book, like the illustrious Humboldt?”

The idea was useful. I modestly admitted that I did cultivate a little science, and allowed my “brother-in-arms” to remain in the belief that I proposed to follow in the footsteps of the author of “Cosmos”—at a distance.

“I have an immense respect for science,” continued the commandant, “and I doubt not that you will write a book which will make you famous. My only regret is, that in the present state of the country you may find going about rather difficult. But it won’t be for long. We have well-nigh got this accursed rebellion under. A few weeks more, and there will not be a rebel left alive between the Andes and the Atlantic. The Captain-General of New Granada reports that he has either shot or hanged every known patriot in the province. We are doing the same here in Venezuela. We give no quarter; it is the only way with rebels. *Guerra a la muerte!*”

After this the commandant asked me to dinner, and insisted on my becoming his guest until the morrow, when he would provide me with mules for myself and my baggage, and give me an escort to Caracas, and letter of introduction to one of his friends there. So great was his kindness, indeed, that only the ferocious sentiments which he had avowed in respect of the rebels reconciled me to the deception which I was compelled to practise. I accepted his hospitality and his offer of mules and an escort, and the next morning I set out on the first stage of my inland journey. Before parting he expressed a hope—which I deemed it prudent to reciprocate—that we should meet again.

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Nothing can be finer than the ride to Caracas by the old Spanish road, or more superb than its position in a magnificent valley, watered by four rivers, surrounded by a rampart of lofty mountains, and enjoying, by reason of its altitude, a climate of perpetual spring. But the city itself wore an aspect of gloom and desolation. Four years previously the ground on which it stood had been torn and rent by a succession of terrible earthquakes in which hundreds of houses were levelled with the earth, and thousands of its people bereft of their lives. Since that time two sieges, and wholesale proscription and executions, first by one side and then by the other, had well-nigh completed its destruction. Its principal buildings were still in ruins, and half its population had either perished or fled. Nearly every civilian whom I met in the streets was in mourning. Even the Royalists (who were more numerous than I expected) looked unhappy, for all had suffered either in person or in property, and none knew what further woes the future might bring them.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE KING'S NAME.

I put up at the Posado de los Generales (recommended by the commandant), and the day after my arrival I delivered the letters confided to me by Senor Moreno. This done, I felt safe; for (as I thought) there was nothing else in my possession by which I could possibly be compromised. I did not deliver the letters separately. I gave the packet, just as I had received it, to a certain Senor Carera, the secret chief of the patriot party in Caracas. I also gave him a long verbal message from Moreno, and we discussed at length the condition of the country and the prospects of the insurrection. In the interior, he said, there raged a frightful guerilla warfare, and Caracas was under a veritable reign of terror. Of the half-dozen friends for whom I had brought letters, one had been garroted; another was in prison, and would almost certainly meet the same fate. It was only by posing as a loyalist and exercising the utmost circumspection that he had so far succeeded in keeping a whole skin; and if he were not convinced that he could do more for the cause where he was than elsewhere, he would not remain in the city another hour. As for myself, he was quite of Moreno's opinion, that the sooner I got away the better.

"I consider it my duty to watch over your safety," he said. "I should be sorry indeed were any harm to befall an English caballero who has risked his life to serve us and brought us such good news."

"What harm can befall me, now that I have got rid of that packet?" I asked.

"In a city under martial law and full of spies, there is no telling what may happen. Being, moreover, a stranger, you are a marked man. It is not everybody who, like the commandant of La Guayra, will believe that you are travelling for your own pleasure.

What man in his senses would choose a time like this for a scientific ramble in Venezuela?”

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And then Senor Carera explained that he could arrange for me to leave Caracas almost immediately, under excellent guidance. The *teniente* of Colonel Mejia, one of the guerilla leaders, was in the town on a secret errand, and would set out on his return journey in three days. If I liked I might go with him, and I could not have a better guide or a more trustworthy companion.

It was a chance not to be lost. I told Senor Carera that I should only be too glad to profit by the opportunity, and that on any day and at any hour which he might name I would be ready.

“I will see the *teniente*, and let you know further in the course of to-morrow,” said Carera, after a moment’s thought. “The affair will require nice management. There are patrols on every road. You must be well mounted, and I suppose you will want a mule for your baggage.”

“No! I shall take no more than I can carry in my saddle-bags. We must not be incumbered with pack-mules on an expedition of this sort. We may have to ride for our lives.”

“You are quite right, Senor Fortescue; so you may. I will see that you are well mounted, and I shall be delighted to take charge of your belongings until the patriots again, and for the last time, capture Caracas and drive those thrice-accursed Spaniards into the sea.”

Before we separated I invited Senor Carera to *almuerzo* (the equivalent to the Continental second breakfast) on the following day.

After a moment’s reflection he accepted the invitation. “But we shall have to be very cautious,” he added. “The *posada* is a Royalist house, and the *posadero* (innkeeper) is hand and glove with the police. If we speak of the patriots at all, it must be only to abuse them.... But our turn will come, and—*por Dios!*—then—”

The fierce light in Carera’s eyes, the gesture by which his words were emphasized, boded no good for the Royalists if the patriots should get the upper hand. No wonder that a war in which men like him were engaged on the one side, and men like el Commandant Castro on the other, should be savage, merciless, and “to the death.”

As I had decided to quit Caracas so soon, it did not seem worth while presenting the letter to one of his brother officers which I had received from Commandant Castro. I thought, too, that in existing circumstances the less I had to do with officers the better. But I did not like the idea of going away without fulfilling my promise to call on Zamorra’s old friend, Don Senor Ulloa.

So when I returned to the *posada* I asked the *posadero* (innkeeper), a tall Biscayan, with an immensely long nose, a cringing manner, and an insincere smile, if he would kindly direct me to Senor Ulloa's house.

"*Si, senor*," said the *posadero*, giving me a queer look, and exchanging significant glances with two or three of his guests who were within earshot. "*Si, senor*, I can direct you to the house of Senor Ulloa. You mean Don Simon, of course?"

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“Yes. I have a letter of introduction to him.”

“Oh, you have a letter of introduction to Don Simon! if you will come into the street I will show you the way.”

Whereupon we went outside, and the *posadero*, pointing out the church of San Ildefonso, told me that the large house over against the eastern door was the house I sought.

“*Gracias, senor*,” I said, as I started on my errand, taking the shady side of the street and walking slowly, for the day was warm.

I walked slowly and thought deeply, trying to make out what could be the meaning of the glances which the mention of Senor Ulloa’s name had evoked, and there was a nameless something in the *posadero’s* manner I did not like. Besides being cringing, as usual, it was half mocking, half menacing, as if I had said, or he had heard, something that placed me in his power.

Yet what could he have heard? What could there be in the name of Ulloa to either excite his enmity or rouse his suspicion? As a man in authority, and the particular friend of an ex-president of the *Audiencia Real*, Don Simon must needs be above reproach.

Should I turn back and ask the *posadero* what he meant? No, that were both weak and impolitic. He would either answer me with a lie, or refuse to answer at all, *qui s’excuse s’accuse*. I resolved to go on, and see what came of it. Don Simon would no doubt be able to enlighten me.

I found the place without difficulty. There could be no mistaking it—a large house over against the eastern door of the church of San Ildefonso, built round a *patio*, or courtyard, after the fashion of Spanish and South American mansions. Like the church, it seemed to have been much damaged by the earthquake; the outer walls were cracked, and the gateway was encumbered with fallen stones.

This surprised me less than may be supposed. Creoles are not remarkable for energy, and it was quite possible that Senor Ulloa’s fortunes might have suffered as severely from the war as his house had suffered from the earthquake. But when I entered the *patio* I was more than surprised. The only visible signs of life were lizards, darting in and out of their holes, and a huge rattlesnake sunning himself on the ledge of a broken fountain. Grass was growing between the stones; rotten doors hung on rusty hinges; there were great gaps in the roof and huge fissures in the walls, and when I called no one answered.

“Surely,” I thought, “I have made some mistake. This house is both deserted and ruined.”

I returned to the street and accosted a passer-by.

“Is this the house of Don Simon Ulloa?” I asked him.

“*Si, Senor*,” he said; and then hurried on as if my question had half-frightened him out of his wits.

I could not tell what to make of this; but my first idea was that Senor Ulloa was dead, and the house had the reputation of being haunted. In any case, the innkeeper had evidently played me a scurvy trick, and I went back to the *posada* with the full intention of having it out with him.

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“Did you find the house of Don Simon, Senor Fortescue?” he asked when he saw me.

“Yes, but I did not find him. The house is empty and deserted. What do you mean by sending me on such a fool’s errand?”

“I beg your pardon, senor. You asked me to direct you to Senor Ulloa’s house, and I did so. What could I do more?” And the fellow cringed and smirked, as if it were all a capital joke, till I could hardly refrain from pulling his long nose first and kicking him afterwards, but I listened to the voice of prudence and resisted the impulse.

“You know quite well that I sought Senor Ulloa. Did I not tell you that I had a letter for him? If you were a caballero instead of a wretched *posadero*, I would chastise your trickery as it deserves. What has become of Senor Ulloa, and how comes it that his house is deserted?”

“Senor Ulloa is dead. He was garroted.”

“Garroted! What for?”

“Treason. There was discovered a compromising correspondence between him and Bolivar. But why ask me? As a friend of Senor Ulloa, you surely know all this?”

“I never was a friend of his—never even saw him! I had merely a letter to him from a common friend. But how happened it that Senor Ulloa, who, I believe, was a *correjidor*, entered into a correspondence with the arch-traitor?”

“That made it all the worse. He richly deserved his fate. His eldest son, who was privy to the affair, was strangled at the same time as his father; his other children fled, and Senora Ulloa died of grief.”

“Poor woman! No wonder the house is deserted. What a frightful state of things!”

And then, feeling that I had said enough, and fearing that I might say more, I turned on my heel, lighted a cigar, and, while I paced to and fro in the *patio*, seriously considered my position, which, as I clearly perceived, was beginning to be rather precarious.

As likely as not the innkeeper would denounce me, and then it would, of course, be very absurd, for I was utterly ignorant, and Zamorra, a Royalist to the bone, must have been equally ignorant that his friend Ulloa had any hand in the rebellion. The mere fact of carrying a harmless letter of introduction from a well-known loyalist to a friend whom he believed to be still a loyalist, could surely not be construed as an offense. At any rate it ought not to be. But when I recalled all I had heard from Morena, and the stories told me but an hour before by Carera, I thought it extremely probable that it would be, and bitterly regretted that I had not mentioned to the latter Ulloa’s name. He would have put me on my guard, and I should not have so fatally committed myself with the *posadero*.

But regrets are useless and worse. They waste time and weaken resolve. The question of the moment was, What should I do? How avoid the danger which I felt sure was impending? There seemed only one way—immediate flight. I would go to Carera, tell him all that had happened, and ask him to arrange for my departure from Caracas that very night. I could steal away unseen when all was quiet.

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“At once,” I said to myself—“at once. If I exaggerate, if the danger be not so pressing as I fear, he is just the man to tell me; but, first of all, I will go into my room and destroy this confounded letter. The *posadero* did not see it. All that he can say is—”

“In the king’s name!” exclaimed a rough voice behind me; and a heavy hand was laid on my arm.

Turning sharply round, I found myself confronted by an officer of police and four alguazils, all armed to the teeth.

“I arrest you in the king’s name,” repeated the officer.

“On what charge?” I asked.

“Treason. Giving aid and comfort to the king’s enemies, and acting as a medium of communication between rebels against his authority.”

“Very well; I am ready to accompany you,” I said, seeing that, for the moment at least, resistance and escape were equally out of the question; “but the charge is false.”

“That I have nothing to do with. The case is one for the military tribunal. Before we go I must search your room.”

He did so, and, except my passport, found nothing whatever of a documentary, much less of a compromising character. He then searched me, and took possession of Zamorra’s unlucky letter to Ulloa and my memorandum-book, in which, however, there were merely a few commonplace notes and scientific jottings.

This done he placed two of his alguazils on either side of me, telling them to run me through with their bayonets if I attempted to escape, and then, drawing his sword and bringing up the rear, gave the order to march.

As we passed through the gateway I caught sight of the *posadero*, laughing consumedly, and pointing at me the finger of scorn and triumph. How sorry I felt that I had not kicked him when I was in the humor and had the opportunity!

CHAPTER IX.

DOOMED TO DIE.

My captors conducted me to a dilapidated building near the Plaza Major, which did duty as a temporary jail, the principal prison of Caracas having been destroyed by the earthquake and left as it fell. Nevertheless, the room to which I was taken seemed quite strong enough to hold anybody unsupplied with housebreaking implements or less

ingenious than Jack Sheppard. The door was thick and well bolted, the window or grating (for it was, of course, destitute of glass) high and heavily barred, yet not too high to be reached with a little contrivance. Mounting the single chair (beside a hammock the only furniture the room contained), I gripped the bars with my hands, raised myself up, and looked out. Below me was a narrow, and, as it might appear, a little-frequented street, at the end of which a sentry was doing his monotonous spell of duty.

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The place was evidently well guarded, and from the number of soldiers whom I had seen about the gateway and in the *patio*, I concluded that, besides serving as a jail, it was used also as a military post. Even though I might get out, I should not find it very easy to get away. And what were my chances of getting out? As yet they seemed exceedingly remote. The only possible exits were the door and the window. The door was both locked and bolted, and either to open or make an opening in it I should want a brace and bit and a saw, and several hours freedom from intrusion. It would be easier to cut the bars—if I possessed a file or a suitable saw. I had my knife, and with time and patience I might possibly fashion a tool that would answer the purpose.

But time was just what I might not be able to command. I had heard that the sole merit of the military tribunal was its promptitude; it never kept its victims long in suspense; they were either quickly released or as quickly despatched—the latter being the alternative most generally adopted. It was for this reason that, the moment I was arrested, I began to think how I could escape. As neither opening the door nor breaking the bars seemed immediately feasible, the idea of bribing the turnkey naturally occurred to me. Thanks to the precaution suggested by Mr. Van Voorst, I had several gold pieces in my belt. But though the fellow would no doubt accept my money, what security had I that he would keep his word? And how, even if he were to leave the door open, should I evade the vigilance of the sentries and the soldiers who were always loitering in the *patio*?

On the whole, I thought the best thing I could do was to wait quietly until the morrow. The night is often fruitful in ideas. I might be acquitted, after all, and if I attempted to bribe the turnkey before my examination, and he should betray me to his superiors, my condemnation would be a foregone conclusion. The mere attempt would be regarded as an admission of guilt.

A while later, the zambo turnkey (half Indian, half negro) brought me my evening meal—a loaf of bread and a small bottle of wine—and I studied his countenance closely. It was both treacherous and truculent, and I felt that if I trusted him he would be sure to play me false.

As it was near sunset I asked for a light, and tried to engage him in conversation. But the attempt failed. He answered surlily, that a dark room was quite good enough for a damned rebel, and left me to myself.

When it became too dark to walk about, I lay down in the hammock and was soon in the land of dreams; for I was young and sanguine, and though I could not help feeling somewhat anxious, it was not the sort of anxiety which kills sleep. Only once in my life have I tasted the agony of despair. That time was not yet.

When I awoke the clock of a neighboring church was striking three, and the rays of a brilliant tropical moon were streaming through the barred window of my room, making it hardly less light than day.

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As the echo of the last stroke dies away, I fancy that I hear something strike against the grating.

I rise up in my hammock, listening intently, and at the same instant a small shower of pebbles, flung by an unseen hand, falls into the room.

A signal!

Yes, and a signal that demands an answer. In less time than it takes to tell I slip from my hammock, gather up the pebbles, climb up to the window, and drop them into the street. Then, looking out, I can just discern, deep in the shadow of the building opposite, the figure of a man. He raises his arm; something white flies over my head and falls on the floor. Dropping hurriedly from the grating, I pick up the message-bearing missile—a pebble to which is tied a piece of paper. I can see that the paper contains writing, and climbing a second time up to the grating, I make out by the light of the moonbeams the words:

"*If you are condemned, ask for a priest.*"

My first feeling was one of bitter disappointment. Why should I ask for a priest? I was not a Roman Catholic; I did not want to confess. If the author of the missive was Carera—and who else could it be?—why had he given himself so much trouble to make so unpleasantly suggestive a recommendation? A priest, forsooth! A file and a cord would be much more to the purpose.... But might not the words mean more than appeared? Could it be that Carera desired to give me a friendly hint to prepare for the worst?... Or was it possible that the ghostly man would bring me a further message and help me in some way to escape? At any rate, it was a more encouraging theory than the other, and I resolved to act on it. If the priest did me no good, he could, at least, do me no harm.

After tearing up the bit of paper and chewing the fragments, I returned to my hammock and lay awake—sleep being now out of the question—until the turnkey brought me a cup of chocolate, of which, with the remains of the loaf, I made my first breakfast. About the middle of the day he brought me something more substantial. On both occasions I pressed him with questions as to when I was to be examined, and what they were going to do with me, to all of which he answered "*No se*" ("I don't know"), and, probably enough, he told the truth. However, I was not kept long in suspense. Later on in the afternoon the door opened for the third time, and the officer who had arrested me, followed by his alguazils, appeared at the threshold and announced that he had been ordered to escort me to the tribunal.

We went in the same order as before; and a walk of less than fifteen minutes brought us to another tumble-down building, which appeared to have been once a court-house. Only the lower rooms were habitable, and at a door, on either side of which stood a sentry, my conductor respectfully knocked.

"*Adelante!*" said a rough voice; and we entered accordingly.

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Before a long table at the upper end of a large, barely-furnished room, with rough walls and a cracked ceiling, sat three men in uniform. The one who occupied the chief seat, and seemed to be the president, was old and gray, with hard, suspicious eyes, and a long, typical Spanish face, in every line of which I read cruelty and ruthless determination. His colleagues, who called him “marquis,” treated him with great deference, and his breast was covered with orders.

It was evident that on this man would depend my fate. The others were there merely to register his decrees.

After leading me to the table and saluting the tribunal, the officer of police, whose sword was still drawn, placed himself in a convenient position for running me through, in the event of my behaving disrespectfully to the tribunal or attempting to escape.

The president, who had before him the letter to Senor Ulloa, my passport, and a document that looked like a brief, demanded my name and quality.

I told him.

“What was your purpose in coming to Caracas?” he asked.

“Simply to see the country.”

He laughed scornfully.

“To see the country! What nonsense is this? How can anybody see a country which is ravaged by brigands and convulsed with civil war? And where is your authority?”

“My passport.”

“A passport such as this is only available in a time of peace. No stranger unprovided with a safe conduct from the *capitan-general* is allowed to travel in the province of Caracas. It is useless trying to deceive us, senor. Your purpose is to carry information to the rebels, probably to join them, as is proved by your possession of a letter to so base a traitor as Senor Ulloa.”

On this I explained how I had obtained the letter, and pointed out that the very fact of my asking the *posadero* to direct me to Ulloa’s house, and going thither openly, was proof positive of my innocence. Had my purpose been that which he imputed to me, I should have shown more caution.

“That does not at all follow,” rejoined the president. “You may have intended to disarm suspicion by a pretence of ignorance. Moreover, you expressed to the *senor posadero* sentiments hostile to the Government of his Majesty the King.”

“It is untrue. I did nothing of the sort,” I exclaimed, impetuously.

“Mind what you say, prisoner. Unless you treat the tribunal with due respect you shall be sent back to the *carcel* and tried in your absence.”

“Do you call this a trial?” I exclaimed, indignantly. “I am a British subject. I have committed no offence; but if I must be tried I demand the right of being tried by a civil tribunal.”

“British subjects who venture into a city under martial law must take the consequences. We can show them no more consideration than we show Spanish subjects. They deserve much less, indeed. At this moment a force is being organized in England, with the sanction and encouragement of the British Government, to serve against our troops in these colonies. This is an act of war, and if the king, my master, were of my mind, he would declare war against England. Better an open foe than a treacherous friend. Do you hold a commission in the Legion, senor?”

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“No.”

“Know you anybody who does?”

“Yes; I believe that several men with whom I served in Spain have accepted commissions. But you will surely not hold me responsible for the doings of others?”

“Not at all. You have quite enough sins of your own to answer for. You may not actually hold a commission in this force of filibusters, but you are acquainted with people who do; and from your own admission and facts that have come to our knowledge, we believe that you are acting as an intermediary between the rebels in this country and their agents in England. It is an insult to our understanding to tell us that you have come here out of idle curiosity. You have come to spy out the nakedness of the land, and being a soldier you know how spies are dealt with.”

Here the president held a whispered consultation with his colleagues. Then he turned to me, and continued:

“We are of opinion that the charges against you have been fully made out, and the sentence of the court is that you be strangled on the Plaza Major to-morrow morning at seven by the clock.”

“Strangled! Surely, senores, you will not commit so great an infamy? This is a mere mockery of a trial. I have neither seen an indictment nor been confronted by witnesses. Call this a sentence! I call it murder.”

“If you do not moderate your language, prisoner, you will be strangled to-night instead of to-morrow. Remove him, *capitan*”—to the officer of police. “Let this be your warrant”—-writing.

“Grant me at least one favor,” I asked, smothering my indignation, and trying to speak calmly. “I have fought and bled for Spain. Let me at least die a soldier’s death, and allow me before I die to see a priest.”

“So you are a Christian!” returned the president, almost graciously. “I thought all Englishmen were heretics. I think senores, we may grant Senor Fortescue’s request. Instead of being strangled, you shall be shot by a firing party of the regiment of Cordova, and you may see a priest. We would not have you die unshriven, and I will myself see that your body is laid in consecrated ground. When would you like the priest to visit you?”

“This evening, senor president. There will not be much time to-morrow morning.”

“That is true. See to it, *capitan*. Tell them at the *carcel* that Senor Fortescue may see a priest in his own room this evening. *Adios senor!*”

And with that my three judges rose from their seats and bowed as politely as if they were parting with an honored guest. Though this proceeding struck me as being both ghastly and grotesque, I returned the greeting in due form, and made my best bow. I learned afterward that I had really been treated with exceptional consideration, and might esteem myself fortunate in not being condemned without trial and strangled without notice.

CHAPTER X.

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SALVADOR.

Now that I knew beyond a doubt what would be my fate unless I could escape before morning, I became decidedly anxious as to the outcome of my approaching interview with the ghostly comforter for whom I had asked. It was my last chance. If it failed me, or the man turned out to be a priest and nothing more, my hours were numbered. The time was too short to arrange any other plan. Would he bring with him a file and a cord? Even if he did, we could hardly hope to cut through the bars before daylight. And, most important consideration of all, how would Carera contrive to send me the right man?

The mystery was solved more quickly than I expected.

After leaving the tribunal, my escort took me back by the way we had come, the police captain, who was showing himself much more friendly (probably because he looked on me as a good "Christian" and a dying man), walking beside instead of behind me; and when we were within a hundred yards or so of the *carcel* I observed a Franciscan friar pacing slowly toward us.

I felt intuitively that this was my man; and when he drew nearer a slight movement of his eyebrows and a quick look of intelligence told me that I was right.

"I have no acquaintance among the clergy of Caracas," I said to my conductor. "This friar will serve my purpose as well as a regular priest."

"As you like, senor. Shall I ask him to see you?"

"*Gracias senor capitan*, if you please."

Whereupon the officer respectfully accosted the friar, and after telling him that I had been condemned to die at sunrise on the morrow, asked if he would receive my confession and give me such religious consolation as my case required.

"*Con mucho gusto, capitan*," answered the friar. "When would the senor like me to visit him?"

"At once, father. My hours are numbered, and I would fain spend the night in meditation and prayer."

"Come with us, father," said the captain. "The senor has the permission of the tribunal to see a priest in his own room."

So we entered the prison together, and the captain, having given the necessary instructions to the turnkey, we were conducted to my room.

“When you have done,” he said, “knock at the door, and I will come and let you out.”

“Good! But you need not wait. I shall not be ready for half an hour or more.”

As the key turned in the lock, the *soi-disant* friar threw back his cowl. “Now, Senor Fortescue,” he said, with a laugh, “I am ready to hear your confession.”

“I confess that I feel as if I were in purgatory already, and I shall be uncommonly glad if you can get me out of it.”

“Well, purgatory is not the pleasantest of places by all accounts, and I am quite willing to do whatever I can for you. By way of beginning, take this ointment and smear your face and hands therewith.”

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“Why?”

“To make you look swart and ugly, like the zambo.”

“And then?”

“And then? When the turnkey comes back we shall overpower, bind, and gag him—if he resists, strangle him. Then you will put on his clothes and don his sombrero, and as the moon rises late, and the prison is badly lighted, I have no doubt we shall run the gauntlet of the guard without difficulty.... That is a splendid ointment. You are almost as dark as a negro. Now for your feet.”

“My feet! I see! I must go out barefoot.”

“Of course. Who ever heard of a zambo turnkey wearing shoes? I will hide yours under my habit, and you can put them on afterward.”

“You are a friend of Carera’s, of course?”

“Yes; I am Salvador Carmen, the *teniente* of Colonel Mejia, at your service.”

“Salvador Carmen! A name of good omen. You are saving me.”

“I will either save you or perish with you. Take this dagger. Better to die fighting than be strangled on the plaza.”

“Is this your plan or Carera’s?” I asked, as I put the dagger in my belt.

“Partly his and partly mine, I think. When he heard of your arrest, he said that it concerned our honor to effect your rescue. The idea of throwing a stone through the window was Carera’s; that of personating a priest was mine.”

“But how did Carera find out where I was? and what assurance had you that when I asked for a priest they would bring you?”

“That was easy enough. This is a small military post as well as an occasional prison, some of the soldiers are always drinking at the *pulperia* round the corner, and they talk in their cups. I even know the countersign for to-night. It is ‘Baylen.’ I saw them take you to the tribunal, and as I knew that when you asked for a priest they would call in the first whom they saw, just to save themselves the trouble of going farther, I took care to be hereabout in this guise as you returned. I was fortunate enough to meet you face to face, and you were sharp enough to detect my true character at a glance.”

“I am greatly indebted to you and Senor Carera—more than I can say. You are risking your lives to save mine.”

“That is nothing, my dear sir. I often risk my life twenty times in a day. And what matters it? We are all under sentence of death. A few years and there will be an end of us.”

Salvador Carmen may have been twenty-six or twenty-eight years old. He was of middle height and athletic build, yet wiry withal, in splendid condition, and as hard as nails. Though darker than the average Spaniard, his short, wavy hair and powerful, clear-cut features showed that his blood was free from negro or Indian taint. His face bespoke a strange mixture of gentleness and resolution, melancholy and ferocity, as if an originally fine nature had been annealed by fiery trials, and perhaps perverted by some terrible wrong.

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“Yes, senor, we carry our lives in our hands in this most unhappy country,” he continued, after a short pause. “Three years ago I was one of a family of eight, and no happier family could be found in the whole *capitanio-general* of Caracas.... Of those eight, seven are gone; I am the only one left. Four were killed in the great earthquake. Then my father took part in the revolutionary movement, and to save his life had to leave his home. One night he returned in disguise to see my mother. I happened to be away at the time; but my brother Tomas was there, and the police getting wind of my father’s arrival, arrested both them and him. My father was condemned as a rebel; my mother and brother were condemned for harboring him, and all were strangled together on the plaza there.”

“Good heaven! Can such things be?” I said, as much moved by his grief as by his tale of horror.

“I saw them die. Oh, my God! I saw them die, and yet I live to tell the tale!” exclaimed Carmen, in a tone of intense sadness. “But”—fiercely—“I have taken a terrible revenge. With my own hand have I slain more than a hundred European Spaniards, and I have sworn to slay as many as there were hairs on my mother’s head.... But enough of this! The night is upon us. It is time to make ready. When the zambo comes in, I shall seize him by the throat and threaten him with my dagger. While I hold him you must stuff this cloth into his mouth, take off his shirt and trousers—he has no other garments—and put them on over your own. That done, we will bind him with this cord, and lock him in with his own key. Are you ready?”

“I am ready.”

Carmen knocked loudly at the door.

Two minutes later the door opens, and as the zambo closes it behind him, Carmen seizes him by the throat and pushes him against the wall.

“A word, a whisper, and you are a dead man!” he hisses, sternly, at the same time drawing his dagger. “Open your mouth, or, *per Dios*—The cloth, senor. Now, off with your shirt and trousers.”

The turnkey obeys without the least attempt at resistance. The shaking of his limbs as I help him to undress shows that he is half frightened to death.

Then Carmen, still gripping the man’s throat and threatening him with his dagger, makes him lie down, and I bind his arms with the cord.

That done, I slip the man’s trousers and shirt over my own, don his sombrero, and take his key.

“So far, well,” says Carmen, “if we only get safely through the *patio* and pass the guard! Put the sombrero over your face, imitate the zambo’s shuffling gait, and walk carelessly by my side, as if you were conducting me to the gate and a short way down the street. Have you your dagger! Good! Open the door and let us go forth. One word more! If it comes to a fight, back to back. Try to grasp the muskets with your left and stab with your right—upward!”

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CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF THE LION'S MOUTH.

As the short sunset of the tropics had now merged into complete darkness, we crossed the *patio* without being noticed; but near the gateway several soldiers of the guard were seated round a small table, playing at cards by the light of a flickering lamp.

"Hello! Who goes there?" said one of them, looking up. "Pablo, the turnkey, and a friar! Won't you take a hand, Pablo? You won a *real* from me last night; I want my revenge."

"He is going with me as far as the plaza. It is dark, and I am very near-sighted," put in Carmen, with ready presence of mind. "He will be back in a few minutes, and then he will give you your revenge, won't you, Pablo?"

"*Si, padre, con mucho gusto*," I answered, mimicking the deep guttural of the zambo.

"Good! I shall expect you in a few minutes," said the soldier. "*Buene noche, padre!*"

"Good-night, my son."

"Now for the sentry," murmured Carmen; "luckily we have the password, otherwise it might be awkward."

"We must try to slip past him."

But it was not to be. As we step through the gateway into the street, the man turns right about face and we are seen.

"*Halte! Quien vive?*" he cried.

"Friends."

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign."

"As you see, I am a friar. I have been shriving a condemned prisoner. You surely do not expect me to give the countersign!" said Carmen, going close up to him.

"Certainly not, *padre*. But who is that with you?"

"Pablo, the turnkey."

"Advance and give the countersign, Pablo."

"Baylen."

“Wrong; it has been changed within the last ten minutes. You must go back and get it, friend Pablo.”

“It is not worth the trouble. He is only seeing me to the end of the street,” pleaded Carmen.

“I shall not let him go another step without the countersign,” returned the sentry, doggedly. “I am not sure that I ought to let you go either, father. He has only to ask—”

A sudden movement of Carmen’s arm, a gleam of steel in the darkness, the soldier’s musket falls from his grasp, and with a deep groan he sinks heavily on the ground.

“Quick, senor, or we shall be taken! Round the corner! We must not run; that would attract attention. A sharp walk. Good! Keep close to the wall. Two minutes more and we shall be safe. A narrow escape! If the sentry had made you go back or called the guard, all would have been lost.”

“How was it? Did you stab him?”

“To the heart. He has mounted guard for the last time. So much the better. It is an enemy and a Spaniard the less.”

“All the same, Senor Carmen, I would rather kill my enemies in fair fight than in cold blood.”

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“I also; but there are occasions. As likely as not this soldier would have been in the firing party told off to shoot you to-morrow morning. There would not have been much fair fight in that. And had I not killed him, we should both have been tried by drum-head court-martial, and shot or strangled to-night. This way. Now, I defy them to catch us.”

As he spoke, Carmen plunged into a heap of ruins by the wayside, with the intricacies of which, despite the darkness, he appeared to be quite familiar.

“Nobody will disturb us here,” he said at length, pausing under the shadow of a broken wall. “These are the ruins of the Church of Alta Gracia, which, in its fall during the great earthquake, killed several hundred worshippers. People say they are haunted; after dark nobody will come near them. But we must not stay many minutes. Take off the zambo’s shirt and trousers, and put on your shoes and stockings—there they are—and I shall doff my cloak of religion.”

“What next?”

“We must make off with all speed and by devious ways—though I think we have quite thrown our pursuers off the scent—to a house in the outskirts belonging to a friend of the cause, where we shall find horses, and start for the llanos before the moon rises, and the hue and cry can be raised.”

“What is the journey?”

“That depends on circumstances. Four or five days, perhaps. *Vamanos!* Time presses.”

We left the ruins at the side opposite to that at which we had entered them, and after traversing several by-streets and narrow lanes reached the open country, and walked on rapidly till we came to a lonesome house in a large garden.

Carmen went up to the door, whistled softly, and knocked thrice.

“Who is there?” asked a voice from within.

“Salvador.”

On this the gate of the *patio*, wide enough to admit a man on horseback, was thrown open, and the next moment I was in the arms of Senor Carera.

“Out of the lion’s mouth!” he exclaimed, as he kissed me on both cheeks. “I was dying of anxiety. But, thank Heaven and the Holy Virgin, you are safe.”

“I have also to thank you and Senor Carmen; and I do thank you with all my heart.”

“Say no more. We could not have done less. You were our guest. You rendered us a great service. Had we let you perish without an effort to save you, we should have been eternally disgraced. But come in and refresh yourselves. Your stay here must be brief, and we can talk while we eat.”

As we sat at table, Carmen told the story of my rescue.

“It was well done,” said our host, thoughtfully, “very well done. Yet I regret you had to kill the sentry. But for that you might have had a little sleep, and started after midnight. As it is, you must set off forthwith and get well on the road before the news of the escape gets noised abroad. And everything is ready. All your things are here, Senor Fortescue. You can select what you want for the journey and leave the rest in my charge.”

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“All my things here! How did you manage that, Senor Carera?”

“By sending a man, whom I could trust, in the character of a messenger from the prison with a note to the *posadero*, as from you, asking him to deliver your baggage and receipt your bill.”

“That was very good of you, Senor Carera. A thousand thanks. How much—”

“How much! That is my affair. You are my guest, remember. Your baggage is in the next room, and while you make your preparations, I will see to the saddling of the horses.”

A very few minutes sufficed to put on my riding boots, get my pistols, and make up my scanty kit. When I went outside, the horses were waiting in the *patio*, each of them held by a black groom. Everything was in order. A *cobija* was strapped behind either saddle, both of which were furnished with holsters and bags.

“I have had some *tasajo* (dried beef) put in the saddle-bags, as much as will keep you going three or four days,” said Senor Carera. “You won’t find many hotels on the road. And you will want a sword, Mr. Fortescue. Do me the favor to accept this as a souvenir of our friendship. It is a fine Toledo blade, with a history. An ancestor of mine wore it at the battle of Lepanto. It may bend but will never break, and has an edge like a razor. I give it to you to be used against my country’s enemies, and I am sure you will never draw it without cause, nor sheathe it without honor.”

I thanked my host warmly for his timely gift, and, as I buckled the historic weapon to my side, glanced at the horse which he had placed at my disposal. It was a beautiful flea-bitten gray, with a small, fiery head, arched neck, sloping shoulders, deep chest, powerful quarters, well-bent hocks, and “clean” shapely legs—a very model of a horse, and as it seemed, in perfect condition.

“Ah, you may look at Pizarro as long as you like, Senor Fortescue, and he is well worth looking at; but you will never tire him,” said Carera. “What will you do if you meet the patrol, Salvador?”

“Evade them if we can, charge them if we cannot.”

“By all means the former, if possible, and then you may not be pursued. And now, Senor, I trust you will not hold me wanting in hospitality if I urge you to mount; but your lives are in jeopardy, and there may be death in delay. Put out the lights, men, and open the gates. *Adios*, Senor Fortescue! *Adios*, my dear Salvador. We shall meet again in happier times. God guard you, and bring you safe to your journey’s end.”

And then we rode forth into the night.

“We had better take to the open country at once, and strike the road about a few miles farther on. It is rather risky, for we shall have to get over several rifts made by the earthquake and cross a stream with high banks. But if we take to the road straightway, we are almost sure to meet a patrol. We may meet one in any case; but the farther from the city the encounter takes place, the greater will be our chance of getting through.”

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“You know best. Lead on, and I will follow. Are these rifts you speak of wide?”

“They are easily jumpable by daylight; but how we shall do them in the dark, I don’t know. However, these horses are as nimble as cats, and almost as keen-sighted. I think, if we leave it to them, they will carry us safely over. The sky is a little clearer, too, and that will count in our favor. This way!”

We sped on as swiftly and silently as the spectre horseman of the story, for Venezuelan horses being unshod and their favorite pace a gliding run (much less fatiguing for horse and rider than the high trot of Europe) they move as noiselessly over grass as a man in slippers.

“Look out!” cried Carmen, reining in his horse. “We are not far from the first grip. Don’t you see something like a black streak running across the grass? That is it.”

“How wide, do you suppose?”

“Eight or ten feet. Don’t try to guide your horse. He won’t refuse. Let him have his head and take it in his own way. Go first; my horse likes a lead.”

Pizarro went to the edge of the rift, stretched out his head as if to measure the distance, and then, springing over as lightly as a deer, landed safely on the other side. The next moment Carmen was with me. After two or three more grips (all of unknown depth, and one smelling strongly of sulphur) had been surmounted in the same way, we came to the stream. The bank was so steep and slippery that the horses had to slide down it on their haunches (after the manner of South American horses). But having got in, we had to get out. This proved no easy task, and it was only after we had floundered in the brook for twenty minutes or more, that Carmen found a place where he thought it might be possible to make our exit. And such a place! We were forced to dismount, climb up almost on our hands and knees, and let the horses scramble after us as they best could.

“That is the last of our difficulties,” said Carmen, as we got into our saddles. “In ten minutes we strike the road, and then we shall have a free course for several hours.”

“How about the patrols? Do you think we have given them the slip?”

“I do. They don’t often come as far as this.”

We reached the road at a point where it was level with the fields; and a few miles farther on entered a defile, bounded on the left by a deep ravine, on the right by a rocky height.

And then there occurred a startling phenomenon. As the moon rose above the Silla of Caracas, the entire savanna below us seemed to take fire, streams as of lava began to

run up (not down) the sides of the hills, throwing a lurid glare over the sleeping city, and bringing into strong relief the rugged mountains which walled in the plain.

“Good heavens, what is that!” I exclaimed.

“It is the time of drought, and the peons are firing the grass to improve the land,” said Carmen. “I wish they had not done it just now, though. However, it is, perhaps, quite as well. If the light makes us more visible to others, it also makes others more visible to us. Hark! What is that? Did you not hear something?”

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“I did. The neighing of a horse. Halt! Let us listen.”

“The neighing of a horse and something more.”

“Men’s voices and the rattle of accoutrements. The patrol, after all. What shall we do? To turn back would be fatal. The ravine is too deep to descend. Climbing those rocks is out of the question. There is but one alternative—we must charge right through them.”

“How many men does a patrol generally consist of?”

“Sometimes two, sometimes four.”

“May it not be a squadron on the march?”

“It may. No matter. We must charge them, all the same. Better die sword in hand than be garroted on the plaza. We have one great advantage. We shall take these fellows by surprise. Let us wait here in the shade, and the moment they round that corner, go at them, full gallop.”

The words were scarcely spoken, when two dragoons came in sight, then two more.

“Four!” murmured Carmen. “The odds are not too great. We shall do it. Are you ready? Now!”

The dragoons, surprised by our sudden appearance, pulled up and stood stock-still, as if doubtful whether our intentions were hostile or friendly; and we were at them almost before they had drawn their swords.

As I charged the foremost Spaniard, his horse swerved from the road, and rolled with his rider into the ravine. The second, profiting by his comrade’s disaster, gave us the slip and galloped toward Caracas. This left us face to face with the other two, and in little more than as many minutes I had run my man through, and Carmen had hurled his to the ground with a cleft skull.

“I thought we should do it,” he said as he sheathed his sword. “But before we ride on let us see who the fellows are, for, ’pon my soul, they have not the looks of a patrol from Caracas.”

As he spoke, Carmen dismounted and closely examined the prostrate men’s facings.

“*Caramba!* They belong to the regiment of Irun.”

“I remember them. They were in Murillo’s *corp d’armee* at Vittoria.”

“I wish they were at Vittoria now. Their headquarters are at La Victoria! Worse luck!”

"Why?"

"Because there may be more of them. You suggested just now the possibility of a squadron. How if we meet a regiment?"

"We should be in rather a bad scrape."

"We are in a bad scrape, *amigo mio*. Unless, I am greatly mistaken the regiment of Irun, or, at any rate, a squadron of it is on the march hitherward. If they started at sunrise and rested during the heat of the day, this is about the time the advance-guard would be here. Having no enemy to fear in these parts, they would naturally break up into small detachments; there has been no rain for weeks, and the dust raised by a large body of horsemen is simply stifling. However, we may as well go forward to certain death as go back to it. Besides, I hate going back in any circumstances. And we have just one chance. We must hurry on and ride for our lives."

