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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN AMERICAN ***

AN AMERICAN

BY BELLE WILLEY GUE



BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER

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**TO THE MEMORY OF HIM WHOM WE ALL DELIGHT
TO HONOR AS FIRST IN PEACE ... FIRST IN
WAR ... AND FIRST IN THE HEARTS
OF HIS COUNTRYMEN ...
GEORGE WASHINGTON**

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AN AMERICAN

INTRODUCTION

There are many characteristics that are essential to true Americanism; among these, none is more prominent than an inborn desire, not only to obtain personal liberty, but, also, to see justice done to others.

We, as Americans, say, with loving pride, that we are citizens of that *one fair land whose single boast has always been that it was free.*

Oppression of the weak and ignorant, by those who are wiser and stronger than they, has, always, aroused in us pronounced, and, often, openly expressed, indignation. More than once, have we, as a nation, arrayed ourselves upon the side of the down-trodden and pitiful, and, in every such instance, we have greatly increased and enhanced the well-being of those whose cause we have espoused.

We have never gone out of our way to look for trouble, being more inclined to attend to our own affairs than to oversee those of our neighbors, and, yet, when, repeatedly, gross acts of injustice and cruelty have been forced under our observation, we have, at times, been aroused to a state of what we have honestly believed to be righteous indignation, and, in these circumstances, we have conducted ourselves in accordance with our ability and the fervor of our convictions.

Prior to the evening of February fifteenth, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, our relations with the government of Spain were amicable; while we, as a people, sympathized, to some extent, with the uprisings of native Cubans, yet, those who were at the head of our national affairs did not, in any instance, uphold or palliate the unlawful acts of the insurrectionists; but, during the hours of darkness of that never-to-be-forgotten night, a dastardly and totally inexcusable deed, in spite of the recent renewal of our friendly intercourse with the Spanish government, made of that nation a foe to be contended against with all the might that was in us.

While our only object, in the beginning of the Spanish-American war, was to teach the Spaniard the lesson he had so richly deserved to learn, at the same time, as the results of autocratic misrule were brought, more and more closely, under our direct observation, we took much honest pride in the reflection that we were not only resenting, as became free and enlightened men and women, an injury to our own well-beloved country, but that we were, at the same time, giving to a people, whose necks were raw and bleeding from the yoke of a tyrannical exercise of absolute power, an opportunity to throw off that yoke, and become, in due time, a self-governed and a self-respecting and an independent nation.

Our short and fiery encounter with Spain demonstrated, as many years of unbroken peace and prosperity had not done and never could do, the invincibility of American arms, and the unexampled superiority of American daring, devotion, inventive genius and self-adjusting prowess; it was supposed that we had a very inadequate naval equipment, and that our standing army was very small, besides being poorly trained; in spite of this widely spread supposition, our troops won many brilliant victories upon the sea as well as on the land.

The same spirit that saved the day for freedom and the right at Bunker Hill and Bennington animated the descendants of those gallant and intrepid warriors, who, soon after the heroic birth of our Republic, defended the cause they deemed to be a sacred one with all that they held dear, when they, too, went to meet the carefully trained and richly caparisoned phalanxes of those who bowed their heads and bent their suppliant knees unto an earthly king.

An American volunteer is as nearly unconquerable as any merely human being can ever really be; his whole being is entirely devoted to the principle for the vindication of which he is about to enter into bodily combat; he is not hampered or bound down by anything that does not meet with

the approval of his own conscience; physically, mentally, and morally, he is the equal of any enemy against whom he may be pitted; above him there floats a flag that has never been defeated, behind him are glorious deeds of valor that are well worthy of emulation, and before him are the hopes and aspirations of those who, with their feet firmly planted upon solid ground, practical, energetic and capable, yet, always, move among their fellows, seeing visions, dreaming dreams.

Shortly before the beginning of the Spanish-American war, there were some, across the water, who dared to complacently imagine that the glowing spark of patriotism, implanted in the breast of every true American at the time of his birth, had lost its kindling power; those who were depending upon this erroneous idea must have had their complacency somewhat rudely shaken when it became known, all over the world, that, within ten days after President McKinley issued a call for one hundred and twenty-five thousand volunteers, seven hundred and fifty thousand eager patriots answered to that call, offering their energies and, if needs be, their lives, to the service of the land they loved and honored.

After thirty-three years of peace, the fighting men of America buckled on their armor, bade a tearful farewell to their homes and families, and, determined, enthusiastic and buoyant, went, blithely, forward to meet, and conquer, a foreign foe; there was not one among these who did not realize and consider the seriousness of the enterprise he had started out upon, yet neither was there one who did not add, in every way within his power, to the light-hearted joyousness, and gentle, childish humor, with which our fearless and devoted "boys" undertook to secure the freedom and general well-being of the Island people, as well as to resent the insult that had been offered to our own country.

The central figure of the Spanish-American war, from its hasty inception until its brilliant and triumphant close, was that of a gallant gentleman, mounted on a high-lifted horse ... as sternly devoted to principle and duty as any Puritan had ever been, as full of the bounding joy of life as any boy who followed him, leader, comrade, friend and brother, fearless, resourceful, primitive, refined, highly educated, yet as simple-hearted as an innocent child, bold, yet cautious and careful, unselfish, yet richly endowed with worldly wisdom, respected almost to the height of reverence, yet looked upon as a cheery, helpful companion, by those with whom he was most closely associated ... THEODORE ROOSEVELT ... a typical American, using that word in its widest and loftiest sense.

After the close of our struggle with Spain, we discovered that we had not only given, but, also, derived, many benefits as the results of that short, but decisive, conflict; we had acquired considerable territory over which to extend the advantages to be gained from our educational and commercial institutions; we had come into such close contact with the people of these, and adjacent, territories that we were enabled to understand their needs and their desires, more fully than we could, otherwise, have done; we had presented to the powers ruling the Old World an object lesson as to the people of the United States of America being, at any and all times, and under every possible circumstance, fully able to take care of themselves, as well as all that, intrinsically, belongs to them; we had set before the mighty nations of Europe an example of the proper attitude of the strong toward the weak; we had bound together, in a common, just and righteous cause, all factions, all clans, all religions, and all parties, in short, we had bound together the entire population of our well-beloved country, and in such a way that the bonds were indissoluble, unbreakable, and permanent.

While we are, above all things, a peaceful and a law-abiding people, yet we not only can, but always will, defend our altars and our homes against any harm that may be threatened to them; while we do not seek an encounter with any government other than our own, yet at the same time, we are not afraid to meet any nation on the face of the earth, in open combat, giving our enemy the privilege of selecting his own weapons and following out his own ideas as to legitimate warfare.

The blood of the sturdy and militant Anglo-Saxon, flowing, now, in Yankee veins, is richer and more life-supporting than it was before the Mayflower landed her precious freight of human strength and more than human aspiration upon Plymouth Rock.

All the fond hopes and all the high ambitions, all the daring and all the deep devotion, all the practical achievements and all the airy dreams, of their revered forefathers, are, now, alive and potent, although, it may be, hidden, in the breasts of all my fellow-countrymen.

If all the titles that have ever been bestowed by human beings upon each other ... all the names that indicate the possession of wealth or fame or place or power upon the earth ... should be displayed before my eyes, and I be asked to select but one among them all to be the one by which I would be known, I would without a moment's hesitation, choose AN AMERICAN.

PLOT

Ruth Wakefield, as the daughter of the United States Consul to Cuba, has lived in a beautiful home which her father prepared for his family on a height above Havana harbor since early childhood. Having lost both her natural protectors ... her parents ... through earthly death, she

has been much alone with trusty servants, as she has found little companionship among the natives of Cuba. However, she has found a highly respected friend in Father Felix, Priest of the village of San Domingo; to him she has confided her great anxiety concerning some prisoners confined, *ex communicado*, in the village jail, at the end of the prado, or central park of the village.

"The Lady of the mansion on the hill," as she is known among the villagers, has not, though, told the Priest her real reason for wishing the freedom of the political prisoners. Victorio Colenzo is a handsome but unscrupulous fellow of mixed blood, being part Spanish and part Cuban; he has found the lonely American girl and has courted her with such dash and apparent sincerity that she has married him secretly, not even informing Father Felix of her union with the attractive stranger. This man is among the political prisoners and it is to free him from bondage that Ruth Wakefield has furnished Father Felix with means with which to overpower and overawe those who have him in charge. Ruth Wakefield is herself deceived, for in the village is a girl, named Estrella, whose lover Victorio Colenzo is known to be by her associates, among whom is another of her lovers ... Manuello ... a native Cuban. This man is also in the San Domingo bastille. Father Felix, at the head of a procession of his followers, breaks into the jail and confronts the keepers with a crucifix which he holds before them, commanding them to release the prisoners; superstitious terror finally induces them to yield to his demands; in the confusion, Manuello contrives to sever the handsome head of Victorio Colenzo from his strong and manly body, so that his corpse is found when the doors are finally thrown open to the people; Estrella finds this body and weeps above it. Father Felix meets Ruth Wakefield by appointment to report as to what he has done, and, in this manner, she discovers the perfidy of her so-called husband. She confesses the truth to Father Felix who sympathizes deeply with her as he knows her to be innocent. She visits the morgue and meets Estrella whom she befriends and, eventually, adds to her household. She has among her servants, a unique character, named Mage, who has been her nurse in babyhood and who is always faithful to her in her own strange way; this old woman, throughout the entire twenty-one chapters of this story, continues to perform unexpected and startling deeds.

Old Mage accompanies her dear young lady when she goes to San Juan and is stationed not far from the battle-field of San Juan Hill. Here, as elsewhere, she continues to exhibit her own individual characteristics as her central and almost sole idea is to protect and assist Ruth Wakefield, whom, although she regards her with unlimited respect and is entirely devoted to her interests, she still thinks of as the small child she loved before they landed upon the Island of Cuba; realizing how different she is from those around her, only increases the worship of her faithful attendant, who, on the other hand, does not hesitate to use language that will express what she wishes those whom she is addressing to fully understand.

Manuello has a primitive, passionate, unbridled and selfish nature; he is wildly in love with Estrella and because she has selected another lover he has committed murder; with this man out of his way, he hopes to succeed with Estrella and goes to her intimate friend, Tessa, to find out how she actually feels about the death of her lover, Victorio Colenzo; Tessa secretly adores Manuello; she is, also, a native Cuban, but her nature is more sluggish than that of Manuello and she has a dog-like affection for Estrella, who has become separated from her own family as a child and is a member of the household of Manuello, being known as his half-sister among the villagers; the handsome peon makes love to little Tessa but she is loyal to Estrella and does what she can to contribute to her happiness, although, when Manuello becomes a fugitive and has been wounded, she ministers to him in a deserted cabin up among the hills where it is almost entirely hidden in a jungle of weeds and rank vegetation. This cabin is the scene of many pitiful endeavors on the part of little Tessa who resists the desires of Manuello to make her his mistress although she dearly and devotedly loves him. Here, at one time, she is secretly followed by Estrella who is led to suspect some secret by Tessa's actions; Estrella informs Father Felix of the situation. Tessa, in one of her struggles with Manuello, has wounded him in one cheek with a knife which she happened to have in her hand. Father Felix visits the hut and Manuello, after severely wounding poor little Tessa, so that she is unable to leave the place, disappears, but turns up again, after the battle of Camp McCalla in a temporary hospital where Ruth Wakefield and Estrella are acting as nurses. Old Mage takes a hand in this affair and so frightens Manuello that he escapes from the hospital although he is wearing many bandages, and, painfully, but determinedly, reaches the deserted hut where he hopes to hide until he has recovered from his wounds. As he approaches the hut he realizes that someone is within it and looks through a small window, seeing Tessa lying on the rude bed she originally prepared for him, and, beside her, kneeling on the floor, Father Felix who has found the weak and suffering girl and is engaged in prayer; Manuello breaks into the cabin and attempts to thrust the Priest aside so that he may wreak his vengeance on the helpless woman. Father Felix, however, proves to be a worthy antagonist and does not hesitate to use his strength in the defense of the innocent, even though it becomes necessary for him to seriously injure the young man who is like a wild beast foiled of its prey. This struggle in the deserted hut, with the wounded girl looking on, continues for some time, but the younger man is finally overpowered, and, seeing himself to be at the mercy of his antagonist, becomes the penitent sinner and confesses to the Priest who labors with him lovingly and ministers to his spiritual condition. The two men then improvise a stretcher and place Tessa upon it, after which they carry the girl to the door of her own home in the village. Here, the Priest dismisses Manuello and tells him to go in peace. The young man then limps back to the deserted hut and remains there unmolested for some time when he disappears again from the neighborhood.