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“I don’t quite see that. We shall meet them all the sooner.”

Carmen made some reply which I failed to catch, and as the way was rough and Pizarro required all my attention, I did not repeat the question.

We passed rapidly up the brow, and when we reached more even ground, put our horses to the gallop and went on, up hill and down dale, until Carmen, uttering an exclamation, pulled his horse into a walk.

“I think we can get down here,” he said.

We had reached a place where, although the mountain to our right was still precipitous, the ravine seemed narrower and the sides less steep.

“I think we can,” repeated Carmen. “At any rate, we must try.”

And with that he dismounted, and leading his horse to the brink of the ravine, incontinently disappeared.

“Come on! It will do!” he cried, dragging his horse after him.

I followed with Pizarro, who missing his footing landed on his head. As for myself, I rolled from top to bottom, the descent being much steeper than I had expected.

CHAPTER XII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

The ravine was filled with shrubs and trees, through which we partly forced, partly threaded our way, until we reached a spot where we were invisible from the road.

“Now off with your *cobija* and throw it over your horse’s head,” said Carmen. “If they don’t hear they won’t neigh, and a single neigh might be our ruin.”

“You mean to stay here until the troops have gone past?”

“Exactly, I knew there was a good hiding-place hereabout, and that if we reached it before the troops came up we should be safe. If there be any more of them they will pass us in a few minutes. Now, if you will hitch Pizarro to that tree—oh, you have done so already. Good! Well, let us return to the road and watch. We can hide in the grass, or behind the bushes.”

We returned accordingly, and choosing a place where we could see without being seen, we lay down and listened, exchanging now and then a whispered remark.

“Hist!” said Carmen, presently, putting his ear to the ground. He had been so long on the war-path and lived so much in the open air, that his senses were almost as acute as those of a wild animal.

“They are coming!”

Soon the hum of voices, the neighing of steeds, and the clang of steel fell on my ear, and peering between the branches I could see a group of shadows moving toward us. Then the shadows, taking form and substance, became six horsemen. They passed within a few feet of our hiding-place. We heard their talk, saw their faces in the moonlight, and Carmen whispered that he could distinguish the facings of their uniforms.

“It is as I feared,” he muttered, “the entire regiment of Irun, shifting their quarters to Caracas. We are prisoners here for an hour or two. Well, it is perhaps better to have them behind than before us.”

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“What will happen when they find the bodies of the two troopers?”

“That is precisely the question I am asking myself. But not having met us they will naturally conclude that we have gone on toward Caracas.”

“Unless they are differently informed by the man who escaped us.”

“I don’t think he would be in any hurry to turn back. He went off at a devil of a pace.”

“He might turn back for all that, when he recovered from his scare. He could not help seeing that we were only two, and if he informs the others they will know of a surety that we are hiding in the ravine.”

“And then there would be a hunt. However, at the speed they are riding it will take them an hour or more to reach the scene of our skirmish, and then there is coming back. Everything depends on how soon the last of them go by. If we have only a few minutes start they will never overtake us, and once on the other side of Los Teycos we shall be safe both from discovery and pursuit. European cavalry are of no use in a Venezuelan forest; and I don’t think these Irun fellows have any blood-hounds.”

“Blood-hounds! You surely don’t mean to say that the Spaniards use blood-hounds?”

“I mean nothing else. General Griscelli, who holds the chief command in the district of San Felipe, keeps a pack of blood-hounds, which he got from Cuba. But, though a Spanish general, Griscelli is not a Spaniard born. He is either a Corsican or an Italian. I believe he was originally in the French army, and when Dupont surrendered at Baylen he went over to the other side, and accepted a commission from the King of Spain.”

“Not a very good record, that.”

“And he is not a good man. He outvies even the Spaniards in cruelty. A very able general, though. He has given us a deal of trouble. Down with your head! Here comes some more.”

A whole troop this time. They pass in a cloud of dust. After a short interval another detachment sweeps by; then another and another.

“*Gracias a Dios!* they are putting on more speed. At this rate we shall soon be at liberty. But, *caramba*, how they might have been trapped, Senor Fortescue! A few men on that height hurling down rocks, the defile lined with sharp-shooters, half a hundred of Mejia’s *llaneros* to cut off their retreat, and the regiment of Irun could be destroyed to a man.”

“Or taken prisoners.”

“I don’t think there would be many prisoners,” said Carmen, grimly. “These must almost be the last, I think—they are. See! Here come the tag-rag and bobtail.”

The tag-rag and bob-tail consisted of a string of loaded mules with their *arrieros*, a dozen women riding mules, and as many men on foot.

“Let us get out of this hole while we may, and before any of them come back. Once on the road and mounted, we shall at least be able to fight; but down here—”

“All the same, this hole has served our turn well. However, I quite agree with you that the best thing we can do is to get out of it quickly.”

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This was more easily said than done. It was like climbing up a precipice. Pizarro slipped back three times. Carmen's mare did no better. In the end we had to dismount, fasten two lariats to each saddle, and haul while the horses scrambled. A little help goes a long way in such circumstances.

All this both made noise and caused delay, and it was with a decided sense of relief that we found ourselves once more in the saddle and *en route*.

"We have lost more time than I reckoned on," said Carmen, as we galloped through the pass. "If any of the dragoons had turned back—However, they did not, and, as our horses are both fresher than theirs and carry less weight, they will have no chance of overtaking us if they do; and, as the whole of the regiment has gone on, there is no chance of meeting any more of them—*Caramba!* Halt!"

"What is it?" I asked, pulling up short.

"I spoke too soon. More are coming. Don't you hear them?"

"Yes; and I see shadows in the distance."

"The shadows are soldiers, and we shall have to charge them whether they be few or many, *amigo mio*; so say your prayers and draw your Toledo. But first let us shake hands, we may never—"

"I am quite ready to charge by your side, Carmen; but would it not be better, think you, to try what a little strategy will do?"

"With all my heart, if you can suggest anything feasible. I like a fight immensely—when the odds are not too great—and I hope to die fighting. All the same, I have no very strong desire to die at this particular moment."

"Neither have I. So let us go on like peaceable travellers, and the chances are that these men, taking for granted that the others have let us pass, will not meddle with us. If they do, we must make the best fight we can."

"A happy thought! Let us act on it. If they ask any questions I will answer. Your English accent might excite suspicion."

The party before us consisted of nine horsemen, several of whom appeared to be officers.

"*Buene noche, senores*," said Carmen, so soon as we were within speaking distance.

"*Buene noche, senores*. You have met the troops, of course. How far are they ahead?" asked one of the officers.

“The main body are quite a league ahead by this time. The pack-mules and *arrieros* passed us about fifteen minutes ago.”

“*Gracias!* Who are you, and whither may you be wending, senores?”

“I am Sancho Mencar, at your service, *senor coronel*, a Government messenger, carrying despatches to General Salazar, at La Victoria. My companion is Senor Tesco, a merchant, who is journeying to the same place on business.”

“Good! you can go on. You will meet two troopers who are bringing on a prisoner. Do me the favor to tell them to make haste.”

“Certainly, *senor coronel. Adios, senores*.”

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"*Adio senores.*"

And with that we rode on our respective ways.

"Two troopers and prisoner," said Carmen, thoughtfully.

"So there are more of them, after all! How many, I wonder? If this prisoner be a patriot we must rescue him, senor Fortescue."

"With all my heart—if we can."

"Only two troopers! You and I are a match for six."

"Possibly. But we don't know that the two are not followed by a score! There seems to be no end of them."

"I don't think so. If there were the colonel would have asked us to tell them also to hurry up. But we shall soon find out. When we meet the fellows we will speak them fair and ask a few questions."

Ten minutes later we met them.

"*Buene noche, senores!*" said Carmen, riding forward. "We bring a message from the colonel. He bids you make haste."

"All very fine. But how can we make haste when we are hampered by this rascal? I should like to blow his brains out."

"This rascal" was the prisoner, a big powerful fellow who seemed to be either a zambo or a negro. His arms were bound to his side, and he walked between the troopers, to whose saddles he was fastened by two stout cords.

"Why don't you blow his brains out?"

"Because we should get into trouble. He is the colonel's slave, and therefore valuable property. We have tried dragging him along; but the villain throws himself down, and might get a limb broken, so all we can do is prod him occasionally with the points of our sabres; but he does not seem to mind us in the least. We have tried swearing; we might as well whistle. Make haste, indeed!"

"A very hard case, I am sure. I sympathize with you, senores. Is the man a runaway that you have to take such care of him?"

"That is just it. He ran away and rambled for months in the forest; and if he had not stolen back to La Victoria and been betrayed by a woman, he would never have been

caught. After that, the colonel would not trust him at large; but he thinks that at Caracas he will have him safe. And now, senores, with your leave we must go on."

"Ah! You are the last, I suppose?"

"We are; curse it! The main body must be a league ahead by this time, and we shall not reach Caracas for hours. *Adios!*"

"Let us rescue the poor devil!" I whispered to Carmen.

"By all means. One moment, senores; I beg your pardon—now, Fortescue!"

And with that we placed our horses across the road, whipped out our pistols and pointed them at the troopers' heads, to their owners' unutterable surprise.

"We are sorry to inconvenience you, senores," said my companion, politely; "but we are going to release this slave, and we have need of your horses. Unbuckle your swords, throw them on the ground, and dismount. No hesitation, or you are dead men! Shall we treat them as they proposed to treat the slave, Senor Fortescue? Blow out their brains? It will be safer, and save us a deal of trouble."

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“No! That would be murder. Let them go. They can do no harm. It is impossible for them to overtake the, others on foot.”

Meanwhile the soldiers, having the fear of being shot before them, had dismounted and laid down their weapons.

“Go!” said Carmen, pointing northward, and they went.

“Your name?” (to the prisoner whose bonds I was cutting with my sword).

“Here they call me Jose. In my own country I was called Gahra—”

“Let it be Gahra, then. It is less common than Jose. Every other peon in the country is called Jose. You are a native of Africa?”

“*Si, senor.*”

“How came you hither?”

“I was taken to Cuba in a slave-ship, brought to this country by General Salazar, and sold by him to Colonel Canimo.”

“You have no great love for the Spaniards, I suppose?”

Gahra pointed to his arms which had been chafed by the rope till they were raw, and showed us his back which bore the marks of recent stripes.

“Can you fight?”

“Against the Spaniards? Only give me the chance, and you shall see,” answered the negro in a voice of intense hate.

“Come with us, and you shall have many chances. Mount one of those horses and lead the other.”

Gahra mounted, and we moved on.

We were now at the beginning of a stiff ascent. The road, which though undulating had risen almost continuously since we left Caracas, was bordered with richly colored flowers and shrubs, and bounded on either side by deep forests. Night was made glorious by the great tropical moon, which shone resplendent under a purple sky gilding the tree-tops and lighting us on our way. Owing to the nature of the ground we could not see far before us, but the backward view, with its wood-crowned heights, deep ravines, and sombre mountains looming in the distance, was fairy-like and fantastic, and the higher we rose the more extensive it became.

“Is this a long hill?” I asked Carmen.

“Very. An affair of half an hour, at least, at this speed; and we cannot go faster,” he answered, as he turned half round in his saddle.

“Why are you looking backward?”

“To see whether we are followed. We lost much time in the *quebrado*, and we have lost more since. Have you good eyes, Gahara? Born Africans generally have.”

“Yes, sir. My name, Gahra Dahra, signifies Dahra, the keen sighted!”

“I am glad to hear it. Be good enough to look round occasionally, and if you see anything let us know.”

We had nearly reached the summit of the rise when the negro uttered an exclamation and turned his horse completely round.

“What is it?” asked Carmen and myself, following his example.

“I see figures on the brow of yonder hill.”

“You see more than I can, and I have not bad eyes,” said Carmen, looking intently. “What are they like, those figures?”

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“That I cannot make out yet. They are many; they move; and every minute they grow bigger! That is all I can tell.”

“It is quite enough. The bodies of the two troopers have been found, the alarm has been given, and we are pursued. But they won’t overtake us. They have that hill to descend, this to mount; and our horses are better than theirs.”

“Are you going far, senor?” inquired Gahra.

“To the llanos.”

“By Los Teycos?”

“Yes. We shall easily steal through Los Teycos, and I know of a place in the forest beyond, where we can hide during the day.”

“Pardon me for venturing to contradict you, senor; but I fear you will not find it very easy to steal through Los Teycos. For three days it has been held by a company of infantry and all the outlets are strictly guarded. No civilian unfurnished with a safe conduct from the captain-general is allowed to pass.”

“*Caramba!* We are between two fires, it seems. Well, we must make a dash for it. The sentries cannot stop us, and we can gallop through before they turn out the guard.”

“The horses will be very tired by that time, senor, and the troopers can get fresh mounts at Los Teycos. But I know a way—”

“The Indian trail! Do you know the Indian trail?”

“Yes, sir. I know the Indian trail, and I can take you to a place in the forest where there is grass and water and game, and we shall be safe from pursuit as long as we like to stay.”

“How far off?”

“About two leagues.”

“Good. Lead on in heaven’s name. You are a treasure, Gahra Dahra. In rescuing you from those ruffianly Spaniards we did ourselves, as well as you, a good turn.”

Our pursuers, who numbered a full score, could now be distinctly seen, but in a few minutes we lost sight of them. After a sharp ride of half an hour, the negro called a halt.

“This is the place. Here we turn off,” he said.

“Here! I see nothing but the almost dry bed of a torrent.”

“So much the better. We shall make no footmarks,” said Carmen. “Go on, Gahra. But first of all turn that led horse adrift. Are you sure this place you speak of is unknown to the Spaniards?”

“Quite. It is known only to a few wandering Indians and fugitive slaves. We can stay here till sunrise. It is impossible to follow the Indian trail by night, even with such a moon as this.”

After we had partly ridden, partly walked (for we were several times compelled to dismount) about a mile along the bed of the stream, which was hemmed in between impenetrable walls of tall trees and dense undergrowth, Gahra, who was leading, called out: “This way!” and vanished into what looked like a hole, but proved to be a cleft in the bank so overhung by vegetation as to be well-nigh invisible.

It was the entrance to a passage barely wide enough to admit a horse and his rider, yet as light as a star-gemmed mid-night, for the leafy vault above us was radiant with fireflies, gleaming like diamonds in the dark hair of a fair woman.

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But even with this help it was extremely difficult to force our way through the tangled undergrowth, which we had several times to attack, sword in hand, and none of us were sorry when Gahra announced that we had reached the end.

"*Por todos los santos!* But this is fairyland!" exclaimed Carmen, who was just before me. "I never saw anything so beautiful."

He might well say so. We were on the shore of a mountain-tarn, into whose clear depths the crescent moon, looking calmly down, saw its image reflected as in a silver mirror. Lilies floated on its waters, ferns and flowering shrubs bent over them, the air was fragrant with sweet smells, and all around uprose giant trees with stems as round and smooth as the granite columns of a great cathedral; and, as it seemed in that dim religious light, high enough to support the dome of heaven.

I was so lost in admiration of this marvellous scene that my companions had unsaddled and were leading their horses down to the water before I thought of dismounting from mine.

Apart from the beauty of the spot, we could have found none more suitable for a bivouac! We were in safety and our horses in clover, and, tethering them with the lariats, we left them to graze. Gahra gathered leaves and twigs and kindled a fire, for the air at that height was fresh, and we were lightly clad. We cooked our *tasajo* on the embers, and after smoking the calumet of peace, rolled ourselves in our *cobijas*, laid our heads on our saddles, and slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE LLANOS.

Only a moment ago the land had been folded in the mantle of darkness. Now, a flaming eye rises from the ground at some immeasurable distance, like an outburst of volcanic fire. It grows apace, chasing away the night and casting a ruddy glow on, as it seems, a vast and waveless sea, as still as the painted ocean of the poem, as silent as death, a sea without ships and without life, mournful and illimitable, and as awe-inspiring and impressive as the Andes or the Alps.

So complete is the illusion that did I not know we were on the verge of the llanos I should be tempted to believe that supernatural agency had transported us while we slept to the coasts of the Caribbean Sea or the yet more distant shores of the Pacific Ocean.

Six days are gone by since we left our bivouac by the mountain-tarn: three we have wandered in the woods under the guidance of Gahra, three sought Mejia and his guerillas, who, being always on the move, are hard to find. Last night we reached the

range of hills which form, as it were, the northern coast-line of the vast series of savannas which stretch from the tropics to the Straits of Magellan; and it is now a question whether we shall descend to the llanos or continue our search in the sierra.

“It was there I left him,” said Carmen, pointing to a *quebrada* some ten miles away.

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“Where we were yesterday?”

“Yes; and he said he would be either there or hereabout when I returned, and I am quite up to time. But Mejia takes sudden resolves sometimes. He may have gone to beat up Griselli’s quarters at San Felipe, or be making a dash across the llanos in the hope of surprising the fortified post of Tres Cruces.”

“What shall we do then; wait here until he comes back?”

“Or ride out on the llanos in the direction of Tres Cruces. If we don’t meet Mejia and his people we may hear something of them.”

“I am for the llanos.”

“Very well. We will go thither. But we shall have to be very circumspect. There are loyalist as well as patriot guerillas roaming about. They say that Morales has collected a force of three or four thousand, mostly Indios, and they are all so much alike that unless you get pretty close it is impossible to distinguish patriots from loyalists.”

“Well, there is room to run if we cannot fight.”

“Oh, plenty of room,” laughed Carmen. “But as for fighting—loyalist guerillas are not quite the bravest of the brave, yet I don’t think we three are quite a match for fifty of them, and we are not likely to meet fewer, if we meet any. But let us adventure by all means. Our horses are fresh, and we can either return to the sierra or spend the night on the llanos, as may be most expedient.”

Ten minutes later we were mounted, and an hour’s easy riding brought us to the plain. It was as pathless as the ocean, yet Carmen, guided by the sun, went on as confidently as if he had been following a beaten track. The grass was brown and the soil yellow; particles of yellow dust floated in the air; the few trees we passed were covered with it, and we and our horses were soon in a like condition. Nothing altered as we advanced; sky and earth were ever the same; the only thing that moved was a cloud, sailing slowly between us and the sun, and when Carmen called a halt on the bank of a nearly dried-up stream, it required an effort to realize that since we left our bivouac in the hills we had ridden twenty miles in a direct line. Hard by was a deserted *hatto*, or cattle-keeper’s hut, where we rested while our horses grazed.

“No sign of Mejia yet,” observed Carmen, as he lighted his cigar with a burning-glass. “Shall we go on toward Tres Cruces, or return to our old camping-ground in the hills?”

“I am for going on.”

“So am I. But we must keep a sharp lookout. We shall be on dangerous ground after we have crossed the Tio.”

“Where is the Tio?”

“There!” (pointing to the attenuated stream near us).

“That! I thought the Tio was a river.”

“So it is, and a big one in the rainy season, as you may have an opportunity of seeing. I wish we could hear something of Mejia. But there is nobody of whom we can inquire. The country is deserted; the herdsmen have all gone south, to keep out of the way of guerillas and brigands, all of whom look on cattle as common property.”

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“Somebody comes!” said Gahra, who was always on the lookout.

“How many?” exclaimed Carmen, springing to his feet.

“Only one.”

“Keep out of sight till he draws near, else he may sheer off; and I should like to have a speech of him. He may be able to tell us something.”

The stranger came unconcernedly on, and as he stopped in the middle of the river to let his horse drink, we had a good look at him. He was well mounted, carried a long spear and a *macheto* (a broad, sword-like knife, equally useful for slitting windpipes and felling trees), and wore a broad-brimmed hat, shirt, trousers, and a pair of spurs (strapped to his naked feet).

As he resumed his journey across the river, we all stepped out of the *hatto* and gave him the traditional greeting, “*Buenas dias, senor.*”

The man, looking up in alarm, showed a decided disposition to make off, but Carmen spoke him kindly, offered him a cigar, and said that all we wanted was a little information. We were peaceful travellers, and would much like to know whether the country beyond the Tio was free from guerillas.

The stranger eyed us suspiciously, and then, after a moment’s hesitation, said that he had heard that Mejia was “on the war-path.”

“Where?” asked Carmen.

“They say he was at Tres Cruces three days ago; and there has been fighting.”

“And are any of Morale’s people also on the war-path?”

“That is more than I can tell you, senores. It is very likely; but as you are peaceful travellers, I am sure no one will molest you. *Adoiso, senores.*”

And with that the man gave his horse a sudden dig with his spurs, and went off at a gallop.

“What a discourteous beggar he is!” exclaimed Carmen, angrily. “If it would not take too much out of my mare I would ride after him and give him a lesson in politeness.”

“I don’t think he was intentionally uncivil. He seemed afraid.”

“Evidently. He did not know what we were, and feared to commit himself. However, we have learned something. We are on Mejia’s track. He was at Tres Cruces three days

since, and if we push on we may fall in with him before sunset, or, at any rate, to-morrow morning."

"Is it not possible that this man may have been purposely deceiving us, or be himself misinformed?" I asked.

"Quite. But as we had already decided to go on it does not matter a great deal whether he is right or wrong. I I think, though, he knew more about the others than he cared to tell. All the more reason for keeping a sharp lookout and riding slowly."

"So as to save our horses?"

"Exactly. We may have to ride for our lives before the sun goes down. And now let us mount and march."

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Our course was almost due west, and the sun being now a little past the zenith, its ardent rays—which shone right in our faces—together with the reverberations from the ground, made the heat almost insupportable. The stirrup-irons burned our feet; speech became an effort; we sat in our saddles, perspiring and silent; our horses, drooping their heads, settled into a listless and languid walk. The glare was so trying that I closed my eyes and let Pizarro go as he would. Open them when I might, the outlook was always the same, the same yellow earth and blue sky, the same lifeless, interminable plain, the same solitary sombrero palms dotting the distant horizon.

This went on for an hour or two, and I think I must have fallen into a doze, for when, roused by a shout from Gahra, I once more opened my eyes the sun was lower and the heat less intense.

“What is it,” asked Carmen, who, like myself, had been half asleep. “I see nothing.”

“A cloud of dust that moves—there!” (pointing).

“So it is,” shading his eyes and looking again. “Coming this way, too. Behind that cloud is a body of horsemen. Be they friends or enemies—Mejia and his people or loyalist guerillas?”

“That is more than I can say, senor. Mejia, I hope.”

“I also. But hope is not certainty, and until we can make sure we had better hedge away toward the north, so as to be nearer the hills in case we have to run for it.”

“You think we had better make for the hills in that case?” I asked.

“Decidedly. Mejia is sure to return thither, and Morale’s men are much less likely to follow us far in that direction than south or east.”

So, still riding leisurely, we diverged a little to the right, keeping the cloud-veiled horsemen to our left. By this measure we should (if they proved to be enemies) prevent them from getting between us and the hills, and thereby cutting off our best line of retreat.

Meanwhile the cloud grew bigger. Before long we could distinguish those whom it had hidden, without, however, being able to decide whether they were friends or foes.

Carmen thought they numbered at least two hundred, and there might be more behind. But who they were he could, as yet, form no idea.

The nearer we approached them the greater became our excitement and surprise. A few minutes and we should either be riding for our lives or surrounded by friends. We

looked to the priming of our pistols, tightened our belts and our horses' girths, wiped the sweat and dust from our faces, and, while hoping for the best, prepared for the worst.

"They see us!" exclaimed Carmen. "I cannot quite make them out, though. I fear.... But let us ride quietly on. The secret will soon be revealed."

A dozen horsemen had detached themselves from the main body with the intention, as might appear, of intercepting our retreat in every direction. Four went south, four north, and four moved slowly round to our rear.

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“Had we not better push on?” I asked. “This looks very like a hostile demonstration.”

“So it does. But we must find out—And there is no hurry. We shall only have the four who are coming this way to deal with, the others are out of the running. All the same, we may as well draw a little farther to the right, so as to give them a longer gallop and get them as far from the main body as may be.”

The four were presently near enough to be distinctly seen.

“Enemies! *Vamonos!*” cried Carmen, after he had scanned their faces. “But not too fast. If they think we are afraid and our horses tired they will follow us without waiting for the others, and perhaps give us an opportunity of teaching them better manners. Your horse is the fleetest, senor Fortescue. You had better, perhaps, ride last.”

On this hint I acted; and when the four guerillas saw that I was lagging behind they redoubled their efforts to overtake me, but whenever they drew nearer than I liked, I let Pizarro out, thereby keeping their horses, which were none too fresh, continually on the stretch. The others were too far in the rear to cause us concern. We had tested the speed of their horses and knew that we could leave them whenever we liked.

After we had gone thus about a couple of miles Carmen slackened speed so as to let me come up with him and Gahra.

“We have five minutes to spare,” he said. “Shall we stop them?”

I nodded assent, whereupon we checked our horses, and wheeling around, looked our pursuers in the face. This brought them up short, and I thought they were going to turn tail, but after a moment’s hesitation they lowered their lances and came on albeit at no great speed, receiving as they did so a point-blank volley from our pistols, which emptied one of their saddles. Then we drew our swords and charged, but before we could get to close quarters the three men sheered off to the right and left, leaving their wounded comrade to his fate. It did not suit our purpose to follow them, and we were about to go on, when we noticed that the other guerillas, who a few minutes previously were riding hotly after us, had ceased their pursuit, and were looking round in seeming perplexity. The main body had, moreover, come to a halt, and were closing up and facing the other way. Something had happened. What could it be?

“Another cloud of dust,” said Gahra, pointing to the north-west.

So there was, and moving rapidly. Had our attention been less taken up with the guerillas this new portent would not so long have escaped us.

“Mejia! I’ll wager ten thousand piasters that behind that cloud are Mejia and his braves,” exclaimed Carmen, excitedly. *Hijo de Dios!* Won’t they make mince-meat of the Spaniard? How I wish I were with them! Shall we go back Senor Fortescue?”

“If you think—”

“Think! I am sure. I can see the gleam of their spears through the dust. By all means, let us join them. The Spaniards have too much on their hands just now to heed us. But I must have a spear.”

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And with that Carmen slipped from his horse and picked up the lance of the fallen guerilla.

“Do you prefer a spear to a sword?” I asked, as we rode on.

“I like both, but in a charge on the llanos I prefer a spear decidedly. Yet I dare say you will do better with the weapon to which you have been most accustomed. If you ward off or evade the first thrust and get to your opponent’s left rear you will have him at your mercy. Our *llaneros* are indifferent swordsmen; but once turn your back and you are doomed. Hurrah! There is Mejia, leading his fellows on. Don’t you see him? The tall man on the big horse. Forward, senors! We may be in time for the encounter even yet.”

CHAPTER XIV.

CAUGHT.

A smart gallop of a few minutes brought us near enough to see what was going on, though as we had to make a considerable *detour* in order to avoid the Spaniards, we were just too late for the charge, greatly to Carmen’s disappointment.

In numbers the two sides were pretty equal, the strength of each being about a thousand men. Their tactics were rather those of Indian braves than regular troops. The patriots were, however, both better led and better disciplined than their opponents, and fought with a courage and a resolution that on their native plains would have made them formidable foes for the “crackest” of European cavalry.

The encounter took place when we were within a few hundred yards of Mejia’s left flank. It was really a charge in line, albeit a very broken line, every man riding as hard as he could and fighting for his own land. All were armed with spears, the longest, as I afterward learned, being wielded by Colombian *gauchos*. These portentous weapons, fully fourteen feet long, were held in both hands, the reins being meanwhile placed on the knees, and the horses guided by voice and spur. The Spaniards seemed terribly afraid of them, as well they might be, for the Colombian spears did dire execution. Few missed their mark, and I saw more than one trooper literally spitted and lifted clean out of his saddle.

Mejia, distinguishable by his tall stature, was in the thick of the fray. After the first shock he threw away his spear, and drawing a long two-handed sword, which he carried at his back, laid about like a *coeur-de-lion*. The combat lasted only a few minutes, and though we were too late to contribute to the victory we were in time to take part in the pursuit.

It was a scene of wild confusion and excitement; the Spaniards galloping off in all directions, singly and in groups, making no attempt to rally, yet when overtaken, fighting

to the last, Mejia's men following them with lowered lances and wild cries, managing their fiery little horses with consummate ease, and *making no prisoners*.

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“Here is a chance for us; let us charge these fellows!” shouted Carmen, as eight or nine of the enemy rode past us in full retreat; and without pausing for a reply he went off at a gallop, followed by Gahra and myself; for although I had no particular desire to attack men who were flying for their lives and to whom I knew no quarter would be given, it was impossible to hold back when my comrades were rushing into danger. Had the Spaniards been less intent on getting away it would have fared ill with us. As it was, we were all wounded. Gahra got a thrust through the arm, Carmen a gash in the thigh; and as I gave one fellow the point in his throat his spear pierced my hat and cut my head. If some of the patriots had not come to the rescue our lives would have paid the forfeit of our rashness.

The incident was witnessed by Mejia himself, who, when he recognized Carmen, rode forward, greeted us warmly and remarked that we were just in time.

“To be too late,” answered Carmen, discontentedly, as he twisted a handkerchief round his wounded thigh.

“Not much; and you have done your share. That was a bold charge you made. And your friends? I don’t think I have the pleasure of knowing them.”

Carmen introduced us, and told him who I was.

“I am delighted to make your acquaintance, senor,” he said, graciously, “and I will give you of my best; but I can offer you only rough fare and plenty of fighting. Will that content you?”

I bowed, and answered that I desired nothing better. The guerilla leader was a man of striking appearance, tall, spare, and long limbed. The contour of his face was Indian; he had the deep-set eyes, square jaws, and lank hair of the abonguil race. But his eyes were blue, his hair was flaxen, and his skin as fair as that of a pure-blooded Teuton. Mejia, as I subsequently heard, was the son of a German father and a mestizma mother, and prouder of his Indian than his European ancestry. It was probably for this reason that he preferred being called Mejia rather than Morgenstern y Mejia, his original appellation. His hereditary hatred of the Spaniards, inflamed by a sense of personal wrong, was his ruling passion. He spared none of the race (being enemies) who fell into his hands. Natives of the country, especially those with Indian blood in their veins, he treated more mercifully—when his men would let him, for they liked killing even more than they liked fighting, and had an unpleasant way of answering a remonstrance from their officers with a thrust from their spears.

Mejia owed his ascendancy over them quite as much to his good fortune in war as to his personal prowess and resolute character.

“If I were to lose a battle they would probably take my life, and I should certainly have to resign my command,” he observed, when we were talking the matter over after the pursuit (which, night being near, was soon abandoned); “and a *llanero* leader must lead—no playing the general or watching operations from the rear—or it will be the worse for him.”

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“I understand; he must be first or nowhere.”

“Yes, first or nowhere; and they will brook no punishment save death. If a man disobeys me I either let it pass or shoot him out of hand, according to circumstances. If I were to strike a man or order him under arrest, the entire force would either mutiny or disband. *Si senor*, my *llaneros* are wild fellows.”

They looked it. Most of them wore only a ragged shirt over equally ragged trousers. Their naked feet were thrust into rusty stirrups. Some rode bare-backed, and there were among them men of every breed which the country produced; mestizoes, mulattoes, zambos, quadroons, negroes, and Indios, but all born *gauchos* and *llaneros*, hardy and in high condition, and well skilled in the use of lasso and spear. They were volunteers, too, and if their chief failed to provide them with a sufficiency of fighting and plunder, they had no hesitation in taking themselves off without asking for leave of absence.

When Mejia heard that a British force was being raised for service against the Spaniards, he was greatly delighted, and offered me on the spot a command in his “army,” or, alternatively, the position of his principal aide-de-camp. I preferred the latter.

“You have decided wisely, and I thank you, *senor coronel*. The advice and assistance of a soldier who has seen so much of war as you have will be very valuable and highly esteemed.”

I reminded the chief that, in the British army, I had held no higher rank than that of lieutenant.

“What matters that? I have made myself a general, and I make you a colonel. Who is there to say me nay?” he demanded, proudly.

Though much amused by this summary fashion of conferring military rank, I kept a serious countenance, and, after congratulating General Mejia on his promotion and thanking him for mine, I said that I should do my best to justify his confidence.

We bivouacked on the banks of a stream some ten miles from the scene of our encounter with the loyalists. On our way thither, Mejia told us that he had taken and destroyed Tres Cruces, and was now contemplating an attack on General Griscelli at San Felipe, as to which he asked my opinion.

I answered that, as I knew nothing either of the defense of San Felipe or of the strength and character of the force commanded by General Griscelli, I could give none. On this, Mejia informed me that the place was a large village and military post, defended by earthworks and block-houses, and that the force commanded by Griscelli consisted of

about twenty-five hundred men, of whom about half were regulars, half native auxiliaries.

“Has he any artillery?” I asked.

“About ten pieces of position, but no field-guns.”

“And you?”

“I have none whatever.”

“Nor any infantry?”

“Not here. But my colleague, General Estero, is at present organizing a force which I dare say will exceed two thousand men, and he promises to join me in the course of a week or two.”

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“That is better, certainly. Nevertheless, I fear that with one thousand horse and two thousand foot, and without artillery, you will not find it easy to capture a strong place, armed with ten guns and held by twenty-five hundred men, of whom half are regulars. If I were you I would let San Felipe alone.”

Mejia frowned. My advice was evidently not to his liking.

“Let me tell you, *senor coronel*” he said, arrogantly, “our patriot soldiers are equal to any in the world, regular or irregular. And, don’t you see that the very audacity of the enterprise counts in our favor? The last thing Griscelli expects is an attack. We shall find him unprepared and take him by surprise. That man has done us a great deal of harm. He hangs every patriot who falls into his hands, and I have made up my mind to hang him!”

After this there was nothing more to be said, and I held my peace. I soon found, moreover, that albeit Mejia often made a show of consulting me he had no intention of accepting my advice, and that all his officers (except Carmen) and most of his men regarded me as a *gringo* (foreign interloper) and were envious of my promotion, and jealous of my supposed influence with the general.

We bivouacked in a valley on the verge of the llanos, and the next few days were spent in raiding cattle and preparing *tasajo*. We had also another successful encounter with a party of Morale’s guerillas. This raised Mejia’s spirits to the highest point, and made him more resolute than ever to attack San Felipe. But when I saw General Estero’s infantry my misgivings as to the outcome of the adventure were confirmed. His men, albeit strong and sturdy and full of fight, were badly disciplined and indifferently armed, their officers extremely ignorant and absurdly boastful and confident. Estero himself, though like Mejia, a splendid patriotic leader, was no general, and I felt sure that unless we caught Griscelli asleep we should find San Felipe an uncommonly hard nut to crack. I need hardly say, however, that I kept this opinion religiously to myself. Everybody was so confident and cock-sure, that the mere suggestion of a doubt would have been regarded as treason and probably exposed me to danger.

A march of four days partly across the llanos, partly among the wooded hills by which they were bounded, brought us one morning to a suitable camping-ground, within a few miles of San Felipe, and Mejia, who had assumed the supreme command, decided that the attack should take place on the following night.

“You will surely reconnoitre first, General Mejia,” I ventured to say.

“What would be the use? Estero and I know the place. However, if you and Carmen like to go and have a look you may.”

Carmen was nothing loath, and two hours before sunset we saddled our horses and set out. I could speak more freely to him than to any of the others, and as we rode on I remarked how carelessly the camp was guarded. There were no proper outposts, and instead of being kept out of sight in the *quebrado*, the men were allowed to come and go as they liked. Nothing would be easier than for a treacherous soldier to desert and give information to the enemy which might not only ruin the expedition but bring destruction on the army.

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“No, no, Fortescue, I cannot agree to that. There are no traitors among us,” said my companion, warmly.

“I hope not. Yet how can you guarantee that among two or three thousand men there is not a single rascal! In war, you should leave nothing to chance. And even though none of the fellows desert it is possible that some of them may wander too far away and get taken prisoners, which would be quite as bad.”

“You mean it would give Griscelli warning?”

“Exactly, and if he is an enterprising general he would not wait to be attacked. Instead of letting us surprise him he would surprise us.”

“*Caramba!* So he would. And Griscelli is an enterprising general. We must mention this to Mejia when we get back, *amigo mio*.”

“You may, if you like. I am tired of giving advice which is never heeded,” I said, rather bitterly.

“I will, certainly, and then whatever befalls I shall have a clear conscience. Mejia is one of the bravest men I know. It is a pity he is so self-opinionated.”

“Yes, and to make a general a man must have something more than bravery. He must have brains.”

Carmen knew the country we were in thoroughly, and at his suggestion we went a roundabout way through the woods in order to avoid coming in contact with any of Griscelli’s people. On reaching a hill overlooking San Felipe we tethered our horses in a grove of trees where they were well hidden, and completed the ascent on foot. Then, lying down, and using a field-glass lent us by Mejia, we made a careful survey of the place and its surroundings.

San Felipe, a picturesque village of white houses with thatched roofs, lay in a wide well-cultivated valley, looking south, and watered by a shallow stream which in the rainy season was probably a wide river. At each corner of the village, well away from the houses, was a large block-house, no doubt pierced for musketry. From one block-house to another ran an earthen parapet with a ditch, and on each parapet were mounted three guns.

“Well, what think you of San Felipe, and our chances of taking it?” asked Carmen, after a while.

“I don’t think its defences are very formidable. A single mortar on that height to the east would make the place untenable in an hour; set it on fire in a dozen places. It is all wood. But to attempt its capture with a force of infantry numerically inferior to the

garrison will be a very hazardous enterprise indeed, and barring miraculously good luck on the one side or miraculously ill luck on the other cannot possibly succeed, I should say. No, Carmen, I don't think we shall be in San Felipe to-morrow night, or any night, just yet."

"But how if a part of the garrison be absent? Hist! Did not you hear something?"

"Only the crackling of a branch. Some wild animal, probably. I wonder whether there are any jaguars hereabout—"

"Oh, if the garrison be weak and the sentries sleep it is quite possible we may take the place by a rush. But, on the other hand, it is equally possible that Griscelli may have got wind of our intention, and—"

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“There it is again! Something more than a wild animal this time, Fortescue,” exclaims Carmen, springing to his feet.

I follow his example; but the same instant a dozen men spring from the bushes, and before we can offer any resistance, or even draw our swords, we are borne to the ground and despite our struggles, our arms pinioned to our sides.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD ENEMY.

Our captors were Spanish soldiers.

“Be good enough to rise and accompany us to San Felipe, senores,” said the non-commissioned officer in command of the detachment, “and if you attempt to escape I shall blow your brains out.”

“*Dios mio!* It serves us right for not keeping a better lookout,” said Carmen, with a laugh which I thought sounded rather hollow. “We shall be in San Felipe sooner than we expected, that is all. Lead on, sergeant; we have a dozen good reasons for not trying to escape, to say nothing of our strait waistcoats.”

Whereupon we were marched down the hill and taken to San Felipe, two men following with our horses, from which and other circumstances I inferred that we had been under observation ever since our arrival in the neighborhood. The others were doubtless under observation also; and at the moment I thought less of our own predicament (in view of the hanging propensities of General Griscelli, a decidedly unpleasant one) than of the terrible surprise which awaited Mejia and his army, for, as I quickly perceived, the Spaniards were quite on the alert, and fully prepared for whatever might befall. The place swarmed with soldiers; sentries were pacing to and fro on the parapets, gunners furbishing up their pieces, and squads of native auxiliaries being drilled on a broad savanna outside the walls.

Many of the houses were mere huts—roofs on stilts; others, “wattle and dab;” a few, brown-stone. To the most imposing of these we were conducted by our escort. Above the doorway, on either side of which stood a sentry, was an inscription: “Headquarters: General Griscelli.”

The sergeant asked one of the sentries if the general was in, and receiving an answer in the affirmative he entered, leaving us outside. Presently he returned.

“The general will see you,” he said; “be good enough to come in.”

We went in, and after traversing a wide corridor were ushered into a large room, where an officer in undress uniform sat writing at a big table. Several other officers were lounging in easy-chairs, and smoking big cigars.

“Here are the prisoners, general,” announced our conductor.

The man at the table, looking up, glanced first at Carmen, then at me.

“*Caramba!*” he exclaimed, with a stare of surprise, “you and I have met before, I think.”

I returned the stare with interest, for though I recognized him I could hardly believe my own eyes.

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“On the field of Salamanca?”

“Of course. You are the English officer who behaved so insolently and got me reprimanded.” (This in French.)

“I did no more than my duty. It was you that behaved insolently.”

“Take care what you say, senor, or *por Dios*—There is no English general to whom you can appeal for protection now. What are you doing here?”

“Not much good, I fear. Your men brought me: I had not the least desire to come, I assure you.”

“You were caught on the hill yonder, surveying the town through a glass, and Sergeant Prim overheard part of a conversation which leaves no doubt that you are officers in Mejia’s army. Besides, you were seen coming from the quarter where he encamped this morning. Is this so?”

Carmen and I exchanged glances. My worst fears were confirmed—we had been betrayed.

“Is this so? I repeat.”

“It is.”

“And have you, an English officer who has fought for Spain, actually sunk so low as to serve with a herd of ruffianly rebels?”

“At any rate, General Griscelli, I never deserted to the enemy.”

The taunt stung him to the quick. Livid with rage he sprung from his chair and placed his hand on his sword.

“Do you know that you are in my power?” he exclaimed. “Had you uttered this insult in Spanish instead of in French, I would have strung you up without more ado.”

“You insulted me first. If you are a true caballero give me the satisfaction which I have a right to demand.”

“No, senor; I don’t meet rebels on the field of honor. If they are common folk I hang them; if they are gentlemen I behead them.”

“Which is in store for us, may I ask?”

“*Por Dios!* you take it very coolly. Perhaps neither.”

“You will let me go, then?”

“Let you go! Let you go! Yes, I *will* let you go,” laughing like a man who has made a telling joke, or conceived a brilliant idea.

“When?”

“Don’t be impatient, senor; I should like to have the pleasure of your company for a day or two before we part. Perhaps after—What is the strength of Mejia’s army?”

“I decline to say.”

“I think I could make you say, though, if it were worth the trouble. As it happens, I know already. He has about two thousand infantry and one thousand cavalry. What has he come here for? Does the fool actually suppose that with a force like that he can capture San Felipe? Such presumption deserves punishment, and I shall give him a lesson he will not easily forget—if he lives to remember it. Your name and quality, senor” (to Carmen).

“Salvador Carmen, *teniente* in the patriot army.”

“I suppose you have heard how I treat patriots?”

“Yes, general, and I should like to treat you in the same way.”

“You mean you would like to hang me. In that case you cannot complain if I hang you. However I won’t hang you—to-day. I will either send you to the next world in the company of your general, or let you go with—”

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“Senor Fortescue?”

“Thank you—with Senor Fortescue. That is all, I think. Take him to the guard-house, sergeant—Stay! If you will give me your parole not to leave the town without my permission, or make any attempt to escape, you may remain at large, Senor Fortescue.”

“For how long?”

“Two days.”

As the escape in the circumstances seemed quite out of the question, I gave my parole without hesitation, and asked the same favor for my companion.

“No” (sternly). “I could not believe a rebel Creole on his oath. Take him away, sergeant, and see that he is well guarded. If you let him escape I will hang you in his stead.”

Despite our bonds Carmen and I contrived to shake hands, or rather, touch fingers, for it was little more.

“We shall meet again.” I whispered. “If I had known that he would not take your parole I would not have given mine. Let courage be our watchword. *Hasta manana!*”

“Pray take a seat, Senor Fortescue, and we will have a talk about old times in Spain. Allow me to offer you a cigar—I beg your pardon, I was forgetting that my fellows had tied you up. Captain Guzman (to one of the loungers), will you kindly loose Mr. Fortescue? *Gracias!* Now you can take a cigar, and here is a chair for you.”

I was by no means sure that this sudden display of urbanity boded me good, but being a prisoner, and at Griscelli’s mercy, I thought it as well to humor him, so accepted the cigar and seated myself by his side.

After a talk about the late war in Spain, in the course of which Griscelli told some wonderful stories of the feats he had performed there (for the man was egregiously vain) he led the conversation to the present war in South America, and tried to worm out of me where I had been and what I had done since my arrival in the country. I answered him courteously and diplomatically, taking good care to tell him nothing that I did not want to be known.

“I see,” he said, “it was a love of adventure that brought you here—you English are always running after adventures. A caballero like you can have no sympathy with these rascally rebels.”

“I beg your pardon; I do sympathize with the rebels; not, I confess, as warmly as I did at first, and if I had known as much as I know now, I think I should have hesitated to join them.”

“How so?”

“They kill prisoners in cold blood, and conduct war more like savages than Christians.”

“You are right, they do. Yes, killing prisoners in cold blood is a brutal practice! I am obliged to be severe sometimes, much to my regret. But there is only one way of dealing with a rebellion—you must stamp it out; civil war is not as other wars. Why not join us, Senor Fortescue? I will give you a command.”

“That is quite out of the question, General Griscelli; I am not a mere soldier of fortune. I have eaten these people’s salt, and though I don’t like some of their ways, I wish well to their cause.”

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“Think better of it, senor. The alternative might not be agreeable.”

“Whatever the alternative may be, my decision is irrevocable. And you said just now you would let me go.”

“Oh, yes, I will let you go, since you insist on it” (smiling). “All the same, I think you will regret your decision—Mejia, of course, means to attack us. He can have come with no other object—by your advice?”

“Certainly not.”

“That means he is acting against your advice. The man is mad. He thought of taking us by surprise, I suppose. Why, I knew he was on his way hither two days ago! And if he does not attack us to-night—and we are quite ready for him—I shall capture him and the whole of his army to-morrow. I want you to go with us and witness the operation—in the character of a spectator.”

“And a prisoner?”

“If you choose to put it so.”

“In that case, there is no more to be said, though for choice, I would rather not witness the discomfiture of my friends.”

Griscelli gave an ironical smile, which I took to mean that it was precisely for this reason that he asked me to accompany him.

“Will you kindly receive Senor Fortescue, as your guest, Captain Guzman,” he said, “take him to your quarters, give him his supper, and find him a bed.”

“*Con mucho gusto.* Shall we go now, Senor Fortescue?”

I went, and spent a very pleasant evening with Captain Guzman, and several of his brother-officers, whom he invited to join us, for though the Spaniards of that age were frightfully cruel to their enemies, they were courteous to their guests, and as a guest I was treated. As, moreover, most of the men I met had served in the Peninsular war, we had quite enough to talk about without touching on topics whose discussion might have been incompatible with good fellowship.

When, at a late hour, I turned into the hammock provided for me by Guzman, it required an effort to realize that I was a prisoner. Why, I asked myself, had Griscelli, who was never known to spare a prisoner, whose face was both cruel and false, and who could bear me no good-will—why had this man treated me so courteously? Did he really mean to let me go, and if so, why; or was the promise made to the ear merely to be broken to the hope?

“Perhaps to-morrow will show,” I thought, as I fell asleep; and I was not far out, for the day after did. Guzman, whose room I shared, wakened me long before daylight.

“The bugle has sounded the reveille, and the troops are mustering on the plaza,” he said. “You had better rise and dress. The general has sent word that you are to go with us, and our horses are in the *patio*.”

I got up at once, and after drinking a hasty cup of coffee, we mounted and joined Griscelli and his staff.

The troops were already under arms, and a few minutes later we marched, our departure being so timed, as I heard the general observe to one of his aides-de-camp, that we might reach the neighborhood of the rebel camp shortly before sunrise. His plan was well conceived, and, unless Mejia had been forewarned or was keeping a sharper lookout than he was in the habit of doing, I feared it would go ill with him.

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The camping-ground was much better suited for concealment than defence. It lay in a hollow in the hills, in shape like a horse-shoe, with a single opening, looking east, and was commanded in every direction by wooded heights. Griscelli's plan was to occupy the heights with skirmishers, who, hidden behind the trees and bushes, could shoot down the rebels with comparative security. A force of infantry and cavalry would meanwhile take possession of the opening and cut off their retreat. In this way, thought Griscelli, the patriots would either be slaughtered to a man, or compelled to surrender at discretion.

I could not deny (though I did not say so) that he had good grounds for this opinion. The only hope for Mejia was that, alarmed by our disappearance, he had stationed outposts on the heights and a line of vedettes on the San Felipe road, and fortified the entrance to the *quebrada*. In that case the attack might be repulsed, despite the superiority of the Spanish infantry and the disadvantages of Mejia's position. But the probabilities were against his having taken any of these precautions; the last thing he thought of was being attacked, and I could hardly doubt that he would be fatally entangled in the toils which were being laid for him.

While these thoughts were passing through my mind we were marching rapidly and silently toward our destination, lighted only by the stars. The force consisted of two brigades, the second of which, commanded by General Estero, had gone on half an hour previously. I was with the first and rode with Griscelli's staff. So far there had not been the slightest hitch, and the Spaniards promised themselves an easy victory.

It had been arranged that the first brigade should wait, about a mile from the entrance to the valley until Estero opened fire, and then advance and occupy the outlet. Therefore, when we reached the point in question a halt was called, and we all listened eagerly for the preconcerted signal.

And then occurred one of those accidents which so often mar the best laid plans. After we had waited a full hour, and just as day began to break, the rattle of musketry was heard on the heights, whereupon Griscelli, keenly alive to the fact that every moment of delay impaired his chances of success, ordered his men to fall in and march at the double. But, unfortunately for the Spaniards, the shots we had heard were fired too soon. The way through the woods was long and difficult, Estero's men got out of hand; some of them, in their excitement, fired too soon, with the result that, when the first division appeared in the valley, the patriots, rudely awakened from their fancied security, were getting under arms, and Mejia saw at a glance into what a terrible predicament his overconfidence had led him. He saw also (for though an indifferent general he was no fool) that the only way of saving his army from destruction, was to break out of the valley at all hazards, before the Spaniards enclosed him in a ring of fire.

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Mejia took his measures accordingly. Placing his *llaneros* and *gauchos* in front and the infantry in the rear, he advanced resolutely to the attack; and though it is contrary to rule for light cavalry to charge infantry, this order, considering the quality of the rebel foot, was probably the best which he could adopt.

On the other hand, the Spanish position was very strong, Griscelli massed his infantry in the throat of the *quebrada*, the thickets on either side of it being occupied in force. The reserve consisted exclusively of horse, an arm in which he was by no means strong. Mejia was thus encompassed on three sides, and had his foes reserved their fire and stood their ground, he could not possibly have broken through them. But the Spaniards opened fire as soon as the rebels came within range. Before they could reload, the *gauchos* charged, and though many saddles were emptied, the rebel horse rode so resolutely and their long spears looked so formidable, that the Spaniards gave way all along the line, and took refuge among the trees, thereby leaving the patriots a free course.

This was the turning-point of the battle, and had the rebel infantry shown as much courage as their cavalry the Spaniards would have been utterly beaten; but their only idea was to get away; they bolted as fast as their legs could carry them, an example which was promptly imitated by the Spanish cavalry, who instead of charging the rebel horse in flank as they emerged from the valley, galloped off toward San Felipe, followed *nolens volens* by Griscelli and his staff.

It was the only battle I ever saw or heard of in which both sides ran away. If Mejia had gone to San Felipe he might have taken it without striking a blow, but besides having lost many of his brave *llaneros*, he had his unfortunate infantry to rally and protect, and the idea probably never occurred to him.

As for the Spanish infantry, they stayed in the woods till the coast was clear, and then hied them home.

Griscelli was wild with rage. To have his well-laid plans thwarted by cowardice and stupidity, the easy victory he had promised himself turned into an ignominious defeat at the very moment when, had his orders been obeyed, the fortunes of the day might have been retrieved—all this would have proved a severe trial for a hero or a saint, and certainly Griscelli bore his reverse neither with heroic fortitude nor saintly resignation. He cursed like the jackdaw of Rheims, threatened dire vengeance on all and sundry, and killed one of the runaway troopers with his own hand. I narrowly escaped sharing the same fate. Happening to catch sight of me when his passion was at the height he swore that he would shoot at least one rebel, and drawing a pistol from his holster pointed it at my head. I owed my life to Captain Guzman, who was one of the best and bravest of his officers.

“Pray don’t do that, general,” he said. “It would be an ill requital for Senor Fortescue’s faithful observance of his parole. And you promised to let him go.”

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“Promised to let him go! So I did, and I will be as good as my word,” returned Griscelli, grimly, as he uncocked his pistol. “Yes, he shall go.”

“Now?”

“No. To-night. Meet me, both of you, near the old sugar-mill on the savanna when the moon rises; and give him a good supper, Guzman; he will need it.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AZUFERALES.

“What is General Griscelli’s game? Does he really mean to let me go, or is he merely playing with me as a cat plays with a mouse?” I asked Guzman, as we sat at supper.

“That is just the question I have been asking myself. I never knew him let a prisoner go before, and I know of no reason why he should treat you more leniently than he treats others. Do you?”

“No. He is more likely to bear me a grudge,” and then I told Guzman what had befallen at Salamanca.

“That makes it still less probable that he will let you go away quietly. Griscelli never forgives, and to-day’s fiasco has put him in a devil of a temper. He is malicious, too. We have all to be careful not to offend him, even in trifles, or he would make life very unpleasant for us, and I fear he has something very unpleasant in store for you. You may depend upon it that he is meditating some trick. He is quite capable of letting you go as far as the bridge, and then bringing you back and hanging you or fastening you to the tail of a wild mustang or the horns of a wild bull. That also would be letting you go.”

“So it would, in a fashion! and I should prefer it to being hanged.”

“I don’t think I would. The hanging would be sooner over and far less painful. And there are many other ways—he might have your hands tied behind your back and cannon-balls fastened to your feet, and then leave you to your own devices.”

“That would not be so bad. We should find some good soul to release us, and I think I could contrive to untie Carmen’s bonds with my teeth.”

“Or he might cut off your ears and put out your eyes—”

“For Heaven’s sake cease these horrible suggestions! You make my blood run cold. But you cannot be serious. Is Griscelli in the habit of putting out the eyes of his prisoners?”

“Not that I am aware of; but I have heard him threaten to do it, and known him to cut off a rebel’s ears first and hang him afterward. All the same I don’t think he is likely to treat you in that way. It might get to the ears of the captain-general, and though he is not very particular where rebels are concerned, he draws the line at mutilation.”

“We shall soon see; we have to be at the old sugar-mill when the moon rises,” I said, gloomily, for the prospect held out by Guzman was anything but encouraging.

“And that will be soon. If I see any way of helping you, without compromising myself, I will. Hospitality has its duties, and I cannot forget that you have fought and bled for Spain. Have another drink; you don’t know what is before you? And take this knife—it will serve also as a dagger—and this pocket-pistol. Put them where they will not be seen. You may find them useful.”

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"*Gracias!* But you surely don't think we shall be sent adrift weaponless and on foot?"

"That is as it may be; but it is well to provide for contingencies. And now let us start; nothing irritates Griscelli so much as having to wait."

So, girding on our swords (mine had been restored to me "by special favor," when I gave my parole), we mounted our horses, which were waiting at the door, and set out.

The savanna was a wide stretch of open ground outside the fortifications, where reviews were held and the troops performed their evolutions; it lay on the north side of the town. Farther on in the same direction was a range of low hills, thickly wooded and ill provided with roads. The country to the east and west was pretty much in the same condition. Southward it was more open, and a score of miles away merged into the llanos.

"We are in good time; the moon is only just rising, and I don't think there is anybody before us," said Guzman, as we neared the old sugar-mill, a dilapidated wooden building, shaded by cebia-trees and sombrero palms.

"But there is somebody behind us," I said, looking back. "A squadron of cavalry at the least."

"Griscelli, I suppose, and Carmen. But why is the general bringing so many people with him, I wonder? And don't I see dogs?"

"Rather! A pack of hounds, I should say."

"You are right; they are Griscelli's blood-hounds. Is it possible that a prisoner or a slave has escaped, and Griscelli will ask us to join in the hunt?"

"Join in the hunt! You surely don't mean that you hunt men in this country?"

"Sometimes—when the men are slaves or rebels. It is a sport the general greatly enjoys. Yet it seems very strange; at this time of night, too—*Dios mio!* can it be possible?"

"Can what be possible, Captain Guzman?" I exclaimed, in some excitement, for a terrible suspicion had crossed my mind.

"Can what be possible? In Heaven's name speak out!"

But, instead of answering, Guzman went forward to meet Griscelli. I followed him.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said the general; "I am glad you are so punctual. I have brought your friend, Senor Fortescue. As you were taken together, it seems only right

that you should be released together. It would be a pity to separate such good friends. You see, I am as good as my word. You don't speak. Are you not grateful?"

"That depends on the conditions, general."

"I make no conditions whatever. I let you go—neither more nor less—whither you will. But I must warn you that, twenty minutes after you are gone, I shall lay on my hounds. If you outrun them, well and good; if not, *tant pis pour vous*. I shall have kept my word. Are you not grateful, senor Fortescue?"

"No; why should I be grateful for a death more terrible than hanging. Kill us at once, and have done with it. You are a disgrace to the noble profession of arms, general, and the time will come—"

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“Another word, and I will throw you to the hounds without further parley,” broke in Griscelli, savagely.

“Better keep quiet; there is nothing to be gained by roiling him,” whispered Carmen.

I took his advice and held my peace, all the more willingly as there was something in Carmen’s manner which implied that he did not think our case quite so desperate as might appear.

“Dismount and give up your weapons,” said Griscelli.

Resistance being out of the question, we obeyed with the best grace we could; but I bitterly regretted having to part with the historic Toledo and my horse Pizarro; he had carried me well, and we thoroughly understood each other. The least I could do was to give him his freedom, and, as I patted his neck by way of bidding him farewell, I slipped the bit out of his mouth, and let him go.

“Hallo! What is that—a horse loose? Catch him, some of you,” shouted Griscelli, who had been talking with his huntsman and Captain Guzman, whereupon two of the troopers rode off in pursuit, a proceeding which made Pizarro gallop all the faster, and I knew that, follow him as long as they might, they would not overtake him.

Griscelli resumed his conversation with Captain Guzman, an opportunity by which I profited to glance at the hounds, and though I was unable just then to regard them with very kindly feelings, I could not help admiring them. Taller and more strongly built than fox-hounds, muscular and broad-chested, with pendulous ears and upper lips, and stern, thoughtful faces, they were splendid specimens of the canine race; even sized too, well under control, and in appearance no more ferocious than other hounds. Why should they be? All hounds are blood-hounds in a sense, and it is probably indifferent to them whether they pursue a fox, a deer, or a man; it is entirely a matter of training.

“I am going to let you have more law than I mentioned just now” said Griscelli, turning to Carmen and me. “Captain Guzman, here, and the huntsmen think twenty minutes would not give us much of a run—these hounds are very fast—so I shall make it forty. But you must first submit to a little operation. Make them ready, Jose.”

Whereupon one of the attendants, producing a bottle, smeared our shoes and legs with a liquid which looked like blood, and was, no doubt, intended to insure a good scent and render our escape impossible. While this was going on Carmen and I took off our coats and threw them on the ground.”

“When I give the word you may start,” said Griscelli, “and forty minutes afterward the hounds will be laid on—Now!”

“This way! Toward the hills!” said Carmen. “Are you in good condition?”

“Never better.”

“We must make all the haste we can, before the hounds are laid on. If we can keep this up we shall reach the hills in forty minutes—perhaps less.”

“And then? These hounds will follow us for ever—no possibility of throwing them out—-unless—is there a river?”

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“None near enough, still—”

“You have hope, then—”

“Just a little—I have an idea—if we can go on running two hours—have you a flint and steel?”

“Yes, and a loaded pistol and a knife.”

“Good! That is better than I thought. But don’t talk. We shall want every bit of breath in our bodies before we have done. This way! By the cane-piece there!”

With heads erect, arms well back, and our chests expanded to their utmost capacity we sped silently onward; and although we do not despair we realize to the full that we are running for our lives; grim Death is on our track and only by God’s help and good fortune can we hope to escape.

Across the savanna, past corn-fields and cane-pieces we race without pause—looking neither to the right nor left—until we reach the road leading to the hills. Here we stop a few seconds, take a few deep breaths, and then, on again. So far, the road has been tolerable, almost level and free from obstructions. But now it begins to rise, and is so rugged withal that we have to slow our speed and pick our way. Farther on it is the dry bed of a torrent, cumbered with loose stones and erratic blocks, among which we have to struggle painfully.

“This is bad,” gasps Carmen. “The hounds must be gaining on us fast.”

“Yes, but the scent will be very catching among these stones. They won’t run fast here. Let us jump from block to block instead of walking over the pebbles. It will make it all the better for us and worse for them.”

On this suggestion we straightway act, but we find the striding and jumping so exhausting, and the risk of slipping and breaking a limb so great, that we are presently compelled to betake ourselves once more to the bed of the stream.

“Never mind,” says Carmen, “we shall soon be out of this valley of stones, and the hounds will not find it easy to pick up the scent hereabout. If we only keep out of their jaws another half-hour!”

“Of course, we shall—and more—I hope for ever. We can go on for another hour. But what is your point?”

“The *azuferales*.”

“The *azuferales*! What are the *azuferales*”

“I cannot explain now. You will see. If we get there ten or fifteen minutes before the hounds we shall have a good chance of escaping them.”

“And how long?”

“That depends—perhaps twenty.”

“Then, in Heaven’s name, lead on. It is life or death? Even five minutes may make all the difference. Which way?”

“By this trail to the right, and through the forest.”

The trail is a broad grass-grown path, not unlike a “ride” in an English wood, bordered by trees and thick undergrowth, but fairly lighted by the moonbeams, and, fortunately for us, rather downhill, with no obstacles more formidable than fallen branches, and here and there a prostrate monarch of the forest, which we easily surmount.

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As we go on I notice that the character of the vegetation begins to change. The trees are less leafy, the undergrowth is less dense, and a mephitic odor pervades the air. Presently the foliage disappears altogether, and the trees and bushes are as bare as if they had been stricken with the blast of an Arctic winter; but instead of being whitened with snow or silvered with frost they are covered with an incrustation, which in the brilliant moonlight makes them look like trees and bushes of gold. Over their tops rise faint wreaths of yellowish clouds and the mephitic odor becomes more pronounced.

“At last!” shouts Carmen, as we reach the end of the trail. “At last! *Amigo mio*, we are saved!”

Before us stretches a wide treeless waste like a turf moor, with a background of sombre forest. The moor, which is broken into humps and hillocks, smokes and boils and babbles like the hell-broth of Macbeth’s witches, and across it winds, snake-wise, a steaming brook. Here and there is a stagnant pool, and underneath can be heard a dull roar, as if an imprisoned ocean were beating on a pebble-strewed shore. There is an unmistakable smell of sulphur, and the ground on which we stand, as well as the moor itself, is of a deep-yellow cast.

This, then, is the *azuferales*—a region of sulphur springs, a brimstone inferno, a volcano in the making. No hounds will follow us over that hideous heath and through that Stygian stream.

“Can we get across and live?” I ask. “Will it bear?”

“I think so. But out with your knife and cut some twigs; and where are your flint and steel?”

“What are you going to do ?”

“Set the forest on fire—the wind is from us—and instead of following us farther—and who knows that they won’t try?—instead of following us farther they will have to hark back and run for their lives.”

Without another word we set to work gathering twigs, which we place among the trees. Then I dig up with my knife and add to the heap several pieces of the brimstone impregnated turf. This done, I strike a light with my flint and steel.

“Good!” exclaims Carmen. “In five minutes it will be ablaze; in ten, a brisk fire;” and with that we throw on more turf and several heavy branches which, for the moment, almost smother it up.

“Never mind, it still burns, and—hark! What is that?”

“The baying of the hounds and the cries of the hunters. They are nearer than I thought. To the *azuferales* for our lives!”

The moor, albeit in some places yielding and in others treacherous, did not, as I feared, prove impassable. By threading our way between the smoking sulphur heaps and carefully avoiding the boiling springs we found it possible to get on, yet slowly and with great difficulty; and it soon became evident that, long before we gain the forest the hounds will be on the moor. Their deep-throated baying and the shouts of the field grow every moment louder and more distinct. If we are viewed we shall be lost; for if the blood-hounds catch sight of us not even the terrors of the *azuferales* will balk them of their prey. And to our dismay the fire does not seem to be taking hold. We can see nothing of it but a few faint sparks gleaming through the bushes.

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But where can we hide? The moor is flat and treeless, the forest two or three miles away in a straight line, and we can go neither straight nor fast. If we cower behind one of the smoking brimstone mounds we shall be stifled; if we jump into one of the boiling springs we shall be scalded.

“Where can we hide?” I ask.

“Where can we hide?” repeated Carmen.

“That pool! Don’t you see that, a little farther on, the brook forms a pool, and, though it smokes, I don’t think it is very hot.”

“It is just the place,” and with that Carmen runs forward and plunges in.

I follow him, first taking the precaution to lay my pistol and knife on the edge. The water, though warm, is not uncomfortably hot, and when we sit down our heads are just out of the water.

We are only just in time. Two minutes later the hounds, with a great crash, burst out of the forest, followed at a short interval by half a dozen horsemen.

“Curse this brimstone! It has ruined the scent,” I heard Griscelli say, as the hounds threw up their heads and came to a dead stop. “If I had thought those *ladrones* would run hither I would not have given them twenty minutes, much less forty. But they cannot be far off; depend upon it, they are hiding somewhere.—*Por Dios*, Sheba has it! Good dog! Hark to Sheba! Forward, forward!”

It was true. One of the hounds had hit off the line, then followed another and another, and soon the entire pack was once more in full cry. But the scent was very bad, and seemed to grow worse; there was a check every few yards, and when they got to the brook (which had as many turns and twists as a coiled rope), they were completely at fault. Nevertheless, they persevered, questing about all over the moor, except in the neighborhood of the sulphur mounds and the springs.

While this was going on the horsemen had tethered their steeds and were following on foot, riding over the *azuferales* being manifestly out of the question. Once Griscelli and Sheba, who appeared to be queen of the pack, came so near the pool that if we had not promptly lowered our heads to the level of the water they would certainly have seen us.

“I am afraid they have given us the slip,” I heard Griscelli say. “There is not a particle of scent. But if they have not fallen into one of those springs and got boiled, I’ll have them yet—even though I stop all night, or come again to-morrow.”

“*Mira! Mira!* General, the forest is on fire!” shouted somebody. “And the horses—see, they are trying to get loose!”

Then followed curses and cries of dismay, the huntsman sounded his horn to call off the hounds and Carmen and I, raising our heads, saw a sight that made us almost shout for joy.

The fire, which all this time must have been smouldering unseen, had burst into a great blaze, trees and bushes were wrapped in sulphurous flames, which, fanned by the breeze, were spreading rapidly. The very turf was aglow; two of the horses had broken loose and were careering madly about; the others were tugging wildly at their lariats.

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Meanwhile Griscelli and his companions, followed by the hounds, were making desperate haste to get back to the trail and reach the valley of stones. But the road was rough, and in attempting to take short cuts several of them came to grief. Two fell into a deep pool and had to be fished out. Griscelli put his foot into one of the boiling springs, and, judging from the loud outcry he made, got badly scalded.

By the time the hunters were clear of the moor the loose horses had disappeared in the forest, and the trees on either side of the trail were festooned with flames. Then there was mounting in hot haste, and the riders, led by Griscelli (the two dismounted men holding on to their stirrup leathers), and followed by the howling and terrified hounds, tore off at the top of their speed.

“They are gone, and I don’t think they will be in any hurry to come back,” said Carmen, as he scrambled out of the pool. “It was a narrow shave, though.”

“Very, and we are not out of the wood yet. Suppose the fire sweeps round the moor and gains the forest on the other side?”

“In that case we stand a very good chance of being either roasted or starved, for we have no food, and there is not a living thing on the moor but ourselves.”

CHAPTER XVII.

A TIMELY WARNING.

The involuntary bath which saved our lives served also to restore our strength. When we entered it we were well-nigh spent; we went out of it free from any sense of fatigue, a result which was probably as much due to the chemical properties of the water as to its high temperature.

But though no longer tired we were both hungry and thirsty, and our garments were wringing wet. Our first proceeding was to take them off and wring them; our next, to look for fresh water—for the *azuferales* was like the ocean-water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink.

As we picked our way over the smoking waste by the light of the full moon and the burning forest, I asked Carmen, who knew the country and its ways so much better than myself, what he proposed that we should do next.

“Rejoin Mejia.”

“But how? We are in the enemies’ country and without horses, and we know not where Mejia is.”

“I don’t think he is far off. He is not the man to retreat after a drawn battle. Until he has beaten Griscelli or Griscelli has beaten him, you may be sure he won’t go back to the llanos; his men would not let him. As for horses, we must appropriate the first we come across, either by stratagem or force.”

“Is there a way out of the forest on this side?”

“Yes, there is a good trail made by Indian invalids who come here to drink the waters. Our difficulty will not be so much in finding our friends as avoiding our enemies. A few hours’ walk will bring us to more open country, but we cannot well start until—”

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“Good heavens! What is that?” I exclaimed, as a plaintive cry, which ended in a wail of anguish, such as might be given by a lost soul in torment, rang through the forest.

“It’s an *araguato*, a howling monkey,” said Carmen, indifferently. “That’s only some old fellow setting the tune; we shall have a regular chorus presently.”

And so we had. The first howl was followed by a second, then by a third, and a fourth, and soon all the *araguatoes* in the neighborhood joined in, and the din became so agonizing that I was fain to put my fingers in my ears and wait for a lull.

“It sounds dismal enough, in all conscience—to us; but I think they mean it for a cry of joy, a sort of morning hymn; at any rate, they don’t generally begin until sunrise. But these are perhaps mistaking the fire for the sun.”

And no wonder. It was spreading rapidly. The leafless trees that bordered the western side of the *azuferales* were all alight; sparks, carried by the wind, had kindled several giants of the forest, which, “tall as mast of some high admiral,” were flaunting their flaring banners a hundred feet above the mass of the fire.

It was the most magnificent spectacle I had ever seen, so magnificent that in watching it we forgot our own danger, as, if the fire continued to spread, the forest would be impassable for days, and we should be imprisoned on the *azuferales* without either food or fresh water.

“Look yonder!” said Carmen, laying his hand on my shoulder. A herd of deer were breaking out of the thicket and bounding across the moor.

“Wild animals escaping from the fire?”

“Yes, and we shall have more of them.”

The words were scarcely spoken when the deer were followed by a drove of peccaries; then came jaguars, pumas, antelopes, and monkeys; panthers and wolves and snakes, great and small, wriggling over the ground with wondrous speed, and creatures the like of which I had never seen before—a regular stampede of all sorts and conditions of reptiles and beasts, and all too much frightened to meddle either with us or each other.

Fortunately for us, moreover, we were not in their line of march, and there lay between us and them a line of hot springs and smoking sulphur mounds which they were not likely to pass.

The procession had been going on about half an hour when, happening to cast my eye skyward, I saw that the moon had disappeared; overhead hung a heavy mass of cloud, the middle of it reddened by the reflection from the fire to the color of blood, while the

outer edges were as black as ink. It was almost as grand a spectacle as the burning forest itself.

“We are going to have rain,” said Carmen.

“I hope it will rain in bucketfuls,” was my answer, for I had drunk nothing since we left San Felipe, and the run, together with the high temperature and the heat of the fire, had given me an intolerable thirst. I spoke with difficulty, my swollen tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and I would gladly have given ten years of my life for one glass of cold water.

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Carmen, whose sufferings were as great as my own, echoed my hope. And it was not long in being gratified, for even as we gazed upward a flash of lightning split the clouds asunder; peal of thunder followed on peal, the rain came down not in drops nor bucketfuls but in sheets, and with weight and force sufficient to beat a child or a weakling to the earth, It was a veritable godsend; we caught the beautiful cool water in our hands and drank our fill.

In less than an hour not a trace of the fire could be seen—nor anything else. The darkness had become so dense that we feared to move lest we might perchance step into one of the boiling springs, fall into the jaws of a jaguar, or set foot on a poisonous snake. So we stayed where we were, whiles lying on the flooded ground, whiles standing up or walking a few paces in the rain, which continued to fall until the rising of the sun, when it ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

The moor had been turned into a smoking swamp, with a blackened forest on one side and a wall of living green on the other. The wild animals had vanished.

“Let us go!” said Carmen.

When we reached the trees we took off our clothes a second time, hung them on a branch, and sat in the sun till they dried.

“I suppose it is no use thinking about breakfast till we get to a house or the camp, wherever that may be?” I observed, as we resumed our journey.

“Well, I don’t know. What do you say about a cup of milk to begin with?”

“There is nothing I should like better—to begin with—but where is the cow?”

“There!” pointing to a fine tree with oblong leaves.

“That!”

“Yes, that is the *palo de vaca* (cow-tree), and as you shall presently see, it will give us a very good breakfast, though we may get nothing else. But we shall want cups. Ah, there is a calabash-tree! Lend me your knife a minute. *Gracias!*”

And with that Carmen went to the tree, from which he cut a large pear-shaped fruit. This, by slicing off the top and scooping out the pulp he converted into a large bowl. The next thing was to make a gash in the *palo de vaca*, whereupon there flowed from the wound a thick milky fluid which we caught in the bowl and drank. The taste was agreeable and the result satisfactory, for, though a beefsteak would have been more acceptable, the drink stayed our hunger for the time and helped us on our way.

The trail was easily found. For a considerable distance it ran between a double row of magnificent mimosa-trees which met overhead at a height of fully one hundred and fifty feet, making a glorious canopy of green leaves and rustling branches. The rain had cooled the air and laid the dust, and but for the danger we were in (greater than we suspected) and the necessity we were under of being continually on the alert, we should have had a most enjoyable walk. Late in the afternoon we passed a hut and a maize-field,

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the first sign of cultivation we had seen since leaving the *azuferales*, and ascertained our bearings from an old peon who was swinging in a grass hammock and smoking a cigar. San Felipe was about two leagues away, and he strongly advised us not to follow a certain trail, which he described, lest haply we might fall in with Mejia's caballeros, some of whom he had himself seen within the hour a little lower down the valley.

This was good news, and we went on in high spirits.

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Carmen, complacently. "I knew Mejia would not be far off. He is like one of your English bull-dogs. He never knows when he is beaten."

After a while the country became more open, with here and there patches of cultivation; huts were more frequent and we met several groups of peons who, however, eyed us so suspiciously that we thought it inexpedient to ask them any questions.

About an hour before sunset we perceived in the near distance a solitary horseman; but as his face was turned the other way he did not see us.

"He looks like one of our fellows," observed Carmen, after scanning him closely. "All the same, he may not be. Let us slip behind this acacia-bush and watch his movements."

The man himself seemed to be watching. After a short halt, he rode away and returned, but whether halting or moving he was always on the lookout, and as might appear, keenly expectant.

At length he came our way.

"I do believe—*Por Dios* it is—Guido Pasto, my own man!" and Carmen, greatly excited, rushed from his hiding-place shouting, "Guido!" at the top of his voice.

I followed him, equally excited but less boisterous.

Guido, recognizing his master's voice, galloped forward and greeted us warmly, for though he acted as Carmen's servant he was a free *llanero*, and expected to be treated as a gentleman and a friend.

"*Gracias a Dios!*" he said; "I was beginning to fear that we had passed you. Gahra and I have been looking for you all day!"

"That was very good of you; and Senor Fortescue and I owe you a thousand thanks. But where are General Mejia and the army?"

“Near the old place. In a better position, though. But you must not go there—neither of you.”

“We must not go there! But why?”

“Because if you do the general will hang you.”

“Hang us! Hang Senor Fortescue, who has come all the way from England to help us! Hang *me*, Salvador Carmen! You have had a sunstroke and lost your wits; that’s what it is, Guido Pasto, you have lost your wits—but, perhaps you are joking. Say, now, you are joking.”

“No, *senor*. It would ill become me to make a foolish joke at your expense. Neither have I lost my wits, as you are pleased to suggest. It is only too true; you are in deadly peril. We may be observed, even now. Let us go behind these bushes, where we may converse in safety. It was to warn you of your danger that Gahra and I have been watching for you. Gahra will be here presently, and he will tell you that what I say is true.”

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“This passes comprehension. What does it all mean? Out with it, good Guido; you have always been faithful, and I don’t think you are a fool.”

“Thanks for your good opinion, senor. Well, it is very painful for me to have to say it; but the general believes, and save your own personal friends, all the army believes, that you and senor Fortescue are traitors—that you betrayed them to the enemy.”

“On what grounds?” asked Carmen, highly indignant.

“You went to reconnoitre; you did not come back; the next morning we were attacked by Griscelli in force, and Senor Fortescue was seen among the enemy, seen by General Mejia himself. It was, moreover, reported this morning in the camp that Griscelli had let you go.”

“So he did, and hunted us with his infernal blood-hounds, and we only escaped by the skin of our teeth. We were surprised and taken prisoners. Senor Fortescue was a prisoner on parole when the general saw him. I believe Griscelli obtained his parole and took him to the *quebrada* for no other purpose than to compromise him with the patriots. And that I, who have killed more than a hundred Spaniards with my own hand, should be suspected of deserting to the enemy is too monstrous for belief.”

“Of course, it is an absurd mistake. Appearances are certainly rather against us—at any rate, against me; but a word of explanation will put the matter right. Let us go to the camp at once and have it out.”

“Not so fast, Senor Fortescue. I should like to have it out much. But there is one little difficulty in the way which you may not have taken into account. Mejia never listens to explanations, and never goes back on his word. If he said he would hang us he will. He would be very sorry afterward, I have no doubt; but that would not bring us back to life, and it would be rather ridiculous to escape Griscelli’s blood-hounds, only to be hanged by our own people.”

“And that is not the worst,” put in Guido.

“Not the worst! Why what can be worse than being hanged?”

“I mean that even if the general did not carry out his threat you would be killed all the same. The Colombian gauchos swear that they will hack you to pieces wherever they find you. When Gahra comes he will tell you the same.”

“You have heard; what do you say?” asked Carmen, turning to me.

“Well, as it seems so certain that if we return to the camp we shall either be hanged or hacked to pieces, I am decidedly of opinion that we had better not return.”

“So am I. At the same time, it is quite evident that we cannot remain here, while every man’s hand is against us. Is there any possibility of procuring horses, Guido?”

“Yes, sir. I think Gahra and I will be able to bring you horses and arms after nightfall.”

“Good! And will Gahra and you throw in your lot with us?”

“Where you go I will go, senor. Let Gahra speak for himself. He will be here shortly. He is coming now. I will show myself that he may know we are here” (stepping out of the thicket).

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When the negro arrived he expressed great satisfaction at finding us alive and well. He did not think there would be any great difficulty in getting away and bringing us horses. The *lleranos* were still allowed to come and go pretty much as they liked, and if awkward questions were asked it would be easy to invent excuses. The best time to get away would be immediately after nightfall, when most of the foraging parties would have returned to camp and the men be at supper.

It was thereupon agreed that the attempt should be made, and that we should stay where we were until we heard the howl of an *araguato*, which Guido could imitate to perfection. This would signify that all was well, and the coast clear.

Then, after giving us a few pieces of *tasajo* and a handful of cigars, the two men rode off; for the night was at hand, and if we did not escape before light of moon, the chances were very much against our escaping at all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

“We seem always to be escaping, *amigo mio*,” said Carmen, as we sat in the shade, eating our *tasajo*. “We got out of one scrape only to get into another. Your experience of the country so far has not been happy.”

“Well, I certainly have had rather a lively time of it since I landed at La Guayra, if that is what you mean.”

“Very. And I should almost advise you to leave the country, if that were possible. But reaching the coast in present circumstances is out of the question. All the ports are in possession of the Spaniards, and the roads thither beset by guerillas. I see nothing for it but to go on the llanos and form a guerilla band of our own.”

“Isn’t guerilla merely another name for brigand?”

“Too often. You must promise the fellows plunder.”

“And provide it.”

“Of course, or pay them out of your own pocket.”

“Well, I am not disposed to become a brigand chief; and I could not keep a band of guerillas at my own charge even if I were disposed. As we cannot get out of the country either by the north or east, what do you say to trying south?”

“How far? To the Brazils?”

“Farther. Over the Andes to Peru.”

“Over the Andes to Peru? That is a big undertaking. Do you think we could find that mountain of gold and precious stones you were telling me about?”

“I never entertained any idea so absurd. I merely mentioned poor old Zamorra’s crank as an instance of how credulous people could be.”

“Well, perhaps the idea is not quite so absurd as you suppose. Even stranger things have happened; and we do know that there is gold pretty nearly everywhere on this continent, to say nothing of the treasure hidden in times past by Indians and Spaniards, and we might find both gold and diamonds.”

“Of course we might; and as we cannot stay here, we may as well make the attempt.”

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“You are not forgetting that it will be very dangerous? We shall carry our lives in our hands.”

“That will be nothing new; I have carried my life in my hands ever since I came to Venezuela.”

“True, and if you are prepared to encounter the risk and the hardship—As for myself, I must confess that the idea pleases me. But have you any money? We shall have to equip our expedition. If there are only four of us we shall not get beyond the Rio Negro. The Indians of that region are as fierce as alligators.”