The Americanism of Ruth Wakefield is pronounced. Father Felix is equally devoted to their common country. These two often confer as to possible complications connected with international affairs; at one of these consultations, Estrella happens to be present and declares that she believes that she, also, is an American and that she wishes to serve under the same flag as that to which the other two have so often pronounced themselves to be devoted. She offers to assist Ruth in every way she can should there be an occasion that would demand their help.

Ruth Wakefield is awake in her own room and looking down upon Havana harbor on the night of February 15th, 1898 and sees the blowing up of the Maine with her own eyes; Father Felix also sees this and hurries up the hill to talk matters over with Ruth; they form plans as to what they can do for their own country and in the service of the down-trodden people of Cuba whose sufferings under Spanish tyranny they have so often witnessed. Ruth opens her home and offers it as a refuge to all those who wish to escape from Spanish oppression.

Father Felix keeps Ruth well informed as to military matters and, when, on June 10th, 1898, our stars and stripes are waving, for the first time, over Cuban soil, Ruth Wakefield is standing beside Father Felix, who has become an army chaplain, at the window of a temporary hospital which her wealth has made possible. This hospital is situated near Santiago and many American soldiers as well as many Cuban scouts are cared for within its shadowy rooms.

After the battle of San Juan Hill on July 1st 1898, Ruth Wakefield is one among many volunteer nurses who went to the assistance of a righteous cause. She stands beside a little cot and meets a man who speaks to her of "Teddy" and of the grand and glorious work that he had done that day; with this bond between them, they soon become friends.

Ruth, as one who has authority, moves from cot to cot and, so, comes to stand beside the murderer of her husband or him whom she had called so, for Manuello evened up some of his wickedness by serving nobly in the battle of San Juan Hill and died in consequence of that day's dreadful harvest of human forms. Estrella, too, and Father Felix, come to stand beside his cot, but Ruth is all alone when his soul leaves the clay that it has been inhabiting for awhile, and, so, she realizes as never before, that the man she knew as husband was beneath her in every way and in that terrible and heart-rending moment, she begins to learn the way to forget the first wild love of her young womanhood and find the steps that lead to saner, quieter and happier hours and days and years.

Ruth is given privileges that are not accorded to many near a bloody battle-field, and, when she leaves the hospital for the night on July 1st, 1898, she drives her team along a lonely road, hoping to leave behind her, not only the scenes she has just been among, but, also, the thoughts that those scenes have awakened in her mind. She thinks she is going directly away from the recent battle-field. Her team is startled by the sudden rising of a man near the road and runs away, throwing her out upon the ground; she climbs over a low embankment beside the road and finds herself among the dead; she is almost stupefied by this knowledge, but, soon, her instincts for helping those who are in trouble rise above her fears and she cries aloud and calls ... asking if any there are in need of help that she can give to them. A faint voice answers her and she seeks it out and finds an officer who has been stricken down at the head of his squad of men; they are all lying in a disordered heap and Ruth is obliged to lift one dead body off of the man who seems to be alive. Having found him, she proceeds, from her knowledge as a nurse, to aid him ... finds a wound from which his life-blood is flowing fast and forms a tourniquet with a silken scarf she happens to be wearing. He revives enough to whisper to her, naming her, on the instant "Tender Heart" by which title he afterwards addresses her.

Having rendered all the aid she can, she speeds away, without fear, now, as she has an object in her flight, until she secures help when she returns and removes the one whom she has found among the dead to the hospital, where, after a long period of suffering and faithful nursing, he recovers sufficiently to accompany her when she returns to her home. Here he proves himself to be worthy of her love which is bestowed upon him with the approval of Father Felix and even of old Mage. Ruth's home has been destroyed by fire and her entire estate has suffered much from vandalism and from enemies of Cuba and of her own country as well, but she still has plenty with which to rebuild her home and to assist many in the village of San Domingo who require aid and comfort from those who are stronger than they are.

Among other patients in her temporary hospital near Santiago, Ruth discovers one who is a Spanish spy, for she remembers meeting him when he was a Spanish officer under most distressing circumstances, when it had been his great desire to do a grievous wrong to a young, ignorant girl whom Ruth rescued from his vile clutches. Ruth hesitates to report this case to the authorities as she is well aware of the fate meted out to spies, and she compromises by telling the facts to Father Felix, who, while he is very tender of the innocent, is just and stern where hypocrites and liars are concerned. The good Priest soon disposes of the Spanish spy.

Father Felix distinguishes himself in many ways during the hostilities between the opposing forces in the Spanish-American war and does much good, for he does not hesitate to do anything that he finds to do regardless of whether it is in the line of his profession or not. He has many experiences as thrilling as the one in the deserted hut with Manuello. He throws himself into many a breach ... wins many a hard-fought battle, and, through it all maintains not only his religious attitude toward all mankind, but manifests a gracious and uplifting love for all who dwell upon the earth, and, at the end of his activities, resumes the humble station he occupied at first, for, as he believes, he can do more good right there in the little village of San Domingo than in a wider and more elevated station.

Many refugees leave Santiago during, and directly after, the naval battle of Santiago; among these are very many wealthy women who are forced to leave their splendid homes and flee, in silken garments, with the riff-raff of the city.

Some among these wealthy women sought to help in temporary hospitals, and one of them, at least, came to that which Ruth Wakefield had endowed; this woman was noticeable in many ways, being of superior intelligence as well as birth and breeding; she, soon, became proficient as a nurse, and when Ruth sees her standing close beside Estrella in the hospital, she suddenly recognizes a subtle resemblance between the two young women and calls their attention to the fact. And, so, it develops that Estrella finds her own blood-kin ... her own loving sister ... there in that shadowy hospital, for it is proven beyond a shadow of a doubt by a little trinket that the girl has always worn about her neck ... a little cross of golden memories, through which, and through the girl herself, her lineage is traced, so that she remains with her own kin, and does not return to the little village where she suffered so much sorrow.

Tessa, with the stolidity of the Cuban peasant, seems to entirely recover both from her wounded leg and her wounded heart, for she marries a sturdy workman who supplies the earthly wants of Tessa and her numerous progeny. If she ever remembers the romantic days through which she has passed, her appearance belies the fact, for she becomes, apparently, contented with her lot in life.

AN AMERICAN

CHAPTER I

About the beginning of the year eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, there had been aroused in the hearts of the people of the United States a strong feeling of pity and compassion toward the inhabitants of the Island of Cuba who were under the ironshod heel of Spain and who had made many appeals for help to our own government in one way and in another.

The time was ripe for a revolution among the dark-skinned populace of the large cities of the Island Empire and many confusing circumstances combined to add to the confusion of sentiments entertained toward the government by those who suffered from its rulings.

Many indignities had been heaped upon the Cubans by those who claimed to represent the young King Alfonso XIII, who, in his far-away palace in old Madrid was as unconscious of what was done in his name, very many times, as he would have disapproved of it had he known it.

The young King and his mother, the Queen *regent*, tried, in every way within their power, to adjust matters amicably between their rebellious subjects and those whom they had sent across the sea to govern them, but they found this a very difficult matter indeed, and between the fiery tempers of the natives and the over-bearing arrogance of the officers who represented them, the poor crowned heads of sunny Spain certainly had a pretty hard time of it.

The Queen mother was naturally a gentle and a very highly educated and studious woman, while the boy King was as far from being the typical idea of a reigning tyrant as a handsome, well-trained young fellow could well be.

But those who represented these two crowned heads were of quite another pattern as to character and disposition and many were the cruelties charged to the account of certain ones among their number due to the opportunities afforded them of gratifying their lowest impulses and following along the paths that led, for the time being, into what seemed to them to be very pleasant pastures and beside very still waters, which, as is well known, often, besides being still, run deep.

One evening, just as dusk was falling over the little town of San Domingo, there appeared, passing along one of the quiet, shadowy narrow streets, a rather strange procession ... well in advance of the rest of the motley company appeared a village Priest bearing in his hand a crucifix which he held before him as if to fend off something evil ... he was dressed, as is the custom of the Catholic Priests of Cuba, in the flowing vestments of his office and the long cord that was knotted round his ample waist had a huge cross dangling from the end of it which struck against his well-formed legs as he strode along with head held high as if he saw beyond the things of earth and gazed upon some beatific vision which upheld him and lifted him above his immediate environment.

Indeed, there was one who walked beside him though he, himself, was unaware of it, except subconsciously, for Father Felix, as this Priest was known, was wandering among strange thoughts as he passed along that almost silent little street, that one sad evening.

He had been, for many peaceful years, the Priest who had officiated at almost all the public meetings of the village, but, never in his life devoted, as it was to the consideration of holy, high and spiritual matters, had he been called upon to conduct so weird a service as he was, then,

about to do.

He wondered, as he marched along, whether he was doing just exactly right in leading these, his simple-minded followers, into what it seemed to them they must do, that night ... he wondered whether, even now, he would not better turn to those who followed after him and call to them to halt and to consider well before they took another single step that might, each one of them, be an irrevocable and a much-to-be-regretted step, for it might lead to what they could not know of ways that might, as well as not, prove very winding and even thorn-strewn ways for those who followed along them. And Father Felix knew that he, alone of all that little company, was gifted with the power to reason out a fair and just conclusion from the premises presented to them all; he knew that he alone had enough of education to even understand the meaning of the words that had been spoken to them all ... he knew that those who came along that little street behind him had trusted to him most implicitly, for many years, in matters that required thought, and, although they had been the ones to beg him to take the step that they were then about to take, he knew that, even then, right at the last, had he been minded to, he might, yet, turn their minds away from what they seemed to be so set upon.

He knew that, if he wished to do so, he could make them see the matter under their consideration in quite another light from what they saw it in at that time ... he knew that he could bend their wills to make them match with his own will for he had done this very many times before ... he was a natural leader, and being well equipped for leadership, he took that place as if it were his natural right ... and so it seemed to be.

Any stranger, glancing along the line of human beings that followed Father Felix and his upheld crucifix, would have noticed many weak and vacillating faces ... many weak and vacillating wills as evidenced by the expressions on those weak and vacillating faces ... many wills that could be bent by anyone who had a strong and capable and domineering mind, and Father Felix had a mind like that ... a natural leader's most commanding mind ... he was a man to win respect wherever he might go ... a man to dominate the wills of those about him ... a man to lead the crowd ... a man to guide the minds of those he met, and, after having occupied the one place in the village that commanded the respect of all, for long, of course they looked to him for guidance and followed where he led as little children follow after the one full-grown human being in their midst.

But, as they marched along, full many whispers ran along that motley little company and gave some prescience of the clamor that would come if all their bridled tongues should really become loose again, for, now, they only spoke in whispers dreading discovery of what they were about to do by some of those against whose orders they were doing it.

"I wonder what the Governor would say if he could know the thing that we're about to do," a beardless youth began, as he edged a little nearer to his mother's side, "I wonder what would happen to us, now, if he discovered our intention."

The mother only put her finger on her lips and shook her head at him, but, later on, when they had gone a little further on their journey, she whispered to him:

"I hope the Governor will never know who did what we're about to do, at least, for, if he should discover which of us accomplished the purpose that all the villagers are interested in, we would suffer for our temerity in doing this ... I almost wish we had not joined this mob, my boy ... I almost wish, at least, that I had left you home to mind the house while I will be away from it," and, then, she ended, sadly, "God knows if we shall ever be allowed to see our home again."

There was one who walked among that little company, that evening, who was not as the rest in very many ways, and, yet, her lot was cast in with the rest for she had lived in that small village since her infancy, and, so, it seemed to her and them as well, that she was one of them and, so, must be among them even then, when they were casting in their lots, at Father Felix' instigation, with the ones who so violently opposed the reigning powers that they were held, then, and had been so held, for many weary months, as *incommunicado* in the village jail or prison in the wide and beautiful and picturesque great prado in the very centre of the town.

The girl who, in very many ways, was different from all the rest was walking in the very centre of the little crowd and, as the others jostled against her, her great blue eyes stared almost vacantly, as it seemed, around her like a startled fawn's when something unknown ventures near to its retreat within its native forest.