“I have a few *maracotes* in the waistband of my trousers and this ring.”

“That ring is worth nothing, my friend; at any rate not more than a few reals.”

“A few reals! It contains a ruby, though you don’t see it, worth fully five hundred piasters—if I could find a customer for it.”

“I don’t think you will easily find a customer for a ruby ring on the llanos. However, I’ll tell you what. An old friend of mine, a certain Senor Morillones, has a large estate at a place called Naparima on the Apure. Let us go there to begin with. Morillones will supply us with mules, and we may possibly persuade some of his people to accompany us. Treasure-hunting is always an attraction for the adventurous. What say you?”

“Yes. By all means let us go.”

“We may regard it as settled, then, that we make in the first instance for Naparima.”

“Certainly.”

“That being the case the best thing we can do is to have a sleep. We got none last night, and we are not likely to get any to-night.”

As Carmen spoke he folded his arms and shut his eyes. I followed his example, and we knew no more until, as it seemed in about five minutes, we were roused by a terrific howl.

We jumped up at once and ran out of the thicket. Gahra and Guido were waiting for us, each with a led horse.

“We were beginning to think you had been taken, or gone away,” said Guido, hoarsely. “I have howled six times in succession. My voice will be quite ruined.”

“It did not sound so just now. We were fast asleep.”

“Pizarro!” I exclaimed, greatly delighted by the sight of my old favorite. “You have brought Pizarro! How did you manage that, Gahra?”

“He came to the camp last night. But mount at once, senor. We got away without difficulty—stole off while the men were at supper. But we met an officer who asked us a question; and though Guido said we were taking the horses by order of General Mejia himself, he did not appear at all satisfied, and if he should speak to the general something might happen, especially as it is not long since we left the camp, and we have been waiting here ten minutes. Here is a spear for you, and the pistols in your holsters are loaded and primed.”

I mounted without asking any more questions. Gahra’s news was disquieting, and we had no time to lose; for, in order to reach the llanos without the almost certainty of falling into the hands of our friend Griscelli, we should have to pass within a mile of the patriot camp, and if an alarm were given, our retreat might be cut off. This, however, seemed to be our only danger; our horses were fleet and fresh, and the llanos near, and, once fairly away, we might bid defiance to pursuit.

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“Let us push on,” said Carmen. “If anybody accosts us don’t answer a word, and fight only at the last extremity, to save ourselves from capture or death; and, above all things, silence in the ranks.”

The night was clear, the sky studded with stars, and, except where trees overhung the road, we could see some little distance ahead, the only direction in which we had reason to apprehend danger.

Carmen and I rode in front; Gahra and Guido a few yards in the rear.

We had not been under way more than a few minutes when Gahra uttered an exclamation.

“Hist, senores! Look behind!” he said.

Turning half round in our saddles and peering intently into the gloom we could just make out what seemed like a body of horsemen riding swiftly after us.

“Probably a belated foraging party returning to camp,” said Carmen. “Deucedly awkward, though! But they have, perhaps, no desire to overtake us. Let us go on just fast enough to keep them at a respectful distance.”

But it very soon became evident that the foraging party—if it were a foraging party—did desire to overtake us. They put on more speed; so did we. Then came loud shouts of “*Halte!*” These producing no effect, several pistol shots were fired.

“*Dios mio!*” said Carmen; “they will rouse the camp, and the road will be barred. Look here, Fortescue; about two miles farther on is an open glade which we have to cross, and which the fellows must also cross if they either meet or intercept us. The trail to the left leads to the llanos. It runs between high banks, and is so narrow that one resolute man may stop a dozen. If any of the *gauchos* get there before us we are lost. Your horse is the fleetest. Ride as for your life and hold it till we come.”

Before the words were well out of Carmen’s mouth, I let Pizarro go. He went like the wind. In six minutes I had reached my point and taken post in the throat of the pass, well in the shade. And I was none too soon, for, almost at the same instant, three *llaneros* dashed into the clearing, and then, as if uncertain what to do next, pulled up short.

“Whereabout was it? What trail shall we take?” asked one.

“This” (pointing to the road I had just quitted).

“Don’t you hear the shouts?—and there goes another pistol shot!”

“Better divide,” said another. “I will stay here and watch. You, Jose, go forward, and you, Sanchez, reconnoitre the llanos trail.”

Jose went his way, Sanchez came my way.

Still in the shade and hidden, I drew one of my pistols and cocked it, fully intending, however, to reserve my fire till the last moment; I was loath to shoot a man with whom I had served only a few days before. But when he drew near, and, shouting my name, lowered his lance, I had no alternative; I fired, and as he fell from his horse, the others galloped into the glade.

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“Forward! To the llanos!” cried Carmen; “they are close behind us. A fellow tried to stop me, but I rode him down.”

And then followed a neck-or-nothing race through the pass, which was more like a furrow than a road, steep, stony, and full of holes, and being overshadowed by trees, as dark as chaos. Only by the marvellous cleverness of our unshod horses and almost miraculous good luck did we escape dire disaster, if not utter destruction, for a single stumble might have been fatal.

But Carmen, who made the running, knew what he was about. His seeming rashness was the truest prudence. Our pursuers would either ride as hard as we did or they would not; in the latter event we should have a good start and be beyond their ken before they emerged from the pass; in the former, there was always the off chance of one of the leading horsemen coming to grief and some of the others falling over him, thereby delaying them past the possibility of overtaking us.

Which of the contingencies came to pass, or whether the guerillas, not having the fear of death behind them, rode less recklessly than we did, we could form no idea. But their shouts gradually became fainter; when we reached the llanos they were no more to be heard, and when the moon rose an hour later none of our pursuers were to be seen. Nevertheless, we pushed on, and except once, to let our animals drink and (relieved for a moment of their saddles) refresh themselves with a roll, after the want of Venezuelan horses, we drew not rein until we had put fifty miles between ourselves and Generals Mejia and Griscelli.

CHAPTER XIX.

DON ESTEBAN’S DAUGHTER.

Ten days after our flight from San Felipe we were on the banks of the Apure. We received a warm welcome from Carmen’s friend, Senor Morillones, a Spanish creole of the antique type, grave, courtly, and dignified, the owner of many square miles of fertile land and hundreds of slaves, and as rich in flocks and herds as Job in the heyday of his prosperity. He had a large house, fine gardens, and troops of servants. A grand seigneur in every sense of the word was Senor Don Esteban Morillones. His assurance that he placed himself and his house and all that was his at our disposal was no mere phrase. When he heard of our contemplated journey, he offered us mules, arms, and whatever else we required and he possessed, and any mention of payment on our part would, as Carmen said, and I could well see, have given our generous host dire offense.

We found, moreover, that we could easily engage as many men as we wanted, on condition of letting them be our co-adventurers and share in the finds which they were

sure we should make; for nobody believed that we would undertake so long and arduous a journey with any other purpose than the seeking of treasure. Our business being thus satisfactorily arranged, we might have started at once, but, for some reason or other—probably because he found our quarters so pleasant—Carmen held back. Whenever I pressed the point he would say: "Why so much haste, my dear fellow? Let us stay here awhile longer," and it was not until I threatened to go without him that he consented to "name the day."

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Now Don Esteban had a daughter, by name Juanita, a beautiful girl of seventeen, as fresh as a rose, and as graceful as a gazelle, a girl with whom any man might be excused for falling in love, and she showed me so much favor, and, as it seemed, took so much pleasure in my company, that only considerations of prudence and a sense of what was due to my host, and the laws of hospitality, prevented me from yielding myself a willing captive to her charms. But as the time fixed for our departure drew near, this policy of renunciation grew increasingly difficult. Juanita was too unsophisticated to hide her feelings, and I judged from her ways that, without in the least intending it, I had won her heart. She became silent and preoccupied. When I spoke of our expedition the tears would spring to her eyes, and she would question me about its dangers, say how greatly she feared we might never meet again, and how lonely she should feel when we were gone.

All this, however flattering to my *amour propre*, was both embarrassing and distressing, and I began seriously to doubt whether it was not my duty, the laws of hospitality to the contrary notwithstanding, to take pity on Juanita, and avow the affection which was first ripening into love. She would be my advocate with Don Esteban, and seeing how much he had his daughter's happiness at heart, there could be little question that he would pardon my presumption and sanction our betrothal.

Nevertheless, the preparations for our expedition went on, and the time for our departure was drawing near, when one evening, as I returned from a ride, I found Juanita alone on the veranda, gazing at the stars, and looking more than usually pensive and depressed.

"So you are still resolved to go, Senor Fortescue?" she said, with a sigh.

"I must. One of my principal reasons for coming to South America is to make an expedition to the Andes, and I want much to travel in parts hitherto unexplored. And who knows? We may make great discoveries."

"But you might stay with us a little longer."

"I fear we have trespassed too long on your hospitality already."

"Our hospitality is not so easily exhausted. But, O senor, you have already stayed too long for my happiness."

"Too long, for your happiness, senorita! If I thought—would you really like me to stay longer, to postpone this expedition indefinitely, or abandon it altogether?"

"Oh, so much, senor, so much. The mere suggestion makes me almost happy again."

"And if I make your wish my law, and say that it is abandoned, how then?"

“You will make me happier than I can tell you, and your debtor for life.”

“And why would it make you so happy, dear Juanita?” I asked, tenderly, at the same time looking into her beautiful eyes and taking her unresisting hand.

“Why! Oh, don’t you know? Have you not guessed?”

“I think I have; all the same, I should like the avowal from your own lips, dear Juanita.”

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“Because—because if you stay, dear,” she murmured, lowering her eyes, and blushing deeply, “if you stay, dear Salvador will stay too.”

“Dear Salvador! Dear Salvador! How—why—when? I—I beg your pardon, senorita. I had no idea,” I stammered, utterly confounded by this surprising revelation of her secret and my own stupidity.

“I thought you knew—that you had guessed.”

“I mean I had no idea that it had gone so far,” I said, recovering my self-possession with a great effort. “So you and Carmen are betrothed.”

“We love. But if he goes on this dreadful expedition I am sure my father would not consent, and Salvador says that as he has promised to take part in it he cannot go back on his word. And I said I would ask you to give it up—Salvador did not like—he said it would be such a great disappointment; and I am so glad you have consented.”

“I beg your pardon, senorita, I have not consented.”

“But you said only a minute ago that you would do as I desired, and that my will should be your law.”

“Nay, senorita, I put it merely as a supposition, I said if I did make your wish my law, how then? Less than ever can I renounce this expedition.”

“Then you were only mocking me! Cruel, cruel!”

“Less than ever can I renounce this expedition. But I will do what will perhaps please you as well. I will release Carmen from his promise. He has found his fortune; let him stay. I have mine to make; I must go.”

“O senor, you have made me happy again. I thank you with all my heart. We can now speak to my father. But you are mistaken; it is not the same to me whether you go or stay so long as you release Salvador from his promise. I would have you stay with us, for I know that he and you are great friends, and that it will pain you to part.”

“It will, indeed. He is a true man and one of the bravest and most chivalrous I ever knew. I can never forget that he risked his life to save mine. To lose so dear a friend will be a great grief, even though my loss be your gain, senorita.”

“No loss, Senor Fortescue. Instead of one friend you will have two. Your gain will be as great as mine.”

My answer to these gracious words was to take her proffered hand and press it to my lips.

"*Caramba!* What is this? Juanita? And you, senor, is it the part of a friend? Do you know?"

"Don't be jealous, Salvador," said Juanita, quietly to her lover, who had come on the balcony unperceived. "Senor Fortescue is a true friend. He is very good; he releases you from your promise. And he seemed so sorry and spoke so nobly that the least I could do was to let him kiss my hand."

"You did right, Juanita. I was hasty; I cry *peccavi* and ask your forgiveness. And you really give up this expedition for my sake, dear friend? Thanks, a thousand thanks."

"No; I absolve you from your promise. But I shall go, all the same."

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Carmen looked very grave.

“Think better of it, *amigo mio*,” he said. “When we formed this project we were both in a reckless mood. Much of the country you propose to explore has never been trodden by the white man’s foot. It is a country of impenetrable forests, fordless rivers, and unclimbable mountains. You will have to undergo terrible hardships, you may die of hunger or of thirst, and escape the poisoned arrows of wild Indians only to fall a victim to the malarious fevers which none but natives of the country can resist.”

“When did you learn all this? You talked very differently a few days ago.”

“I did, but I have been making inquiries.”

“And you have fallen in love.”

“True, and that has opened my eyes to many things.”

“To the dangers of this expedition, for instance; likewise to the fact that fighting Spaniards is not the only thing worth living for.”

“Very likely; love is always stronger than hate, and I confess that I hate the Spaniards much less than I did. Yet, in this matter, I assure you that I do not in the least exaggerate. You must remember that your companions will be half-breeds, men who have neither the stamina nor the courage for really rough work. When the hardships begin they are almost sure to desert you. If we were going together we might possibly pull through, as we have already pulled through so many dangers.”

“Yes, I shall miss you sorely. All the same, I am resolved to go, even were the danger tenfold greater than you say it is.”

“I feared as much. Well, if I cannot dissuade you from attempting this enterprise, I must e’en go with you, as I am pledged to do. To let you undertake it alone, after agreeing to bear you company were treason to our friendship. It would be like deserting in the face of the enemy.”

“Not so, Carmen. The agreement has been cancelled by mutual consent, and to leave Juanita after winning her heart would be quite as bad as deserting in face of the enemy. And I have a right to choose my company. You shall not go with me.”

Juanita again gave me her hand, and from the look that accompanied it I thought that, had I spoken first—but it was too late; the die was cast.

“You will not go just yet,” she murmured; “you will stay with us a little longer.”

“As you wish, senorita. A few days more or less will make little difference.”

Several other attempts were made to turn me from my purpose. Don Esteban himself (who was greatly pleased with his daughter's betrothal to Carmen), prompted thereto by Juanita, entered the lists. He expressed regret that he had not another daughter whom he could bestow upon me, and went even so far as to offer me land and to set me up as a Venezuelan country gentleman if I would consent to stay.

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But I remained firm to my resolve. For, albeit, none perceived it but myself I was in a false position. Though I was hopelessly in love with Juanita I liked her so well that the contemplation of Carmen's happiness did not add to my own. I thought, too, that Juanita guessed the true state of the case; and she was so kind and gentle withal, and her gratitude at times was so demonstrative that I feared if I stayed long at Naparima there might be trouble, for like all men of Spanish blood, Carmen was quite capable of being furiously jealous.

I left them a month before the day fixed for their marriage. My companions were Gahra, and a dozen Indians and mestizoes, to each of whom I was enabled, by Don Esteban's kindness, to give a handsome gratuity beforehand.

To Juanita I gave as a wedding-present my ruby-ring, to Carmen my horse Pizarro.

Our parting was one of the most painful incidents of my long and checkered life. I loved them both and I think they loved me. Juanita wept abundantly; we all embraced and tried to console ourselves by promising each other that we should meet again; but when or where or how, none of us could tell, and in our hearts we knew that the chances against the fruition of our hopes were too great to be reckoned.

Then, full of sad thoughts and gloomy forebodings, I set out on my long journey to the unknown.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HAPPY VALLEY.

My gloomy forebodings were only too fully realized. Never was a more miserably monotonous journey. After riding for weeks, through sodden, sunless forests and trackless wastes we had to abandon our mules and take to our feet, spend weeks on nameless rivers, poling and paddling our canoe in the terrible heat, and tormented almost to madness by countless insects. Then the rains came on, and we were weather-stayed for months in a wretched Indian village. But for the help of friendly aborigines—and fortunately the few we met, being spoken fair showed themselves friendly—we must all have perished. They gave us food, lent us canoes, served us as pilots and guides, and thought themselves well paid with a piece of scarlet cloth or a handful of glass beads.

My men turned out quite as ill as I had been led to expect. Several deserted at the outset, two or three died of fever, two were eaten by alligators, and when we first caught sight of the Andes, Gahra was my sole companion.

We were in a pitiful plight. I was weak from the effects of a fever, Gahra lame from the effects of an accident. My money was nearly all gone, my baggage had been lost by

the upsetting of a canoe, and our worldly goods consisted of two sorry mules, our arms, the ragged clothes on our backs, and a few pieces of silver. How we were to cross the Andes, and what we should do when we reached Peru was by no means clear. As yet, the fortune which I had set out to seek seemed further off than ever. We had found neither gold nor silver nor precious stones, and all the coin I had in my waist-belt would not cover the cost of a three days' sojourn at the most modest of *posaderos*.

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But we have left behind us the sombre and rain-saturated forests of the Amazon and the Orinoco, and the fine country around us and the magnificent prospect before us made me, at least, forget for the moment both our past privations and our present anxieties. We are on the *montana* of the eastern Cordillera, a mountain land of amazing fertility, well wooded, yet not so thickly as to render progress difficult; the wayside is bordered with brilliant flowers, cascades tumble from rocky heights, and far away to the west rise in the clear air the glorious Andes, alps on alps, a vast range of stately snow-crowned peaks, endless and solemn, veiled yet not hidden by fleecy clouds, and as cold and mysterious as winter stars looking down on a sleeping world.

For a long time I gaze entranced at the wondrous scene, and should probably have gone on gazing had not Gahra reminded me that the day was well-nigh spent and that we were still, according to the last information received, some distance from the mission of San Andrea de Huanaco, otherwise Valle Hermoso, or Happy Valley.

One of our chief difficulties had been to find our way; maps we had none, for the very sufficient reason that maps of the region we had traversed did not at that time exist; our guides had not always proved either competent or trustworthy, and I had only the vaguest idea as to where we were. Of two things only was I certain, that we were south of the equator and within sight of the Andes of Peru (which at that time included the countries now known as Ecuador and Bolivia).

A few days previously I had fallen in with an old half-caste priest, from whom I had heard of the Mission of San Andrea de Huanaco, and how to get there, and who drew for my guidance a rough sketch of the route. The priest in charge, a certain Fray Ignacio, a born Catalan, would, he felt sure, be glad to find me quarters and give me every information in his power.

And so it proved. Had I been his own familiar friend Fray Ignacio could not have welcomed me more warmly or treated me more kindly. A European with news but little above a year old was a perfect godsend to him. When he heard that I had served in his native land and the Bourbons once more ruled in France and Spain, he went into ecstasies of delight, took me into his house, and gave me of his best.

San Andrea was well named Valle Hermoso. It was like an alpine village set in a tropical garden. The mud houses were overgrown with greenery, the rocks mantled with flowers, the nearer heights crested with noble trees, whose great white trunks, as smooth and round as the marble pillars of an eastern palace, were roofed with domes of purple leaves.

Through the valley and between verdant banks and blooming orchards meandered a silvery brook, either an affluent or a source of one of the mighty streams which find their homes in the great Atlantic.

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The mission was a village of tame Indians, whose ancestors had been “Christianized,” by Fray Ignacio’s Jesuit predecessor. But the Jesuits had been expelled from South America nearly half a century before. My host belonged to the order of St. Francis. The spiritual guide, as well as the earthly providence of his flock, he managed their affairs in this world and prepared them for the next. And they seemed nothing loath. A more listless, easy-going community than the Indians of the Happy Valley it were difficult to imagine. The men did little but smoke, sleep, and gamble. All the real work was done by the women, and even they took care not to over-exert themselves. All were short-lived. The women began to age at twenty, the men were old at twenty-five and generally died about thirty, of general decay, said the priest. In my opinion of pure laziness. Exertion is a condition of healthy existence; and the most active are generally the longest lived.

Nevertheless, Fray Ignacio was content with his people. They were docile and obedient, went regularly to church, had a great capacity for listening patiently to long sermons, and if they died young they got so much the sooner to heaven.

All the same, Fray Ignacio was not so free from care as might be supposed. He had two anxieties. The Happy Valley was so far untrue to its name as to be subject to earthquakes; but as none of a very terrific character had occurred for a quarter of a century he was beginning to hope that it would be spared any further visitations for the remainder of his lifetime. A much more serious trouble were the occasional visits of bands of wild Indians—*Indios misterios*, he called them; what they called themselves he had no idea. Neither had he any definite idea whence they came; from the other side of the Cordilleras, some people thought. But they neither pillaged nor murdered—except when they were resisted or in drink, for which reason the father always kept his *aguardiente* carefully hidden. Their worst propensity was a passion for white girls. There were two or three *mestizo* families in the village, some of whom were whiter, or rather, less coppery than the others, and from these the *misterios* would select and carry off the best-looking maidens; for what purpose Fray Ignacio could not tell, but, as he feared, to sacrifice to their gods.

When I heard that these troublesome visitors generally numbered fewer than a score, I asked why, seeing that the valley contained at least a hundred and fifty men capable of bearing arms, the raiders were not resisted. On this the father smiled and answered, that no earthly consideration would induce his tame Indians to fight; it was so much easier to die. He could not even persuade the *mestizoes* to migrate to a safer locality. It was easier to be robbed of their children occasionally than to move their goods and chattels and find another home.

I asked Fray Ignacio whether he thought these robbers of white children were likely to pay him a visit soon.

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“I am afraid they are,” he said. “It is nearly two years since their last visit, and they only come in summer. Why?”

“I have a curiosity to see these; and I think I could save the children and give these wild fellows such a lesson that they would trouble you no more—at any rate for a long time to come.”

“I should be inexpressibly grateful. But how, senor?”

Whereupon I disclosed my scheme. It was very simple; I proposed to turn one of the most likely houses in the village into a small fortress which might serve as a refuge for the children and which Gahra and I would undertake to defend. We had two muskets and a pair of double-barrelled pistols, and the priest possessed an old blunderbuss, which I thought I could convert into a serviceable weapon. In this way we should be able to shoot down four or five of the *misterios* before any of them could get near us, and as they had no firearms I felt sure that, after so warm a reception, they would let us alone and go their way. The shooting would demoralize them, and as we should not show ourselves they could not know that the garrison consisted only of the negro and myself.

“Very well,” said the priest, after a moment’s thought. “I leave it to you. But remember that if you fail they will kill you and everybody else in the place. However, I dare say you will succeed, the firearms may frighten them, and, on the whole, I think the risk is worth running!”

The next question was how to get timely warning of the enemy’s approach. I suggested posting scouts on the hills which commanded the roads into the valley. I thought that, albeit the tame Indians were good for nothing else, they could at least sit under a tree and keep their eyes open.

“They would fall asleep,” said Fray Ignacio.

So we decided to keep a lookout among ourselves, and ask the girls who tended the cattle to do the same. They were much more wide-awake than the men, if the latter could be said to be awake at all.

The next thing was to fortify the priest’s house, which seemed the most suitable for our purpose. I strengthened the wall with stays, repaired the old *trabuco*, which was almost as big as a small cannon, and made ready for barricading the doors and windows on the first alarm.

This done, there was nothing for it but to wait with what patience I might, and kill time as I best could. I walked about, fished in the river, and talked with Fray Ignacio. I would

have gone out shooting, for there was plenty of game in the neighborhood, only that I had to reserve my ammunition for more serious work.

For the present, at least, my idea of exploring the Andes appeared to be quite out of the question. I should require both mules and guides, and I had no money either to buy the one or to pay the other.

And so the days went monotonously on until it seemed as if I should have to remain in this valley surnamed Happy for the term of my natural life, and I grew so weary withal that I should have regarded a big earthquake as a positive god-send. I was in this mood, and ready for any enterprise, however desperate, when one morning a young woman who had been driving cattle to an upland pasture, came running to Fray Ignacio to say that she had seen a troop of horsemen coming down from the mountains.

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"The *misterios*!" said the priest, turning pale. "Are you still resolved, senor?"

"Certainly," I answered, trying to look grave, though really greatly delighted. "Be good enough to send for the girls who are most in danger. Gahra and I will take possession of the house, and do all that is needful."

It was further arranged that Fray Ignacio should remain outside with his tame Indians, and tell the *misterios* that all the good-looking *mestiza*, maidens were in his house, guarded by braves from over the seas, who would strike dead with lightning anybody who attempted to lay hands on them.

By the time our preparations were completed, and the frightened and weeping girls shut up in an inner room, the wild Indians were at the upper end of the big, straggling village, and presently entered a wide, open space between the ramshackle old church and Ignacio's house. The party consisted of fifteen or sixteen warriors mounted on small horses. All rode bare-back, were naked to the waist, and armed with bows and arrows and the longest spears I had yet seen.

The tame Indians looked stolidly on. Nothing short of an earthquake would have disturbed their self-possession. Rather to my surprise, for he had not so far shown a super-abundance of courage, Fray Ignacio seemed equal to the occasion. He was tall, portly, and white-haired, and as he stood at the church door, clad in his priestly robes, he looked venerable and dignified.

One of the *misterios*, whom from his remarkable head-dress—a helmet made of a condor's skull—I took to be a cacique, after greeting the priest, entered into conversation with him, the purport of which I had no difficulty in guessing, for the Indian, laughing loudly, turned to his companions and said something that appeared greatly to amuse them. Neither he nor they believed Fray Ignacio's story of the great pale-face chief and his death-dealing powers.

The cacique, followed by a few of his men, then rode leisurely toward the house. He was a fine-looking fellow, with cigar-colored skin and features unmistakably more Spanish than Indian.

My original idea was to shoot the first two of them, and so strike terror into the rest. But the cacique bore himself so bravely that I felt reluctant to kill him in cold blood; and, thinking that killing his horse might do as well, I waited until they were well within range, and, taking careful aim, shot it through the head. As the horse went down, the cacique sprang nimbly to his feet; he seemed neither surprised nor dismayed, took a long look at the house, then waved his men back, and followed them leisurely to the other side of the square.

“What think you, Gahra? Will they go away and leave us in peace, or shall we have to shoot some of them?” I said as I reloaded my musket.

“I think we shall, senor. That tall man whose horse you shot did not seem much frightened.”

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“Anything but that, and—what are they about now?”

The wild Indians, directed by their chief, were driving the tame Indians together, pretty much as sheep-dogs drive sheep, and soon had them penned into a compact mass in an angle formed by the church and another building. Although the crowd numbered two or three hundred, of whom a third were men, no resistance was offered. A few of exceptionally energetic character made a languid attempt to bolt, but were speedily brought back by the *misterios*, whose long spears they treated with profound respect.

So soon as this operation was completed the cacique beckoned peremptorily to the *padre*, and the two, talking earnestly the while, came toward the house. It seemed as if the Indian chief wanted a parley; but, not being quite sure of this, I thought it advisable, when he was about fifty yards off, to show him the muzzle of my piece. The hint was understood. He laid his weapons on the ground, and, when he and the padre were within speaking distance, the *padre*, who appeared very much disturbed, said the cacique desired to have speech of me. Not to be outdone in magnanimity I opened the door and stepped outside.

The cacique doffed his skull-helmet and made a low bow. I returned the greeting, said I was delighted to make his acquaintance, and asked what I could do to oblige him.

“Give up the maidens,” he answered, in broken Spanish.

“I cannot; they are in my charge. I have sworn to protect them, and, as you discovered just now, I have the means of making good my word.”

“It is true. You have lightning; I have none, and I shall not sacrifice my braves in a vain attempt to take the maidens by force. Nevertheless, you will give them up.”

“You are mistaken. I shall not give them up.”

“The great pale-face chief is a friend of these poor tame people; he wishes them well?”

“It is true, and for that reason I shall not let you carry off the seven maidens.”

“Seven?”

“Yes, seven.”

“How many men and women and maidens are there yonder, trembling before the spears of my braves like corn shaken by the wind—fifty times seven?”

“Probably.”

“Then my brother—for I also am a great chief—my brother from over the seas holds the liberty of seven to be of more account than the lives of fifty times seven.”

“My brother speaks in riddles,” I said, acknowledging the cacique’s compliment and adopting his style.

“It is a riddle that a child might read. Unless the maidens are given up—not to harm, but to be taken to our country up there—unless they are given up the spears of my braves will drink the blood of their kinsfolk, and my horses shall trample their bodies in the dust.”

The cacique spoke so gravely and his air was so resolute that I felt sure he would do as he said, and I did not see how I could prevent him. His men were beyond the range of our pieces, and to go outside were to lose our lives to no purpose. We might get a couple of shots at them, but, before we could reload, they would either shoot us down with their bows or spit us with their spears.

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Fray Ignacio, seeing the dilemma, drew me aside.

“You will have to do it,” he said. “I am very sorry. The girls will either be sacrificed or brought up as heathens; but better so than that these devils should be let loose on my poor people, for, albeit some might escape, many would be slaughtered. Why did you shoot the horse and let the savage and his companion go scathless?”

“You may well ask the question, father. I see what a grievous mistake I made. When it came to the point, I did not like to kill brave men in cold blood. I was too merciful.”

“As you say, a grievous mistake. Never repeat it, senor. It is always a mistake to show mercy to *Indios brutos*. But what will you do?”

“I suppose give up the girls; it is the smaller evil of the two. And yet—I promised that no evil should befall them—no, I must make another effort.”

And with that I turned once more to the cacique.

“Do you know,” I said, laying my hand on the pistol in my belt—“do you know that your life is in my hands?”

He did not flinch; but a look passed over his face which showed that my implied threat had produced an effect.

“It is true; but if a hair of my head be touched, all these people will perish.”

“Let them perish! What are the lives of a few tame Indians to me, compared with my oath? Did I not tell you that I had sworn to protect the maidens—that no harm should befall them? And unless you call your men off and promise to go quietly away—” Here I drew my pistol.

It was now the cacique’s turn to hesitate. After a moment’s thought he answered:

“Let the lightning kill me, then. It were better for me to die than to return to my people empty-handed; and my death will not be unavenged. But if the pale-face chief will go with us instead of the maidens, he will make Gondocori his friend, and these tame Indians shall not die.”

“Go with you! But whither?”

Gondocori pointed toward the Cordillera.

“To our home up yonder, in the heart of the Andes.”

“And what will you do with me when you get me there?”

“Your fate will be decided by Mamcuna, our queen. If you find favor in her sight, well.”

“And if not—?”

“Then it would not be well—for you. But as she has often expressed a wish to see a pale-face with a long beard, I think it will be well; and in any case I answer for your life.”

“What security have I for this? How do I know that when I am in your power you will carry out the compact?”

“You have heard the word of Gondocori. See, I will swear it on the emblem you most respect.”

And the cacique pressed his lips to the cross which hung from Ignacio’s neck. It was a strange act on the part of a wild Indian, and confirmed the suspicion I already entertained, that Condocori was the son of a Christian mother.

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“He is a heathen; his oath is worthless; don’t trust him, let the girls go,” whispered the padre in my ear.

But I had already made up my mind. It was on my conscience to keep faith with the girls; I wanted neither to kill the cacique nor see his men kill the tame Indians, and whatever might befall me “up yonder” I should at any rate get away from San Andrea de Huanaco.

“The die is cast; I will go with you,” I said, turning to Gondocori.

“Now, I know, beyond a doubt, that my brother is the bravest of the brave. He fears not the unknown.”

I asked if Gahra might bear me company.

“At his own risk. But I cannot answer for his safety. Mamcuna loves not black people.”

This was not very encouraging, and after I had explained the matter to Gahra I strongly advised him to stay where he was. But he said he was my man, that he owed me his liberty, and would go with me to the end, even though it should cost him his life.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

We have left behind us the *montano*, with its verdant uplands and waving forests, its blooming valleys, flower-strewed savannas, and sunny waters, and are crawling painfully along a ledge, hardly a yard wide, stern gray rocks all round us, a foaming torrent only faintly visible in the prevailing gloom a thousand feet below. Our mules, obtained at the last village in the fertile region, move at the speed of snails, for the path is slippery and insecure, and one false step would mean death for both the rider and the ridden,

Presently the gorge widens into a glen, where forlorn flowers struggle toward the scanty light and stunted trees find a precarious foothold among the rocks and stones. Soon the ravine narrows again, narrows until it becomes a mere cleft; the mule-path goes up and down like some mighty snake, now mounting to a dizzy height, anon descending to the bed of the thundering torrent. The air is dull and sepulchral, an icy wind blows in our faces, and though I am warmly clad, and wrapped besides in a thick *poncho*, I shiver to the bone.

At length we emerge from this valley of the shadow of death, and after crossing an arid yet not quite treeless plain, begin to climb by many zigzags an almost precipitous height. The mules suffer terribly, stopping every few minutes to take breath, and it is

with a feeling of intense relief that, after an ascent of two hours, we find ourselves on the *cumbre*, or ridge of the mountain.

For the first time since yesterday we have an unobstructed view. I dismount and look round. Backward stretches an endless expanse of bleak and stormy-swept billowy mountains; before us looms, in serried phalanx, the western Cordillera, dazzling white, all save one black-throated colossus, who vomits skyward thick clouds of ashes and smoke, and down whose ragged flanks course streams of fiery lava.

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After watching this stupendous spectacle for a few minutes we go on, and shortly reach another and still loftier *quebrada*. Icicles hang from the rocks, the pools of the streams are frozen; we have reached an altitude as high as the summit of Mont Blanc, and our distended lips, swollen hands, and throbbing temples show how great is the rarefaction of the air.

None of us suffer so much from the cold as poor Gahra. His ebon skin has turned ashen gray, he shivers continually, can hardly speak, and sits on his mule with difficulty.

The country we are in is uninhabited and the trail we are following known only to a few Indians. I am the first white man, says Gondocori, by whom it has been trodden.

We pass the night in a ruined building of cyclopean dimensions, erected no doubt in the time of the Incas, either for the accommodation of travellers by whom the road was then frequented or for purposes of defence. But being both roofless, windowless, and fireless, it makes only a poor lodging. The icy wind blows through a hundred crevices; my limbs are frozen stiff, and when morning comes many of us look more dead than alive.

I asked Condocori how the poor girls of San Andrea could possibly have survived so severe a journey.

“The weaker would have died. But I did not expect this cold. The winter is beginning unusually early this year. Had we been a few days later we should not have got through at all, and if it begins to snow it may go ill with us, even yet. But to-morrow the worst will be over.”

The cacique had so far behaved very well, treating me as a friend and an equal, and doing all he could for my comfort. His men treated me as a superior. Gondocori said very little about his country, still less about Queen Mamcuna, whom he also called “Great Mother.” To my frequent questions on these subjects he made always the same answer: “Patience, you will see.”

He did, however, tell me that his people called their country Pachatupec and themselves Pachatupecs, that the Spaniards had never subdued them or even penetrated into the fastnesses where they dwelt, and that they spoke the ancient language of Peru.

Gondocori admitted that his mother was a Christian, and to her he no doubt owed his notions of religion and the regularity of his features. She had been carried off as he meant to carry off the seven maidens of the Happy Valley, for the *misterios* had a theory that a mixture of white and Indian blood made the finest children and the boldest warriors. But white wives being difficult to obtain, *mestiza* maidens had generally to be accepted, or rather, taken in their stead.

We rose before daybreak and were in the saddle at dawn. The ground and the streams are hard frozen, and the path is so slippery that the trembling mules dare scarcely put one foot before the other, and our progress is painfully slow. We are in a broad, stone-strewed valley, partly covered with withered puma-grass, on which a flock of graceful *vicunas* are quietly grazing, as seemingly unconscious of our presence as the great condors which soar above the snowy peaks that look down on the plain.

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As we leave the valley, through a pass no wider than a gateway, the cacique gives me a word of warning.

“The part we are coming to is the most dangerous of all,” he said. “But it is, fortunately, not long. Two hours will bring us to a sheltered valley. And now leave everything to your mule. If you feel nervous shut your eyes, but as you value your life neither tighten your reins nor try to guide him.”

I repeat this caution to Gahra, and ask how he feels.

“Much better, senor; the sunshine has given me new life. I feel equal to anything.”

And now we have to travel once more in single file, for the path runs along a mountain spur almost as perpendicular as a wall; we are between two precipices, down which even the boldest cannot look without a shudder. The incline, moreover, is rapid, and from time to time we come to places where the ridge is so broken and insecure that we have to dismount, let our mules go first, and creep after them on our hands.

At the head of the file is an Indian who rides the *madrina* (a mare) and acts as guide, next come Gondocori, myself and Gahra, followed by the other mounted Indians, three or four baggage-mules, and two men on foot.

We have been going thus nearly an hour, when a sudden and portentous change sets in. Murky clouds gather round the higher summits and shut out the sun, a thick mist settles down on the ridge, and in a few minutes we are folded in a gloom hardly less dense than midnight darkness.

“Halt!” shouts the guide.

“What shall we do?” I ask the cacique, whom, though he is but two yards from me, I cannot see.

“Nothing. We can only wait here till the mist clears away,” he shouts in a muffled voice.

“And how soon may that be?”

“*Quien Sabe?* Perhaps a few minutes, perhaps hours.”

Hours! To stand for hours, even for one hour, immovable in that mist on that ridge would be death. Since the sun disappeared the cold had become keener than ever. The blood seems to be freezing in my veins, my beard is a block of ice, icicles are forming on my eyelids.

If this goes on—a gleam of light! Thank Heaven, the mist is lifting, just enough to enable me to see Gondocori and the guide. They are quite white. It is snowing, yet so softly as not to be felt, and as the fog melts the flakes fall faster.

“Let us go on,” says Gondocori. “Better roll down the precipice than be frozen to death. And if we stop here much longer, and the snow continues, the pass beyond will be blocked, and then we must die of hunger and cold, for there is no going back.”

So we move on, slowly and noiselessly, amid the fast-falling snow, like a company of ghosts, every man conscious that his life depends on the sagacity and sure-footedness of his mule. And it is wonderful how wary the creatures are. They literally feel their way, never putting one foot forward until the other is firmly planted. But the snow confuses them. More than once my mule slips dangerously, and I am debating within myself whether I should not be safer on foot, when I hear a cry in front.

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“What is it?” I ask Gondocori, for I cannot see past him.

“The guide is gone. The *madrina* slipped, and both have rolled down the precipice.”

“Shall we get off and walk?”

“If you like. You will not be any safer, though you may feel so. The mules are surer footed than we are, and they have four legs to our two. I shall keep where I am.”

Not caring to show myself less courageous than the *cacique*, I also keep where I am. We get down the ridge somehow without further mishaps, and after a while find ourselves in a funnel-shaped gully the passage of which, in ordinary circumstances, would probably present no difficulty. But just now it is a veritable battle-field of the winds, which seem to blow from every point of the compass at once. The snow dashes against our faces like spray from the ocean, and whirls round us in blasts so fierce that, at times, we can neither see nor hear. The mules, terrified and exhausted, put down their heads and stand stock-still. We dismount and try to drag them after us, but even then they refuse to move.

“If they won’t come they must die; and unless we hurry on we shall die, too. Forward!” cried Gondocori, himself setting the example.

Never did I battle so hard for very life as in that gully. The snow nearly blinded me, the wind took my breath away, forced me backward, and beat me to the earth again and again. More than once it seemed as if we should have to succumb, and then there would come a momentary lull and we would make another rush and gain a little more ground.

Amid all the hurly-burly, though I cannot think consecutively (all the strength of my body and every faculty of my mind being absorbed in the struggle), I have one fixed idea—not to lose sight of Gondocori, and, except once or twice for a few seconds, I never did. Where he goes I go, and when, after an unusually severe buffeting, he plunges into a snow-drift at the end of the ravine, I follow him without hesitation.

Side by side we fought our way through, dashing the snow aside with our hands, pushing against it with our shoulders, beating it down with our feet, and after a desperate struggle, which though it appeared endless could have lasted only a few minutes, the victory was ours; we were free.

I can hardly believe my eyes. The sun is visible, the sky clear and blue, and below us stretches a grassy slope like a Swiss “alp.” Save for the turmoil of wind behind us and our dripping garments I could believe that I had just wakened from a bad dream, so startling is the change. The explanation is, however, sufficiently simple: the area of the *tourmente* is circumscribed and we have got out of it, the gully merely a passage

between the two mighty ramparts of rock which mark the limits of the tempest and now protect us from its fury.

“But where are the others?”

Up to that moment I had not given them a thought. While the struggle lasted thinking had not been possible. After we abandoned the mules I had eyes only for Gondocori, and never once looked behind me.

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“Where are the others?” I asked the *cacique*.

“Smothered in the snow; two minutes more and we also should have been smothered.”

“Let us go back and see. They may still live.”

“Impossible! We could not get back if we had ten times the strength and were ten instead of two. Listen!”

The roar of the storm in the gully is louder than ever; the drift, now higher than the tallest man, grows even as we look.

Fifteen men buried alive within a few yards of us, yet beyond the possibility of help! Poor Gahra! If he had loved me less and himself more, he would still be enjoying the *dolce far niente* of Happy Valley, instead of lying there, stark and stiff in his frozen winding-sheet. A word of encouragement, a helping hand at the last moment, and he might have got through. I feel as if I had deserted him in his need; my conscience reproaches me bitterly. And yet—good God! What is that? A black hand in the snow!

“With a single bound I am there. Gondocori follows, and as I seize one hand he finds and grasps the other, and we pull out of the drift the negro’s apparently lifeless body.

“He is dead,” says the *cacique*.

“I don’t think so. Raise him up, and let the sun shine on him.”

I take out my pocket-flask and pour a few drops of *aguardiente* down his throat. Presently Gahra sighs and opens his eyes, and a few minutes later is able to stand up and walk about. He can tell very little of what passed in the gully. He had followed Gondocori and myself, and was not far behind us. He remembered plunging into the snow-drift and struggling on until he fell on his face, and then all was a blank. None of the Indians were with him in the drift; he felt sure they were all behind him, which was likely enough, as Gahra, though sensitive to cold, was a man of exceptional bodily strength. It was beyond a doubt that all had perished.

“I left Pachatupec with fifteen braves. I have lost my braves, my mules, and my baggage, and all I have to show are two men, a pale-face and a black-face. Not a single maiden. How will Mamcuna take it, I wonder?” said Gondocari, gloomily. “Let us go on.”

“You think she will be very angry?”

“I do.”

“Is she very unpleasant when she is angry?”

“She generally makes it very unpleasant for others. Her favorite punishment for offenders is roasting them before a slow fire.”

“And yet you propose to go on?”

“What else can we do? Going back the way we came is out of the question, equally so is climbing either of those mountain-ranges. If we stay hereabout we shall starve. We have not a morsel of food, and until we reach Pachatupec we shall get none.”

“And when may that be?”

“By this time to-morrow.”

“Well, let us go on, then; though, as between being starved to death and roasted alive, there is not much to choose. All the same, I should like to see this wonderful queen of whom you are so much afraid.”

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“You would be afraid of her, too, and very likely will be before you have done with her. Nevertheless, you may find favor in her sight, and I have just bethought me of a scheme which, if you consent to adopt it, may not only save our lives, but bring you great honor.”

“And what is that scheme, Gondocori?”

“I will explain it later. This is no time for talk. We must push on with all speed or we shall not get to the boats before nightfall.”

“Boats! You surely don’t mean to say that we are to travel to Pachatupec by boats. Boats cannot float on a frozen mountain torrent!”

But the cacique, who was already on the march, made no answer.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CACIQUE’S SCHEME.

Shortly before sunset we arrived at our halting-place for the night and point of departure for the morrow—a hollow in the hills, hemmed in by high rocks, almost circular in shape and about a quarter of a mile in diameter. The air was motionless and the temperature mild, the ground covered with grass and shrubs and flowers, over which hovered clouds of bright-winged butterflies. Low down in the hollow was a still and silent pool, and though, so far as I could make out, it had no exit, two large flat-bottomed boats and a couple of canoes were made fast to the side. Hard by was a hut of sun-dried bricks, in which were slung three or four grass hammocks.

There was also fuel, so we were able to make a fire and have a good warming, of which we stood greatly in need. But as nothing in the shape of food could be found, either on the premises or in the neighborhood, we had to go supperless to bed.

Before we turned in Gondocori let us into the secret of the scheme which was to propitiate Queen Mamcuna, and bring us honor and renown, instead of blame and (possibly) death.

“I shall tell her,” said the cacique, “that though I have lost my braves and brought no maidens, I have brought two famous medicine-men, who come from over the seas.”

“Very good. But how are we to keep up the character?”

“You must profess your ability to heal the sick and read the stars.”

“Nothing easier. But suppose we are put to the test? Are there any sick in your country?”

“A few; Mamcuna herself is sick; you have only to cure her and all will be well.”

“Very likely; but how if I fail?”

“Then she would make it unpleasant for all of us.”

“You mean she would roast us by a slow fire?”

“Probably. There is no telling, though. Our Great Mother is very ingenious in inventing new punishments, and to those who deceive her she shows no mercy.”

“I understand. It is a case of kill or cure.”

“Exactly. If you don’t cure her she will kill you.”

“I will do my best, and as I have seen a good deal of practical surgery, helped to dress wounds and set broken limbs, and can let blood, you may truthfully say that I have some slight knowledge of the healing art. But as for treating a sick woman—However, I leave it to you, Gondocori. If you choose to introduce me to her Majesty as a medicine-man I will act the part to the best of my ability.”

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“I ask no more, senor; and if you are fortunate enough to cure Mamcuna of her sickness —”

“Or make her believe that I have cured her.”

“That would do quite as well; you will thank me for bringing you to Pachatupec, for although the queen can make things very unpleasant for those who offend her, she can also make them very pleasant for those whom she likes. And now, senores, as we must to-morrow travel a long way fasting, let us turn into our hammocks and compose ourselves to sleep.”

Excellent advice, which I was only too glad to follow. But we were awake long before daylight—for albeit fatigue often acts as an anodyne, hunger is the enemy of repose—-and at the first streak of dawn wended to the silent pool.

As we stepped into the canoe selected by Gondocori (the boats were intended for the transport of mules and horses) I found that the water was warm, and, on tasting it, I perceived a strong mineral flavor. The pool was a thermal spring, and its high temperature fully accounted for the fertility of the hollow and the mildness of the air. But how were we to get out of it? For look as I might, I could see no signs either of an outlet or a current. Gondocori, who acted as pilot, quickly solved the mystery. A buttress of rock, which in the distance looked like a part of the mass, screened the entrance to a narrow waterway. Down this waterway the cacique navigated the canoe. It ran in tortuous course between rocks so high that at times we could see nothing save a strip of purple sky, studded with stars. Here and there the channel widened out, and we caught a glimpse of the sun; and at an immeasurable height above us towered the *nevados* (snowy slopes) of the Cordillera.

The stream, if that can be called a stream which does not move, had many branches, and we could well believe, as Gondocori told us, that it was as easy to lose one’s self in this watery labyrinth as in a tropical forest. In all Pachatupec there were not ten men besides himself who could pilot a boat through its windings. He told us, also, that this was the only pass between the eastern and western Cordillera in that part of the Andes, that the journey from San Andrea to Pachatupec by any other route would be an affair not of days but of weeks. The water was always warm and never froze. Whence it came nobody could tell. Not from the melting of the snow, for snow-water was cold, and this was always warm, winter and summer. For his own part he thought its source was a spring, heated by volcanic fires, and many others thought the same. Its depth was unknown; he himself had tried to fathom it with the longest line he could find, yet had never succeeded in touching ground.

Meanwhile we were making good progress, sometimes paddling, sometimes poling (where the channel was narrow) and toward evening when, as I reckoned, we had

travelled about sixty miles, we shot suddenly into a charming little lake with sylvan banks and a sandy beach.

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Gondocori made fast the canoe to a tree, and we stepped ashore.

We are on the summit of a spur which stands out like a bastion from the imposing mass of the Cordillera, through the very heart of which runs the mysterious waterway we have just traversed. Two thousand feet or more below is a broad plain, bounded on the west by a range of gaunt and treeless hills ribbed with contorted rocks, which stretch north and south farther than the eye can reach. The plain is cultivated and inhabited. There are huts, fields, orchards, and streams, and about a league from the foot of the bastion is a large village.

“Pachatupec?” I asked.

“*Si, senor*, that is Pachatupec, a very fair land, as you see, and yonder is Pachacamac, where dwells our queen,” said Gondocori, pointing to the village; and then he fell into a brown study, as if he was not quite sure what to do next.

The sight of his home did not seem to rejoice the cacique as much as might be supposed. The approaching interview with Mamcuna was obviously weighing heavily on his soul, and, to tell the truth, I rather shared his apprehensions. A savage queen with a sharp temper who occasionally roasted people alive was not to be trifled with. But as delay was not likely to help us, and I detest suspense, and, moreover, felt very hungry, I suggested that we had better go on to Pachacamac forthwith.

“Perhaps we had. Yes, let us get it over,” he said, with a sigh.

After descending the bastion by a steep zigzag we turned into a pleasant foot-path, shaded by trees, and as we neared our destination we met (among other people) two tall Indians, whose condor-skull helmets denoted their lordly rank. On recognizing Gondocori (who had lost his helmet in the snow-storm and looked otherwise much dilapidated) their surprise was literally unspeakable. They first stared and then gesticulated. When at length they found their tongues they overwhelmed him with questions, eying Gahra and me the while as if we were wild animals. After a short conversation, of which, being in their own language, I could only guess the purport, the two caciques turned back and accompanied us to the village. Save that there was no sign of a church, it differed little from many other villages which I had met with in my travels. There were huts, mere roofs on stilts, cottages of wattle and dab, and flat-roofed houses built of sun-dried bricks. Streets, there were none, the buildings being all over the place, as if they dropped from the sky or sprung up hap-hazard from the ground.

About midway in the village one of the caciques left us to inform the queen of our arrival and to ask her pleasure as to my reception. The other cacique asked us into his house, and offered us refreshments. Of what the dishes set before us were composed I had only the vaguest idea, but hunger is not fastidious and we ate with a will.

We had hardly finished when cacique number one, entering in breathless haste, announced that Queen Mumcuna desired to see us immediately, whereupon I suggested to Gondocori the expediency of donning more courtly attire, if there was any to be got.

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“What, keep the queen waiting!” he exclaimed, aghast. “She would go mad. Impossible! We must go as we are.”

Not wanting her majesty to go mad, I made no further demur, and we went.

The palace was a large adobe building within a walled inclosure, guarded by a company of braves with long spears. We were ushered into the royal presence without either ceremony or delay. The queen was sitting in a hammock with her feet resting on the ground. She wore a bright-colored, loosely-fitting bodice, a skirt to match, and sandals. Her long black hair was arranged in tails, of which there were seven on each side of her face. She was short and stout, and perhaps thirty years old, and though in early youth she might have been well favored, her countenance now bore the impress of evil passions, and the sodden look of it, as also the blood-streaks in her eyes, showed that her drink was not always water. At the same time, it was a powerful face, indicative of a strong character and a resolute will. Her complexion was bright cinnamon, and the three or four women by whom she was attended were costumed like herself.

On entering the room the three caciques went on their knees, and after a moment’s hesitation Gahra followed their example. I thought it quite enough to make my best bow. Mamcuna then motioned us to draw nearer, and when we were within easy speaking distance she said something to Gondocori that sounded like a question or a command, on which he made a long and, as I judged from the vigor of his gesture and the earnestness of his manner, an eloquent speech. I watched her closely and was glad to see that though she frowned once or twice during its delivery, she did not seem very angry. I also observed that she looked at me much more than at the cacique, which I took to be a favorable sign. The speech was followed by a lively dialogue between Mamcuna and the cacique, after which the latter turned to me and said, as coolly as if he were asking me to be seated:

“The queen commands you to strip.”

“Commands me to strip! What do you mean?”

“What I say; you have to strip—undress, take off your clothes.”

“You are joking.”

“Joking! I should like to see the man who would dare to take such a liberty in the audience-chamber of our Great Mother. Pray don’t make words about it, senor. Take off your clothes without any more bother, or she will be getting angry.”

“Let her get angry. I shall do nothing of the sort—No, don’t say that; say that English gentlemen—I mean pale-face medicine-men from over the seas, never undress in the presence of ladies; their religion forbids it.”

Gondocori was about to remonstrate again when the queen interposed and insisted on knowing what I said. When she heard that I refused to obey her behest she turned purple with rage, and looked as if she would annihilate me. Then her mood, or her mind, changing, she laughed loudly, at the same time pointing to the door and making an observation to the cacique.

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Having meanwhile reflected that I was not in an English drawing-room, that this wretched woman could have me stripped whether I would or no, and that refusal to comply with her wishes might cost me my life, I asked Gondocori why the queen wanted me to undress.

“She wants to see whether your body is as hairy as your face (I had not shaved since I left Naperima), and your face as fair as your body.”

“Will it satisfy her if I meet her half-way—strip to the waist? You can say that I never did as much for any woman before, and that I would not do it for the queen of my own country, whatever might be the consequence.”

The cacique interpreted my proposal, and Mamcuna smiled assent. “The queen says, ‘let it be as you say;’ and she charges me to tell you that she is very much pleased to know that you will do for her what you would not do for any other woman.”

On that I took off my upper garments and Mamcuna, rising from her hammock, examined me as closely as a military surgeon examines a freshly caught recruit. She felt the muscles of my arms, thumped my chest, took note of the width of my back, punched my ribs, and finally pulled a few hairs out of my beard. Then, smiling approval, she retired to her chinchura.

“You may put on your clothes; the inspection is over,” said Gondocori. “I am glad it has passed off so well. I was rather afraid, though, when she began to pinch you.”

“Afraid of what?”

“Well, the queen is rather curious about skin and color and that, and does curious things sometimes. She once had a strip of skin cut out of a mestiza maiden’s back, to see whether it was the same color on both sides. But she seems to have taken quite a liking for you; says you are the prettiest man she ever saw; and if you cure her of her illness I have no doubt she will give you a condor’s skull helmet and make you a cacique.”

“I am greatly obliged to her Majesty, I am sure, and very thankful she did not take a fancy to cut a piece out of my back. As for curing her, I must first of all know what is the matter.”

“Shall I ask her to describe her symptoms?”

“If you please.” In reply to the questions which I put, through Gondocori, the queen said that she suffered from headache, nausea, and sleeplessness, and that, whereas only a few years ago she was lithe, active, and gay, she was now heavy, indolent, and melancholy, adding that she had suffered much at the hands of the late court medicine-man, who did not understand her case at all, and that to punish him for his ignorance

and presumption she made him swallow a jarful of his own physic, from the effects of which he shortly afterward expired in great agony. The place was now vacant, and if I succeeded in restoring her to health she would make me his successor and always have me near her person.

I cannot say that I regarded this prospect as particularly encouraging; nevertheless, I tried to look pleased and told Gondocori to assure the queen of my gratitude and devotion and ask her to show me her tongue. He put this request with evident reluctance, and Mamcuna made an angry reply.

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“I knew how it would be,” said the cacique. “You have put her in a rage. She thinks you want to insult her, and absolutely refuses to make herself hideous by sticking out her tongue.”

“She will of course do as she pleases. But unless she shows me her tongue I cannot cure her. I shall not even try. Tell her so.”

To tell the truth I had really no great desire to look at the woman’s tongue, but having made the request I meant to stand to my guns.

After some further parley she yielded, first of all making the three caciques and Gahra look the other way. The appearance of her tongue confirmed the theory I had already formed that she was suffering from dyspepsia, brought on by overeating and a too free indulgence in the wine of the country (a sort of cider) and indolent habits.

I said that if she would follow my instructions I had no doubt that I could not only cure her but make her as lithe and active as ever she was. Remembering, however, that as even the highly civilized people object to be made whole without physic and fuss, and that the queen would certainly not be satisfied with a simple recommendation to take less food and more exercise, I observed that before I could say anything further I must gather plants, make decoctions, and consult the stars, and that my black colleague should prepare a charm which would greatly increase the potency of my remedies and the chances of her recovery.

Mamcuna answered that I talked like a medicine-man who understood his business and her case, that she would strictly obey my orders, and so soon as she felt better give me a condor’s skull helmet. Meanwhile, I was to take up my quarters in her own house, and she ordered the caciques to send me forthwith three suits of clothes, my own, as she rightly remarked, not being suitable for a man of my position.

“Now, did not I tell you?” said Gondocori, as we left the room. “Oh, we are going on swimmingly; and it is all my doing. I do believe that if I had not protested that you were the greatest medicine-man in the world, and had come expressly to cure her, she would have had you roasted or ripped up by the man-killer or turned adrift in the desert, or something equally diabolical. Your fate is in your own hands now. If you fail to make good your promises, it will be out of my power to help you. You heard how she treated your predecessor.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

YOU ARE THE MAN.

Early next morning I sent Gahra secretly up to the lake on the bastion for a jar of chalybeate water, which, after being colored with red earth and flavored with wild garlic,

was nauseous enough to satisfy the most exacting of physic swallowers. Then the negro sacrificed a cock in the royal presence, and performed an incantation in the most approved African fashion, and we made the creature's claws and comb into an amulet, which I requested the queen to hang round her neck.

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This done, I gave my instructions, assuring her that if she failed in any particular to observe them my efforts would be vain, and her cure impossible. She was to drink nothing but water and physic (of the latter very little), eat animal food only once a day, and that sparingly, and walk two hours every morning; and finding that she could ride on horseback (like a man), though she had lately abandoned the exercise, I told her to ride two hours every evening. I also laid down other rules, purposely making them onerous and hard to be observed, partly because I knew that a strict regimen was necessary for her recovery, partly to leave myself a loop-hole, in the event of her not recovering, for I felt pretty sure that she would not do all that I had bidden her, and if she came short in any one thing I should have an excuse ready to my hand.

But to my surprise she did not come short. For Mamcuna to give up her cider and her flesh pots, and, flabby and fat as she was, to walk and ride four hours every day, must have been very hard, yet she conformed to regulations with rare resolution and self-denial. As a natural consequence she soon began to mend, at first slowly and almost imperceptibly, afterward rapidly and visibly, as much to my satisfaction as hers; for if my treatment had failed, I could not have said that the fault was hers.

Meanwhile I was picking up information about her people, and acquiring a knowledge of their language, and as I was continually hearing it spoken I was soon able to make myself understood.

The Pachatupecs, though heathens and savages, were more civilized than any of the so-called *Indios civilizados* with whom I had come in contact. They were clean as to their persons, bathing frequently, and not filthy in their dwellings; they raised crops, reared cattle, and wore clothing, which for the caciques consisted of a tunic of quilted cotton, breeches loose at the knees, and sandals. The latter virtue may, however, have been due to the climate, for though the days were warm the nights were chilly, and the winters at times rather severe, the country being at a considerable height above the level of the sea. On the other hand, the Pachatupecs were truculent, gluttonous, and not very temperate; they practised polygamy, and all the hard work devolved on the women, whose husbands often brutally ill-used them. It was contrary to etiquette to ask a man questions about his wives, and if you went to a cacique's house you were expected either to ignore their presence or treat them as slaves, as indeed they were, and the condition of captive Christian girls was even worse than that of the native women.

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Considering the light esteem in which women were held I was surprised that the Pachatupecs consented to be ruled by one of the sex. But Gondocori told me that Mamcuna came of a long line of princes who were supposed to be descended from the Incas, and when her father died, leaving no male issue, a majority of the caciques chose her as his successor, in part out of reverence for the race, in part out of jealousy of each other, and because they thought she would let them do pretty much as they liked. So far from that, however, she made them do as she liked, and when some of the caciques raised a rebellion she took the field in person, beat them in a pitched battle, and put all the leaders and many of their followers to death. Since that time there had been no serious attempt to dispute her authority, which, so far as I could gather, she used, on the whole, to good purpose. Though cruel and vindictive, she was also shrewd and resolute, and semi-civilized races are not ruled with rose-water. She could only maintain order by making herself feared, and even civilized governments often act on the principle that the end justifies the means.

Mamcuna had never married because, as she said, there was no man in the country fit to mate with a daughter of the Incas; but as Gondocori and some others thought, the man did not exist with whom she would consent to share her power.

The Pachatupec braves were fine horsemen and expert with the lasso and the spear and very fine archers. They were bold mountaineers, too, and occasionally made long forays as far as the pampas, where, I presume, they had brought the progenitors of the *nandus*, of which there were a considerable number in the country, both wild and tame. The latter were sometimes ridden, but rather as a feat than a pleasure. The largest flock belonged to the queen.

By the time I had so far mastered the language as to be able to converse without much difficulty, the queen had fully regained her health. This result—which was of course entirely due to temperate living and regular exercise—she ascribed to my skill, and I was in high favor. She made me a cacique and court medicine-man; I had quarters in her house, and horses and servants were always at my disposal. Had her Majesty's gratitude gone no further than this I should have had nothing to complain of; but she never let me alone, and I had no peace. I was continually being summoned to her presence; she kept me talking for hours at a time, and never went out for a ride or a walk without making me bear her company. Her attentions became so marked, in fact, that I began to have an awful fear that she had fallen in love with me. As to this she did not leave me long in doubt.

One day when I had been entertaining her with an account of my travels, she startled me by inquiring, *a propos* to nothing in particular, if I knew why she had not married.

"Because you are a daughter of the Incas, and there is no man in Pachatupec of equal rank with yourself."

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“Once there was not, but now there is.”

I breathed again; she surely could not mean me.

“There is now—there has been some time,” she continued, after a short pause. “Know you who he is?”

I said that I had not the slightest idea.

“Yourself, senor; you are the man.”

“Impossible, Mamcuna! I am of very inferior rank, indeed—a common soldier, a mere nobody.”

“You are too modest, senor; you do yourself an injustice. A man with so white a skin, a beard so long, and eyes so beautiful must be of royal lineage, and fit to mate even with the daughter of the Incas.”

“You are quite mistaken, Mamcuna; I am utterly unworthy of so great an honor.”

“You are not, I tell you. Please don’t contradict me, senor” (she always called me ’senor’); “it makes me angry. You are the man whom I delight to honor and desire to wed; what would you have more?”

“Nothing—I would not have so much. You are too good; but it would be wrong. I really cannot let you throw yourself away on a nameless foreigner. Besides what would your caciques say?”

“If any man dare say a word against you I will have his tongue torn out by the roots.”

“But suppose I am married already—that I have left a wife in my own country?” I urged in desperation.

“That would not matter in the least. She is not likely to come hither, and I will take care that I am your only wife in this country.”

“Your condescension quite overwhelms me. But all this is so sudden; you must really give me a little time—”

“A little time! why? You perhaps think I am not sincere, that I do not mean what I say, that I may change my mind. Have no fear on that score. There shall be no delay. The preparations for our wedding shall be begun at once, and ten days hence, dear senor, you will be my husband.”

What could I say? I had, of course, no intention of marrying her—I would as lief have married a leopardess. But had I given her a peremptory negative she might have had me laid by the heels without more ado, or worse. So I bowed my head and held my tongue, resolving at the same time that, before the expiration of the ten days' respite, I would get out of the country or perish in the attempt. Whereupon Mamcuna, taking my silence for consent, showed great delight, patted me on the back, caressed my beard, fondled my hands, and called me her lord. Fortunately, kissing was not an institution in Pachatupec.

One good result of our betrothal, if I may so call it, was that the preparations for the wedding took up so much of Mamcuna's time that she had none left for me, and I had leisure and opportunity to contrive a plan of escape, if I could, for, as I quickly discovered, the difficulties in the way were almost if not altogether insurmountable. I could neither go back to the eastern Cordillera by the road I had come, nor, without guides, find any other pass, either farther north or farther south. Westward was a range of barren hills bounded by a sandy desert, destitute of life or the means of supporting life, and stretching to the desolate Pacific coast, whence, even if I could reach it, I should have no means of getting away.

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There was, moreover, nobody to whom I could appeal for counsel or help. Gondocori thought me the most fortunate of men, and was quite incapable of understanding my scruples. Gahra, albeit willing to go with me, knew no more of the country than I did, and there was not a man in it who could have been induced even by a bribe either to act as my guide or otherwise connive at my escape; and I had no inducement to offer.

Nevertheless, the opportunity I was looking for came, as opportunities often do come, spontaneously and unexpectedly, yet in shape so questionable that it was open to doubt whether, if I accepted it, my second condition would not be worse than my first.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE TOILS.

Five days after I had been wooed by the irresistible Mamcuna, and as I was beginning to fear that I should have to marry her first and run away afterward, I chanced to be riding in the neighborhood of the village, when a woman darted out of the thicket and, standing before my horse, held up her arms imploringly. I had never spoken to her, but I knew her as the white wife of one of the caciques.

“Save me, senor!” she exclaimed, “for the love of heaven and in the name of our common Christianity, I implore you to save me!”

“From what?”

“From my wretched life, from despair, degradation, and death.” And then she told me that, while travelling in the mountains with her husband, a certain Senor de la Vega, and several friends, they were set upon by a band of Pachatupecs who, after killing all the male members of the party, carried her off and brought her to Pachacamac, where she had been compelled to become one of the wives of the cacique Chimu, and that between his brutality and the jealousy of the other women, her life, apart from its ignominy, was so utterly wretched that, unless she could escape, she must either go mad or be driven to commit suicide.

“I should be only too glad to rescue you if I could. I want to escape myself; but how? I see no way.”

“It is not so difficult as you think, senor; if we can get horses and a few hours’ start, I will act as guide and lead you to a civilized settlement, where we shall be safe from pursuit. I know the country well.”

“Are you quite sure you can do this, senora? It will be a hazardous enterprise, remember.”

“Quite sure.”

“And you are prepared to incur the risk?”

“I will run any risk rather than stay where I am.”

“Very well, I will see what can be done. Meet me here to-morrow at this hour. And now, we had better separate; if we are seen together it will be bad for both of us. *Hasta manana*.”

And then she went her way and I went mine.

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I had said truly “a hazardous enterprise.” Hazardous and difficult in any circumstances, the hazard and the difficulty would be greatly increased by the presence of a woman; and the fact of a cacique’s wife being one of the companions of my flight would add to the inveteracy of the pursuit. I greatly doubted, moreover, whether Senora de la Vega knew the country as well as she asserted. She was so sick of her wretched condition that she would say or do anything to get away from it—and no wonder. But was I justified in letting her run the risk? The punishment of a woman who deserted her husband was death by burning; were Senora de la Vega caught, this punishment would be undoubtedly inflicted; were it even suspected that she had met me or any other man, secretly, Chimu would almost certainly kill her. Pachatupec husbands had the power of life and death over their wives, and they were as jealous and as cruel as Moors. Yet death was better than the life she was compelled to lead, and as she was fully cognizant of the risk it seemed my duty to do all that I could to facilitate her escape.

Then another thought occurred to me. Could this be a trap, a “put up job,” as the phrase goes. Though the *caciques* had not dared to make any open protest against Mamcuna’s matrimonial project, I knew that they were bitterly opposed to it, and nothing, I felt sure, would please them better than to kindle the queen’s jealousy by making it appear that I was engaged in an intrigue with one of Chimu’s wives.

Yet no, I could not believe it. No Christian woman would play so base a part. Senora de la Vega could have no interest in betraying me. She hated her savage husband too heartily to be the voluntary instrument of my destruction, and she was so utterly wretched that I pitied her from my soul.

A creole of pure Spanish blood and noble family, bereft of her husband, forced to become the slave of a brutal Indian, and the constant associate of hardly less brutal women, painfully conscious of her degradation, hopeless of any amendment of her lot, poor Senora de la Vega’s fate would have touched the hardest heart. And she had little children at home! My suspicions vanished even more quickly than they had been conceived, and before I reached my quarters I had decided that, come what might, the attempt should be made.

The next question was how and when. Clearly, the sooner the better; but whether we had better set off at sunrise or sunset was open to doubt. By leaving at sunset we should be less easily followed; on the other hand, we should have greater difficulty in finding our way and be sooner missed. It was generally about sunset that Mamcuna sent for me, and I knew that at this time it would be well-nigh impossible for Senora de la Vega to leave Chimu’s house without being observed and questioned, perhaps followed. So when we met as agreed, I told her that I had decided to make the attempt on the next morning, and asked her to be in a grove of plantains, hard by, an hour before dawn. I besought her, whatever she did, to be punctual; our lives depended on our stealing away before people were stirring.

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Meanwhile Gahra and I had laid our plans. He was to give out the night before that we were setting off early next morning on a hunting expedition. This would enable us, without exciting suspicion, to take a supply of provisions, arms, and a led horse (for carrying any game we might kill) and, as I hoped, give us a long start. For even when Senora de la Vega was missed nobody would suspect that she had gone with us.

In the event—as we hoped, the improbable event—of our being overtaken or intercepted, Gahra and I were resolved not to be taken alive; but we had, unfortunately, no firearms; they were all lost in the snow-storm. Our only weapons were bows and arrows and machetes. I carried the former merely as a make-believe, to keep up my character as a hunter; for the same reason we took with us a brace of dogs. If it came to fighting I should have to put my trust in my *machete*, a long broad-bladed sword like a knife, formidable as a lethal weapon, yet chiefly used for clearing away brambles and cutting down trees.

All went well at the beginning. We were up betimes and off with our horses before daylight. The braves on duty asked no questions, there was no reason why they should, and we passed through the village without meeting a soul.

So far, good. The omens seemed favorable, and my hopes ran high. We should get off without anybody knowing which way we had taken, and several hours before Senora de la Vega was likely to be missed.

But when we reached the rendezvous she was not there. I whistled and called softly; nobody answered.

“She will be here presently, we must wait,” I said to Gahra.

It was terribly annoying. Every minute was precious. The Pachatupecs are early risers, and if Senora de la Vega did not join us before daylight we might be seen and the opportunity lost. The sun rose; still she did not come, and I had just made up my mind to put off our departure until the next morning, and try to communicate with Senora de la Vega in the meantime, when Gahra pointed to a pathway in the wood, where his sharp eyes had detected the fluttering of a robe.

At last she was coming. But too late. To start at that time would be madness, and I was about to tell her so, send her back, and ask her to meet me on the next morning, when she ran forward with terrified face and uplifted hands.

“Save me! Save me!” she cried, “I could not get away sooner. I have been watched. They are following me, even now.”

This was a frightful misfortune, and I feared that the senora had acted very imprudently. But it was no time either for reproaches or regrets, and the words were scarcely out of

her mouth when I lifted her into the saddle; as I did so, I caught sight of two horsemen and several foot-people, coming down the pathway.

“Go!” I said to Gahra, “I shall stay here.”

“But, senor—”

“Go, I say; as you love me, go at once. This lady is in your charge. Take good care of her. I can keep these fellows at bay until you are out of sight and, if possible, I will follow. At once, please, at once!”

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They went, Gahra's face expressing the keenest anguish, the senora half dead with fear. As they rode away I turned into the pathway and prepared for the encounter. The foot-people might do as they liked, they could not overtake the fugitives, but I was resolved that the horsemen should only pass over my body.

The foremost of them was Chimu himself. When he saw that I had no intention of turning aside, he and his companion (who rode behind him) reined in their horses. The cacique was quivering with rage.

"My wife has gone off with your negro," he said, hoarsely.

I made no answer.

"I saw you help her to mount. You have met her before. Mamcuna shall know of this, and my wife shall die."

Still I made no answer.

"Let me pass!"

I drew my *machete*.

Chimu drew his and came at me, but he was so poor a swordsman, that I merely played with him, my object being to gain time, and only when the other fellow tried to push past me and get to my left-rear, did I cut the cacique down. On this his companion bolted the way he had come. I galloped after him, more with the intention of frightening than hurting him, and was just on the point of turning back and following the fugitives, when something dropped over my head, my arms were pinioned to my side, and I was dragged from my saddle.

The foot-people had lassoed me.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAN-KILLER.

I was as helpless as a man in a strait waistcoat. When I tried to rise, my captors tautened the rope and dragged me along the ground. Resistance being futile, I resigned myself to my fate.

On seeing what had happened, the flying brave (a kinsman of Chimu's) returned, and he and the others held a palaver. As Mamcuna's affianced husband, I was a person of importance, and they were evidently at a loss how to dispose of me. If they treated me roughly, they might incur her displeasure. The discussion was long and rather stormy.

In the result, I was asked whether I would go with them quietly to the queen's house or be taken thither, *nolens volens*. On answering that I would go quietly, I was unbound and allowed to mount my horse.

I do not think I am a coward, and in helping Senora de la Vega to escape and sending her off with Gahra, I knew that I had done the right thing. Yet I looked forward to the approaching interview with some misgiving. Barbarian though Mamcuna was, I could not help entertaining a certain respect for her. She had treated me handsomely; in offering to make me her husband she had paid me the greatest compliment in her power; and how little soever you may reciprocate the sentiment, it is impossible to think altogether unkindly of the woman who has given you her love. And my conscience was not free from reproach; I had let her think that I loved her—as I now perceived, a great mistake. Courageous herself, she could appreciate courage in others, and had I boldly and unequivocally refused her offer and given my reasons, I did not believe she would have dealt hardly with me.

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As it was Mamcuna might well say that, having deliberately deceived her, I deserved the utmost punishment which it was in her power to inflict. At the same time, I was not without hope that when she heard my defence she would spare my life.

By the time we reached the queen's house my escort had swollen into a crowd, and one of the caciques went in to inform Mamcuna what had befallen and ask for her instructions.

In a few minutes he brought word that the queen would see me and the people who had taken part in my capture forthwith. We found her sitting in her *chinchura*, in the room where she and I first met. Bather to my surprise she was calm and collected; yet there was a convulsive twitching of her lips and an angry glitter in her eyes that boded ill for my hopes of pardon.

"Is it true, this they tell me, senor—that you have been helping Chimu's wife to escape, and killed Chimu?" she asked.

"It is true."

"So you prefer this wretched pale-face woman to me?"

"No, Mamcuna."

"Why, then, did you help her to escape and kill her husband? Don't trifle with me."

"Because I pitied her."

"Why?"

"Chimu treated her ill, and she was very wretched. She wanted to go back to her own country, and she has little children at home."

"What was her wretchedness to you? Did you not know that you were incurring my displeasure and risking your own life?"

"I did. But a Christian caballero holds it his duty to protect the weak and deliver the oppressed, even at the risk of his own life."

Mamcuna looked puzzled. The sentiment was too fine for her comprehension.

"You talk foolishness, senor. No man would run into danger for a woman whom he did not desire to make his own."

"I had no desire to make Senora de la Vega my wife. I would have done the same for any other woman."

“For any other woman! Would you risk your life for me, senor?”

“Surely, Mamcuna, if you were in sorrow or distress and I could do you any good thereby.”

“It is well, senor; your voice has the ring of truth,” said the queen, softly, and with a gratified smile, “and inasmuch as you went not away with Chimu’s pale-faced wife, but let her depart with the negro—”

“The senor would have gone also had we not hindered him,” interposed Chimu’s kinsman. “We saw him lift the woman into the saddle, and he was turning to follow her when Lurin caught him with the lasso.”

“Is this true; would you have gone with the woman?” asked the queen, sternly, her smile changing into an ominous frown.

“It is true; but let me explain—”

“Enough; I will not hear another word. So you would have left me, a daughter of the Incas, who have honored you above all other men, and gone away with a woman you say you do not love! Your heart is full of deceit, your mouth runs over with lies. You shall die; so shall the white woman and the black slave. Where are they? Bring them hither.”

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The caciques and braves who were present stared at each other in consternation. In their exultation and excitement over my capture the fugitives had been forgotten.

“Mules! Idiots! Old women! Follow them and bring them back. They shall be burned in the same fire. As for you, senor, because you cured me of my sickness and were to have been my husband I will let you choose the method of your death. You may either be roasted before a slow fire, hacked to pieces with *machetes*, or fastened on the back of the man-killer and sent to perish in the desert. Choose.”

“Just one word of explanation, Mamcuna. I would fain—”

“Silence! or I will have your tongue torn out by the roots. Choose!”

“I choose the man-killer.”

“You think it will be an easier death than being hacked to pieces. You are wrong. The vultures will peck out your eyes, and you will die of hunger and thirst. But as you have said so let it be. Tie him to the back of the man-killer, men, and chase it into the desert. If you let him escape you die in his place. But treat him with respect; he was nearly my husband.”

And then Mamcuna, sinking back into her *chinchura*, covered her face with her hands; but she showed no sign of relenting, and I was bound with ropes and hurried from the room.

The man-killer was a nandu[1] belonging to the queen, and had gained his name by killing one man and maiming several others who unwisely approached him when he was in an evil temper. Save for an occasional outburst of homicidal mania and his abnormal size and strength, the man-killer did not materially differ from the other nandus of Mamcuna’s flock. His keeper controlled the bird without difficulty, and I had several times seen him mount and ride it round an inclosure.

[1] The American ostrich.

The desert, as I have already mentioned, lies between the Cordillera and the Pacific Ocean, stretching almost the entire length of the Peruvian coast, with here and there an oasis watered by one or other of the few streams which do not lose themselves in the sand before they reach the sea. It is a rainless, hideous region of naked rocks and whirling sands, destitute of fresh water and animal life, a region into which, except for a short distance, the boldest traveller cares not to venture.

After leaving the queen’s house I was placed in charge of a party of braves commanded by a cacique, and we set out for the place where my expiation was to begin. The nandu, led by his keeper and another man, of course went with us. My conductors, albeit they made no secret of their joy over my downfall, did their mistress’s bidding, and

treated me with respect. They loosed my bonds, taking care, however, so to guard me as to render escape impossible, and, when we halted, gave me to eat and drink. But their talk was not encouraging. In their opinion, nothing could save me from a horrible death, probably of thirst. The best that I could hope for was being smothered in a sandstorm. The man-killer would probably go on till he dropped from exhaustion, and then, whether I was alive or dead, birds of prey would pick out my eyes and tear the flesh from my bones.

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About midday we reached the mountain range which divides Pachatupec from the desert. Anything more lonesome and depressing it were impossible to conceive. Not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade of grass nor any green thing; neither running stream nor gleam of water could be seen. It was a region in which the blessed rain of heaven had not fallen for untold ages, a region of desolation and death, of naked peaks, rugged precipices, and rocky ravines. The heat from the overhead sun, intensified by the reverberations from the great masses of rock around us, and unrelieved by the slightest breath of air, was well-nigh suffocating.

Into this plutonic realm we plunged, and, after a scorching ride, reached the head of a pass which led straight down to the desert. Here the cacique in command of the detachment told me, rather to my surprise, that we were to part company. They were already a long way from home and saw no reason why they should go farther. The desert, albeit four or five leagues distant, was quite visible, and, once started down the pass, the nandu would be bound to go thither. He could not climb the rocks to the right or the left, and the braves would take care that he did not return.

As objection, even though I had felt disposed to make it, would have been useless, I bowed acquiescence. The thought of resisting had more than once crossed my mind, and, by dint of struggling and fighting, I might have made the nandu so restive that I could not have been fastened on his back. But in that case my second condition would have been worse than my first; I should have been taken back to Pachatupec and either burned alive or hacked to pieces, and, black as seemed the outlook, I clung to the hope that the man-killer would somehow be the means of saving my life.

The binding was effected with considerable difficulty. It required the united strength of nearly all the braves to hold the nandu while the cacique and the keepers secured me on his back. As he was let go he kicked out savagely, ripping open with his terrible claws one of the men who had been holding him. The next moment he was striding down the steep and stony pass at a speed which, in a few minutes, left the pursuing and shouting Pachatupecs far behind. The ground was so rough and the descent so rapid that I expected every moment we should come to grief. But on we went like the wind. Never in my life, except in an express train, was I carried so fast. The great bird was either wild with rage or under the impression that he was being hunted. The speed took my breath away; the motion make me sick. He must have done the fifteen miles between the head of the pass and the beginning of the desert in little more than as many minutes. Then, the ground being covered with sand and comparatively level, the nandu slacked his speed somewhat, though he still went at a great pace.

The desert was a vast expanse of white sand, the glare of which, in the bright sunshine, almost blinded me, interspersed with stretches of rock, swept bare by the wind, and loose stones.

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Instead of turning to the right or left, that is to say, to the north or south, as I hoped and expected he would, the man-killer ran straight on toward the sea. As for the distance of the coast from that part of the Cordillera I had no definite idea—perhaps thirty miles, perhaps fifty, perhaps more. But were it a hundred we should not be long in going thither at the speed we were making; and vague hopes, suggesting the possibility of signalling a passing ship or getting away by sea, began to shape themselves in the mind. The nandu could not go on forever; before reaching the sea he must either alter his course or stop, and if he stopped only a few minutes and so gave me a chance of steadying myself I thought that, by the help of my teeth, I might untie one of the cords which the movements of the bird and my own efforts had already slightly loosened, and once my arms were freed the rest would be easy.

An hour (as nearly as I could judge) after leaving the Cordillera I sighted the Pacific—a broad expanse of blue water shining in the sun and stretching to the horizon. How eagerly I looked for a sail, a boat, the hut of some solitary fisherman, or any other sign of human presence! But I saw nothing save water and sand; the ocean was as lonesome as the desert. There was no salvation thitherward.

Though my hope had been vague, my disappointment was bitter; but a few minutes later all thought of it was swallowed up in a new fear. The sea was below me, and as the ground had ceased to fall I knew that the desert must end on that side in a line of lofty cliffs. I knew, also, that nandus are among the most stupid of bipeds, and it was just conceivable that the man-killer, not perceiving his danger until too late, might go over the cliffs into the sea.

The hoarse roar of the waves as they surge against the rocks, at first faint, grows every moment louder and deeper. I see distinctly the land's end, and mentally calculate from the angle it makes with the ocean, the height of the cliffs.