She drew her slender figure up to its full height, and she was taller than the rest of those who walked beside her, when someone whispered to her:

"What think you of all this, Estrella? Is it to your taste to be a part of those who, in their puny strength, contend against the strong? Do you think that you'll enjoy the future that we are advancing to? What do you think will happen to us when we reach the prado, anyway? Do you think the Governor has found out what we are going to do and if he does what action will he take? I'm more than half afraid myself ... I don't deny that I'm afraid ... how do you feel about it all?"

"I don't believe I know just how I *do* feel, Tessa," said the taller girl, "I think that I'm afraid, too ... I know my knees are trembling a very little, so I must be scared the same as you say you are. Let us keep as close together as we can, so, if anything happens to one it will be sure to happen to us both ... it seems to me ..." she ended, dreamily, "that even death itself could not be much worse

than the things that we've endured just lately, here."

And then the two young creatures shuddered at the very thought of death and huddled just as close together as they could and marched along among the rest as quietly as if they had not been afraid of anything at all.

At last they reached the Prado and Father Felix paused and held his crucifix even a little higher than he had done all along and waited for the little company to assemble directly in front of him, when he stretched his arms out wide in silent blessing on their undertaking, and proceeded toward the little prison that stood at one end of the Prado facing the great public square where games were held when *fiestas* were in order.

But it was for no festal undertaking that they had gathered there, that evening; silent preparations were making as they halted ... battering rams were being raised and carried forward by the men and tears and flowers seemed to be the offering of the women in the crowd to the ones they hoped to liberate from the dark, forbidding precincts of the edifice before them.

Father Felix motioned those who held the battering rams to hold them in their hands in readiness for instant action at a word from him ... then he called aloud to him who kept the keys to bring them forth and give them to him, or he would be, in case that his request should be refused, compelled, in spite of his strong desire to avoid all violence if possible, to use force in effecting the object for which the multitude surrounding him, outside, had gathered there.

He waited, patiently, for several minutes, but, as he received no answer to his demand, he called again:

"Bring forth the keys at once!" he cried raising his voice so that it carried far beyond the limits of the building that stood there before him, "bring them forth unless you wish to force me to use violence for I am determined to liberate the prisoners you hold within, and, if you do not bring to me the keys so that I may open the strong doors with them, why, then, I'll be obliged to break down the barriers that are between the ones you hold within that prison and the freedom that is their natural right. Once more do I command you ..." he cried in a stentorian voice, using the quality of voice that he employed when he intoned with due solemnity, the holy mass, "bring forth to me the keys that I may liberate my children that you hold without the right to hold them, or, if you refuse to do my bidding, then may the consequences of what will follow that refusal be upon your own head...."

As, still there was no answer from the dark and gloomy precincts of the edifice before him, he prepared to carry out the threats that he had made.

First, he commanded those who held the battering rams in readiness to advance until they were the proper distance from the doors for the use of their rude weapons, then he told the others to await his word but to be in readiness, each one, to follow where he led, then, holding high his crucifix and calling most devoutly, on the name of God, he came as near to those who were about to use the battering rams as he could do and not impede their movements, then he cried:

"Advance and give no quarter! Do your duty as I have instructed you to the full extent of it! Follow me, my little children, God is good and He will care for us in this our desperate undertaking."

As the heavy detonation of the strokes of those who held the battering rams rang through the building, cries were heard as if of those who were in agony and many shuddered at the sound for well they thought they knew its cause ... it seemed to them that they would be too late ... that those they sought to rescue were even at that moment being foully murdered in their cells because they were about to save them from the fate that they had been condemned to undergo.

The fair Estrella clung to her dark little friend and whispered to her:

"Tessa, it is more terrible than we imagined it would be ... what shall we do? How can we bear to go yet nearer to the horror that the prison hides from us? Tessa ... little Friend ..." she ended, "I'm awfully afraid ... are you?"

"I'm almost scared to death myself, Estrella," Tessa whispered back, "I know I'll die of fright alone if this keeps on much longer ... hear that scream! It's very terrible!"

But, then, all sounds were hushed, for prison doors that had been locked as tight as any prison doors could be had yielded to the heavy blows that had been rained upon them and, as they opened, they could plainly see, in the dim light that fell within that prison's entrance, that they had been, indeed, too late for him who lay at his full length across the entrance to the prison, for his body had been twisted in its fall so that his head that had been almost severed from it lay askew as if its eyes, that stared as wildly and as full of earthly horror as dead eyes could, had been trying to discover something strange about the figure that, but only lately, was as full of life and vigor as was any figure standing there without that prison door.

Estrella gazed at that still figure ... then she screamed in almost more than human agony and darted forward till she crouched beside it as it lay there at the entrance to the prison ... straightening the handsome head, she lifted it until it rested in her lap, and, then, she softly smoothed the dark and clustering curls that hung above the broad, full brow, and looked within the great brown eyes that stared at her, or so it seemed, as if the owner of them had been walking in his sleep, and then she pressed her virgin lips upon the full, be-whiskered mouth of

him whose head she held within her lap.

She fainted, then, and fell across the body of the man who lay across the entrance to that prison, and Father Felix lifted her and laid the senseless, almost severed head upon the floor again, and supported her until he left her with her little friend, outside, among the crowd.

And then the village Priest came back and led the men who held the battering rams within the prison to the cells of those they wished to liberate and commanded them to break down those doors as they had broken down the other ones, but, here, he found his way was barred, for, just as soon as blows began to fall upon the doors of those narrow cells those within those cells began to call to them and caution them that, if the doors were broken down, they'd find the prison-guards behind them with their loaded guns and the prisoners told their friends that those loaded guns were pointed at their breasts and would be fired at them just as soon as their cell-doors gave way.

When Father Felix heard this ultimatum he thought that all his efforts had been useless and his deep-laid plans of no avail until he heard a voice behind him softly whisper ... a voice that he had never heard before:

"Be not weary in well-doing. The cell-doors will open and the prisoners come forth alive if you but use the proper means to bring about that end. Call out to those you wish to succor, now, and tell them to be of good cheer for deliverance is at hand."

The soft voice drifted away into silence, then, but the village Priest obeyed its mandates and reassured the ones within those narrow cells and gave them courage to withstand the threats of instant death that faced them there.

And, then, he turned to those who waited his commands and told them that help was very near ... that, waiting there within the corridors of that small prison were those who'd come from far to bring to them assistance ... the kind of help that loaded guns would not affect. Then, he told them of the punishment that would await the ones who disobeyed the orders he was just about to give ... a punishment that would not only last through earthly life but would go on into eternity ... a punishment that would not only blast the earthly tenements but would condemn the souls of those who chose to act in opposition to his orders to everlasting torment.

And, then, he turned to those who, breathlessly, were waiting for the orders he was just about to give, and said to them:

"When I have counted up to three, prepare to break the doors down ... when I have counted up to six, if so be they remain unopened, go on and break them in!" he stopped a moment, then, to ascertain whether his followers fully understood the instructions he was giving to them ... seeing all of them alert, he continued, "to you who are within, I make this unalterable statement. Choose between a longer lease of earthly life and instant death! Choose between forgiveness for your past sins or everlasting punishment! Open these doors from within or we will break them down and those whose human bodies we will find, lying stark and cold in earthly death, will not be those of our dear friends who are your prisoners, for there are those within those cells of whose presence you are unaware but who are potent in the cause of right and truth and justice. I will now proceed to count ... one ... two ... three ..." at that, he heard a key thrust rapidly within a lock, but, as it was unturned, he went on counting, "four ..." he heard another key inserted in a lock, "five ..." he waited just a second longer, then, than he had done before, hoping that the keys would turn before the final number had to come, but, as they did not do that, he opened his mouth to pronounce the fatal word and was about to utter it, when, suddenly, all the cell-doors opened and the prison-guards within had fallen on their knees in superstitious terror of what they did not know, and, so, instead of uttering the fatal number, good Father Felix said, "Thank God!" and raised his crucifix and pronounced a blessing on them all, both prisoners and those who'd guarded them.

CHAPTER II

When Father Felix ceased to be engaged in silent prayer he lowered the crucifix he held in his right hand and placed it in the bosom of the robe he wore and welcomed those who came from out that gloomy prison-cell with praises and with prayers upon their trembling lips; he took their hands in his and held them for a moment as they passed in slow procession, for they were very weak from fasting and from long confinement, on their way out into the open light of day.

The first of all who passed from out those gloomy cells was he who'd called to Father Felix to stay the hands of those who sought to liberate the prisoners ... he was taller than the rest of those who crowded out into the corridor and they seemed to follow him as if he were their natural leader.

He only paused a moment when he reached the side of the Priest and hurried on as if he sought someone whom he hoped to find among the motley multitude who surged around the broken doors that led into the Prado where most of the women were assembled waiting for the more desperate action of the men who'd gone inside the prison.

The liberated prisoner, although he, too, was weak and worn as all of his companions were, yet

rushed with rapid strides from side to side of the excited mob whose clamor, now released, quite filled the Prado with vociferous shouts of joy, until he seemed to find the object of his hasty search, for, when he came to where Estrella lay supported by her little friend upon a hastily constructed bed of straw and grass, he stooped above her anxiously and leaned to look within her face, but, when her wide and terror-stricken eyes looked into his, he turned away as if he had not found the one he was in search of after all.

Estrella raised herself upon one elbow and rested on the ready shoulder of her little friend while she gazed after his retreating form with an eagerness not unmingled with sudden fear; it seemed as if the girl were fascinated by him, and, yet, dreaded his approach, for she did not even speak to him although she knew that he had been one of those whom they had come to liberate and had looked forward to greeting him when he should be released.

But the horror that had been thrust upon her at the very entrance of that dark and gloomy prison had quite unnerved her and had made her shrink from any contact with the prisoners who, now, came trooping out and mingled with the crowd by which they were soon, as it seemed, absorbed.

Then, suddenly, a trumpet blast rang through the wide and spacious Prado and a company of mounted cavalry, with naked swords uplifted, rode madly in among the crowd and scattered it as chaff is scattered by a furious wind ... cries of agony were heard as some were trampled by the horses, tortured by the cruel spurs which their infuriated riders were driving into their tender skins, and many men and women fell into disordered heaps of human misery in wildly scrambling toward a place of temporary safety.

The soldiers gave no quarter to the fleeing masses of the people but kept driving all of them who stood upon their feet at all toward the open streets of the little village that led out of the Prado, ordering them to cease from disturbing the peace and calling upon them in the name of the young King, Alfonso XIII, to disperse at once and to return to their homes in the village without delay.

The most of those within the Prado had been driven out before the commanding officer of the soldiers noticed that the prison doors were open, even then, at first he did not perceive just what the crowd had been collected for, or he might have given other orders than he had.

When he beheld the broken doors he marvelled greatly, for this was an unlooked-for and unprecedented method of liberating political prisoners in San Domingo and the commanding officer did not know just what action to take in the matter but felt that he must wait for further orders from his superiors in command before taking any drastic steps to quell the evident uprising of public opinion.

Father Felix had seen the soldiers as they dashed into the Prado and he hastened outside the prison intending to meet them and hold some colloquy with their leader, but, when he had reached the centre of the Prado the soldiers were driving the crowd out at the farther end of the enclosure, so that, instead of meeting the leader of the soldiery he came upon his own people as they lay in disordered heaps or staggered to their feet.

Observing Estrella and Tessa crouched back against a wall as far away from the soldiers as they could manage to put themselves, he approached them and asked them what they knew about this new phase of the tumultuous doings of the day.

The two girls greeted him joyfully for they had had their fill of horror and welcomed the Priest who represented to them the sanctity of the church:

"Father Felix," cried the little Tessa, "tell us what we are to do next and where we are to go and what we are to do when we get there, for we are dreadfully upset and poor Estrella has had a terrible shock and is still weakened from her fainting fit, while I am just as I have been right along ... scared half to death."

The good Priest stopped beside the girls long enough to tell them to quietly go to their own homes and stay indoors until morning, then he passed on to the other groups, and, where he could do so, assisted them to leave the Prado, preparatory to seeking their own places of abode where he advised them all to remain if possible without molestation from the authorities.

When Father Felix had reached the little cluster of people surrounding the liberated prisoner whom we have mentioned before, he came to a halt, and, beckoning the young man referred to to follow him, he passed on out of ear-shot of the rest and said to him:

"I wish that you would explain to me how it happens that Estrella is in need of help and you, although free, are not by her side. How does it happen, Manuello, that your half-sister has only her little friend, Tessa, to lean upon, while your strong arms are without a burden?"