Still the man-killer strides on, as straight as an arrow and as resolutely as if a hundred miles of desert, instead of ten thousand miles of water, stretched before him. Three minutes more and—I set my teeth hard and draw a deep breath. At any rate, it will be an easier end than burning, or dying of thirst—Another moment and—

But now the nandu, seeing that he will soon be treading the air, makes a desperate effort to stop short, in which failing he wheels half round, barely in time to save his life and mine, and then courses madly along the brink for miles, as if unable to tear himself away, keeping me in a state of continual fear, for a single slip, or an accidental swerve to the right, and we should have fallen headlong down the rocks, against which the waves are beating.

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As night closes in he gradually—to my inexpressible relief—draws inland, making in a direction that must sooner or later take us back to the Cordillera, though a long way south of the pass by which we had descended to the desert. But I have hardly sighted the outline of the mighty barrier, looming portentously in the darkness, when he alters his course once again, wenching this time almost due south. And so he continues for hours, seldom going straight, now inclining toward the coast, anon facing toward the Cordillera but always on the southward tack, never turning to the north.

It was a beautiful night. The splendor of the purple sky with its myriads of lustrous stars was in striking contrast with the sameness of the white and deathlike desert. A profound melancholy took hold of me. I had ceased to fear, almost to think, my perceptions were blinded by excitement and fatigue, my spirits oppressed by an unspeakable sense of loneliness and helplessness, and the awful silence, intensified rather than relieved by the long drawn moaning of the unseen ocean, which, however far I might be from it, was ever in my ears.

I looked up at the stars, and when the cross began to bend I knew that midnight was past, and that in a few hours would dawn another day. What would it bring me—life or death? I hardly cared which; relief from the torture and suspense I was enduring would be welcome, come how it might. For I suffered cruelly; I had a terrible thirst. The cords chafed my limbs and cut into my flesh. Every movement gave an exquisite pain; I was continually on the rack; rest, even for a moment, was impossible, as, though the nandu had diminished his speed, he never stopped. And then a wind came up from the sea, bringing with it clouds of dust, which well-nigh choked and half blinded me; filled my ears and intensified my thirst. After a while a strange faintness stole over me; I felt as if I were dying, my eyes closed, my head sank on my breast, and I remembered no more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANGELA.

"*Regardez mon pere, regardez! Il va mieux, le pauvre homme.*"

"*C'est ca, ma fille cherie, faites le boire.*"

I open my eyes with an effort, for the dust of the desert has almost blinded me.

I am in a beautiful garden, leaning against the body of the dead ostrich, a lovely girl is holding a cup of water to my parched lips, and an old man of benevolent aspect stands by her side.

"*Merci mademoiselle, vous etes bien bonne*," I murmur.

"Oh, father, he speaks French."

“This passes comprehension. Are you French, monsieur?”

“No, English.”

“English! This is stranger still. But whence come you, and who bound you on the nandu?”

“I will tell you—a little more water, I pray you, mademoiselle.”

“Let him drink again, Angela—and dash some water in his face; he is faint.”

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"*Le pauvre homme!* See how his lips are swollen! Do you feel better, monsieur?" she asked compassionately, again putting the cup to my lips.

"Much. A thousand thanks. I can answer your question now (to the old man). I was bound on the nandu by order of the Queen of the Pachatupec Indians."

"The Pachatupec Indians! I have heard of them. But they are a long way off; more than a hundred leagues of desert lies between us and the Pachatupec country. Are you quite sure, monsieur?"

"Quite. And seeing that the nandu went at great speed, though not always in a direct line, and we must have been going fifteen or sixteen hours, I am not surprised that we have travelled so far."

"*Mon dieu!* And all that time you have neither eaten nor drunk. No wonder you are exhausted! Come with us, and we will give you something more invigorating than water. You shall tell us your story afterward—if you will."

I tried to rise, but my stiffened and almost paralyzed limbs refused to move.

"Let us help you. Take his other arm, Angela—thus, Now!" And with that they each gave me a hand and raised me to my feet.

"How was it? Who killed the nandu?" I asked as I hobbled on between them.

"We saw the creature coming toward us with what looked like a dead man on his back, and as he did not seem disposed to stop I told Angela, who is a famous archer, to draw her bow and shoot him. He fell dead where he now lies, and when we saw that, though unconscious, you still lived, we unloosed you."

"And saved my life. Might I ask to whom I am indebted for this great service, and to what beautiful country the nandu has brought me?"

"Say nothing about the service, my dear sir. Helping each other in difficulty and distress is a duty we owe to Heaven and our common humanity. I count your coming a great blessing. You are the first visitor we have had for many years, and the Abbe Balthazar gives you a warm welcome to San Cristobal de Quipai. The name is of good omen, Quipai being an Indian word which signifies 'Rest Here,' and I shall be glad for you to rest here so long as it may please you."

"Nigel Fortescue, formerly an officer in the British Army, at present a fugitive and a wanderer, tenders you his warmest thanks, and gratefully accepts your hospitality—And now that we know each other, Monsieur l'Abbe, might I ask the favor of an introduction to the young lady to whom I owe my deliverance from the nandu?"

“She is Angela, monsieur. My people call her Senorita Angela. It pleases me sometimes to speak of her as Angela Dieu-donnee, for she was sent to us by God, and ever since she came among us she has been our good angel.”

“I am sure she has. Nobody with so sweet a face could be otherwise than good,” I said, with an admiring glance at the beautiful girl which dyed the damask of her cheek a yet deeper crimson.

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It was no mere compliment. In all my wanderings I have not beheld the equal of Angela Dieu-donnee. Though I can see her now, though I learned to paint in order that, however inadequately, I might make her likeness, I am unable to describe her; words can give no idea of the comeliness of her face, the grace of her movements, and the shapeliness of her form. I have seen women with skins as fair, hair as dark, eyes as deeply blue, but none with the same brightness of look and sweetness of disposition, none with courage as high, temper as serene.

To look at Angela was to love her, though as yet I knew not that I had regained my liberty only to lose my heart. My feelings at the moment oscillated between admiration of her and a painful sense of my own disreputable appearance. Bareheaded and shoeless, covered with the dust of the desert, clad only in a torn shirt and ragged trousers, my arms and legs scored with livid marks, I must have seemed a veritable scarecrow. Angela looked like a queen, or would have done were queens ever so charming, or so becomingly attired. Her low-crowned hat was adorned with beautiful flowers; a loose-fitting alpaca robe of light blue set off her form to the best advantage, and round her waist was a golden baldrick which supported a sheaf of arrows. At her breast was an orchid which in Europe would have been almost priceless, her shapely arms were bare to the shoulder, and her sandaled feet were innocent of hosen.

I was wondering who could have designed this costume, in which there was a savor of the pictures of Watteau and the court of Versailles, how so lovely a creature could have found her way to a place so remote as San Cristobal de Quipai, when the abbe resumed the conversation.

“Angela came to us as strangely and unexpectedly as you have come, Monsieur Nigel” (he found my Christian name the easier to pronounce), “and, like you, without any volition on her part or previous knowledge of our existence. But there is this difference between you: she came as a little child, you come as a grown man. Sixteen years ago we had several severe earthquakes. They did us little harm down here, but up on the Cordillera they wrought fearful havoc, and the sea rose and there was a great storm, and several ships were dashed to pieces against our iron-bound coast, which no mariner willingly approaches. The morning after the tempest there was found on the edge of the cliffs a cot in which lay a rosy-cheeked babe. How it came to pass none could tell, but we all thought that the cot must have been fastened to a board, which became detached from the cot at the very moment when the sea threw it on the land. The babe was just able to lisp her name—’Angela,’ which corresponded with the name embroidered on her clothing. This is all we know about her; and I greatly fear that those to whom she belonged perished in the storm. Even the wreckage that was washed ashore furnished no clew; it was part of two different vessels. The little waif was brought to me and with me she has ever since remained.”

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“And will always remain, dear father,” said Angela, regarding the old priest with loving reverence. “All that I lost in the storm has he been to me—father, mother, instructor, and friend. You see here, monsieur, the best and wisest man in all the world.”

“You have had so wide an experience of the world and of men, *mignonne*!” returned the abbe, with an amused smile. “Sir, since she could speak she has seen two white men. You are the second.—Ah, well, if I were not afraid you would think we had constituted ourselves into a mutual admiration society I should be tempted to say something even more complimentary about her.”

“Say it, Monsieur l’Abbe, say it, I pray you,” I exclaimed, eagerly, for it pleased me more than I can tell to hear him sound Angela’s praises.

“Nay, I would rather you learned to appreciate her from your own observation. Yet I will say this much. She is the brightness of my life, the solace of my old age, and so good that even praise does not spoil her. But you look tired; shall we sit down on this fallen log and rest a few minutes?”

To this proposal I gladly assented, for I was spent with fatigue and faint with hunger. Angela, however, after glancing at me compassionately and saying she would be back in a few minutes, went a little farther and presently returned with a bunch of grapes.

“Eat these,” she said, “they will refresh you.”

It was a simple act of kindness; but a simple act of kindness, gracefully performed, is often an index of character, and I felt sure that the girl had a kind heart and deserved all the praise bestowed on her by the abbe.

I was thanking her, perhaps more warmly than the occasion required, when she stopped the flow of my eloquence by reminding me that I had not yet told them why the Indian queen caused me to be fastened on the back of the *nandu*.

On this hint I spoke, and though the abbe suggested that I was too tired for much talking, I not only answered the question but briefly narrated the main facts of my story, reserving a fuller account for a future occasion.

Both listened with rapt attention; but of the two Angela was the more eager listener. She several times interrupted me with requests for information as to matters which even among European children are of common knowledge, for, though the abbe was a man of high learning and she an apt pupil, her experience of life was limited to Quipai; and he had been so long out of the world that he had almost forgotten it. As for news, he was worse off than Fray Ignacio. He had heard of the First Consul but nothing of the Emperor Napoleon, and when I told him of the restoration of the Bourbons he shed tears of joy.

“Thank God!” he exclaimed, fervently, “France is once more ruled by a son of St. Louis. The tricolor is replaced by the *fleur-de-lis*. You are our second good angel, Monsieur Fortescue; you bring us glad tidings of great joy—You smile, but I am persuaded that Providence has led you hither in so strange a way for some good purpose, and as I venture to hope, in answer to my prayers; for albeit our lives here are so calm and happy, and I have been the means of bringing a great work to a successful issue, it is not in the nature of things that men should be free from care, and my mind has lately been troubled with forebodings—”

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“And you never told me, father!” said Angela, reproachfully. “What are they, these forebodings?”

“Why should you be worried with an old man’s difficulties? One has reference to my people, the other—but never mind the other. It may be that already a way has been opened.—If you feel sufficiently rested, Monsieur Nigel, I think we had better proceed. A short walk will bring us to San Cristobal, and it would be well for us to get thither before the heat of the day.”

I protested that the rest and the bunch of grapes had so much refreshed me that I felt equal to a long walk, and we moved on.

“What a splendid garden!” I exclaimed for the third or fourth time as we entered an alley festooned with trailing flowers and grape-vines from which the fruit hung in thick clusters.

“All Quipai is a garden,” said the abbe, proudly. “We have fruit and flowers and cereals all the year round, thanks to the great *azequia* (aqueduct) which the Incas built and I restored. And such fruit! Let him taste a *chirimoya ma fille cherie*.”

From a tree about fifteen feet high Angela plucked a round green fruit, not unlike an apple, but covered with small knobs and scales. Then she showed me how to remove the skin, which covered a snow-white juicy pulp of exquisite fragrance and a flavor that I hardly exaggerated in calling divine. It was a fruit fit for the gods, and so I said.

“We owe it all to the great *azequia*,” observed the abbe. “See, it feeds these rills and fills those fountains, waters our fields, and makes the desert bloom like the rose and the dry places rejoice. And we have not only fruit and flowers, but corn, coffee, cocoa, yuccas, potatoes, and almost every sort of vegetable.”

“Quipai is a land of plenty and a garden of delight.”

“A most apt description, and so long as the great *azequia* is kept in repair and the system of irrigation which I have established is maintained it will remain a land of plenty and a garden of delight.”

“And if any harm should befall the *azequia*?”

“In that case, and if our water-supply were to fail, Quipai, as you see it now, would cease to exist. The desert, which we are always fighting and have so far conquered, would regain the mastery, and the mission become what I found it, a little oasis at the foot of the Cordillera, supporting with difficulty a few score families of naked Indians. One of these days, if you are so disposed, you shall follow the course of the *azequia* and see for yourself with what a marvellous reservoir, fed by Andean snows, Nature has

provided us. But more of this another time. Look! Yonder is San Cristobal, our capital as I sometimes call it, though little more than a village."

The abbe said truly. It was little more than a village; but as gay, as picturesque, and as bright as a scene in an opera—two double rows of painted houses forming a large oval, the space between them laid out as a garden with straight walks and fountains and clipped shrubs, after the fashion of Versailles; in the centre a church and two other buildings, one of which, as the abbe told me, was a school, the other his own dwelling.

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The people we met saluted him with great humility, and he returned their salutations quite *en grand seigneur*, even, as I thought, somewhat haughtily. One woman knelt in the road, kissed his hand, and asked for his blessing, which he gave like the superior being she obviously considered him. It was the same in the village. Everybody whom we met or passed stood still and uncovered. There could be no question who was master in San Cristobal. Abbe Balthazar was both priest and king, and, as I afterward came to know, there was every reason why he should be.

He kept a large establishment, for the country, and lived in considerable state. On entering his house, which was surrounded by a veranda and embowered in trees, the abbe, asked if I would like a bath, and on my answering in the affirmative ordered one of the servants, all of whom spoke Spanish, to take me to the bath-room and find me a suit of clothes.

The bath made me feel like another man, and the fresh garments effected as great a change in my personal appearance. There was not much difficulty about the fit. A cotton undershirt, a blue jacket with silver buttons, a red sash, white breeches, loose at the knee, and a pair of sandals, and I was fully attired. Stockings I had to dispense with. They were not in vogue at San Cristobal.

When I was ready, the servant, who had acted as my valet, conducted me to the dining-room, where I found Angela and the abbe.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the latter, who occasionally indulged in expressions that were not exactly clerical. "*Parbleu!* I had no idea that a bath and clean raiment could make so great an improvement in a man's appearance. That costume becomes you to admiration, Monsieur Nigel. Don't you think so, Angela?"

"You forget, father, that he is the only caballero I ever saw. Are all caballeros like him?"

"Very few, I should say. It is a long time since I saw any; but even at the court of Louis XV. I do not remember seeing many braver looking gentlemen than our guest."

As I bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment Angela gave me a quick glance, blushed deeply, and then, turning to the abbe, proposed that we should take our places at the table.

I was so hungry that even an indifferent meal would have seemed a luxurious banquet, but the repast set before us might have satisfied an epicure. We had a delicious soup, something like mutton-cutlets, land-turtle steaks, and capon, all perfectly cooked; vegetables and fruit in profusion, and the wine was as good as any I had tasted in France or Spain. After dinner coffee was served and the abbe inquired whether I would retire to my room and have a sleep, or smoke a cigarette with him and Angela on the veranda.

In ordinary circumstances I should probably have preferred to sleep; but I was so fascinated with Mademoiselle Dieu-donnee, so excited by all that I had seen and heard, so curious to know the history of this French priest, who talked of the court of Louis XV., who had created a country and a people, and contrived, in a region so remote from civilization, to surround himself with so many luxuries, that I elected without hesitation for the cigarettes and the veranda.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

ABBE BALTHAZAR.

Though my wounds had not ceased their smarting nor my bones their aching my happiness was complete. The splendid prospect before me, the glittering peaks of the Cordillera, the gleaming waters of the far Pacific, the gardens and fountains of San Cristobal, the charm of Angela's presence, and the abbe's conversation made me oblivious to the past and careless of the future. The hardships and perils I had lately undergone, my weary wanderings in the wilderness, the dull monotony of the Happy Valley, the passage of the Andes, my terrible ride on the *nandu*, all were forgotten. The contrast between my by-gone miseries and present surroundings added zest to my enjoyment. I felt as one suddenly transported from Hades to Elysium, and it required an effort to realize that it was not all a dream, destined to end in a rude awaking.

After some talk about Europe, the revolt of the Spanish colonies, and my recent adventures, the abbe gave me an account of his life and adventures. The scion of a noble French family, he had been first a page of honor at Versailles, then an officer of the *garde du corps*, and among the gayest of the gay. But while yet a youth some terrible event on which he did not like to dwell—a disastrous love affair, a duel in which he killed one who had been his friend—wrought so radical a change in his character and his ideals that he resigned his commission, left the court, and joined the Society of Jesus, under the name of Balthazar. Being a noble he became an abbe (though he had never an abbey) as a matter of course, and full of religious ardor and thirsting for distinction in his new calling he volunteered to go out as a missionary among the wild tribes of South America.

After long wanderings, and many hardships, Balthazar and two fellow priests accidentally discovered Quipai, at that time a mere collection of huts on the banks of a small stream which descended from the gorges of the Cordillera only to be lost in the sands of the desert. But all around were remains which showed that Quipai had once been a place of importance and the seat of a large population—ruined buildings of colossal dimensions, heaps of quarried stones, a cemetery rich in relics of silver and gold; and a great *azequia*, in many places still intact, had brought down water from the heart of the mountains for the irrigation of the rainless region of the coast.

Balthazar had moreover heard of the marvellous system of irrigation whereby the Incas had fertilized nearly the whole of the Peruvian desert; and as he surveyed the ruins he conceived the great idea of restoring the aqueduct and repeopling the neighboring waste. To this task he devoted his life. His first proceeding was to convert the Indians and found a mission, which he called San Cristobal de Quipai; his next to show them how to make the most of the water-privileges they already possessed. A reservoir was built, more land brought under cultivation, and the oasis rendered capable of supporting

a larger population. The resulting prosperity and the abbe's fame as a physician (he possessed a fair knowledge of medicine) drew other Indians to Quipai.

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After a while the gigantic undertaking was begun, and little by little, and with infinite patience and pain accomplished. It was a work of many years, and when I travelled the whole length of the *azequia* I marvelled greatly how the abbe, with the means at his command, could have achieved an enterprise so arduous and vast. The aqueduct, nearly twenty leagues in length, extended from the foot of the snow-line to a valley above Quipai, the water being taken thence in stone-lined canals and wooden pipes to the seashore. In several places the *azequia* was carried on lofty arches over deep ravines: and there were two great reservoirs, both remarkable works. The upper one was the crater of an extinct volcano, of unknown depth, which contained an immense quantity of water. It took so long to fill that the abbe, as he laughingly told me, began to think that there must be a hole in the bottom. But in the end it did fill to the very brim, and always remained full. The second reservoir, a dammed up valley, was just below the first; it served to break the fall from the higher to the lower level and receive the overflow from the crater.

A bursting of either of the reservoirs was quite out of the question; at any rate the abbe so assured me, and certainly the crater looked strong enough to hold all the water in the Andes, could it have been got therein, while the lower reservoir was so shallow—the out-flow and the loss by evaporation being equal to the in-take—that even if the banks were to give way no great harm could be done.

I mention these particulars because they have an important bearing on events that afterward befell, and on my own destiny.

Only a born engineer and organizer of untiring energy and illimitable patience could have performed so herculean a labor. Balthazar was all this, and more. He knew how to rule men despotically yet secure their love. The Indians did his bidding without hesitation and wrought for him without pay. In the absence of this quality his task had never been done. On the other hand, he owed something to fortune. All the materials were ready to his hand. He built with the stone quarried by the Incas. His work suffered no interruption from frost or snow or rain. His very isolation was an advantage. He had neither enemies to fear, friends to please, nor government officers to propitiate.

On the landward side Quipai was accessible only by difficult and little known mountain-passes which nobody without some strong motive would care to traverse, and passing ships might be trusted to give a wide berth to an iron-bound coast destitute alike of harbors and trade.

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So it came to pass that, albeit the mission of Quipai was in the dominion of the King of Spain, none of his agents knew of its existence, his writs did not run there, and Balthazar treated the royal decree for the expulsion of the Jesuits from South America (of which he heard two or three years after its promulgation) with the contempt that he thought it deserved. Nevertheless, he deemed it the part of prudence to maintain his isolation more rigidly than ever, and make his communications with the outer world few and far between, for had it become known to the captain-general of Peru that there was a member of the proscribed order in his vice-royalty, even at so out of the way a place as Quipai he would have been sent about his business without ceremony. The possibility of this contingency was always in the abbe's mind. For a time it caused him serious disquiet; but as the years went on and no notice was taken of him his mind became easier. The news I brought of the then recent events in Spain and the revolt of her colonies made him easier. The viceroy would have too many irons in the fire to trouble himself about the mission of Quipai and its chief, even if they should come to his knowledge, which was to the last degree improbable. We sat talking for several hours, and should probably have talked longer had not the abbe kindly yet peremptorily insisted on my retiring to rest.

Early next morning we started on an excursion to the valley lake, each of us mounted on a fine mule from the abbe's stables, and attended by an *arriero*. North as well as south of San Cristobal (as the village was generally called) the country had the same garden-like aspect. There was none of the tangled vegetation which in tropical forests impedes the traveller's progress; except where they had been planted by the roadside for protection from the sun, or bent over the water-courses, the trees grew wide apart like trees in a park. Men and women were busy in the fields and plantations, for the abbe had done even a more wonderful thing than restoring the great *azequia*—-converted a tribe of indolent aborigines into an industrious community of husbandmen and craftsmen; among them were carpenters, smiths, masons, weavers, dyers, and cunning workers in silver and gold. The secret of his power was the personal ascendancy of a strong man, the naturally docile character of his converts, the inflexible justice which characterized all his dealings with them, and the belief assiduously cultivated, that as he had been their benefactor in this world he could control their destinies in the next. Though he never punished he was always obeyed, and there was probably not a man or woman under his sway who would have hesitated to obey him, even to death.

The lake was small yet picturesque, its verdant banks deepening by contrast the dark desolation of the arid mountains in which it was embosomed. Some three thousand feet above it rose the extinct volcano, the slopes of which in the days of the Incas were terraced and cultivated. Angela and I half rode, half walked to the top; but the abbe, on the plea that he had some business to look after, stayed at the bottom.

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The crater was about eight hundred yards in diameter and filled nearly to the brim with crystal water, which outflowed by a wide and well made channel into the lake, the supply being kept up by the in-flow from the *azequia*, whose course we could trace far into the mountains.

The view from our coigne of vantage was unspeakably grand. Behind us rose the stupendous range of the Andes, with its snow-white peaks and smoking volcanoes; before us the oasis of Quipai rolled like a river of living green to the shores of the measureless ocean, whose shining waters in that clear air and under that azure sky seemed only a few miles away, while, as far as the eye could reach, the coast-line was fringed with the dreary waste where I had so nearly perished.

The oasis, as I now for the first time discovered, was a valley, a broad shallow depression in the desert falling in a gentle slope from the foot of the Cordillera to the sea, whereby its irrigation was greatly facilitated.

“How beautiful Quipai looks, and how like a river!” said Angela. “That is what I always think when I come here—how like a river!”

“Who knows that long ago the valley was not the bed of a river!”

“It must be very long ago, then, before there was any Cordillera. Rain-clouds never cross the Andes, and for untold ages there can have been no rain here on the coast.”

“You are right. Without rain you cannot have much of a river, and if the *azequia* were to fail there would be very little left of Quipai.”

“Don’t suggest anything so dreadful as the failure of the *azequia*. It is the Palladium of the mission and the source of all our prosperity and happiness. Besides, how could it fail? You see how solidly it is built, and every month it is carefully inspected from end to end.”

“It might be destroyed by an earthquake.”

“You are pleased to be a Job’s comforter, Monsieur Nigel. Damaged it might be, but hardly destroyed, except in some cataclysm which would destroy everything, and that is a risk which, like all dwellers in countries subject to earthquakes, we must run. We cannot escape from the conditions of our existence; and life is so pleasant here, we are spared so many of the miseries which afflict our fellow-creatures in other parts of the world—war, pestilence, strife, and want—that it were as foolish and ungrateful to make ourselves unhappy because we are exposed to some remote danger against which we cannot guard, as to repine because we cannot live forever.”

“You discourse most excellent philosophy, Mademoiselle Angela.”

“Without knowing it, then, as Monsieur Jourdan talked prose.”

“So! You have read Moliere?”

“Over and over again.”

“Then you must have a library at San Cristobal.”

“A very small one, as you may suppose; but a small library is not altogether a disadvantage, as the abbe says. The fewer books you have the oftener you read them; and it is better to read a few books well than many superficially.”

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“The abbe has been your sole teacher, I suppose?”

“Has been! He is still. He has even written books for me, and he is the author of some of the best I possess—But don’t you think, monsieur, we had better descend to the valley? The abbe will have finished his business by this time, and though he is the best man in the world he has the fault of kings; he does not like to wait.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I BID YOU STAY.

“You have been here a month, Monsieur Nigel, living in close intimacy with Angela and myself,” said the abbe, as we sat on the veranda sipping our morning coffee. “You have mixed with our people, seen our country, and inspected the great *azequia* in its entire length. Tell me, now, frankly, what do you think of us?”

“I never passed so happy a month in my life, and—”

“I am glad to hear you say so, very glad. My question, however, referred not to your feelings but your opinion. I will repeat it: What think you of Quipai and its institutions?”

“I know of but one institution in Quipai, and I admire it more than I can tell.”

“And that is?”

“Yourself, Monsieur l’Abbe.”

The abbe smiled as if the compliment pleased him, but the next moment his face took the “pale cast of thought,” and he remained silent for several minutes.

“I know what you mean,” he said at length, speaking slowly and rather sadly. “You mean that I am Quipai, and that without me Quipai would be nowhere.”

“Exactly, Monsieur l’Abbe. Quipai is a miracle; you are its creator, yet I doubt whether, as it now exists, it could long survive you. But that is a contingency which we need not discuss; you have still many years of life before you.”

“I like a well-turned compliment, Monsieur Nigel, because in order to be acceptable it must possess both a modicum of truth and a *soupcon* of wit. But flattery I detest, for it must needs be insincere. A man of ninety cannot, in the nature of things, have many years of life before him. What are even ten years to one who has already lived nearly a century? This is a solemn moment for both of us, and I want to be sincere with you. You were sincere just now when you said Quipai would perish with me. And it will—-unless I can find a successor who will continue the work which I have begun. My

people are good and faithful, but they require a prescient and capable chief, and there is not one among them who is fitted either by nature or education to take the place of leader. Will you be my successor, Monsieur Nigel?"

This was a startling proposal. To stay in Quipai for a few weeks or even a few months might be very delightful. But to settle for life in an Andean desert! On the other hand, to leave Quipai were to lose Angela.

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“You hesitate. But reflect well, my friend, before denying my request. True, you are loath to renounce the great world with its excitements, ambitions, and pleasures. But you would renounce them for a life free from care, an honorable position, and a career full of promise. It will take years to complete the work I have begun, and make Quipai a nation. As I said when you first came, Providence sent you here, as it sent Angela, for some good end. It sent the one for the other. Stay with us, Monsieur Nigel, and marry Angela! If you search the world through you could find no sweeter wife.”

My hesitation vanished like the morning mist before the rising sun.

“If Angela will be my wife,” I said, “I will be your successor.”

“It is the answer I expected, Monsieur Nigel. I am content to let Angela be the arbiter of your fate and the fate of Quipai. She will be here presently. Put the question yourself. She knows nothing of this; but I have watched you both, and though my eyes are growing dim I am not blind.”

And with that the abbe left me to my thoughts. It was not the first time that the idea of asking Angela to be my wife had entered my mind. I loved her from the moment I first set eyes on her, and my love has become a passion. But I had not been able to see my way. How could I ask a beautiful, gently nurtured girl to share the lot of a penniless wanderer, even if she could consent to leave Quipai, which I greatly doubted. But now! Compared with Angela, the excitements and ambitions of which the abbe had spoken did not weigh as a feather in the balance. Without her life would be a dreary penance; with her a much worse place than Quipai would be an earthly paradise.

But would she have me? The abbe seemed to think so. Nevertheless, I felt by no means sure about it. True, she appeared to like my company. But that might be because I had so much to tell her that was strange and new; and though I had observed her narrowly, I had detected none of that charming self-consciousness, that tender confusion, those stolen glances, whereby the conventional lover gauges his mistress’s feelings, and knows before he speaks that his love is returned. Angela was always the same—frank, open, and joyous, and, except that her caresses were reserved for him, made no difference between the abbe and me.

“A *chirimoya* for your thoughts, senor!” said a well-known voice, in musical Castilian. “For these three minutes I have been standing close by you, with this freshly gathered chirimoya, and you took no notice of me.”

“A thousand pardons and a thousand thanks, senorita!” I answered, taking the proffered fruit. “But my thoughts were worth all the chirimoyas in the world, delicious as they are, for they were of you.”

“We were thinking of each other then.”

“What! Were you thinking of me?”

“*Si, senor.*”

“And what were you thinking, senorita?”

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“That God was very good in sending you to Quipai.”

“Why?”

“For several reasons.”

“Tell me them.”

“Because you have done the abbe good. Aforetime he was often sad. You remember his saying that he had cares. I know not what, but now he seems himself again.”

“Anything else?”

“*Si, senor.* You have also increased my happiness. Not that I was unhappy before, for, thanks to the dear abbe, my life has been free from sorrow; but during the last month—-since you came—I have been more than happy, I have been joyous.”

“You don’t want me to go, then?”

“O senor! Want you to go! How can you—what have I done or said?” exclaimed the girl, impetuously and almost indignantly. “Surely, sir, you are not tired of us already?”

“Heaven forbid! If you want me to stay I shall not go. It is for you to decide. *Angela mia*, it depends on you whether I go away soon—how or whither I know not—or stay here all my life long.”

“Depends on me! Then, sir, I bid you stay.”

“Oh, Angela, you must say more than that. You must consent to become my wife; then do with me what you will.”

“Your wife! You ask me to become your wife?”

“Yes, Angela. I have loved you since the day we first met; every day my love grows stronger and deeper, and unless you love me in return, and will be my wife, I cannot stay; I must go—go at once.”

“*Quipai, senor*,” said Angela, archly, at the same time giving me her hand.

“Quipai! I don’t quite understand—unless you mean—”

“Quipai,” she repeated, her eyes brightening into a merry smile.

“Unless you mean—”

“Quipai.”

“Oh, how dull I am! I see now. Quipai—rest here.”

“*Si, senor.*”

“And if I rest here, you will—”

“Do as you wish, senor, and with all my heart; for as you love me, so I love you.”

“Dearest Angela!” I said, kissing her hand, “you make me almost too happy. Never will I leave Quipai without you.”

“And never will I leave it without you. But let us not talk of leaving Quipai. Where can we be happier than here with the dear abbe? But what will he say?”

“He will give us his blessing. His most ardent wish is that I should be your husband and his successor.”

“How good he is? And I, wicked girl that I am, repay his goodness with base ingratitude. Ah me! How shall I tell him?”

“You repay his goodness with base ingratitude? You speak in riddles, my Angela.”

“Since the waves washed me to his feet, a little child, the abbe has cherished me with all the tenderness of a mother, all the devotion of a father. He has been everything to me; and now you are everything to me. I love you better than I love him. Don’t you think I am a wicked girl?” And she put her arm within mine, and looking at me with love-beaming eyes, caressing my cheek with her hand.

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“I will grant you absolution, and award you no worse penance than an embrace, *ma fille cherie*,” said the abbe, who had returned to the veranda just in time to overhear Angela’s confession. “I rejoice in your happiness, *mignonne*. To-day you make two men happy—your lover and myself. You have lightened my mind of the cares which threatened to darken my closing days. The thought of leaving you without a protector and Quipai without a chief was a sore trouble. Your husband will be both. Like Moses, I have seen the Promised Land, and I shall be content.”

“Talk not of dying, dear father or you will make me sad,” said Angela, putting her arms round his neck.

“There are worse things than dying, my child. But you are quite right; this is no time for melancholy forebodings. Let us be happy while we may; and since I came to Quipai, sixty years ago, I have had no happier day than this.”

As the only law at Quipai was the abbe’s will, and we had neither settlements to make, trousseaux to prepare, nor house to get ready (the abbe’s house being big enough for us all), there was no reason why our wedding should be delayed, and the week after Angela and I had plighted our troth, we were married at the church of San Cristobal.

The abbe’s wedding-present to Angela was a gold cross studded with large uncut diamonds. Where he got them I had no idea, but I heard afterward—and something more.

All this time nothing, save vague generalities, had passed between us on the subject of religion—rather to my surprise, for priests are not wont to ignore so completely their *raison d’etre*, but I subsequently found that Balthazar, albeit a devout Christian, was no bigot. Either his early training, his long isolation from ecclesiastical influence, or his communings with Nature had broadened his horizon and spiritualized his beliefs. Dogma sat lightly on him, and he construed the apostolic exhortations to charity in their widest sense. But these views were reserved for Angela and myself. With his flock he was the Roman ecclesiastic—a sovereign pontiff—whom they must obey in this world on pain of being damned in the next. For he held that the only ways of successfully ruling semi-civilized races are by physical force, personal influence, or their fear of the unseen and the unknown. At the outset Balthazar, having no physical force at his command, had to trust altogether to personal influence, which, being now re-enforced by the highest religious sanctions, made his power literally absolute. Albeit Quipai possessed neither soldiers, constables, nor prison, his authority was never questioned; he was as implicitly obeyed as a general at the head of an army in the field.

I have spoken of the abbe’s communings with Nature. I ought rather to have said his searchings into her mysteries; for he was a shrewd philosopher and keen observer, and despite the disadvantages under which he labored, the scarcity of his books, and the rudeness of his instruments, he had acquired during his long life a vast fund of curious

knowledge which he placed unreservedly at my disposal. I became his pupil, and it was he who first kindled in my breast that love of science which for nearly three-score years I have lived only to gratify.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ABBE'S LEGACY.

Life was easy at Quipai, and we were free from care. On the other hand, we had so much to do that time sped swiftly, and though we were sometimes tired we were never weary. The abbe made me the civil governor of the mission, and gave orders that I should be as implicitly obeyed as himself. My duties in this capacity, though not arduous, were interesting, including as they did all that concerned the well-being of the people, the maintenance of the *azequia*, and the irrigation of the oasis. My leisure hours were spent in study, working in the abbe's laboratory, and with Angela, who nearly always accompanied me on my excursions to the head of the aqueduct which, as I have already mentioned was at the foot of the snow-line, two days' journey from the valley lake.

It was during one of these excursions that we planned our new home, a mountain nest which we would have all to ourselves, and whither at the height of summer we might escape from the heat of the oasis, for albeit the climate of Quipai was fine on the whole, there were times when the temperature rose to an uncomfortable height. The spot on which we fixed was a hollow in the hills, some two miles beyond the crater reservoir and about eight thousand feet above the level of the sea. By tapping the *azequia* we turned the barren valley into a garden of roses, for in that rainless region water was a veritable magician, whatsoever it touched it vivified. This done we sent up timber, and built ourselves a cottage, which we called Alta Vista, for the air was superb and the view one of the grandest in the world.

Angela would fain have persuaded the abbe to join us; yet though I made a well-graded road and the journey was neither long nor fatiguing he came but seldom. He was so thoroughly acclimatized that he preferred the warmth of San Cristobal to the freshness of Alta Vista, and the growing burden of his years indisposed him to exertion, and made movement an effort. We could all see, and none more clearly than himself, that the end was not far off. He contemplated it with the fortitude of a philosopher and the faith of a Christian. For the spiritual wants of his people he provided by ordaining (as in virtue of his ecclesiastical rank he had the right to do), three young men, whom he had carefully educated for the purpose; the reins of government he gave over entirely to me.

"I have lived a long life and done a good work, and though I shall be sorry to leave you, I am quite content to go," he said one day to Angela and me. "It is not in my power to bequeath you a fortune, in the ordinary sense of the word, for money I have none, yet so long as the mission prospers you will be better off than if I could give you millions. But everything human is ephemeral and I cannot disguise from myself the possibility of some great disaster befalling you. Those mountains contain both gold

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and silver, and an invasion of treasure-seekers, either from the sea or the Cordillera would be the ruin of the mission. My poor people would be demoralized, perhaps destroyed, and you would be compelled to quit Quipai and return to the world. For that contingency, though I hope it will never come to pass, you must be prepared, and I will point out the way. The mountains, as I have said, contain silver and gold; and contain something even more precious than silver and gold—diamonds, I made the discovery nearly half a century ago, and I confess that, for a time, the temptation was almost more than I could withstand. With such wealth as I saw at my disposal I might do anything, be anything, enrich my order, win distinction for myself, and attain to high rank, perhaps the highest, in the church, or leave it and become a power in the world, a master of men and the guest of princes. Yes, it was a sore temptation, but with God's help, I overcame it and chose the better part, the path of duty, and I have my reward. I brought a few diamonds away with me, some of which are in Angela's cross; but I have never been to the place since. I told you not this sooner, my son, partly because there seemed no need, partly because, not knowing you as well as I know you now, I thought you might be tempted in like manner as I was and we pray not to be led into temptation. But though I tell you where these precious stones are to be found, I am sure that you will never quit Quipai."

"I have no great desire to know the whereabout of this diamond mine, father. Tell me or not as you think fit. In any case, I shall be true to my trust and my word. I promise you that I will not leave Quipai till I am forced, and I hope I never may be."

"All the same, my son, it is the part of a wise man to provide for even unlikely contingencies. Remember, it is the unexpected that happens, and I would not have you and our dear Angela cast on the world penniless. For her, bred as she has been, it would be a frightful misfortune; and up yonder are diamonds which would make you rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Promise me that you will go thither, and bring away as many as you can conveniently carry about your persons in the event of your being compelled to quit the oasis at short notice."

"I promise. Nevertheless, I see no probability—"

"We are discussing possibilities not probabilities, my son. And during the last few days I have had forebodings, if I were superstitious I should say prophetic visions, else had I not broached the subject. Regard it, if you like, as an old man's whim—and keep a look-out on the sea."

"Why particularly on the sea?"

"It is the quarter whence danger is most to be apprehended. If some Spanish war-ship were to sight the oasis and send a boat ashore, either out of idle curiosity or for other

reasons, a report would be made to the captain-general, or to whomsoever is now in authority at Lima, and there would come a horde of government functionaries, who would take possession of everything, and you would have to go. But take your pen and note down the particulars that will enable you to find the diamond mine."

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Though Angela and I listened to the abbe's warnings with all respect, they made little impression on our minds. We regarded them as the vagaries of an old man, whose mind was affected by the feebleness of his body, and a few weeks later he breathed his last. His death came in the natural order of things, and, as he had outlived his strength, it was for him a happy release; yet, as we had loved him much, we sorrowed for him deeply, and I still honor his memory. Take him all in all, Abbe Balthazar was the best man I have ever known.

Shortly after we laid him in the ground I made a visit to the diamond ground, the situation of which the abbe had so fully described that I found it without difficulty. But the undertaking, besides proving much more arduous than I had anticipated, came near to costing me my life. I took with me an *arriero* and three mules, one carrying an ample supply of food, and, as I thought, of water, for the abbe had told me that a mountain-stream ran through the valley where I was to look for the diamonds. As ill-luck would have it, however, the stream was dried up. Had it not been that I did not like to return empty-handed I should have returned at once, for our stock of water was exhausted and we were two days' journey from Quipai.

I spent a whole day seeking among the stones and pebbles, and my search was so far successful that I picked up two score diamonds, some of considerable size. If I could have stayed longer I might have made a still richer harvest; and I had an idea that there were more under than above ground. But I had stayed too long as it was. The mules were already suffering for want of water; all three perished before we reached Quipai, and the arriero and myself got home only just alive.

Nevertheless, had not Angelo put her veto on the project, I should have made another visit to the place, provided with a sufficiency of water for the double journey. I, moreover, thought that with time and proper tools I could find water on the spot. However, I went not again, and I renounced my design all the more willingly as I knew that the diamonds I had already found were a fortune in themselves. I added them to my collection of minerals which I kept in my cabinet at Alta Vista. My Quipais being honest and knowing nothing whatever of precious stones I had no fear of robbers.

For several years after Balthazar's death nothing occurred to disturb the even tenor of our way, and I had almost forgotten his warnings, and that we were potentially "rich beyond the dreams of avarice," when one day a runner brought word that two men had landed on the coasts and were on the way to San Cristobal.

This was startling news, and I questioned the messenger closely, but all he could tell me was that the strangers had arrived in a small boat, half famished and terribly thirsty, and had asked, in broken Spanish, to be taken to the chief of the country, and that he had been sent on to inform me of their coming.

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“The abbe!” exclaimed Angela, “you remember what he said about danger from the sea.”

“Yes; but there is nothing to fear from two hungry men in a small boat—as I judge from the runner’s account, shipwrecked mariners.”

“I don’t know; there’s no telling, they may be followed by others, and unless we keep them here—”

“If necessary we must keep them here; as, however, they are evidently not Spaniards it may not be necessary. But as to that I can form no opinion till I have seen and questioned them.”

We were still talking about them, for the incident was both suggestive and exciting, when the strangers were brought in. As I expected, they were seamen, in appearance regular old salts. One was middle-sized, broad built, brawny, and large-limbed—a squat Hercules, with big red whiskers, earrings and a pig-tail. His companion was taller and less sturdy, his black locks hung in ringlets on either side of a swarthy, hairless face, and the arms and hands of both, as also their breasts were extensively tattooed.

Their surprise on beholding Angela and me was almost ludicrous. They might have been expecting to see a copper-colored cacique dressed in war-paint and adorned with scalps.

“White! By the piper that played before Moses, white!” muttered the red-whiskered man. “Who’d ha’ thought it! A squaw in petticoats, too, with a gold chain round her neck! Where the hangmant have we got to?”

“You are English?” I said, quietly.

“Well, I’ll be—yes, sir! I’m English, name of Yawl, Bill Yawl, sir, of the port of Liverpool, at your service. My mate, here, he’s a—”

“I’ll tell my own tale, if you please, Bill Yawl,” interrupted the other as I thought rather peremptorily. “My name is Kidd, and I’m a native of Barbadoes in the West Indies, by calling, a mariner, and late second mate of the brig Sulky Sail, Jones, master, bound from Liverpool to Lima, with a cargo of hardware and cotton goods.”

“And what has become of the Sulky Sail?”

“She went to the bottom, sir, three days ago.”

“But there has been no bad weather, lately.”

“Not lately. But we made very bad weather rounding the Horn, and the ship sprang a leak, and though, by throwing cargo overboard, and working hard at the pumps, we managed to keep her afloat nearly a month; she foundered at last.”

“And are you the only survivors?”

“No, sir; the master and most of the crew got away in the long boat. But as the ship went down the dinghy was swamped. Bill and me managed to right her and get aboard again, but the others as was with us got drowned.”

“And the long boat?”

“We lost each other in the night, and, having no water, and only a tin of biscuits, Bill and me made straight for the coast, and landed in the little cove down below this morning. All we have is what we stand up in. And we shall feel much obliged if you will kindly give us food and shelter until such time as we can get away.”

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On this I assured Mr. Kidd that I was sorry for their misfortune, and would gladly find them food and lodging, and whatever else they might require, but as for getting away, I did not see how that was possible, unless by sea, and in their own dinghy.

“We are very grateful for your kindness, sir; but I don’t think we should much like to make another voyage in the dinghy.”

“She ain’t seaworthy,” growled Yawl, “you’ve to bale all the time, and if it came on to blow she’d turn turtle in half a minute.”

“May be some vessel will be touching here, sir,” suggested Kidd.

“Vessels never do touch here, except to be dashed in pieces against the rocks.”

“Well, I suppose we shall have to wait till a chance happens out. This seems a nice place, and we are in no hurry, if you aren’t.”

So the two castaways became my guests; and if they waited to be taken off by a passing ship they were likely to remain my guests as long as they lived.

For a few days they rambled about the place with their hands in their pockets and cigars (with which I supplied them liberally) in their mouths. But after a while time began to hang heavy on their hands, and one day they came to me with a proposal.

“We are tired of doing nothing, Mr. Fortescue,” said Kidd.

“It is the hardest work I ever put my hand to, and not a grog-shop in the place,” interposed Yawl.

“Hold your jaw, Bill, and let me say my say out. We are tired of doing nothing, and if you like we will build you a sloop.”

“A sloop! To go away in, I suppose?”

“That is as you please, sir. Anyhow, a sloop, say of fifteen or twenty tons, would be very useful. You might take a sail with your lady now and again, and explore the coast. Yawl has been both ship’s carpenter and bo’son—he’ll boss the job; and I’m a very fair amateur cabinet-maker. If you want anything in that line doing at your house, sir, I shall be glad to do it for you.”

The project pleased me; an occasional cruise would be an agreeable diversion, and I assented to Kidd’s proposal without hesitation. There was as much wreckage lying on the cliff as would build a man-of-war, and a small cove at the foot of the oasis where the sloop could lie safely at anchor.

So the work was taken in hand, some of my own people helping, and after several months' labor the Angela, as I proposed to call her, was launched. She had a comfortable little cabin and so soon as she was masted and rigged would be ready for sea.

In the mean time I asked Kidd to superintend some alterations I was making at Alta Vista, and among other things construct larger cabinets for my mineral and entomological specimens. He did the work quite to my satisfaction, but before it was well finished I made a portentous discovery—several of my diamonds were missing. There could be no doubt about it, for I knew the number to a nicety, and had counted them over and over again. Neither could there be any doubt that Kidd was the thief. Besides my wife, myself, and one or two of our servants, no one else had been in the room; and our own people would not have taken the trouble to pick up a diamond from the ground, much less steal one from my house.

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My first impulse was to accuse Kidd of the theft and have him searched. And then I reflected that I was almost as much to blame as himself. Assuming that he knew something of the value of precious stones, I had exposed him to temptation by leaving so many and of so great value in an open drawer. He might well suppose that I set no store by them, and that half a dozen or so would never be missed. So I decided to keep silence for the present and keep a watch on Mr. Kidd's movements. It might be that he and Yawl were thinking to steal a march on me and sail away secretly with the sloop, and perhaps something else. They had both struck up rather close friendships with native women.

But as I did not want to lose any more of my diamonds, and there was no place at Alta Vista where they would be safe so long as Kidd was on the premises, I put them in a bag in the inside pocket of a quilted vest which I always wore on my mountain excursions, my intention being to take them on the following day down to San Cristobal and bestow them in a secure hiding-place.

I little knew that I should never see San Cristobal again.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE QUENCHING OF QUIPAI.

The cottage at Alta Vista had expanded little by little into a long, single storied flat-roofed house, shaded by palm-trees and set in a fair garden, which looked all the brighter from its contrast with the brown and herbless hill-sides that uprose around it.

In the after part of the day on which I discovered the theft, Angela and myself were sitting under the veranda, which fronted the house and commanded a view of the great reservoir, the oasis and the ocean. She was reading aloud a favorite chapter in "Don Quixote," one of the few books we possessed. I was smoking.

Angela read well; her pronunciation of Spanish was faultless, and I always took particular pleasure in hearing her read the idiomatic Castilian of Cervantes. Nevertheless, my mind wandered; and, try as I might, I could not help thinking more of the theft of the diamonds than the doughty deeds of the Don and the shrewd sayings of Sancho Panza. Not that the loss gave me serious concern. A few stones more or less made no great difference, and I should probably never turn to account those I had. But the incident revived suspicions as to the good faith of the two castaways, which had been long floating vaguely in my mind. From the first I had rather doubted the account they gave of themselves. And Kidd! I had never much liked him; he had a hard inscrutable face, and unless I greatly misjudged him was capable of bolder enterprises than petty larceny. He was just the man to steal secretly away and return with a horde of unscrupulous treasure-seekers, for he knew now that there were diamonds in the

neighborhood, and he must have heard that we had found gold and silver ornaments and vessels in the old cemetery—

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"*Dios mio!* What is that?" exclaimed Angela, dropping her book and springing to her feet, an example which I instantly followed, for the earth was moving under us, and there fell on our ears, for the first time, the dread sound of subterranean thunder.

"An earthquake!"

But the alarm was only momentary. In less time than it takes to tell the trembling ceased and the thunder died away.

"Only a slight shock, after all," I said, "and I hope we shall have no more. However, it is just as well to be prepared. I will have the mules got out of the stable; and if there is anything inside you particularly want you had better fetch it. I will join you in the garden presently."

As I passed through the house I saw Kidd coming out of the room where I kept my specimens.

"What are you doing there?" I asked him, sharply.

"I went for a tool I left there" (holding up a chisel). "Did you feel the shock?"

"Yes, and there may be another. Tell Maximiliano to get the mules out."

"If he has been after the diamonds," I thought, "he must know that I have taken them away. I had better make sure of them." And with that I stepped into my room, put on my quilted jacket, and armed myself with a small hatchet and a broad-bladed, highly tempered knife, given to me by the abbe, which served both as a dagger and a *machete*.

When I had seen the mules safely tethered, and warned the servants and others to run into the open if there should be another shock, I returned to Angela, who had resumed her seat in the veranda.

"Equipped for the mountains! Where away now, *caro mio*?" she said, regarding me with some surprise.

"Nowhere. At any rate, I have no present intention of running away. I have put on my jacket because of these diamonds, and brought my hatchet and hunting-knife because, if the house collapses, I should not be able to get them at the very time they would be the most required."

"If the house collapses! You think, then, we are going to have a bad earthquake?"

"It is possible. This is an earthquake country; there has been nothing more serious than a slight trembling since long before the abbe died; and I have a feeling that something

more serious is about to happen. Underground thunder is always an ominous symptom.—Ah! There it is again. Run into the garden. I will bring the chairs and wraps."

The house being timber built and one storied, I had little fear that it would collapse; but anything may happen in an earthquake, and in the garden we were safe from anything short of the ground on which we stood actually gaping or slipping bodily down the mountain-side.

The second shock was followed by a third, more violent than either of its predecessors. The earth trembled and heaved so that we could scarcely stand. The underground thunder became louder and continuous and, what was even more appalling, we could distinctly see the mountain-tops move and shake, as if they were going to fall and overwhelm us.

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But even this shock passed off without doing any material mischief, and I was beginning to think the worst was over when one of the servants drew my attention to the great reservoir. It smoked and though there was no wind the water was white with foam and running over the banks.

This went on several minutes, and then the water, as if yielding to some irresistible force, left the sides, and there shot out of it a gigantic jet nearly as thick as the crater was wide and hundreds of feet high. It broke in the form of a rose and fell in a fine spray, which the setting sun hued with all the colors of the rainbow.

It was the most splendid sight I had ever seen and the most portentous—for I knew that the crater had become active, and remembering how long it had taken to fill I feared the worst.

The jet went on rising and falling for nearly an hour, but as the mass of the water returned to the crater, very little going over the sides, no great harm was done.

“Thank Heaven for the respite!” exclaimed Angela, who had been clinging to me all the time, trembling yet courageous. “Don’t you think the danger is now past, my Nigel?”

“For us, it may be. But if the crater has really become active. I fear that our poor people at San Cristobal will be in very great danger indeed.”

“No! God alone—Hearken!”

A muffled peal of thunder which seemed to come from the very bowels of the earth, followed by a detonation like the discharge of an army’s artillery, and the sides of the crater opened, and with a wild roar the pent-up torrent burst forth, and leaping into the lake, rolled, a mighty avalanche of water, toward the doomed oasis.

We looked at each other in speechless dismay. Nothing could resist that terrible flood; it would sweep everything before it, for, though its violence might be lessened before it reached the sea, only the few who happened to be near the coast could escape destruction.

Nobody spoke; the roar of the cataract deafened us, the awfulness of the catastrophe made us dumb. We were as if stunned, and I was conscious of nothing save a sickening sense of helplessness and despair.

For an hour we stood watching the outpouring of the water. In that hour Quipai was destroyed and its people perished.

As the blood-red sun sank into the bosom of the broad Pacific, a great cloud of smoke and steam, mingled with stones and ashes, was puffed out of the crater and a stream of

fiery lava, bursting from the breach in the side of the mountain, followed in the wake of the water.

The uproar was terrific; explosion succeeded explosion; great stones hurled through the air and fell back into the crater with a din like discharges of musketry, and whenever there came a lull we could hear the hissing of the water as it met the lava.

We remained in the garden the night through. Nobody thought of going indoors; but after a while we became so weary with watching and overwrought with excitement that, despite the danger and the noise we could not keep our eyes open. Before the southern cross began to bend we were all asleep, Angela and I wrapped in our cobijas, the others on the turf and under the trees.

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When I opened my eyes the sun was rising majestically above the Cordillera, but its rays had not yet reached the ocean. I rose and looked around. The crater was still smoking, and a mist hung over the oasis, but the lava had ceased to flow, and not a zephyr moved the air, not a tremor stirred the earth. Only the blackened throat of the volcano and the ghastly rent in its side were there to remind us of the havoc that had been wrought and the ruin of Quipai.

I roused the people and bade them prepare breakfast, for though thousands may perish in a night, the survivors must eat on the morrow. The house, albeit considerably shaken, was still intact, but several of the doors were so tightly jammed that I had to break them open with my hatchet.

When breakfast was ready I woke Angela.

“Is it real, or have I been dreaming?” she asked, with a shudder, looking wildly round.

“It is only too real,” I said, pointing to the smoking crater.

“*Misericordia!* what shall we do?”

“First of all, we must go down to the oasis and see whether any of the people are left alive.”

“You are right. When we have done what we can for the others it will be time enough to think about ourselves.”

“Are there any others?” I thought, for I greatly doubted whether we should find any alive, except, perhaps, Yawl and the three or four men who were helping him. But I kept my misgivings to myself, and after breakfast we set off. Angela and myself were mounted, and I assigned a mule to Kidd. The man might be useful, and, circumstanced as we were, it would have been bad policy to give him the cold shoulder. We also took with us provisions, clothing, and a tent, for I was by no means sure that we should find either food or shelter on the oasis.

As we passed the volcano I looked into the crater. Nearly level with the breach made by the water was a great mass of seething lava, which I regarded as a sure sign that another eruption might take place at any moment. The valley lake had disappeared; banks, trees, soil, dwellings, all were gone, leaving only bare rocks and burning lava. Of San Cristobal there was not a vestige; the oasis had been converted into a damp and steaming gully, void of vegetation and animal life. But, as I had anticipated, the force of the flood was spent before it reached the coast. Much of the water had overflowed into the desert and been absorbed by the sand, and the little that remained was now sinking into the earth and being evaporated by the sun.

For hours Angela and I rode on in silence; our distress was too deep for words.

“Quipai is gone,” she murmured at length, shuddering and looking at me with tear-filled eyes.

“Yes, gone and forever. As entirely as if it had never been. It is worse than the carnage of a great battle. These poor people! Nature is more cruel than man.”

“But surely! will you not try to restore the oasis and re-create Quipai?”

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“To do that, *cara mia*, would require another Abbe Balthazar and sixty years of life. And to what end? Sooner or later our work would be destroyed as his has been, even if we were allowed to begin it. The volcano may be active for ages. We must go.”

“Whither?”

“Back to the world, that in new scenes and occupation we may perchance forget this crowning calamity.”

“It is something to have been happy so long.”

“It is much; it is almost everything. Whatever the future may have in store for us, darling, nothing can deprive us of the sunny memories of the past, and the happiness we have enjoyed at Quipai.”

“True, and if this misfortune were not so terrible—But God knows best. It ill becomes me, who never knew sorrow before, to repine.—Yes, let us go. But how?”

“By sea. I fear you would never survive the hazards and hardships of a journey over the Cordillera, and dearly as I love you—because I love you—I would rather have you die than be captured by Indians and made the wife of some savage cacique. Yes, we must go by sea, in the sloop built by these two castaways. Yet, even in that there will be a serious risk; for if they suspect I have the diamonds in my possession—and I am afraid the suspicion is inevitable—they will probably—”

“What?”

“Try to murder us.”

“Murder us! For the diamonds?”

“Yes, my Angela, for the diamonds. In the world which you have never seen men commit horrible crimes for insignificant gains, and I have here in my pocket the value of a king’s ransom. Even the average man could hardly withstand so great a temptation, and all we know of these sailors is that one of them is a thief.”

“What will you do then?”

“First of all, I must find a safer hiding-place for our wealth than my pockets; and we must be ever on our guard. The voyage will not be long, and we shall be three against two.”

“Three! You will take Ramon, then?”

“Certainly—if he will go with us.”

“Of course he will. Ramon would follow you to the world’s end. And the other sailor—-Yawl—may have been drowned in the flood.”

“I don’t think so. The flood did not go much farther than this, and Yawl was busy with his boat. But we shall soon know; the cliffs are in sight.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

NORTH BY WEST.

Besides Yawl and his helpers, we found on the beach about thirty men and women, the saved of two thousand. Among them was one of the priests ordained by the abbe. All had lived in the lower part of the oasis, and when the volcano began spouting water, after the third earthquake, they fled to the coast and so escaped. Though naturally much distressed (being bereft of home, kindred, and all they possessed), they bore their misfortunes with the uncomplaining stoicism so characteristic of their race.

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The immediate question was how to dispose of these unfortunates. I could not take them away in the sloop, and I knew that they would prefer to remain in the neighborhood where they were born. But the oasis was uninhabitable. A few weeks and it would be merged once more in the desert from which it had been so painfully won. Therefore I proposed that they should settle at Alta Vista under charge of the priest. Alta Vista being above the volcano no outburst of lava could reach them, and the *azequia* being intact beyond that point they could easily bring more land under cultivation and live in comfort and abundance.

To this proposal the survivors and the priest gladly and gratefully assented. They were very good, those poor Indians, and seemed much more concerned over our approaching departure than their own fate, beseeching us, with many entreaties, not to leave them. Angela would have yielded, but I was obdurate. I could not see that it was in any sense our duty to bury ourselves in a remote corner of the Andes for the sake of a score or two of Indians who were very well able to do without us. What could be the good of building up another colony and creating another oasis merely that the evil genii of the mountains might destroy them in a night? Had the abbe, instead of spending a lifetime in making Quipai, devoted his energies to some other work, he might have won for himself enduring fame and permanently benefited mankind. As it was, he had effected less than nothing, and I was resolved not to court his fate by following his example.

Those were the arguments I used to Angela, and in the end she not only fully agreed with me that it was well for us to go, but that the sooner we went the better. The means were at hand. Yawl could have the yacht ready for sea within twenty-four hours. There was little more to do than head the sails and get water and provisions on board. I had the casks filled forthwith—for the water in the channels was fast draining away—set some of the people to work preparing *tasajo*, and sent Ramon with the mules and two *arrieros* to Alta Vista for the remainder of our clothing, bedding, and several other things which I thought would be useful on the voyage.

Ramon, I may mention, was my own personal attendant. He had been brought up and educated by Angela and myself, and was warmly attached to us. In disposition he was bright and courageous, in features almost European; there could be little doubt that he was descended from some white castaway, who had landed on the coast and been adopted by this tribe. He said it would break his heart if we left him behind, so we took him with us, and he has ever since been the faithful companion of my wanderings and my trusty friend.

My wife and I slept in our tent, Kidd and Yawl on the sloop. As the sails were not bent nor the boat victualled, I had no fear of their giving us the slip in the night. In the morning Ramon and the *arrieros* returned with their lading, and by sunset we had everything on board and was ready for a start.

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The next thing was to settle our course. I wanted to reach a port where I could turn some of my diamonds into cash and take shipping for England, the West Indies, or the United States. We were between Valparaiso and Callao, and the former place, as being on the way, seemed the more desirable place to make for. But as the prevailing winds on the coast are north and northwest a voyage in the opposite direction would involve much beating up and nasty fetches, and, in all probability, be long and tedious. For these reasons I decided in favor of Callao, and told Kidd to shape our course accordingly.

“Just as you like, sir,” he said; “it is all the same to Yawl and me where we go. But it’s a longish stretch to Callao. Don’t you think we had better make for some nearer place? There’s Islay, and there’s Arica; and I doubt whether our water will last out till we get to Callao.”

“We must make it last till we get to Callao,” I answered, sharply; “except under compulsion I will put in neither at Islay nor Arica.”

“All right, sir! We are under your orders, and what you say shall be done, as far as lies in our power.”

Kidd’s answer was civil but his manner was surly and defiant, and it struck me that he might have some special reason for desiring to avoid Callao. But I was resolved to go thither, so that in case of need I might claim the protection of the British consul, whom I was sure to find there. I was by no means sure that I should find one either at Islay or Arica. I knew something of the ways of Spanish revenue officers, and as I had no papers, it was quite possible that (in the absence of a consul) I might be cast into prison and plundered of all I possessed, especially if Mr. Kidd should hint that it included a bag of diamonds.

The sloop’s accommodation for passengers was neither extensive nor luxurious. The small cabin aft was just big enough to hold Angela and myself, and once in it, we were like rats in a hole, as, to get out, we had to climb an almost perpendicular ladder. Kidd and Yawl were to sleep, turn and turn about, in a sort of dog-house which they had contrived in the bows. Ramon would roll himself in his *cobija* and sleep anywhere.

Before going on board I made such arrangements as I hoped would insure us against foul play. I stitched one half of the diamonds in my waist-belt; the other half my wife hid away in her dress. Among the things brought down from Alta Vista was an exquisite little dagger with a Damascened blade, which I gave to Angela. I had my hunting-knife, and Ramon his *machete*.

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I laid it down as a rule from which there was to be no departure, that Ramon and I were neither to sleep at the same time nor be in the cabin together, and that when we had anything particular to say we should say it in Quipai. As it happened, he knew a little English; I had taught my wife my mother-tongue, and Ramon, by dint of hearing it spoken, and with a little instruction from me and from her, had become so far proficient in the language that he could understand the greater part of what was said. This, however, was not known to Kidd and Yawl; I told him not to let them know; but whenever opportunity occurred to listen to their conversation, and report it to me. I thought that if they meditated evil against us I might in this way obtain timely information of their designs; and I considered that, in the circumstances (our lives being, as I believed, in jeopardy), the expedient was quite justifiable.

We sailed at sunset and got well away, and the clear sky and resplendent stars, the calm sea and the fair soft wind augured well for a prosperous voyage. Yet my heart was sad and my spirits were low. The parting with our poor Indians had been very trying, and I could not help asking myself whether I had acted quite rightly in deserting them, whether it would not have been nobler (though perhaps not so worldly wise) to throw in my lot with theirs and try to recreate the oasis, as Angela had suggested. I also doubted whether I was acting the part of a prudent man in embarking my wife, my fortune, and myself on a wretched little sloop (which would probably founder in the first storm), under the control of two men of whom I knew no good, and who, as I feared, might play us false?

But whether I had acted wisely or unwisely, there was no going back now, and as I did not want Angela to perceive that I was either dubious or downcast, I pulled myself together, put on a cheerful countenance, and spoke hopefully of our prospects.

She was with us on deck, Kidd being at the helm.

“I have no very precise idea how far we maybe from Callao,” I said, “but if this wind lasts we should be there in five or six days at the outside. Don’t you think so, Kidd?”

“May be. You still think of going to Callao, then?”

“Still think of going to Callao! I am determined to go to Callao. Why do you ask? Did not I distinctly say so before we started?”

“I thought you had maybe changed your mind. And Callao won’t be easy to make. Neither Yawl nor me has ever been there; we don’t know the bearings, and we have no compass, and I don’t know much about the stars in these latitudes.”

“But I do, and better still, I have a compass.”

“A compass! Do you hear that, Bill Yawl? Mr. Fortescue has got a compass. Go to Callao! Why, we can go a’most anywhere. Where have you got it, sir—in the cabin?”

“Yes, Abbe Balthazar and I made it, ever so long since. It is only rudely fashioned, and has never been adjusted, but I dare say it will answer the purpose as well as another.”

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“Of course it will, and if you’ll kindly bring it here, it’ll be a great help. I reckon if I keep her head about—”

“Nor’ by west.”

“Ay, ay, sir, that’s it, I have no doubt. If I keep her head nor’ by west, I dare say we shall fetch Callao as soon as you was a-saying just now. But Bill and me should have the compass before us when we’re steering; and to-morrow we’ll try to rig up a bit of a binnacle. You, perhaps, would not mind fetching it now, sir?—Bring that patent lantern of yours, Bill.”

I fetched the compass and Yawl the lantern, made of a glass bottle and a piece of copper sheeting (like the rest of our equipments, the spoil of the sea).

Kidd was quite delighted with the compass, the card of which was properly marked and framed in a block of wood, and said it could easily be suspended on gimbals and fixed on a binnacle.

After a while, Angela, who felt tired, went below, and I with her, but only to fetch my *cobija* and a pillow, for, as I told Kidd, I intended to remain on deck all night, the cabin being too close and stuffy for two persons. This was true, yet not the whole truth. I had another reason; I saw that nothing would be easier than for Kidd or Yawl to slip on the cabin-hatch while I was below, and so have us at their mercy, for Ramon, though a stalwart youth enough, could not contend with the two sailors single-handed.

“Just as you like, sir; it’s all the same to me,” answered Kidd, rather shortly, and then relapsed into thoughtful silence.

I felt sure that he was scheming something which boded us no good, though, as yet, I had no idea what it could be. His motive for desiring to take the sloop to Islay or Arica, rather than to Callao, was pretty obvious, but why he should change his mind on the subject simply because of the compass, passed my comprehension. We could make Callao merely by running up the coast, with which, despite his disclaimer, I had not the least doubt he was quite familiar; and even if he were not, there was nothing in a compass to enlighten him.

But whatever his scheme might be I did not think he would attempt to use force—unless he could take us at a disadvantage. Man for man, Ramon and I were quite equal to Kidd and Yawl. We were, moreover, better armed, as so far as I knew, they had no weapons, save their sailors’ knives. In a personal struggle, they might come off second best; were, in any case, likely to get badly hurt, and unless I was much mistaken, they wanted to get hold of my diamonds with a minimum of risk to themselves. Wherefore, so long as we kept a sharp lookout, we had little to fear from open violence. As for the

scheme which was seething in Kidd's brain, I must needs wait for further developments before taking measures to counteract it.

When I had come to this conclusion I told Ramon, in Quipai, to lie down, and that when I wanted to sleep I would waken him.

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I watched until midnight, at which hour Yawl relieved Kidd at the helm, and Kidd turned in. Shortly afterward I roused Ramon, and bade him keep watch while I slept.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FOUND OUT.

When I awoke it was broad daylight, Yawl at the helm, the sloop bowling along at a great rate before a fresh breeze. But, to my utter surprise, there was no land in sight.

“How is this, Yawl?” I asked; “we are out of doors. How have you been steering?”

“The course you laid down sir, nor’ by west.”

“That is impossible. I am not much of a seaman, yet I know that if you had been steering nor’ by west, we should have the coast under our lee, and we cannot even see the peaks of the Cordillera.”

“Of course you cannot; they are covered with a mist,” put in Kidd.

“I see no mist; moreover, the Cordillera is visible a hundred miles away, and by good rights we should not be more than thirty or forty miles from the coast.”

“It’s the fault of your compass, then. The darned thing is all wrong. Better chuck it overboard and have done with it.”

“If you do, I’ll chuck you overboard. The compass is quite correct. You have been steering due west for some purpose of your own, against my orders.”

“Oh, that’s your game, is it? You are the skipper, and us a brace of lubbers as doesn’t know north from west, I suppose. Let him sail the cursed craft hissel, Bill.”

Yawl let go the tiller, on which the sloop broached to and nearly went on her beam ends. This was more than I could bear, and calling on Ramon to follow me, I sprang forward, seized Kidd by the throat, and, drawing my dagger, told him that unless he promised to obey my orders and do his duty, I would make an end of him then and there. Meanwhile, Ramon was keeping Yawl off with his *machete*, flourishing it around his head in a way that made the old salt’s hair nearly stand on end. Seeing that resistance was useless, Kidd caved in.

“I ask your pardon, Mr. Fortescue,” he said, hoarsely, for my hand was still on his throat. “I ask your pardon, but I lost my temper, and when I lose my temper it’s the very devil; I don’t know what I’m doing; but I promise faithfully to obey your orders and do my duty.”

On this I loosed him, and bade Ramon put up his *machete* and let Yawl go back to his steering. In one sense this was an untoward incident. It made Kidd my personal enemy. Quite apart from the question of the diamonds, he would bear me a grudge and do me an ill turn if he could. He was that sort of a man. Henceforward it would be war to the knife between us, and I should have to be more on my guard than ever. On the other hand, it was a distinct advantage to have beaten him in a contest for the mastery; if he had beaten me, I should have had to accept whatever conditions he might have thought fit to impose, for I was quite unable to sail the sloop myself.

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A light was thrown on his motive for changing the sloop's course by something Ramon had told me when the trouble was over. Shortly before I awoke he heard Kidd say to Yawl that he would very much like to know where I had hidden the diamonds, and that if they could only keep her head due west, we should make San Ambrosio about the same time that I was expecting to make Callao.

I had never heard of San Ambrosio before; but the fact of Kidd wanting to go thither was reason enough for my not wanting to go, so I bade Yawl steer due north, that is to say, parallel with the coast, and as the continent of South America trends considerably to the westward, about twenty degrees south of the equator, I reckoned that this course should bring us within sight of land on the following day, or the day after, according to the speed we made.

I not only told Yawl and Kidd to steer north, but saw that they did it, as to which, the compass being now always before us, there was no difficulty. Thinking it was well to learn to steer, I took a hand now and again at the tiller, under the direction of Kidd, whose manners my recent lesson had greatly improved. He was very affable, and obeyed my orders with alacrity and seeming good-will.

The next day I began to look out for land, without, however, much expectation of seeing any, but when a second day, being the third of our voyage, ended with the same result or, rather, want of result, I became uneasy, and expressed myself in this sense to Kidd.

"You have miscalculated the distance," he said, "and there's nothing so easy, when you've no chart and can take no observations. And how can you tell the sloop's rate of sailing? The wind is fair and constant—it always is in the trades—but how do you know as there is not a strong current dead against us? I don't think there's the least use looking for land before to-morrow."

This rather reassured me. It was quite true that the sloop might not be going so fast as I reckoned, and the coast be farther off than I thought—although I did not much believe in the current.

But the morrow came and went, and still no sign of land, and again, on the fifth day, the sun rose on an unbroken expanse of water. In clear weather—and no weather could be clearer—the Andes, as I had heard, were visible to mariners a hundred and fifty miles out at sea. Yet not a peak could be seen. Then I knew beyond a doubt that something was wrong. What could it be? Sailing as swiftly as we had been for five days, it was inconceivable that we should not have made land if we had been steering north, and for that I had the evidence of my senses. Where, then, was the mystery?

As I asked myself this question, Ramon touched me on the shoulder, and whispered in Quipai:

“Just now Yawl said to Kidd that it was quite time we sighted San Ambrosio, and that if we missed it, after all, it would be cursed awkward. And Kidd answered that ‘if we fell in with Hux it would be all right.’”

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This was more puzzling still. He had said before that, if we continued on the westward tack, we should make San Ambrosio at the time I was expecting to sight Callao, and now, although we were sailing due north, the villains counted on making San Ambrosio all the same.

Where was San Ambrosio? Not on the coast, for they were clearly looking for it then, had probably been looking for it some time, and the mainland must be at least two hundred miles away. If not on the coast San Ambrosio was an island, yet how it could lie both to the west and to the north was not quite obvious. And who was Hux, and why should falling in with him make matters all right for my interesting shipmates? Of one thing I felt sure—all right for these meant all wrong for me, and it behooved me to prevent the meeting—but how?

While these thoughts were passing through my mind, I was pacing to and fro on the sloop's deck, where was also Angela, sitting on a *cobija*, and leaning against the taffrail, Kidd being at the helm, and Ramon and Yawl smoking in the bows, for though they did not quite trust each other, they occasionally exchanged a not unfriendly word. Now and then I glanced mechanically at the compass. As I have already mentioned, it was not an ordinary ship compass in a brass frame, but a makeshift affair, in a wooden frame, to which Kidd had attached makeshift gimbals and hung on a makeshift binnacle, the latter being fixed between the tiller and the cabin-hatch. The deck was very narrow, and to lengthen my tether I generally passed between the tiller and the binnacle, sometimes exchanging a word with Angela. Once, as I did so, the sun's rays fell athwart the sloop's stern, and, happening the same moment to look at the compass, I made a discovery that sent the blood with sudden rush first to my heart and then to my brain; a small piece of iron, invisible in an ordinary light, had been driven into the framework of the compass, close to that part of the card marked "W," thereby deflecting the needle to the point in question, so that ever since our departure from Quipai, we had been steering due west, instead of north by west, as I intended and believed. The dodge might not have deceived a seaman, but it had certainly deceived me.

"You infernal scoundrel, I have found you out. Look there!" I shouted, pointing at the piece of iron. As I spoke Kidd let go the tiller, and quick as lightning gave me a tremendous blow with his fist between the shoulders, which just missed throwing me head foremost down the cabin-hatch, and sent me face downward on the deck breathless and half stunned. Before I could even think of rising, Kidd, who, as he struck, shouted to Yawl to "kill the Indian," was kneeling on my back with his fingers round my windpipe.

"At last! I have you now, you conceited jackanapes, you d——d sea-lawyer. Where have you got them diamonds? You won't answer! Shall I throttle you, or brain you with this belaying-pin? I'll throttle you; then there'll be none of your dirty blood to swab up."

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With that the villain squeezed my windpipe still tighter, and quite unable either to struggle or speak, I was giving myself up for lost, when his hold suddenly relaxed, and groaning deeply, he sank beside me on the deck. Freed from his weight, I staggered to my feet to find that I owed my life to Angela, who had used her dagger to such purpose that Kidd was like never to speak again.

“Ramon! Ramon! Haste, or that man will kill him,” she cried, all in a tremble, and pale with horror at the thought of her own boldness.

Yawl’s onslaught was so sudden that the boy had been unable to draw his *machete*, and after a desperate bout of tugging and straining, the sailor had got the upper-hand and was now kneeling on Ramon’s chest, and feeling for his knife. Though sorely bruised with my fall, and still gasping for breath, I ran to the rescue, and gripping Yawl by the shoulders, bore him backward on the deck. Another moment, and we had him at our mercy; I held down his head, while Ramon, astride on his body, pinioned his arms.

“Now, look here, Yawl!” I said. “You have tried to commit murder and deserve to die; your comrade and accomplice is dead, but I will spare your life on conditions. You must promise to obey my orders as if I were your captain, and you under articles of war, and help me to work the sloop to Callao, or some other port on the mainland. In return, I promise not to bring any charge against you when we get there.”

“All right, sir! Kidd was my master, and I obeyed him; now you are my master and I will obey you.”

I quite believed that the old salt was speaking sincerely. He had been so completely under Kidd’s influence as to have no will of his own.

“Good! but there is something else. I must have those diamonds he stole from my house at Alta Vista. Where are they?”

“Stitched inside his jersey, under the arm-hole.”

I went to Kidd’s body, cut open his jersey, and found the diamonds in two small canvas bags. They were among the largest I had and (as I subsequently found) worth fifty thousand pounds. After we had thrown the body overboard, I ordered Yawl to put the sloop on the starboard tack, and myself taking the helm changed the course to due north. Then I asked him who he and Kidd were, whence they came, and why they had so shamefully deceived me as to the course we were steering.

On this Yawl answered in a dry, matter-of-fact manner, as if it were all in the way of business, that Kidd had been captain and he boatswain and carpenter of a “free-trader,” known as the Sky Scraper, Sulky Sail, and by several other aliases; that the captain and crew fell out over a division of plunder, of which Kidd wanted the lion’s share, the upshot

being that he and Yawl, who had taken sides with him, were shoved into the dinghy and sent adrift. In these circumstances they naturally made for the nearest land, which proved to be Quipai, and deeming

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it inexpedient to confess that they were pirates, pretended to be castaways. They built the sloop with the idea of stealing away by themselves, and but for my discovery of the theft of the diamonds and the bursting of the crater would have done so. As I suspected, Kidd allowed us to go with them, solely with a view to cutting our throats and appropriating the remainder of the diamonds. This design being frustrated by our watchfulness, he next conceived the notion of putting in at Arica or Islay, charging me with robbing him, and, in collusion with the authorities, whom he intended to bribe, depriving me of all I possessed. This plan likewise failing, and having a decided objection to Callao, where he was known and where there might be a British cruiser as well as a British consul, Kidd hit on the brilliant idea of doctoring the compass and making me think we were going north by west, while our true course was almost due west, his object being to reach San Ambrosio, a group of rocky islets some three hundred miles from the coast, and a pirate stronghold and trysting-place. If they did not find any old comrades there, they would at least find provisions, water, and firearms, and so be able, as they thought, to despoil me of my diamonds. Also Kidd had hopes of falling in with Captain Hux, a worthy of the same kidney, who commanded the "free-trader" Culebra, and whose favorite cruising-ground was northward of San Ambrosio.

"But in my opinion," observed Mr. Yawl, coolly, when he had finished his story, "in my opinion we passed south of the islands last night, and so I told Kidd; they're very small, and as there's no lights, easy missed."

"We must be a long way from Callao, then. How far do you suppose?"

"That is more than I can tell; may be four hundred miles."

"And how long do you think it will take us to get there, assuming it to be four hundred miles?"

"Well, on this tack and with this breeze—you see, sir, the wind has fallen off a good deal since sunrise—with this breeze, about eight days."

"Eight days!" I exclaimed, in consternation. "Eight days! and I don't think we have food and water enough for two. Come with me below, Ramon, and let me see how much we have left."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GRIEF AND PAIN.

It was even worse than I feared. Reckoning neither on a longer voyage than five or six days nor on being so far from the coast that, in case of emergency, we could not obtain

fresh supplies, we had used both provisions and water rather recklessly, and now I found that of the latter we had no more than, at our recent rate of consumption, would last eighteen hours, while of food we had as much as might suffice us for twenty-four. It was necessary to reduce our allowance forthwith, and I put it to Yawl whether we could not make for some nearer port than Callao. Better risk the loss of my diamonds than die of hunger and

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thirst. Yawl's answer was unfavorable. The nearest port of the coast as to distance was the farthest as to time. To reach it, the wind being north by west, we should have to make long fetches and frequent tacks, whereas Callao, or the coast thereabout, could be reached by sailing due north. So there seemed nothing for it but to economize our resources to the utmost and make all the speed we could. Yet, do as we might, it was evident that, unless we could obtain a supply of food and water from some passing ship we should have to put ourselves on a starvation allowance. I was, however, much less concerned for myself and the others, than for Angela. Accustomed as she had been to a gentle, uneventful, happy life, the catastrophe of Quipai, the anxieties we had lately endured, and the confinement of the sloop, were telling visibly on her health. Moreover, Kidd's death, richly as he deserved his fate, had been a great shock to her. She strove to be cheerful, and displayed splendid courage, yet the increasing pallor of her cheeks and the sadness in her eyes, showed how much she suffered. We men stinted ourselves of water that she might have enough, but seeing this she declined to take more than her share, often refusing to drink when she was tormented with thirst.

And then there befell an accident which well-nigh proved fatal to us all. A gust of wind blew the mainsail (made of grass-cloth) into ribbons, the consequence being that our rate of sailing was reduced to two knots an hour, and our hope of reaching Callao to zero.

Meanwhile, Angela grew weaker and weaker, she fell into a low fever, was at times even delirious, and I began to fear that, unless help speedily came, a calamity was imminent, which for me personally would be worse than the quenching of Quipai. And when we were at the last extremity, mad with thirst and feeble with fasting, help did come. One morning at daylight Yawl sighted a sail—a large vessel a few miles astern of us, but a point or two more to the west, and on the same tack as ourselves. We altered the sloop's course at once so as to bring her across the stranger's bows, for having neither ensign to reverse, nor gun wherewith to fire a signal of distress, it was a matter of life and death for us to get within hailing-distance.

"What is she! Can you make her out?" I asked Yawl, as trembling with excitement, we looked longingly at the noble ship in which centered our hopes.

"Three masts! A merchantman? No, I'm blest if I don't think she's a man-of-war. So she is, a frigate and a firm 'un—forty or fifty guns, I should say."

"Under what flag?"

"I'll tell you in a minute—Union Jack! No, stars and stripes. She belongs to Uncle Sam, she do, sir, and he's no call to be ashamed of her; she's a perfect beauty and well

handled. By—I do believe they see us. They are shortening sail. We shall be alongside in a few minutes."

"Who are you and what do you want?" asked a voice from the frigate, so soon as we were within hail.

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“We are English and starving. For God’s sake, throw us a rope!” I answered.

The rope being thrown and the sloop made fast, I asked the officer of the watch to take us on board the frigate, as seeing the condition of our boat and ourselves, I did not think we could possibly reach our destination, that my wife was very sick, and unless she could have better attention than we were able to give her, might not recover.

“Of course we will take you on board—and the poor lady. Pass the word for the doctor, you there! But what on earth are you doing with a lady in a craft like that, so far out at sea, too?”