The young fellow hung his head as if ashamed, for a moment, before he answered Father Felix, and seemed to ponder deeply over his reply to the good Priest's intimate question:

"I can tell you about that in a very few words, Father," he at length summoned courage to say, "I have only within the past few most delightful moments been freed from a loathsome dungeon and have been receiving the felicitations of some of my friends on my fortunate escape. I did not realize that Estrella needed my services ... if so, of course I will at once offer them to her."

Bowing low before Father Felix, he put his right hand to his head as if to doff its covering, but,

finding it bare except for his thick mop of dishevelled brown hair, he smiled, instead, and, suiting his actions to his words, approached the two girls who still remained where Father Felix had left them as if afraid to move:

"Allow me!" he cried, gayly, extending one strong arm to each of the maidens, "Accept my escort to whatever place you desire to go!"

Estrella seemed to take no notice of the offered arm, but Tessa eagerly laid hold of the proffered protection and snuggled her small person against the tall figure of the young fellow who turned to her companion as if to discover the cause of her apparent coolness.

"Why so silent, fair Lady?" he inquired, "Have you no congratulations to offer me upon my recent harrowing experience and subsequent and most fortunate escape?"

Estrella did not answer him at first, but gazed intently into his eager face as if to read there the inner motives that prompted his lightly-spoken words.

After she had looked into his face for a few seconds of earnest scrutiny, she said to him:

"Manuello, why did you not speak to me when we first met after your liberation from the prison? Why have you spent the time since then among the others instead of looking after my interests? Have you ceased to care for me during your incarceration? What have I done to deserve such treatment from you? Have I not treated you as a sister should? In what way have I offended you, Manuello?"

As she uttered these words her fair face flushed with the tide of deep emotion that swept over it and her blue eyes grew dark and full of feeling. She placed one of her hands on his arm, lightly, but held herself aloof from contact with his person.

He recognized this attitude of hers by standing a little more erectly and holding the arm on which her hand had been laid, stiffly extended a little from his body:

"How suddenly affectionate you have become, my soft and yielding sister! It seems to me that I remember how earnestly you plead with me to cease embracing you whenever opportunity was afforded to me, before I went to prison for my sins.... I think you are the girl who used to say to me 'please, Manuello, don't hold my hand so tightly! You are too rough!' I do not wish to be considered rough by any woman, and, so, I am more cautious in approaching your sacred person, now that I have had time to reflect upon your many words."

"How can you speak so to her, Manuello," exclaimed the dark-skinned Tessa, "now that you are free once more? Poor Estrella has had a most terrible experience, here, tonight ... you ought to comfort instead of scolding her."

The tender-hearted little girl looked up at the big man reproachfully and reached around his back to pat Estrella's shoulder, but he only stalked along between the two girls, sullenly and almost silently.

At length, they reached the little cottage where Estrella and her family lived and Tessa ran along a little further to her own home while Manuello and his half-sister entered their own dwelling.

It happened that they were alone, at first, as the other members of the little family had not yet returned from the Prado, and, in that interval of time, considerable was said and done by both of them.

"Manuello," said the girl, putting one hand on each of his broad shoulders, "have you no pity for me, now that Victorio is dead? You must have seen his poor, mangled body lying there at the entrance of the prison, Manuello ... can you tell how he came to die just as he and all the rest were about to be released from prison?"

Her tear-stained face was very near to his and his own lips began to tremble before he mustered courage to answer her:

"Of course, I'm sorry for you, Estrella," he began haltingly and slow, "of course I pity you as well as any other woman whose lover's newly dead. As to how he happened to be killed ... why, I guess you will never know just what did happen in that prison when those battering rams began to rock it by their impact ... I am certain that I cannot give you much explanation as I, myself, was one of those who suffered, although you do not seem concerned as to that in any way."

"You escaped alive, Manuello, and poor Victorio did not for his poor head was almost severed from his body ..." said Estrella, weeping violently, with deep-drawn sobs of agony, "I lifted him and tried to hold his head upon my lap ... oh, Manuello," she continued, clinging to him involuntarily, "it was very terrible!"

Her sufferings seemed to move him for he put his arms about her shoulders and drew her head forward until it rested on his broad and palpitating breast:

"Poor little girl!" he murmured, softly, stroking her fair hair, "Poor little Estrella! I *am* sorry for you ... I *do* pity you, though why you chose Victorio for your lover was always beyond my comprehension."

CHAPTER III

When Father Felix left the Prado he went directly to the church where he officiated, and, thence, into the small refectory behind it; here, he removed the flowing vestments he had worn when engaged in the enterprise which we have described in a previous chapter of this book, and assumed a more conventional and handy garb for he had work to do that would require all the strength of his arms and all the muscles of his broad back; he had set himself a task that was never meant for priestly hands to do, and, in the doing of it, he would need all the strength that years of careful living and an inherited and bounding health had bestowed upon him.

He, at once, began preparations for the work he had to do, and, to begin with, he adjusted the heavy cross which he always wore about his neck so that it would hang exactly in front of him and not over-balance his body by being on one side or the other; this cross had been a relic much prized by him of an old Priest with whom he had studied and whose sainted memory he revered almost as much as that of the saints whom he had been taught to worship along with the Virgin Mary and The Babe of Bethlehem; then, he put on next to his skin a hair-cloth shirt so constructed as not to scratch and yet to be very warm; over this he placed a heavy riding-coat which had been given to him by one of those who attended the services he conducted in the church; these garments, together with heavy breeches and warm, woolen stockings worn under heavy boots, completed, with the addition of a broad-brimmed hat, a disguise that would deceive almost any person who was acquainted with his ordinary appearance.

Having clothed himself to his own satisfaction, he took a heavy stick he had handy in his strong right hand and proceeded to leave the vicinity where he was accustomed, at all hours, to be found, and, stealthily and quietly, exercising all the precaution of which he was capable, he proceeded up the street that ran behind the little church with as much of haste as was consistent with the object of his journey.

When he had gone about two blocks from the church he turned sharply to his left and proceeded about as far again up the street that led away from the village, then, turning again to his left, he walked briskly for another block or two, when he came to a sharp turn and paused as if in doubt as to just which turn to take, when, suddenly, as if from the ground at his feet, he heard a low voice addressing him in no uncertain language:

"Turn toward the right side of this street," whispered the voice, "take the right-hand side of this street and then turn again toward the left when you have gone for two more blocks toward the right. You will find the object of your search has been in waiting for you for some hours and is now growing impatient ... so make all possible haste, good Father Felix ... make all possible haste for she is sore pressed with fatigue and fear."

When the voice had ceased speaking to him, Father Felix followed the direction it gave him, implicitly, and found, indeed, as it had assured him, the object of the night-journey he had just made, waiting for him with great impatience, coupled with much fear and dread of consequences; he hastened to reassure her as soon as he reached her side by saying softly to her:

"Be of good cheer, dear Madam. The work that you commissioned me to do has been well done and all of the prisoners excepting one are now at liberty. Unfortunately, one of our friends lost his life just before the wide doors of the prison were burst open ... no one seems to know how this came about, but we found his dead body across the very entrance as if, indeed, he had been about to join our ranks outside when death overtook and stopped him."

"Which of the prisoners was killed?" asked the woman who had been waiting there for his coming, eagerly and apprehensively.

"I do not suppose that you were acquainted with the young fellow ..." answered the good Father Felix, soothingly, "he was called Victorio Colenzo ... he was the lover of a girl I know very well and she was with the crowd, who followed me; she dashed into the entrance of the prison and held his head, which had been almost severed from its body, in her lap until she fainted and became mercifully unconscious of her horrible surroundings ... the poor girl was almost crazed with agony and regret, for she had flouted him to some extent because of his revolutionary sentiments...."

He had gotten that far in his narrative little thinking of the intense interest it had for the woman listening to it, until he happened to look earnestly at her when he saw, in an instant, that it held for her great personal appeal; he stopped at that knowledge and waited for her to explain the situation if so be she wished to do so; at length, between low-drawn sobs, she said, falteringly:

"You say Victorio Colenzo was the lover of some light girl you know? Indeed, you are much mistaken. Instead of being any girl's lover, he belonged solely to me. He was my own dearly beloved husband, Father Felix. I had not yet told you of our marriage for I wanted you to think of me only in my own personal right, but I am the widow of the man whose shameful and horrible death you have just been describing to me ... I am the weeping widow of Victorio Colenzo, Father Felix, and, if it be in my power, his death shall be avenged in blood!"

As she ceased speaking she put her hands before her face and gave way, utterly, to her great sorrow, for she had but spoken the solemn truth although no one of her many acquaintances suspected that she was a married woman at all.

Father Felix was dumbfounded by the intelligence the young woman had just given to him and pitied her from the very bottom of his tender heart and he blamed his blundering tongue for giving to her such a shock as he had just been the cause of; at the same time he could not blame himself as much as he might have done had he not known of the marriage contract of Estrella and this same man of whom he had been speaking; he hastened to place this young girl in the right light before his companion by saying:

"My dear Madam, as to the girl of whom I was just speaking, she is in every sense of the word a good girl and innocent of any wrong intention; if there is a sinner in this matter it was he who is now not to be condemned by any human being, for he has gone before his Maker Who will mete out to him whatever is his just dessert. I am deeply grieved that I should have caused you this deep grief at this time, but, as the circumstances are, you would have been obliged to know it very soon in any case."

The young woman who had been waiting for the Priest to come to her to make his report as to how he had done the work that she had set for him to do, was beautiful as any dream of womanhood could ever be.

Her great gray eyes, that shone like stars upon a misty night, were lifted to his face and questioned him as to the truth of his last statement while they plainly showed the almost holy faith she had in all he did:

"Dear Father Felix," she said, finally, stifling as best she could the sobs that shook her slender figure, "dear Father Felix, I know you speak the truth, and, yet, it does not seem to me that he could have ever been a hypocrite such as a man would have to be to be what you infer he was. He was my darling husband ... if he, also, was the lover of a trusting girl, then he sinned most grievously ... it breaks my heart," she ended, clasping her soft, white hands together spasmodically, "it breaks my heart to think he could be such a villain as you say he was. Dear Father Felix," she began again, for hope will sometimes come upon the very heels of wild despair, "dear Father Felix, are you sure that this man who is newly dead can be the Victorio Colenzo that I know ... the man who is ... I hope he is ... my own dear husband? The one I mean was a prisoner with the others you have liberated ... it was for his sake alone that I arranged to have you do the work you've done ... might it not be that you have been mistaken in the man? Might there not have even been two men bearing the same name within that prison?"

Eagerly and hopefully, she questioned the good Priest. He sadly shook his head and said to her:

"The young man whose body lay within the entrance to the prison when we had battered down the door, was tall and very dark ... his hair was like a raven's wing for blackness ... his eyes were like the falcon's in their keenness ... he was a handsome fellow in every possible way and the girl, Estrella, of whom I spoke, fairly worshipped him although her own family flouted her for doing so, as he only came to see her at long intervals and seemed ashamed to be seen with her ... seldom ever went out anywhere with her, but they were plighted lovers ... that I know ... they came to me together, one evening, in the church, and I blessed their future union, believing him to be an honest man and knowing her to be a gentle, true and loving girl."

"I fear he was my husband, Father Felix.... I fear the very one I hoped to liberate has lost his life and lost his honor, too. Father Felix, tell me how to bear this great and hopeless sorrow! *Is* there any way to bear a sorrow such as this one is? *Can* I shut my Husband's memory from my heart because I can no longer have respect for him? *Is* there any way," she wailed, pleadingly, "*is* there any way to bear a sorrow such as this one is? *Tell* me, good Father, *tell* me, is there any way of escape for me who am as innocent as is this young girl of whom you have just spoken? Is there some way in which I can assist her, Father Felix? Perhaps it is my duty, under these circumstances, to hunt her up and try to help her, who is, also, as it were, a widow of my darling Husband. Must I do this, Father? Would it be my duty, as the wife of Victorio Colenzo, to look this girl up and try to help her bear her sorrow on account of his death?"

The good Priest looked at her in deep amazement, but he answered her as calmly as he could command his voice to speak:

"No, my Daughter, no ... that would be going beyond reason as to duty. It might be right for you to send her something if she were in need of monetary assistance.... I do not think she is, however, I do not think Estrella is in need of anything to live upon ... they had not been married, you understand ... she was not his wife as you were ... only just he'd promised he would marry her, sometime. No, you owe her nothing more than womanly sympathy in her bereavement and you do not need to see her at all, for that matter. It would give you unnecessary pain, it seems to me. As for her, if we can, we will let her remain in ignorance of the character of him she loved ... she would the sooner repair the injury, it seems to me, if she could still respect his memory. It must be doubly hard for you, my Daughter, to lose him and respect for him at the same time ... yet, it would have been a terrible knowledge for you to have gained ... that he had misled this innocent girl ... even during his life. A man has little thought of the women who love him when he plays fast and loose with more than one of them at a time, anyway. I wish I knew what words to say to you to make you strong to bear this misery, dear Daughter ... you must bear it all alone, I know that much ... only God in His great Mercy, can assist you in this matter ... only He can tell you what to do or how to endure your agony of spirit, for only He can understand your heart. I am but a feeble instrument in God's Own Hands, my dear, afflicted Daughter.... I am but a very feeble instrument.... I wish I knew the way to help you bear this thing. I wish that I could say the fitting word to turn your mind to other thoughts, for only in the mind can fitting help be found ...

only the spiritual side of your strong nature can uphold you now."

He'd kept on talking to her hoping to alleviate her pain in some degree ... hoping that her fits of violent and heart-breaking weeping would grow farther and farther apart until they would cease altogether so that, being calmer, she could better face this heavy burden that was hers, and hers alone, to bear. Seeing no cessation of her sobs and moans of agony of spirit, he began to speak of other matters, hoping to distract her mind and turn her thoughts to other things, thereby giving her an opportunity to face the sorrow that had come upon her so suddenly with more strength than she would have if she continued to dwell on it alone. So he bethought him of the soldiery and of their coming riding into the Prado and he began to tell her of this phase of the adventure he had on her account, mainly. She listened calmly to this narrative and even asked some questions, haltingly, but, just as soon as that account was ended, she began again to ask concerning poor Victorio:

"Where have they taken his remains, good Father? Where can I find my darling Husband's body? How can I bear to have to see his face which has always to my knowledge been so full of life and youth and perfect health lying stark and still with no expression in his glorious dark eyes that always looked so lovingly at me? Father Felix, even now, it seems to me that there must be some mistake about my Husband's being the same man who was the lover of this girl you know about.... I think that I will see her ... there ... beside my darling Husband's body and decide the matter for myself instead of listening to the tales that have been told to me. That is how I think I will proceed," she ended, then, quite calmly, as it seemed, for secretly she then began to hope that it was not her husband, after all, "That is how I will proceed about this terrible calamity, Father Felix. I will see this girl beside the body of the man she says has been her lover ... he may not be my darling Husband, after all."

And so their conference ended, he giving her explicit directions as to where Victorio's body had been placed, and she thanking him for carrying out her wishes even though, as it seemed then, the very thing she had him do the work for had failed her utterly.

Father Felix went back, then, to the refectory, with this complicated matter bearing hard upon his heart. He pitied both the suffering women very much and wished to help them both if so be he could find the proper way to do the task in.

He pondered deeply on the various situations he'd surprised in carrying out the project of the woman he had met, that night; she had not told him of her plans in their entirety, and, so, it seemed, the very plans she doted on the most had very far miscarried and the work, so far as she had been concerned, had not only been as futile as any work could ever be, but, also, it had brought to her a new and horrible calamity besides the failure of her plans and loss of him she evidently deeply loved as tender women love but only once in all their human lives, perhaps, for Victorio Colenzo had been a man to claim the love of tender women ... he was very tall and very handsome, too; his deep, dark eyes were very full of loving expression and his strong arms, folded close about a tender woman's yielding form, would lift her spirit up and make her almost wild with joy and gladness.

And, as it looked now, those strong arms had been folded, not only round his own wife's tender form, but, also, about, at least, one other woman's, too. Good Father Felix reflected on the frailty of man and pondered deeply on the tenderness of women, but he did not, even then, reach the very root of the whole matter, for he, being what he was, would not be very likely ever to know the heights and depths, as well, of human love, for he had always been a religious devotee in spite of his great strength of limb ... he'd only used his bodily powers to forward the work to which his whole life was devoted utterly, and, so, good Father Felix could not fully understand a man such as Victorio Colenzo must have been to leave the record that he'd left behind him when he died, there, in the entrance to that dark and gloomy prison, just as he had been about to come again, a free man, into the glorious light of day.

CHAPTER IV

Father Felix had prepared the widow of Victorio Colenzo for the sight she would behold when she went to the rude dwelling where they had laid the form of the prisoner whose dead body had been found lying in the entrance to the prison on the day the people battered down the doors and set at liberty several political prisoners confined therein, but no one could, really, prepare a woman for the vision presented to her eyes when she entered the cottage that had been turned into a temporary morgue, for more than one of those engaged in the deadly strife with the soldiery in the Prado after the deliverance of the prisoners had given up his earthly life, either at the time of the attack or afterwards from wounds inflicted either intentionally or inadvertently by those who had been sent to the Prado to quell an uprising of the Cuban populace.

As the woman we have before described entered the rude shelter where the dead bodies of several of the residents of the little village lay, she was surprised and grieved by the number of the dead and, also, by the many mourners who crowded among the slabs on which the bodies lay, for there was little of orderly array there, everything being of the rudest and most primitive pattern as the reigning government did not wish to dignify those who had opposed it even after death had taken from their limbs the power to oppose anything in the world of men and women.

The woman, who was of a higher class than most of those assembled there, was treated with marked deference as became her superior position both as to wealth and education, for the widow of Victorio Colenzo occupied a proud place in her own right, having been, for a long time, the occupant of a large and beautiful residence that commanded a wide view of the harbor of Havana and was situated on an elevation above the little village of San Domingo; this home had been hers long before she had ever met the handsome peon whom she had acknowledged as her husband to Father Felix after having learned of his death.

It was through her own instigation that the man had taken the position which had, subsequently, placed him among the prisoners for offenses against the reigning government who had been liberated under her direct orders and with her pronounced sanction, although she had not actually taken part in the work which she had directed.

This woman was of another type entirely as compared with the others in that small dwelling and walked among them almost haughtily in spite of her eagerness in the search after evidence that would convince her that she had not been utterly mistaken in the man she had secretly married, believing him to represent the finest and highest example of patriotic courage and devotion that she had met during the whole of her long residence in the Island of Cuba.

She had come to the Island, in her first youth, as the daughter of the American Consul who represented the United States in the council chambers where were gathered those who discussed affairs of state with the ruling Spanish powers; her father had purchased the beautiful site on which he had built the home that was still hers, although both of her parents had died, there in Cuba, within the past few years; the girl had been left practically without living relatives, and, so, loving her Island home, she had remained there in spite of the solicitations of many American friends who had visited her in Cuba and urged her to return to the United States with them; she was of a reticent and retiring disposition, loving a good book more than almost anything else in the world, and being surrounded by a splendid library, her time was fully and pleasantly occupied, as she had trustworthy retainers who followed her mandates because they loved to fulfill them and pitied her loneliness while they almost worshiped her superior manners and style of speech as well as of living; Father Felix, alone, understood her mental attainments and was greatly bewildered when she told him that she had married Victorio Colenzo as he considered her far removed from the peons who were the regular inhabitants of the Island and among whom he labored as a missionary rather than as an equal, although his deep humility of manner always led them to believe that he was on their own level of intelligence, while the aloofness of this one woman set her apart from all of her neighbors and made her seem to them like a being from another and a higher world.

As she walked among the slabs on which the dead bodies had been laid, that morning, for she had come down from her home early, having slept, during the past night, only the few hours preceding her meeting with Father Felix, as she hoped to have her doubts set at rest and to be assured that the man she had secretly united to herself by marriage was still worthy of her respect and love which she had given to him without further knowledge of his character than what he chose to exhibit to her in their infrequent meetings prior to his declaration of undying worship and deep and overpowering love for herself as well as of patriotic zeal which latter emotion she fully sympathized with, as she regarded it as similar in many ways to her own feeling for her much-beloved land which was all the more powerful because of her isolation from others of her own nation, she representing, to herself at least, the whole of the entire broad expanse of the United States; it was this sympathy with the ardent patriotism of Victorio Colenzo that had led to her present plight for, believing him to possess the strong feelings for his native land which he had professed to her to have, she had urged his participation in the plot which, on its discovery by the Spanish authorities, had plunged him, with others, into the prison from which, through her own earnest efforts, they had just been liberated, or, at least, a part of them.

Now, she reached the side of the farthest slab in that small room, and noticed, at once, crouching down beside it, a fair-haired girl who seemed, beyond all doubt, the one bereft by the condition of the body lying there, so straight and still, beneath the rude pall that had been thrown over it so that even its face was hidden from sight. She softly touched the mourner on the shoulder nearest to her and whispered:

"My poor Girl, for whom do you mourn? Is it the body of your brother lying here, or, yet," she went on, hesitatingly, for a horrible suspicion began to thrust its ugly head before her vision, "can he who lies here so quietly have been, maybe, your husband? You are young but I know well that the girls, here, marry very young...."

She ended haltingly, for the girl had raised her lovely face, tear-stained and drawn by sorrow, and looked up into the face that bent so near to her own:

"He was my plighted husband, Lady; he *would* have been my husband had death not intervened to take him from me! I *love* him so ..." she suddenly screamed in agony, "I *love* him so ... Victorio! Why have you left me all alone in a cruel world to be a widow before I was a wife? Victorio...."

And, then, she rose, as one who had that right, and turned the pall back from the countenance of him who lay there on that senseless slab.

The other woman did not scream, as poor Estrella had ... she did not even move, indeed, but stood as if she had been carved from marble, for her face was almost just as pale as death itself ... the pulsing blood receded from her cheeks and from her trembling lips ... she stood so tall and

still that the poor girl became conscious of her in spite of her own grief and wondered if she, also, sought to find some one she loved among the dead; with that thought in her mind, she stepped back from the corpse she had been leaning over, and said to her who stood there silently as if her interest in the affairs of life had, suddenly, ceased:

"I beg your pardon for my selfishness. Are you, too, one of those who lost some loved one yesterday? Do you seek, here, in this sad place, the body of one whom you've loved as I have loved the man who lies here ... dead ... before me?"

The older girl was silent, for she could not talk to poor Estrella as she wished to do ... as she had meant to do in case her worst fears had to be realized; she did not wish to add a single hair's weight to the sorrow that the poor girl felt for him who had been false to both of those trusting women who stood there beside his corpse; she did not wish to harm the innocent girl, for she could see how true and loving she had been by gazing, only for a moment, in her wide, blue eyes, and, yet, it was her right and, perhaps, it was also her duty, to the man who had been her earthly husband, to claim his body and to bury it as would become the husband of a woman such as she had, always, been; but, as he'd always begged her to keep secret their marriage which had taken place in Havana instead of having Father Felix marry them at his request, for political reasons, he had told her, with the thought that she, being an American, might complicate his position with the Spanish government, as he had occupied a place of trust under the Governor, until the proper time would come to expose his actual feelings for his native land.

And, so, she had to think of this side of the complicated problem presented to her by her strange position while she stood there with that weeping, loving, sympathetic, untaught girl clinging to her hand and questioning her. At length, having collected a little of her usual unselfish consideration for the people living on the Island, she turned to poor Estrella and said to her, softly, and, yet, without condescension in her manner:

"Yes, my poor Girl, I, also, seek someone I love among the newly dead.... I, also, wish to find the man I loved as you have loved the man who lies here on this slab.... I, also...."

Then, her courage failed her utterly and she fainted dead away, even as poor Estrella, herself, had, when she had first beheld the body of the man who had made love to both of them.

The fair-haired girl bent over the older woman and lifted her in her strong arms and carried her into the outer air and found the carriage where it waited for its mistress and placed her in the care of those who served her; then, for the first time, she realized who the lady was who'd found her there beside her dead, as she supposed, for Victorio had no family in San Domingo, having only come there recently, and having held himself as somewhat superior to the most of his own countrymen whom he met, so poor Estrella claimed his body as having been his sweetheart, since he had, as she believed, no wife in all the world, for he had often told her he had never found a woman he could love before he met her.

Now, she helped to chafe the hands of her who lay there in that costly carriage with her brown hair making a soft frame for her pale face which lay upon the lap of one who loved her with the kind of love an ignorant, older woman gives to one she much admires and who is far superior to her in every possible way; this woman smoothed the fluffy hair back from the high white brow, now, and spoke to her as if she were her baby instead of one whom she looked up to and respected:

"There ... there! My Pretty! Open your sweet eyes and look at your own loving Mage!" she said, as the long, brown lashes that fringed the delicate white lids still brushed the rounded cheeks that were almost as white as the smooth brow. "Look up at me and let me see your shining eyes, again!"