Without waiting for an answer to his question, the officer ordered a hammock to be lowered, in which we carefully placed Angela, who was thereupon hoisted on the frigate’s deck. We men followed, and were received by a fine old gentleman with a florid face and white hair, whom I rightly conjectured to be the captain.

“Well,” he said, quietly, “what can I do for you?”

“Water,” I gasped, for the exertion of coming on board had been almost too much for me.

“Poor fellow! Certainly. Why did I not think of it before? You shall have both food and drink. Somebody bring water with a dash of rum in it—not too much, they are weak. And Mr. Charles, tell the wardroom steward to get a square meal ready for this gentleman. Might I ask your name, sir?”

“Nigel Fortescue.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fortescue. Mine is Bigelow, and I have the honor to command the United States ship Constellation. Here’s the water! I hope you have not forgotten the dash of rum, Tomkins.—There! Take a long drink. You will feel better now, and when you have had a square meal, you shall tell me all about it. And the others? You are an old salt, anybody can see that.”

“Yes, sir. Bill Yawl at your service, an old man-o’-war’s man, able-bodied seaman, bo’s’n, and ship’s carpenter, anything you like sir. Ax your pardon, sir, but a glass of half-water grog—”

“Not until you have eaten. Then you may have two glasses. Tomkins, take these men to the purser and tell him to give them a square meal. The doctor is attending to your wife, Mr. Fortescue. She is in my state-room and shall have every comfort we can give her.”

“I thank you with all my heart, Captain Bigelow. You are really too good, I can never—”

“Tut, tut, tut, my dear sir. Pray don’t say a word. I have only given her my spare state-room. Mr. Charles will take you to the ward-room, we can talk afterward. Meanwhile, I shall have your belongings got on board, and then, I suppose, we had better sink that craft of yours. If we leave her to knock about the ocean she may be knocking against some ship in the night and doing her a mischief.”

After I had eaten the “square meal” set for me in the ward-room, and spent a few minutes with Angela, I joined the captain and first lieutenant in the former’s state-room, and over a glass of grog, told them briefly, but frankly, something of my life and adventures.

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“Well, it is the queerest yarn I ever heard; but I dare say none the less true on that account,” said Captain Bigelow, when I had finished. “With that sweet lady for your wife and your belt full of diamonds, you may esteem yourself one of the most fortunate of men. And you did quite right to get away from that place. But what was your point? where did you expect to get to with that sloop of yours?”

“Callao.”

“Callao! Why the course you were on would never have taken you to Callao. Callao lies nor’ by east, not nor’ by west. If you had not fallen in with us, I am afraid you would never have got anywhere.”

“I am sure we should not. Three days more and we should have died of thirst.”

“Where shall we put you ashore?”

“That is for you to say. Where would it be convenient?”

“How would Panama suit you?”

“It is just the place. We could cross the isthmus to Chagres; but before going to England, I should like to call at La Guayra, and find out whether my friend Carmen still lives.”

“You can do that easily; but if I were you, and had all those diamonds in my possession, I would get home as quickly as possible, and put them in a place of safety. There are men who would commit a thousand murders for one of them.”

“Well, I shall see. Perhaps I had better consign them to London through some merchant, and have them insured.”

“Perhaps you had, especially if you can get somebody to insure the insurer. And take my advice, don’t tell a soul on board what you have told us. My crew are passably honest, but if they knew how many diamonds you carried about you, I should be very sorry to go bail for them.”

As I went on deck after our talk, I was met by the surgeon.

“A word with you, Mr. Fortescue,” he said, gravely, taking me aside, “your wife—”

“Yes, sir, what about my wife?” I asked, with a sudden sinking of the heart, for the man’s manner was even more portentous than his words.

“She is very ill.”

“She was very ill, and if we had remained longer on the sloop—but now—with nourishing food and your care, doctor, she will quickly regain her strength. Indeed, she is better already.”

“For the moment. But she is very much reduced and the symptoms are grave. A recurrence of the fever—”

“But such a fever is so easily cured. I know what you are hinting at, doctor. Yet I cannot think—You will not let her die. After surmounting so many dangers, and being so miraculously rescued, and with prospects so fair, it would be too cruel.”

“I will do my best, sir, you may be sure. But I thought it my duty to prepare you for the worst. The issue is with God.”

* * * * *

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This is a part of my story on which I care not to dwell. Even yet I cannot think of it without grief and pain. My dear wife was taken from me. She died in my arms, her hand in mine, as sweetly and serenely as she had lived. But for Captain Bigelow and his officers I should have buried myself with Angela in the fathomless sea. I owed him my life a second time—such as it was—more, for he taught me the duty and grace of resignation, showed me that, though to cherish the memory of a great sorrow ennobles a man, he who abandons himself to unmeasured grief is as pusillanimous as he who shirks his duty on the field of battle.

Captain Bigelow had a great heart and a chivalrous nature. After Angela's death he treated me more as a cherished son than as a casual guest. Before we reached Panama we were fast friends. He provided me with clothing and gave me money for my immediate wants, as to have attempted to dispose of any of my diamonds there, or at Chagres, might have exposed me to suspicion, possibly to danger. In acknowledgement of his kindness and as a souvenir of our friendship, I persuaded him to accept one of the finest stones in my collection, and we parted with mutual assurances of goodwill and not without hope of meeting again.

Ramon of course, went with me. Bill Yawl, equally of of course, I left behind. He had slung his hammock in the Constellation's fo'castle, and became captain of the foretop.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OLD FRIENDS AND A NEW FOE.

I had made up my mind to see Carmen, if he still lived; and finding at Chagres a schooner bound for La Guayra I took passages in her for myself and Ramon, all the more willingly as the captain proposed to put in at Curacoa. It occurred to me that Van Voorst, the Dutch merchant in whose hands I had left six hundred pounds, would be a likely man to advise me as to the disposal of my diamonds—if he also still lived.

Rather to my surprise, for people die fast in the tropics, I did find the old gentleman alive, but he had made so sure of my death that my reappearance almost caused his. The pipe he was smoking dropped from his mouth, and he sank back in his chair with an exclamation of fear and dismay.

"Yor need not be alarmed, Mynheer Van Voorst," I said; "I am in the flesh."

"I am glad to see you in the flesh. I don't believe in ghosts, of course. But I happened to be in what you call a brown study, and as I had heard you were shot long ago on the llanos you rather startled me, coming in so quietly—that rascally boy ought to have announced you. But I was not afraid—not in the least. Why should one be afraid of a ghost! And I saw at a glance that, as you say, you were in the flesh. I suppose you

have come to inquire about your money. It is quite safe, my dear sir, and at your disposal, and you will find that it has materially increased. I will call for the ledger, and you shall see."

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The ledger was brought in by a business-looking young man, whom the old merchant introduced to me as his nephew and partner, Mynheer Bernhard Van Voorst.

“This is Mr. Fortescue, Bernhard,” he said, “the English gentleman who was dead—I mean that I thought he was dead, but is alive—and who many years ago left in my hands a sum of about two thousand piasters. Turn to his account and see how much there is now to his credit?”

“At the last balance the amount to Mr. Fortescue’s credit was six thousand two hundred piasters."[2]

[2] At the time in question, “piaster” was a word often used as an equivalent for “dollar,” both in the “Gulf ports” and the West Indies.

“You see! Did I not say so? Your capital is more than doubled.”

“More than doubled! How so?”

“We have credited you with the colonial rate of interest—ten per cent.—as was only right, seeing that you had no security, and we had used the money in our business; and my friend, compound interest at ten per cent, is a great institution. It beats gold-mining, and is almost as profitable as being President of the Republic of Venezuela. How will you take your balance, Mr. Fortescue? We will have the account made up to date. I can give you half the amount in hard money—coin is not too plentiful just now in Curacoa, half in drafts at seven days’ sight on the house of Goldberg, Van Voorst & Company, at Amsterdam, or Spring & Gerolstein, at London. They are a young firm, but do a safe business and work with a large capital.”

“I am greatly obliged to you but all I require at present is about five hundred piasters, in hard money.”

“Ah then, you have made money where you have been?” observed Mr. Van Voorst, eying me keenly through his great horn spectacles.

“Not money, but money’s worth,” I replied, for I had quite decided to make a confident of the honest old Dutchman, whom I liked all the better for going straight to the point without asking too many questions.

“Then it must be merchandise and merchandise is money—sometimes.”

“Yes, it is merchandise.”

“If it be readily salable in this island or on the Spanish Main we shall be glad to receive it from you on consignment and make you a liberal advance against bills of lading.

Hardware and cotton prints are in great demand just now, and if it is anything of that sort we might sell it to arrive."

"It is nothing of that sort, Mr. Van Voorst."

"More portable, perhaps?"

"Yes, more portable."

"If you could show me a sample—"

"I can show you the bulk."

"You have got it in the schooner?"

"No, I have got it here."

"Gold dust?"

"Diamonds. I found them in the Andes, and shall be glad to have your advice as to their disposal."

"Diamonds! Ach! you are a happy man. If you would like to show me them I can perhaps give you some idea of their value. The house of Goldberg & Van Voorst, at Amsterdam, in which I was brought up, deal largely in precious stones."

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On this I undid my belt and poured the diamonds on a large sheet of white paper, which Mr. Van Voorst spread on his desk.

"*Mein Gott! Mein Gott!*" he exclaimed in ecstacy, glaring at the diamonds through his big glasses and picking out the finest with his fat fingers. "This is the finest collection of rough stones I ever did see. They are worth—until they are weighed and cut it is impossible to say how much—but at least a million dollars, probably two millions. You found them in the Andes? You could not say where, could you, Mr. Fortescue?"

"I could, but I would rather not."

"I beg your pardon. I should have known better than to ask. You intend to go there again, of course?"

"Never! It would be at the risk of my life—and there are other reasons."

"There is no need. You are rich already, and enough is as good as a feast. You ask my advice as to the disposal of these stones. Well, my advice is that you consign them, through us, to the house of Goldberg, Van Voorst & Company. They are honest and experienced. They will get them cut and sell them for you at the highest price. They are, moreover, one of the richest houses in Amsterdam, trustworthy without limit. What do you say?"

"Yes, I will act on your advice, and consign these stones to your friends for sale at Amsterdam, or elsewhere, as they may think best. And be good enough to ask them to advise me as to the investment of the proceeds."

"They will do that with pleasure, mine friend, and having financial relations with every monetary centre in Europe they command the best information. And now we must count and weigh these stones carefully, and I shall give you a receipt in proper form. They must be shipped in three or four parcels so as to divide the risk, and I will write to Goldberg & Van Voorst to take out open policies 'by ship or ships'—for how much shall we say?"

"That I must leave to you, Mr. Van Voorst."

"Then I will say two million dollars—better make it too much than too little—and two millions may not be too much. I do not profess to be an expert, and, as likely as not, my estimate is very wide of the mark."

After the diamonds had been counted and weighed, and a receipt written out, in duplicate and in two languages, I informed Mr. Van Voorst of my intention to visit Caracas and asked whether things were pretty quiet there.

“At Caracas itself, yes. But in the interior they are fighting, as usual. The curse of Spanish rule has been succeeded by the still greater curse of chronic revolution.”

“But foreigners are admitted, I suppose? I run no risk of being clapped in prison as I was last time?”

“Not the least. You can go and come as you please. You don’t even require a passport. The Spaniards, who were once so hated, are now almost popular. I hear that several Spanish officers, who served in the royal army during the war, are now at Caracas, and have offered their swords to the government for the suppression of the present rebellion. Do you intend to stay long in Venezuela?”

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“I think not. In any case I shall see you before I leave for Europe. Much depends on whether I find my friend Carmen alive.”

“Carmen, Carmen! I seem to know the name. Is he a general?”

“Scarcely, I should think. He was only a *teniente* of guerillas when we parted some ten years ago.”

“They are all generals now, my dear sir, and as plentiful as frogs in my native land. If you are ever in doubt as to the rank of a Venezolano, you are always safe in addressing him as a general. Yes, I fancy you will find your friend alive. At any rate, there is a General Carmen, rather a leading man among the Blues, I think, and sometimes spoken of as a probable president. You will, of course, put up at the Hotel de los Generales. Ah, here is Bernhard with the five hundred dollars in hard money, for which you asked. If you should want more, draw on us at sight. I will give you a letter of introduction to the house of Bluehm & Bluthner at Caracas, who will be glad to cash your drafts at the current rate of exchange, and to whose care I will address any letters I may have occasion to write to you.”

This concluded my business with Mr. Van Voorst, and three days later I was once more in Caracas. I found the place very little altered, less than I was myself. I had entered it in high spirits, full of hope, eager for adventure, and intent on making my fortune. Now my heart was heavy with sorrow and bitter with disappointment. Though I had made my fortune, I had lost, as I thought, both the buoyancy of youth and the capacity for enjoyment, and I looked forward to the future without either hope or desire.

As I rode with Ramon into the *patio* of the hotel, where I had been arrested by the alguazils of the Spanish governor, a man came forward to greet me, so strikingly like the ancient *posadero* that I felt sure he was the latter’s son. My surmise proved correct, and I afterwards heard, not without a sense of satisfaction, that the father was hanged by the patriots when they recaptured Caracas.

After I had engaged my rooms the *posadero* informed me (in answer to my inquiry) that General Salvador Carmen (this could be none other than my old friend) was with the army at La Victoria, but that he had a house at Caracas where his wife and family were then residing. He also mentioned incidentally that several Spanish officers of distinction, who had arrived a few days previously, were staying in the *posada*—-doubtless the same spoken of by Van Voorst.

The day being still young, for I had left La Guayra betimes, I thought I could not do better than call on Juanita, who lived only a stone’s throw from the Hotel de los Generales. She recognized me at once and received me—almost literally—with open arms. When I essayed to kiss her hand, she offered me her cheek.

“After this long time! It is a miracle!” she exclaimed. “We mourned for you as one dead; for we felt sure that if you were living we should have had news of you. How glad Salvador will be! Where have you been all this time, and why, oh why, did you not write?”

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“I have been in the heart of the Andes, and I did not write because I was as much cut off from the world as if I had been in another planet.”

“You must have a long story to tell us, then. But I am forgetting the most important question of all. Are you still a bachelor?”

“Worse than that, Juanita. I am a widower. I have lost the sweetest wife—”

“*Misericordia! Misericordia! Pobre amigo mio!* Oh, how sorry I am; how much I pity you!” And the dear lady, now a stately and handsome matron, fell a-weeping out of pure tenderness, and I had to tell her the sad story of the quenching of Quipai and Angela’s death. But the telling of it, together with Juanita’s sympathy, did me good, and I went away in much better spirits than I had come. Salvador, she said, would be back in a few days, and she much regretted not being able to offer me quarters; it was contrary to the custom of the place and Spanish etiquette for ladies to entertain gentlemen visitors during their husbands’ absence.

After leaving Juanita I walked round by the guard-house in which I had been imprisoned, and through the ruins where Carmen and I had hidden when we were making our escape. They suggested some stirring memories—Carera (who, as I learned from Juanita, had been dead several years) and his chivalrous friendship; Salvador and his reckless courage; our midnight ride; Gahra and the bivouac by the mountain-tarn (poor Gahra, what had become of him?); Majia and his guerillas; Griscelli and his blood-hounds (how I hated that man, but surely by this time he had got his deserts); Gondocori and Queen Mamcuna; the man-killer; and Quipai.

My mind was still busied with these memories when I reached the hotel. There seemed to be much more going on than there had been earlier in the day—horsemen were coming and going, servants hurrying to and fro, people promenading on the *patio*, a group of uniformed officers deep in conversation. One of them, a tall, rather stout man, with grizzled hair, a pair of big epaulettes, and a coat covered with gold lace, had his back toward me, and as my eye fell on his sword-hilt it struck me that I had seen something like it before. I was trying to think where, when the owner of it turned suddenly round, and I found myself face to face with—GRISCELLI!!

For some seconds we stared at each other in blank amazement. I could see that though he recognized me, he was trying to make believe that he did not; or, perhaps, he really doubted whether I was the man I seemed.

“That is my sword,” I said, pointing to the weapon by his side, which had been given to me by Carera.

“Your sword! What do you mean?” “You took it from me eleven years ago, when I fell into your hands at San Felipe, and you hunted my friend Carmen and myself with bloodhounds.”

“What folly is this? Hunted you with bloodhounds, forsooth! Why, this is the first time I ever set eyes on you—the man is mad—or drunk” (addressing his friends).

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“You lie, Griscelli; and you are not a liar merely, but a murderer and a coward.”

“*Por Dios*, you shall pay for this insult with your heart’s blood!” he shouted, furiously, half drawing his sword.

“It is like you to draw on an unarmed man.” I said, laying hold of his wrist. “Give me a sword, and you shall make me pay for the insult with my blood—if you can. Senores” (by this time all the people in the *patio* had gathered round us), “Senores, are there here any Venezuelan caballeros who will bear me out in this quarrel. I am an Englishman, by name Fortescue; eleven years ago, while serving under General Mejia on the patriot side, I fell into the hands of General Griscelli, who deprived me of the sword he now wears, which I received as a present from Senor Carera, whose name you may remember. Then, after deceiving us with false promises—my friend General Carmen and myself—he hunted us with his bloodhounds, and we escaped as by a miracle. Now he protests that he never saw me before. What say you, senores, am I not right in stigmatizing him as a murderer and liar?”

“Quite right!” said a middle-aged, soldierly-looking man. I also served in the war of liberation, and remember Griscelli’s name well. It would serve him right to poniard him on the spot.”

“No, no. I want no murder. I demand only satisfaction.”

“And he shall give it you or take the consequences. I will gladly act as one witness, and I am sure my friend here, Senor Don Luis de Medina, who is also a veteran of the war, will act as the other. Will you fight, Griscelli?”

“Certainly—provided that we fight at once, and to the death. You can arrange the details with my friends here.”

“Be it so.” I said, “*A la muerte.*”

“To the death! To the death!” shouted the crowd, whose native ferocity was now thoroughly roused.

After a short conference and a reference to Griscelli and myself, the seconds announced that we were to fight with swords in Senor de Medina’s garden, whither we straightway wended, for there were no police to meddle with us, and at that time duels *a la muerte* were of daily occurrence in the city of Caracas. When we arrived at the garden, which was only a stone’s-throw walk from the *posada*, Senor de Medina produced two swords with cutting edges, and blades five feet long; for we were to fight in Spanish fashion, and Spanish duelists both cut and thrust, and, when occasion serves, use the left hand as a help in parrying.

Then the spectators, of whom there were fully two score, made a ring, and Griscelli and I (having meanwhile doffed our hats, coats, and shirts), stepped into the arena.

I had not handled a sword for years, and for aught I knew Griscelli might be a consummate swordsman and in daily practice. On the other hand, he was too stout to be in first-rate condition, and, besides being younger, I had slightly the advantage in length of arm.

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When the word was given to begin, he opened the attack with great energy and resolution, and was obviously intent on killing me if he could. For a minute or two it was all I could do to hold my own; and partly to test his strength and skill, partly to get my hand in, I stood purposely on the defensive.

At the end of the first bout neither of us had received a scratch, but Griscelli showed signs of fatigue while I was quite fresh. Also he was very angry and excited, and when we resumed he came at me with more than his former impetuosity, as if he meant to bear me down by the sheer weight and rapidity of his strokes. His favorite attack was a cut aimed at my head. Six several times he repeated this manoeuvre, and six times I stopped the stroke with the usual guard. Baffled and furious, he tried it again, but—-probably because of failing strength—less swiftly and adroitly. My opportunity had come. Quick as thought I ran under his guard, and, thrusting his right arm aside with my left hand, passed my sword through his body.

Then there were cries of bravo, for the popular feeling was on my side, and my seconds congratulated me warmly on my victory. But I said little in reply, my attention being attracted by a young man who was kneeling beside Griscelli's body and, as it might seem, saying a silent prayer. When he had done he rose to his feet, and as I looked on his face I saw he was the dead man's son.

"Sir, you have killed my father, and I shall kill you," he said, in a calm voice, but with intense passion. "Yes, I shall kill you, and if I fail my cousins will kill you. If you escape us all, then we will charge our children to avenge the death of the man you have this day slain. We are Corsicans, and we never forgive. I know your name; mine is Giuseppe Griscelli."

"You are distraught with grief, and know not what you say," I said as kindly as I could, for I pitied the lad. "But let not your grief make you unjust. Your father died in fair fight. If I had not killed him he would have killed me, and years ago he tried to hunt me to death for his amusement."

"And I and mine—we will hunt you to death for our revenge. Or will you fight now? I am ready."

"No, I have no quarrel with you, and I should be sorry to hurt you."

"Go your way, then, but remember—"

"Better leave him; he seems half-crazed," interposed Medina. "Come into my house while my slaves remove the body."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A NOVEL WAGER.

Three days afterward Carmen, apprised by his wife of my arrival, returned to Caracas, and I became their guest, greatly to my satisfaction, for the duel with Griscelli, besides making me temporarily famous, had brought me so many friends and invitations that I knew not how to dispose of them.

In discussing the incident with Salvador, I expressed surprise that Griscelli should have dared to return to a country where he had committed so many cruelties and made so many enemies.

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“He left Venezuela the year after you disappeared, and much is forgotten in ten years,” was the answer. “All the same, I don’t suppose he would have come back if Olivarez—-the last president and a Yellow—had not made it known that he would bestow commissions on Spanish officers of distinction and give them commands in the national army. It was a most absurd proceeding. But we shot Olivarez three months ago, and I will see that these Spanish interlopers are sent out of the country forthwith, that young spark who threatens to murder you, included.”

“Let him stay if he likes. I doubt whether he meant what he said.”

“I have no doubt of it, whatever, *amigo mio*, and he shall go. If he stayed in the country I could not answer for your safety; and if you come across any of the Griscellis in Europe, take my advice and be as watchful as if you were crossing a river infested with *caribe* fish.”

Carmen was much discouraged by the state of the republic, as well he might be. By turning out the Spaniards the former colonies had merely exchanged despotism for anarchy; instead of being beaten with whips they were beaten with scorpions. But though discouraged Carmen was not dismayed. He belonged to the Blues, who being in power, regarded their opponents, the Yellows, as rebels; and he was confident that the triumph of his party would insure the tranquillity of the country. As he was careful to explain to me, he was a Blue because he was a patriot, and he pressed me so warmly to return with him to La Victoria, accept a command in his army, and aid in the suppression of the insurrection, that I ended by consenting.

At Carmen’s instance, the president gave me the command of a brigade, and would have raised me to the rank of general. But when I found that there were about three generals for every colonel I chose the nominally inferior but actually more distinguished grade.

I remained in Venezuela two years, campaigning nearly all the time. But it was an ignoble warfare, cruel and ruthless, and had I not given my word to Carmen, to stand by him until the country was pacified, I should have resigned my commission much sooner than I did. Ramon, who acted as one of my orderlies, bore himself bravely and was several times wounded.

In the meanwhile I received several communications from Van Voorst, and made two visits to Curacoa. The cutting and disposal of my diamonds being naturally rather a long business, it was nearly two years after I had shipped them to Holland before I learned the result of my venture.

After all expenses were paid they brought me nearly three hundred thousand pounds, which account Goldberg, Van Voorst & Company “held at my disposal.”

It was to arrange and advise with the Amsterdam people, as to the investment of this great fortune, that I went to Europe. But I did not depart until my promise was fulfilled. I left Venezuela pacified—from exhaustion—and Carmen in somewhat better spirits than I had found him.

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His last words were a warning, which I have had frequent occasion to remember: “Beware of the Griscellis.”

I sailed from Curacoa (Ramon, of course, accompanying me), in a Dutch ship, bound for Rotterdam, whither I arrived in due course, and proceeding thence to Amsterdam, introduced myself to Goldberg, Van Voorst & Company. They were a weighty and respectable firm in every sense of the term, and received me with a ponderous gravity befitting the occasion.

Though extremely courteous in their old-fashioned way, they neither wasted words nor asked unnecessary questions. But they made me a momentous proposal—no less than to become their partner. They had an ample capital for their original trade of diamond merchants; but having recently become contractors for government loans, they had opportunities of turning my fortune to much better account than investing it in ordinary securities. Goldberg & Company did not make it a condition that I should take an active part in the business—that would be just as I pleased. After being fully enlightened as to the nature of their transactions, and looking at their latest balance-sheets, I closed with the offer, and I have never had occasion to regret my decision. We opened branch houses in London and Paris; the firm is now one of the largest of its kind in Europe; we reckon our capital by millions, and, as I have lived long, and had no children to provide for, the amount standing to my credit exceeds that of all the other partners put together, and yields me a princely income.

But I could not settle down to the monotonous career of a merchant, and though I have always taken an interest in the business of the house, and on several important occasions acted as its special agent in the greater capitals, my life since that time—a period of nearly fifty years—has been spent mainly in foreign travel and scientific study. I have revisited South America and recrossed the Andes, ridden on horseback from Vera Cruz to San Francisco, and from San Francisco to the headwaters of the Mississippi and the Missouri. I served in the war between Belgium and Holland, went through the Mexican campaign of 1846, fought with Sam Houston at the battle of San Jacinto, and was present, as a spectator, at the fall of Sebastopol and the capture of Delhi. In the course of my wanderings I have encountered many moving accidents by flood and field. Once I was captured by Greek brigands, after a desperate fight, in which both Ramon and myself were wounded, and had to pay four thousand pounds for my ransom. For the last twenty years, however, I have avoided serious risks, done no avoidable fighting, and travelled only in beaten tracks; and, unless I am killed by one of the Griscelli, I dare say I shall live twenty years longer.

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While studying therapeutics and pathology under Professor Giessler, of Zurich, shortly after my return to Europe, I took up the subject of longevity, as to which Giessler had collected much curious information, and formed certain theories, one being that people of sound constitution and strong vitality, with no hereditary predisposition to disease may, by observing a correct regimen, easily live to be a hundred, preserving until that age their faculties virtually intact—in other words, only begin to be old at a hundred. So far I agree with him, but as to what constituted a "correct regimen" we differed. He held that the life most conducive to length of years was that of the scholar—his own, in fact—regular, uneventful, reflective, and sedentary. I, on the other hand, thought that the man who passed much of his time in the open air, moving about and using his limbs, would live the longer—other things being equal, and assuming that both observed the accepted rules of health.

The result of our discussion was a friendly wager. "You try your way; I will try mine," said Giessler, "and we will see who lives the longer—at any rate, the survivor will. The survivor must also publish an account of his system, *pour encourageur les autres*."

As we were of the same age, equally sound in constitution and strong in physique, and not greatly dissimilar in temperament, I accepted the challenge. The competition is still going on. Every New Year's day we write each other a letter, always in the same words, which both answers and asks the same questions: "Still alive?" If either fails to receive his letter at the specified time, he will presume that the other is *hors de combat*, if not dead, and make further inquiry. But I think I shall win. Three years ago I met Giessler at the meeting of the British Association, and, though he denied it, he was palpably aging. His shoulders were bent, his hearing and eye-sight failing, and the *area senilis* was very strongly marked, while I—am what you see.

I have, however, had an advantage over the professor, which it is only fair to mention. In my wanderings I have always taken occasion, when opportunity offered, to observe the habits of tribes who are remarkable for longevity. None are more remarkable in this respect than the Callavayas of the Andes, and I satisfied myself that they do really live long, though perhaps not so long as some of them say. Now, these people are herbalists, and when they reach middle age make a practice of drinking a decoction which, as they believe, has the power of prolonging life. I brought with me to Europe specimens and seeds of the plant (peculiar to the region) from which the simple is distilled, analyzed the one and cultivated the other. The conclusion at which I arrived was, that the plant in question did actually possess the property of retarding that softening of the arteries which more than anything else causes the decrepitude

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of old age. It contains a peculiar alkaloid of which, for thirty years past, I had taken (in solution) a much-diluted dose almost daily. You see the result. I also give Ramon an occasional dose, and he is the most vigorous man of his years I know. I sent some to Giessler, but he said it was an empirical remedy, and declined to take it. He preferred electric baths. I take my electric baths by horseback exercise, and riding to hounds.

Yes, I believe I shall finish my century—without becoming senile either in body or mind—if I can escape the Griscelli. I was in hopes that I had escaped them by coming here; but I never stay long in Europe that they don't sooner or later find me out. I think I shall have to spend the remainder of my life in America or the East. The consciousness of being continually hunted, that at any moment I may be confronted with a murderer and perchance be murdered, is too trying for a man of my age. To tell the truth, I am beginning to feel that I have nerves; though my elixir delays death, it does not insure perpetual youth; and propitiating these people is out of the question—I have tried it.

Three years after my return from Venezuela, Guiseppe, son of the man whom I killed at Caracas, tried to kill me at Amsterdam, fired at me point-blank with a duelling pistol, and so nearly succeeded that the bullet grazed my cheek and cut a piece out of my ear. Yet I not only pardoned him, but bribed the police to let him go, and gave him money. Well, seven years later he repeated the attempt at Naples, waylaid me at night and attacked me with a dagger, but I also happened to be armed, and Guiseppi Griscelli died.

At Paris, too—indeed, while the empire lasted—I found it expedient to shun France altogether. At that time Corsicans were greatly in favor; several members of the Griscelli family belonged to the secret police and had great influence, and as I never took an *alias* and my name is not common, I was tracked like a criminal. Once I had to leave Paris by stealth at dead of night; another time I saved my life by simulating death. But why recount all the attempts on my life? Another time, perhaps. The subject is not a pleasant one, but this I will say: I never spared a Griscelli that I had not cause to regret my clemency. The last I spared was the young man who tried to murder me down in the wood there; and if he does not repay my forbearance by repeating the attempt, he will be false to the traditions of his race.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

EPILOGUE.

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It is scarcely necessary to observe that the deciphering of Mr. Fortescue's notes and the writing of his memoirs were not done in a day. There were gaps to be filled up, obscure passages to be elucidated, and parts of several chapters and the whole of the last were written to his dictation, so that the summer came and went, and another hunting-season was "in view," before my work, in its present shape, was completed. I would fain have made it more complete by giving a fuller account of Mr. Fortescue's adventures (some of which must have been very remarkable) between his first return from South America and his appearance at Matching Green, and I should doubtless have been able to do so (for he had promised to continue and amplify his narrative during the winter, as also to give me the recipe of his elixir), had not our intercourse been abruptly terminated by one of the strangest events in my experience and, I should think, in his.

But, before going further, I would just observe that Mr. Fortescue's cynicism, which, when I first knew him, had rather repelled me, was only skin-deep. Though he held human life rather cheaper than I quite liked, he was a kind and liberal master and a generous giver. His largesses were often princely and invariably anonymous, for he detested everything that savored of ostentation and parade. On the other hand, he had no more tolerance for mendicants in broadcloth than for beggars in rags, and to those who asked he gave nothing. As an instance of his dislike of publicity, I may mention that I had been with him several months before I discovered that he had published, under a pseudonym, several scientific works which, had he acknowledged them, would have made him famous.

After Guiseppe Griscelli's attempt on his life, I prevailed on Mr. Fortescue never to go outside the park gates unaccompanied; when he went to town, or to Amsterdam, Ramon always went with him, and both were armed. I also gave strict orders to the lodge-keepers to admit no strangers without authority, and to give me immediate information as to any suspicious-looking characters whom they might see loitering about.

These precautions, I thought, would be quite sufficient to prevent any attack being made on Mr. Fortescue in the daytime. It was less easy to guard against a surprise during the night, for the park-palings were not so high as to be unclimbable; and the idea of a night-watchman was suggested only to be dismissed, for the very sufficient reason that when he was most wanted he would almost certainly be asleep. I had no fear of Griscelli breaking in at the front door; but the house was not burglar-proof, and, as it happened, the weak point in our defence was one of the windows of Mr. Fortescue's bedroom. It looked into the orchard, and, by climbing a tree which grew hard by, an active man could easily reach it, even without a ladder. The danger was all the greater, as, when the weather was mild, Mr. Fortescue always slept with the window open. I proposed iron bars, to which he objected that iron bars would make his room look like a prison. And then I had a happy thought.

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“Let us fix a strong brass rod right across the window-frame,” I said, “in such a way that nobody can get in without laying hold of it, and by connecting it with a strong dynamo-battery inside, make sure that the man who does lay hold of it will not be able to let go.”

The idea pleased Mr. Fortescue, and he told me to carry it out, which I did promptly and effectively, taking care to make the battery so powerful that, if Mr. Griscelli should try to effect an entrance by the window, he would be disagreeably surprised. The circuit was, of course, broken by dividing the rod in two parts and interposing a non-conductor between them.

To prevent any of the maids being “shocked,” I told Ramon (who acted as his master’s body servant) to connect the battery every night and disconnect it every morning. From time to time, moreover, I overhauled the apparatus to see that it was in good working order, and kept up its strength by occasionally recharging the cells.

Once, when I was doing this, Mr. Fortescue said, laughingly: “I don’t think it is any use, Bacon; Griscelli won’t come in that way. If, as some people say, it is the unexpected that happens, it is the expected that does not happen.”

But in this instance both happened—the expected and the unexpected.

As I mentioned at the outset of my story, the habits of the Kingscote household were of an exemplary regularity. Mr. Fortescue, who rose early, expected everybody else to follow his example in this respect, and, as a rule, everybody did so.

One morning, at the beginning of October, when the sun rose about six o’clock, and we rose with it, I got up, donned my dressing-gown, and went, as usual, to take my matutinal bath. In order to reach the bath-room I had to pass Mr. Fortescue’s chamber-door. As I neared it I heard within loud exclamations of horror and dismay, in a voice which I recognized as the voice of Ramon. Thinking that something was wrong, that Mr. Fortescue had perchance been taken suddenly ill, I pushed open the door and entered without ceremony.

Mr. Fortescue was sitting up in bed, looking with startled gaze at the window; and Ramon stood in the middle of the room, aghast and dismayed.

And well he might, for there hung at the window a man—or the body of one—his hands convulsively grasping the magnetized rod, the distorted face pressed against the glass, the lack-lustre eyes wide open, the jaw drooping. In that ghastly visage I recognized the features of Giuseppe Griscelli!

“Is he dead, doctor?” asked Mr. Fortescue.

“He has been dead several hours,” I said, as I examined the corpse.

“So much the better; the brood is one less, and perhaps after this they will let me live in peace. They must see that so far as their attempts against it are concerned, I bear a charmed life. You have done me a great service, Doctor Bacon, and I hold myself your debtor.”

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Ramon and I disconnected the battery and dragged the body into the room. We found in the pockets a butcher's knife and a revolver, and round the waist a rope, with which the would-be murderer had doubtless intended to descend from the window after accomplishing his purpose.

This incident, of course, caused a great sensation both at Kingscote and in the country-side, and, equally of course, there was an inquest, at which Mr. Fortescue, Ramon, and myself, were the only witnesses. As Mr. Fortescue did not want it to be known that he was the victim of a *vendetta*, and detested the idea of having himself and his affairs discussed by the press, we were careful not to gainsay the popular belief that Griscelli was neither more nor less than a dangerous and resolute burglar, and, as his possession of lethal weapons proved, a potential murderer. As for the cause of death I said, as I then fully believed (though I have since had occasion to modify this opinion somewhat), that the battery was not strong enough to kill a healthy man, and that Griscelli had died of nervous shock and fear acting on a weak heart. In this view the jury concurred and returned a verdict of accidental death, with the (informal) rider that it "served him right." The chairman, a burly farmer, warmly congratulated me on my ingenuity, and regretted that he had not "one of them things" at every window in his house.

So far so good; but, unfortunately, a London paper which lived on sensation, and happened at the moment to be in want of a new one, took the matter up. One of the editor's jackals came down to Kingscote, and there and elsewhere picked up a few facts concerning Mr. Fortescue's antecedents and habits, which he served up to his readers in a highly spiced and amazingly mendacious article, entitled "old Fortescue and his Strange Fortunes." But the sting of the article was in its tail. The writer threw doubt on the justice of the verdict. It remained to be proved, he said, that Griscelli was a burglar, and his death accidental. And even burglars had their rights. The law assumed them to be innocent until they were proved to be guilty, and it could be permitted neither to Mr. Fortescue nor to any other man to take people's lives, merely because he suspected them of an intention to come in by the window instead of the door. By what right, he asked, did Mr. Fortescue place on his window an appliance as dangerous as forked lightning, and as deadly as dynamite? What was the difference between magnetized bars in a window and spring-guns on a game-preserve? In conclusion, the writer demanded a searching investigation into the circumstances attending Guiseppe Griscelli's death, likewise the immediate passing of an act of Parliament forbidding, under heavy penalties, the use of magnetic batteries as a defence against supposed burglars.

This effusion (which he read in a marked copy of the paper obligingly forwarded by the enterprising editor) put Mr. Fortescue in a terrible passion, which made him, for a moment, look younger than ever I had seen him look before. The outrage rekindled the fire of his youth; he seemed to grow taller, his eyes glowed with anger, and, had the enterprising editor been present, he would have passed a very bad quarter of an hour.

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“The fellow who wrote this is worse than a murderer!” he exclaimed. “I’ll shoot him—-unless he prefers cold steel, and then I shall serve him as I served General Griscelli; and ’pon my soul I believe Griscelli was the least rascally of the two! I would as lief be hunted by blood-hounds as be stabbed in the back by anonymous slanderers!”

And then he wanted me to take a challenge to the enterprising editor, and arrange for a meeting, which rendered it necessary to remind him that we were not in the England of fifty years ago, and that duelling was abolished, and that his traducer would not only refuse to fight, but denounce his challenger to the police and gibbet him in his paper. I pointed out, on the other hand, that the article was clearly libellous, and recommended Mr. Fortescue either to obtain a criminal information against the proprietor of the paper, or sue him for damages.

“No, sir!” he answered, with a gesture of indignation and disdain—“no, sir, I shall neither obtain a criminal information nor sue for damages. The man who goes to law surrenders his liberty of action and becomes the sport of chicaning lawyers and hair-splitting judges. I would rather lose a hundred thousand pounds!”

Mr. Fortescue passed the remainder of the day at his desk, writing and arranging his papers. The next morning I heard, without surprise, that he and Ramon were going abroad.

“I don’t know when I shall return,” said Mr. Fortescue, as we shook hands at the hall door, “but act as you always do when I am from home, and in the course of a few days you will hear from me.”

I did hear from him, and what I heard was of a nature so surprising as nearly to take my breath away.

“You will never see me at Kingscote again,” he wrote; “I am going to a country where I shall be safe, as well from the attacks of Corsican assassins as from the cowardly outrages of rascally newspapers.” And then he gave instructions as to the disposal of his property at Kingscote. Certain things, which he enumerated, were to be packed up in cases and forwarded to Amsterdam. The furniture and effects in and about the house were to be sold, and the proceeds placed at the disposal of the county authorities for the benefit of local charities. Every outdoor servant was to receive six months’ pay, every in-door servant twelve months’ pay, in lieu of notice. Geirt was to join Mr. Fortescue in a month’s time at Damascus; and to me, in lieu of notice, and as evidence of his regard, he gave all his horses, carriages, saddlery, harness, and stable equipments (not being freehold) of every description whatsoever, to be dealt with as I thought fit for my personal advantage. His solicitors, with my help, would wind up his affairs, and his bankers had instructions to discharge all his liabilities.

His memoirs, or so much of them as I had written down, I might (if I thought they would interest anybody) publish, but not before the fiftieth year of the Victorian era, or the death of the German emperor, whichever event happened first. The letter concluded thus: "I strongly advise you to buy a practice and settle down to steady work. We may meet again. If I live to be a hundred, you shall hear from me. If I die sooner you will probably hear of my demise from the house at Amsterdam, to whom please send your new address."

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I was exceedingly sorry to lose Mr. Fortescue. Our intercourse had been altogether pleasant and agreeable, and to myself personally in a double sense profitable; for he had taught me many things and rewarded me beyond my deserts. Also the breaking up of Kingscote and the disposal of the household went much against the grain. Yet I freely confess that Mr. Fortescue's splendid gift proved a very effective one, and almost reconciled me to his absence.

All the horses and carriages, except five of the former, and two traps, I sent up to Tattersall's. As the horses, without exception, were of the right sort, most of them perfect hunters, and it was known that Mr. Fortescue would not have an unsound or vicious animal in his stables, they fetched high prices. The sale brought me over six thousand pounds. Two-thirds of this I put out at interest on good security; with the remainder I bought a house and practice in a part of the county as to which I will merely observe that it is pleasantly situated and within reach of three packs of hounds. The greater part of the year I work hard at my profession; but when November comes round I engage a second assistant and (weather permitting) hunt three and sometimes four days a week, so long as the season lasts.

And often when hounds are running hard and I am well up, or when I am "hacking" homeward after a good day's sport, I think gratefully of the man to whom I owe so much, and wonder whether I shall ever see him again.