"Her heart is beating, now, more regularly," said Estrella, for her hand had sought the other's bosom to see if she still lived at all. "She breathes more easily, too. I think she will recover very soon ... poor Lady! She sympathized with me in my great sorrow so deeply that she fainted. How sweet and dear she is!" she added, softly, as a shudder shook the form before her. "How very sweet and dear she is. You *must* love her very much indeed.... I never happened to see her before today, but I know who she is, now, and how very kind she has been to so many of our people."

"I wish the color would creep back into her cheeks ..." moaned Mage. "Her cheeks are almost always rosy as the dawn ... it seems so strange to see them white ... she don't look natural to me this way ... you should see her when she thinks her husband's coming to the house ... *then* her cheeks are like a flame of light ... her eyes are just as bright as stars at midnight ... there! They've opening, now ... my Pretty ... my own pretty Dear ... Mage is here ... I'm right here by you Dearie ... there! I'm afraid she's fainted away, again. She seemed to look at you, Estrella, stand farther back so, when she opens her eyes next time, she'll see just me ... she knows old Mage loves her always ... she knows her own old Mage would take good care of her no matter what would come.... Dearie ... I am right here ... old Mage is close beside you...."

At that, the woman lying there within her faithful arms, stirred softly, and, once again, her glorious gray eyes opened, and she looked at poor old Mage whose face was all distraught with many wrinkles and with deep anxiety for her. Then she raised herself to a sitting posture and put her hands before her eyes as if to hide some horrible spectre from her sight, and, then, she looked at poor Estrella standing there not knowing what to do, for Mage would not allow her, even now, to come a single step nearer to her mistress, and then she spoke:

"My poor Girl," she said, "My poor Girl, I too, sought to find the man I loved, but his body is not here. I pity you with all my heart and wish that I could help you bear your sorrow. Come to me and I will try to help you ... come this evening, just at sunset, to my house. I think you know which one it is.... Mage, you tell her where to come."

For she had reached the limit of her endurance, for the moment, and old Mage, seeing her evident distress, hurriedly told Estrella where to come to find her mistress, and gave the orders to the coachman to drive home at once.

And, then, Estrella went again into the habitation of the dead and the other woman, with her heart like lead within her breast, went back to her own place and left the body of the man she'd called her husband for a few short months lying there upon that senseless slab with the weeping girl beside it.

CHAPTER V

When the evening shadows were falling over the almost palatial home of Ruth Wakefield, the young girl whom she had begged to come to her climbed the rugged height upon which the former United States Consul had erected his residence hoping to occupy it long after his term of office should expire as he had found the climate very beneficial to the health of his entire family, as it seemed, and desired to have a fitting place of abode during the childhood of his only and much-loved child, who, now, a sorrowing widow and a humiliated wife, was sitting idly waiting to receive poor Estrella, not knowing, certainly, just what she would do or say when she had to really face the situation into which she had been forced by untoward circumstances.

As Estrella reached the rear door, to which she had gone by an almost unerring instinct, feeling strange and unnatural among the rich surroundings, old Mage appeared to welcome her, as she had been directed by her mistress to do; the old woman was greatly in doubt as to the condition of affairs in the home she loved to be a part of and had longed to get hold of the peon girl alone.

There was something about Ruth Wakefield that commanded the respect of even the lowest among those who knew her ... her natural refinement had been accentuated by her seclusion from the outer world and by her almost constant thought of higher and better matters than the gross and humdrum affairs of the daily life by which she was surrounded. Yet, she always entered into practical affairs with vigor and entire understanding, so that, while she was counted as a dreamer of dreams beyond the earth, yet she was acknowledged to be eminently practical and able to attend to her own business affairs with no danger of being over-reached by those with whom she dealt as to monetary matters, as her natural acumen in such matters had been sharpened by various experiences of a more or less unpleasant character, such as the loss of certain sums of money through trusting to the honor of some of those with whom she had had sympathy in their need, for she had discovered that, when it comes to money, people are very apt to forget their obligations entirely, only attending to that part of life when in need themselves and not considering the fact that, unless one gets what is one's due, at least to some extent, one cannot, on the other hand, meet one's own obligations, so that the lonely girl had learned some hard lessons by practical knowledge of human nature gained in the only school where such knowledge can be gained ... experience.

But old Mage was of a far different type of womankind ... true as steel to her beloved young lady as she always called her in her thoughts, although she often found verbal fault with her to her fair and tender face ... fond of gossip and garrulous to an almost alarming extent yet she could keep a secret as inviolate as even Ruth Wakefield herself.

At this moment, her great desire was to worm out of poor Estrella whatever it was that had made her own young lady faint that morning ... she was not worried about the poor girl's loss of him she had called her lover except in so far as it affected her own people as she was fond of distinguishing them, for old Mage, although uneducated and almost unaware of her own nationality as her mother had died at her birth and her father had immediately deserted her, yet prided herself on being far superior to the natives among whom she dwelt, for she had come to Cuba with the Wakefield family, having been employed by them as nurse for the small Ruth and having stuck tightly to her charge from that time on.

So that, when she faced the poor, ignorant, as she secretly considered Estrella, girl, it was with an air of superiority as belonging to a higher race than she, for it is a fact that uneducated persons feel any elevation above their fellows much more strongly than those who have had more insight into the humble attainments of even the wisest of human beings, for those who have been permitted to climb the heights of thought have had a glimpse of the vastness and unattainable grandeur of which even the highest human intellect must only be a spectator ... an humble and admiring witness of the matchless beauty and majestic splendor that dwell beyond and yet beyond the vision of the keenest human imagination.

But old Mage seldom allowed herself even to wonder about what she could not understand, being content with the plane of existence upon which she found herself and finding amusement and profit as well in attending to the various small duties of her daily life as she performed those duties through love and pride. Having seated the girl who was almost overpowered, already, by

the unknown glamour of wealthy surroundings, she proceeded to follow out her own ideas and to attempt to satisfy her own curiosity before apprising Ruth of the arrival of her invited guest.

She began by commiserating the girl upon her recent loss, little dreaming that, in this way, she would find out far more than had been her own desire, for old Mage, while she had never liked the young man who, for the past few months, had been an almost daily visitor at the home she dearly loved, yet had tried to think that her young lady had chosen wisely, even if unconventionally, when she had married him, as it was very hard for her ever to really question any object upon which Ruth had set her heart, it having been one of the criticisms of the parents of the little girl that old Mage had always indulged her slightest whim and always satisfied at least her own conscience by finding some good reason for the indulgence; in the present instance, she had often said to herself:

"My poor child is alone so much with her own thoughts and what she gets out of all those big books," for what anyone could find in the way of company in a book which required so much labor, in her own case, to decipher at all was a mystery to her, "and she needs company ... a woman needs a man around to make love to her and this fellow is good at that what with his guitar and his mandolin and his fine voice, not to speak of his wonderful dark eyes and his curly black hair and his strong, powerful figure ... it is too bad that he is only a native Cuban instead of an American ... that is too bad ... but..." she would end, brightly, "he can be naturalized if we ever go back to the States."

So, now, when she turned to Estrella with the conventional question as to the identity of her lover on her ready tongue, she little dreamed of the consequences:

"My poor girl," she began, "you were to have been married, they tell me, to the man who was found dead at the entrance to the prison, last night.... I wonder if I happened to know him ... what was his name?"

She had asked the question idly, wishing only to engage the girl in conversation to find out whatever she could.

"My lover was a wonderful man ..." declared Estrella; "he was not a common man at all ... he was superior to all the men I know or ever have known ... he was the handsomest as well as the most intelligent man among the whole people of this Island, I think.... I know I never saw anyone either so handsome or so smart as was my dear Victorio.... I don't suppose you would ever have met him for he was not a servant and yet he was a Cuban ... he was a wonderful man and I was to have been his wife and he was most foully murdered there in that hateful prison."

And the poor bereft creature began to moan and sob and wring her hands in agony of spirit.

This was not at all what Mage desired to do ... to get the girl all wrought up before her young lady even saw her, so she tried to comfort and calm her by speaking rather sharply to her as she knew hysteria can only be overcome by the application of fierce remedies, or, at least, that is what she had been taught, so, in order to cauterize the wound her words seemed to have made, she said:

"You say your lover was a superior man ... was he, then, a leader among the political prisoners who were liberated?"

"Indeed he was ..." proudly answered the bereaved girl. "Victorio Colenzo was a leader wherever he went ... why ..."

But even her pride in her dead lover did not hide from her the effect his name had had on poor old Mage for she had crumpled down in her chair as if she had received a stroke of some kind and seemed as if paralyzed, for her poor old mouth fell open, revealing its entire innocence of teeth; she gasped for breath for a moment and then demanded:

"Say that name again! What kind of looking man was he?"

Hastening to comply with the demand made on her, the girl proceeded, proudly:

"His name was Victorio Colenzo and he was the handsomest man in the whole of Cuba, I believe ... his eyes were very dark and expressive and his hair was the very most beautiful curly hair that ever grew on any human head ... he was tall and strong and handsome in every way and, yet," she ended dreamily, "and, yet, he never loved a woman in his life before he found me."

Old Mage had other words upon her lips than those which she said after having hauled herself up sharply, remembering how unprotected her dear young lady was and wishing, above all else, even her own almost insatiable curiosity, to shield her from any harm:

"It must be a great comfort to you to know that, now that he is dead and gone," she said to the girl, though what she added in her own mind may as well not be recorded here, for, with all the fierceness of the far-famed tiger with her young, old Mage, in her own primitive mind, was wishing several distinct kinds of punishment would fall, in its immediate future, upon the soul of the man who had brought sorrow to her dear, innocent lamb. As far as the girl was concerned she felt that she had had more than her just deserts already and wished to relieve her young lady of any further torture regarding the mixed matter, for old Mage, though an ignorant woman in many ways, had lived a great many observant years among human men and women, and, now, that her experience might serve to protect Ruth in this hard crisis of her young womanhood, she

threw herself and all her previous knowledge of the world right into the breach. She reflected only for a few moments after having made the diplomatic speech referred to above, before she decided on a course of immediate action.

To begin with, she decided to clear the decks, as it were, of the obstruction of the girl's presence in the home of the wronged wife; she went about this with precision and dispatch, for, once she had settled on any certain course, old Mage was like a mild whirlwind, scattering everything before her:

"Well," she began, eyeing the girl suspiciously, wondering whether she had any inkling of the exact situation, "I suppose you have folks to live with and are not in need of anything much?"

"I am alone in this wide world," declared Estrella, "for I am but a foster child among the people who have brought me up ... my parents I know nothing of but believe that I am not of Cuban blood... I think ..." she hesitated, "I think ... I am ... an American, the same as the sweet young lady who lives here with you."

The last few words almost undid old Mage's stern resolve, but she kept her one idea of saving her young lady from further annoyance in view and answered this appeal:

"It don't make much difference in this world *who* you are but it does matter *what* you are ... now, I take it, you are a good girl and will marry some good man when you have recovered from this loss ... you are too young to feel this as deeply as you might ... I hope so, anyway ..." she temporized, seeing the look of despair that settled on Estrella's really beautiful and innocent features, "and my young lady wanted me to help you if you needed any help for she feels so sorry that your lover happened to be killed just as he was about to get free ... she wanted me to tell you ..." but at that point in her benevolent intention she was interrupted by the appearance of the mistress of the place, and ended, rather lamely, "she wanted me to tell you to come to her as soon as you got here."

"Why, Mage," said Ruth in her usual sweet, low voice, "you had not told me that Estrella had come ... have you been waiting for me very long?" she kindly asked the girl.

"No, Madam," said Estrella feeling the immense difference in their positions in spite of the evident indisposition and tender youth of the other woman, "I have only rested for a few moments after my climb to the top of the hill. It was very kind," she added, "of you to ask me to come and the cool air of the evening has refreshed my head for it has been aching terribly, all day."

"Can't you find some sort of refreshments for her, Mage?" asked Ruth, feeling sorry for the other's plight. "Maybe a good cup of tea would give you added strength to bear your great sorrow ... we women," she said while her sweet, low voice trembled, "we women are but weak and yet often the very heaviest of sorrows is laid upon us.... I do not know the reason for this ... I do not understand ... but I believe that we are all but a part of a very great plan which is beyond our comprehension while we are here in this finite world, and I hope ..." she had the look of one of God's good angels on her face as she said it, "and I hope to know more about this great plan when I have passed beyond this world and all its many disappointments. You have had a terrific blow, my poor Girl," she went on, kindly. "You alone must bear this grief but God has sent other human beings into this human life so that we may help each other, if only by our mutual sympathy, when we must meet what it seems almost impossible for us to bear alone ... so," she ended, "so, maybe I have been sent to try to give you courage to go on in life when your future must look dreadfully black to you."

"It surely does look black ..." moaned poor Estrella, "Victorio was all I had to lean upon in this wide world for I don't belong to the people where I live and Manuello persists in making love to me and I can't bear to have him touch me after having known the love of a man who never even looked at any other woman but me, and who was," her pride in her dead lover again taking the ascendancy in her emotions, "the handsomest and smartest man who ever came to Cuba."

"The low-lived pup!" said old Mage, who had just come in with the tea-tray in her hands and heard the last few words, but she made this remark to herself alone and would have ground her teeth in making it had it not happened that she had mislaid those triumphs of the dentist's art, for old Mage was the proud possessor of two entire sets of teeth, although she seldom could lay her hands on them as she invariably removed them from her mouth each time she wished to eat anything, having grown so accustomed to gumming her food that the teeth were dreadfully in her way.

She set the tea-tray with its array of cups and saucers down and added several little concoctions of her own making to the little feast before she began, thinking to change the subject:

"Dear Miss Ruth, I wish you could have seen little Tid-i-wats a few minutes ago; she was out in the big yard and I wanted her to come back in her own place so as to be safe and so instead of going to pick her up as you know very well she won't allow anyone to do except yourself, I just got one of her saucers and a silver spoon and pounded on the edge of the saucer with the spoon, and here she came fairly bounding along the driveway; she galloped, Miss Ruth, just like a little colt out in one of our own big pastures, back home."

"The dear little Dadditts!" exclaimed her young lady, using a pet name of her own making. "How cute she must have looked ... she is so little," she explained to Estrella, "she is so very small and so very cute ... I have had her with me, now, for ... how long is it, Mage?" for she knew the old

woman enjoyed being asked for information, "since we came from America the last time?"

"Let me see ..." answered Mage, deliberating, "it must be anyway twelve years and Tid-i-wats was not a young cat, even then, for she had raised one family of kittens at least ... she must be thirteen or more years old, my Dear," she said to the young girl, hoping to attract her attention to herself and so leave Ruth free from her immediate scrutiny, "just think of that! You must come with me, when you have had your tea, and see the cute little yard we have for her and then you must look over the grounds with me. Miss Ruth is not feeling very well, today, although she has such a healthy-looking, rosy face, and, so, I'll entertain you while you're here; Miss Ruth is a great reader and her eyes are not very strong ... sometimes the sun hurts them awfully."

And Ruth let her have her way, that time, as she found that she could scarcely endure the calm, blue, staring eyes of the girl and listen to her innocent gabble concerning her own husband; so she called old Mage into another room and cautioned her to be very kind to poor Estrella and gave her quite a sum of money to hand to her, thinking, in this manner to defray the funeral expenses of the man whom she had believed to be the very soul of honor fired with an almost holy patriotism.

Old Mage received her directions quietly enough and used her own good judgment as to carrying them all out; her main idea was to relieve her mistress and this she did by assuring her that she would look after the girl and would ask her to come to see them again when she had in some measure recovered from her sorrow.

What she was saying to her own self we will not record but she relieved her own feelings, while attempting to help Estrella who was as innocent as her own young lady was, as she could see, for old Mage was seldom mistaken in her estimate of women, although men, as she expressed it, quite often "pulled the wool over her eyes."

CHAPTER VI

As the young girl descended the hill to the little village she reflected upon the splendor of the home she had just quitted and wondered if such wealth as was displayed there could take the place of the companionship of a loved and loving human being; she remembered the very sad expression of the great gray eyes into which she had peered for a few fleeting moments and she marveled at the memory, for, as it seemed to the inexperience of Estrella, Ruth Wakefield should have been as happy as a queen indeed for she had the proud position, almost, of Royalty among the peons to whose constant society she, herself, had had to be accustomed from her earliest recollection of society at all.

In spite of her own great sorrow on account of the sudden death of Victorio Colenzo she felt comforted, somehow, by the memory of the vital nearness of the woman who was so much her superior, as it seemed to her, in every possible way; she could not know that in Ruth Wakefield's gentle bosom there throbbed a deeper and more lasting agony than any that she, herself, had ever experienced ... she only saw her own position among those who had little sympathy for her, as all the girls she knew well, except little Tessa, envied her as having been the sweetheart of a man they all admired, and the young men, feeling that she was superior, in many ways, to the girls of their own type, were jealous of the handsome Colenzo who had won so easily what they had failed to even attract.

Chief among these latter was Manuello who called himself her half-brother, half in derision and half in rough sport, for well he knew that no similar blood flowed through their veins as Estrella had been taken care of by his own mother simply from motives of pity for a deserted and helpless orphan; this loving and unselfish mother had passed away some time before the opening of this tale and Estrella had taken full charge of the household affairs of the family among whom she had grown up, as being the eldest of the girls, having always been of a domestic turn of mind and wishing to repay the kindness of those who had cared for her when she was unable to do so.

As she walked along she remembered several little duties for her to perform yet that night, although she felt that she wished to devote her entire attention to the funeral arrangements that she had made for poor Victorio whose mangled remains still lay at the improvised morgue in the village.

Reflecting on these arrangements, she remembered the money that old Mage had given to her which was yet clutched in the hand that had received it; hearing a slight noise in the path ahead of her, she hastily thrust the money into the bosom of her gown and advanced, cautiously, for there was much unrest all over the Island of Cuba at this time and no one was really safe, either at home or abroad, as the Governor-General had issued positive orders to arrest without question all those who were, in any manner, detrimental to the ruling powers.

Estrella was aware, in a dim and uncertain way, of existing conditions, and, having been a participant in the recent uprising, she was afraid that she might be detained by the government, in which case, how she could attend to the sorrowful duty of the morrow was a problem too big for her to solve on the spur of the moment; with the thought of this danger in her mind, she stepped carefully to one side of the narrow path, hoping that whoever or whatever had made the noise she had heard would pass on up the hill without observing her; she was standing as still as

possible, fairly holding her breath and involuntarily clutching at the bundle of money in her dress, when she became conscious of the approach of someone or something from behind her and jumped, like a startled fawn, back into the path and down the hill at top speed; she knew that she was followed but did not stop until she had reached the door of the little cottage where she made her home; as she pushed madly at the door it yielded to her touch too quickly to have been moved by herself alone, and, hurriedly entering, she found herself face to face with Manuello who pulled her hastily inside and barred the simple door, saying testily:

"Why did you startle me so? Had I not known your step, I would have kept you out until you had told me who you were ... don't you know that we, who have made ourselves conspicuous in the recent uprising, are being closely watched by the authorities and are liable to arrest at any moment? Why do you expose us in this manner by staying out after nightfall and perhaps bringing the soldiers who are stationed in the block-houses upon us? Is it not enough that you are marked as being the sweetheart of our dead leader? Must you even stray about the country-side after dark?"

"Manuello ..." panted the poor girl, "I was so frightened ... someone was in the path and I jumped to one side and then someone came behind me and I ran! I did not mean to do wrong ... I went to see the lady at the mansion on the hill ... she asked me to come for she pitied me because of Victorio's death.... I am sorry if I did wrong by going, Manuello ... I hope you will forgive me ..." she ended, pleadingly, leaning against the door with one hand over her fluttering heart and looking up into his angry eyes.

His countenance softened in a moment as he gazed upon her delicate beauty, and stretching out his arms he said to her:

"Rest, little Sister, here, here upon my breast. All the others are asleep and you and I are alone. I would not scold you for the world, but we must all be as cautious as we can for we are living in very dangerous times."

Estrella evaded his offered embrace and hastened into her own little room after bidding him a short goodnight; she wondered, vaguely, what it was that had startled her in the path, but, in spite of everything, her healthy youth soon asserted itself and she was lost to her little world upon the earth with all its many disappointments and unknown turnings.

The day upon which Estrella made her visit to the mansion on the hill, as the residence of Ruth Wakefield was popularly known in the village of San Domingo, was a memorable one in the history of the Spanish-American war for it happened to be the fifteenth day of February in the year of our Lord and Master 1898.

Upon that fateful day secret preparations had been made by the agents of some of those who were then in power over the people of Cuba ... secret mines had been laid and large quantities of explosives had been placed in Havana Harbor with a set purpose in view; many of those who had been incarcerated in political prisons had been kept in total ignorance of the movements of Spanish troops in Cuba but most of the inhabitants of the Island had known that, for some time, some definite object with reference to our own United States was being considered by those who directed the Spanish soldiery.

Among those who had been apprised of what had been going on during the confinement of those who had been liberated the night before in San Domingo was Manuello; during the absence of Estrella from their home, that evening, this redoubtable warrior had been hobnobbing with the Spanish soldiers in the block-house nearest to the village and had discovered something of the plot to blow up a United States battleship in Havana Harbor; as it was known that the *Maine*, an armored cruiser of the second-class, had been lying in the harbor for some weeks, the young fellow was especially nervous, and, hearing Estrella's flying feet approaching their dwelling, he dreaded some new horror.

The little village of San Domingo was wrapped in the first sound slumber of the night. Good Father Felix had been dreaming, for some hours, of the heavenly home he hoped, sometime, to reach; old Mage had long ago forgotten all about her defense of her dear young lady, that day, and Estrella was far away from every human care.

But Ruth Wakefield was one of those who never sleep right through the dark hours of any night; from her earliest recollection, she had been wide awake, with a clarified vision of the affairs of daily life as well as of those that were quite beyond the world of men and women who were yet embodied, about the hour of two A.M., and, when she had some especially knotty problem to solve, she seldom slept for more than an hour or so at a time, but would waken to a consciousness of the facts of her human existence with a shock that would almost always cause her to jump as if struck a blow, which, indeed, was the exact state of affairs, only the blow was a mental one.

On this one night, having lost the most of the sleep she should have had upon the previous one, her bodily strength was almost entirely exhausted so that she sunk into a deep and dreamless sleep during the first part of the evening and woke, with a start, about nine P.M.

Rising from her bed, as was her custom upon awakening in the night, she approached one of the large windows of her own room facing Havana Harbor; she could see the lights from the various vessels lying at anchor and imagined that she could make out those of the *Maine*, which, as it represented her own native land to her, was, naturally, of deep interest to her; she fell to

imagining how it would seem to return to the United States on that great ship lying so peacefully and appearing to be so staunch and strong in the harbor below her window ... she wondered if it might not be better for her, now that she no longer had the keen interest in Cuba that she had only recently had, to go back to her own country and so possibly forget the dark eyes and lying lips of the man to whom she had given her virginity only to find it flouted and treated with disdain; for, try as she would to vindicate Victorio Colenzo, she was too just and reasonable to deny to herself that he had acted the part of a sneaking villain both to her and to poor, trusting Estrella, who had not had to see her dream of him lying in fragments at her feet, but who still believed that he had spoken the truth to her when he had told her that she was the only woman he had ever loved; she was too young to know that this statement is a regular trite and tried prevarication, common to almost all male lovers.

But Ruth, at present, was laboring under no delusions with regard to the man she had married, although his dead body was still unburied and she had not so much as said a prayer over his remains ... she knew beyond all shadow of doubt that he had been untrue to both of the women he had professed to love in San Domingo, and her mind was much distraught as she sat at her window and, gazed down upon Havana Harbor upon that memorable evening of February fifteenth, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight.

She had been watching a little boat plying back and forth between the wharf and the battleship which she had picked out among the other black hulks in the harbor as being the *Maine*, and was speculating, idly, what it could be about, as it seemed busily engaged in something of importance, when, all at once, a mighty detonation shook the entire harbor and the adjacent shore, making even her own stout residence tremble, and, where the majestic battleship had, only just a moment before, been a thing of beauty and power, there was nothing but a wild mass of flying débris and a raging furnace of belching, flaming fire.

Ruth Wakefield realized, even as the terrific explosion occurred, that here was a turning point in the affairs of state and that, in all probability, her own country would, after this, become involved in the war that had been raging in Cuba, then, for about three years; it was with mingled feelings of dismay and dread that she surveyed the activity that very soon became apparent both in the harbor and in the city of Havana; she could see the lights of the rescuing boats as they circled about the scene of the wreck and even hear the groans and supplications of some of the severely wounded survivors, for the night was clear and the light wind carried the sounds from the harbor up to her window so that her very acute hearing told her that this was no casual accident, but, in all probability, a carefully planned holocaust in which her own much-loved native land would, inevitably be involved.

Manuello was one of the first to rush out upon the streets of the little village after the terrific noise of the explosion had rolled away; he passed hastily from cottage to cottage asking the inmates if they were aware of the cause of it, for, being a little below the level of Havana Harbor, the inhabitants of San Domingo could not command a view of it.

As no one seemed able to give him any explanation of the disturbing detonation, he even dared to approach one of the block houses held by the Spanish soldiery; here, he found everything in confusion and excitement ... men were hastily arming themselves so as to be in readiness for whatever orders might come from their superiors, and Manuello found no one among them who seemed much better informed than he, himself, was; he imagined that what he had heard had been the result of the consummation of the plans upon which he had stumbled earlier in the evening and started to climb to the top of the hill upon which Ruth Wakefield's residence was located in order to gain a view of Havana Harbor.

Manuello had almost reached the very top of the hill before he realized that he had come out into the night without a weapon of any kind, and, no sooner had he made this disconcerting discovery than he became aware of some sort of movement directly in his rear; wishing to avoid whatever it might be, he hastily concealed himself and waited for the approach of his unseen companion in the darkness; the steps he had heard came along the path hastily, yet steadily, and the owner of them soon appeared; as he passed Manuello, the young fellow made out that the new-comer was none other than the village Priest who, as it seemed likely, was bent upon the same errand as the hidden peon; Father Felix kept on, sturdily, climbing the grade to the mansion on the hill; having reached the house he at once disappeared inside it and Manuello was again alone upon the hillside.

Gaining a point of vantage, Manuello looked down upon Havana Harbor, and, at once, decided upon the course that he must pursue to cover himself from danger of suspicion as to the possibility of his having participated in the terrible calamity that had befallen the United States battleship, for Manuello knew the exact location of the different ships then anchored in Havana Harbor as he had in his possession a map of it upon which he had drawn certain black crosses which indicated the positions of different vessels, also certain ingenious little flourishes told him the nationality of the various ships, so that he felt as sure as if he were right upon the scene that the battleship *Maine* had been blown up in Havana Harbor, that fateful evening, and he knew that there would be a searching investigation made as to what had caused the explosion, so that Manuello had this little problem to consider as well as the one concerning the sudden and mysterious death of Victorio Colenzo just as he was about to be liberated from the prison at San Domingo; for Manuello knew far more concerning that casualty than he had imparted to Estrella when she had so diligently inquired of him about it.

Father Felix found Ruth Wakefield and her little, frightened household fully awake as well as fully

aware of the nature of the episode that had startled him to such an extent that he had climbed the hill to ascertain the safety of the inhabitants of the mansion on the hill, for the good Priest pitied the mistress of the mansion far more than he did the poor girl in the cottage, knowing that added refinement often makes more poignant a sorrow that would inevitably be hard for any human heart to bear.

CHAPTER VII

All over the little village of San Domingo, on the morning of February sixteenth, 1898, the news spread like wild-fire that the United States battleship, *Maine*, had been blown up in Havana Harbor.

Manuello, having secreted his map in what he considered to be a safe place, and having remained quietly inside his own domicile during the balance of the night preceding the general acceptance of the salient facts concerned in the great disaster, ventured forth at daylight, hoping to discover the condition of the public mind with regard to it.

The first place he visited was one of the block-houses where he had hob-nobbed with the soldiers before the news of the explosion had reached them; here he found closely shut mouths and stern countenances meeting him on every side, as he was known to be engaged in stirring up strife and dissatisfaction among the peons of whom, to some extent, now that Victorio Colenzo was dead, he was an acknowledged leader; the soldiers, knowing nothing of what action would be taken by their own government, much less of how far the resentment of the powerful nation involved in the disaster would carry them, thought that discretion was, by all means, the better part of valor, in this instance, and, accordingly, had no private conversation with Manuello at all, being careful to have several of their number within ear-shot of every word he uttered; he, realizing the situation, after some few moments, went quietly away, glad, indeed, to escape so easily from among the armed hosts of Spain, for his own native country had been under the heel of Spanish oppressors for more than three years, at this time.

From the block-house, the young fellow proceeded to the dwelling of little Tessa for he had a sort of mild affection for her, knowing how profoundly she admired him and being flattered by her preference, while his own heart was set on Estrella, to win whom he had, indeed, committed a most terrible crime, for it had been his hand that had almost severed the handsome head of Victorio Colenzo from his strong and agile body, he having taken advantage of the confusion in the prison at the time of the liberation of the political offenders to vent his own jealous spite upon the natural leader of them all, little dreaming that he had cut off in his prime the husband of the lady of the mansion on the hill, but only congratulating himself on having removed from his own path a dangerous rival in the affections, not only of Estrella, but also of all of those with whom he, Manuello, hoped to advance his own interests; for Victorio Colenzo was a man to be feared by all those who opposed him as Manuello knew very well; now that his dead body was lying there in the little improvised morgue, it seemed to the young Cuban that his great influence would soon die away, and, so far as Estrella was concerned, he felt pretty sure of her as she was so near to him and would, naturally, lean upon him in trouble.

So that, he felt quite complacent as to the recent turns in his affairs, when he entered the rude home of little Tessa; he found that small, dark young woman standing quietly beside a window watching his approach; she turned to him, when another member of the family had admitted him, eagerly and expectantly:

"What do you think, Manuello?" she inquired. "What will be the result of last night's terrible disaster? Shall we, now, have the Americans to fight as well as the Spanish? Will the great United States hold us responsible for this crime? I wondered, right away, what you would think about it all and am so glad you have come over early. Is dear Estrella as well as we could expect under her distressing circumstances? Will the body of her lover be buried, today? Will this new trouble make any difference with the burial of the bodies in the morgue? Tell me everything you know, Manuello. Don't pay any attention to my questions ... just go ahead and tell me!"

She had come near to him as she kept asking questions, and was now beside him and had grasped the collar of his short jacket, for Manuello was something of a dude among his associates and was very particular as to his appearance, being proud of his straight, strong figure and broad shoulders which towered above many of the heads of his companions, so that little Tessa had to stretch her small, dark hands well above her smooth, black head in order to cling as closely as she desired to him.

The young fellow looked down into the eager face lifted toward his own and hesitated a little while before he answered her; diplomacy had become so much a part of his acquired habit that, even when it was unnecessary, as in the present instance, for Tessa trusted him implicitly, he still employed it:

"To begin with," he said, as if issuing a decree from a judgment-seat, "I do not think that the blowing up of the battleship, last night, will make our case in Cuba much harder than it already is ... in fact, it might be that the American government would resent the loss of their property and the murder of their sailors sufficiently to induce them to assist us in our struggle for

independence from the tyranny of Spain." He looked about him anxiously, as he made this last statement, for he knew that agents of the government might be in hiding almost anywhere. "As to the burial of Victorio Colenzo," he pronounced the name with some braggadocio, "and the rest, this disaster should make no difference as to that, for when human beings die they have to be buried somehow, no matter what happens." It was with secret satisfaction that he explained this last matter, for, so far as he was concerned, the sooner the body of his victim was under the ground the better he, himself, would feel, "and as to Estrella, as soon as she recovers from the loss of her handsome lover, I think she will listen to reason again and be the same nice girl she was before she ever met this stranger who came among us like a whirlwind and who has left us as suddenly as he appeared among us. Now, little Tessa," he ended, "I think that I have answered all of your questions ... suppose you answer some of mine ... for example," and he bent his bold eyes on her little face, "why are you growing to be so beautiful? Whom do you love more than anything else in the world? When will you be a married woman? Do you like me as well as you did when we were little children? Do you think that Estrella will ever marry me, now that she has lost her new lover? Are you my little friend in this matter and will you assist my cause with Estrella?" seeing a look of consternation spread over her countenance, he ended his category with, "Who is *your* lover, little Tessa? I know you must have one for you have grown to be very fair and winsome since we were shut up in that hateful prison."

"Manuello," said the girl, "I don't believe that I will ever marry.... I have no lover and I am not beautiful. Estrella does not love you, now, but she may learn to do so. I wish her to be very happy and if being your wife would make her so, and I see no reason why a girl could not be happy as your wife, Manuello, then I will do what I can to further your cause with her. I know she is in deep sorrow, today, and I intend to do all that I can to help her. Of course you know what arrangements have already been made. Father Felix will take charge of the ceremonies, I understand. I will accompany poor Estrella to the burial place. You may tell her that I will soon be with her."

The simplicity and truth of the young and innocent girl affected even the hardened heart of the murderer and the evident adoration with which she regarded him also had its effect upon him, so that Manuello trembled, inwardly, in spite of all his hardihood and determination to force his passionate love upon Estrella, as he intended only to use poor little Tessa's admiration for him to influence the older and fairer woman; the very fact that Estrella was, very evidently, not of his own race had a powerful attraction for his untutored imagination and, in secret, he often dwelt upon her difference from all the other women of his acquaintance, while he assumed toward herself an air of superiority, hoping thereby to attract her to himself as being above all of the others of their acquaintance; now that his successful rival was out of his way the young fellow looked forward to an early conquest of the heart and hand of Estrella, and, now that the Americans had become involved in the Cuban war, he hoped for the defeat of the Spaniards as he never had before. Therefore, he could well afford to be a little condescending to the young girl who still clung to his hands as if to her only hope of happiness and looked up adoringly into his smiling eyes.

Stooping toward her a little, he suddenly raised her in his strong arms and lifted her small, eager face to a level with his own; her lips were very near to his and were trembling for that very reason, so he stilled them by holding them for a passionate moment against his virile mouth.

Tessa yielded to his embrace without thinking of its import for Manuello was a strong and healthy man, full of the electrical attraction that goes with those of his build, and, like many uneducated human beings, the animal side of his nature was more fully developed than any other part of it so that almost any healthy young woman appealed to him in some degree and Tessa's evident affection for himself added to her power in this respect.

The two young beings were placed in the situation in which we have described them for only a very short space of earthly time, but it was sufficient to build up a barrier around Manuello that separated him from all the rest of the young men known to the simple-minded girl with whom he was only playing at making love, for all of that sacred emotion of which he was capable had been laid at the feet of the girl who had scoffed at his advances, for some years.

When he had set her, gently, upon her small feet again, Manuello addressed the small maiden in an almost wheedling tone, for he thought that he could, now, better control her feelings than before the episode of the past few moments:

"You *do* like me as much as before I was put away in prison, don't you, little Tessa? Estrella's aloofness from me on account of her crazy notions about Victorio Colenzo has not affected you with regard to me, has it? I can depend upon you as upon a faithful little friend, I believe I can, anyway ... how about that, little Girl?"

He bent his black eyes upon her as he asked the question, and, with his picturesque costume, dark face, up-tilted *mustachio*, as black as his heavy, curling hair, and his strong and agile figure, in many ways, he was as handsome as anyone upon whom Tessa's eyes had ever rested, for, to her simple mind, Victorio had been too much inclined toward intellectual pursuits to really appeal very strongly to her untutored mind and she had never been able to understand why Estrella preferred him to Manuello; now, she answered the latter in no uncertain language:

"Of *course* you can depend on my friendship ... of *course* I would always do anything I could to help you ... even ..." her voice shook over the words, "even with the woman whom you love and prefer to all the other women whom you know ... Estrella," she said this firmly as if to convince

even herself of the truth of the statement. "Estrella *is* superior to the rest of us girls around here ... she is of another race of people, I believe ... a superior race, I guess ... anyway," she ended naïvely, "I love her and do not blame *you*, Manuello, for doing the same thing."

It took a good deal of courage and loyalty combined for the girl to make the remarks we have just recorded here with her small mouth yet tingling from the kisses, for Manuello had not been chary of their number while he had the opportunity to bestow them, of the man whom she almost worshiped as earthly women adore merely human men, but she had waded through the above sentences, bravely, and felt better after having passed through what was an ordeal for her to undergo.

Manuello scarcely knew how to meet this plain exposition of the matter under consideration and quickly changed the subject of conversation, not wishing to go too far, all at once, with Tessa, as that might complicate his relations with Estrella, and, yet, feeling the need of some staunch friend, in case he should have need of one, for he realized, dimly, that he might easily be in danger, at any time, for various good reasons, for he had been implicated in many of the plots of the revolutionists as well as having secrets of his own to cover up; he was naturally cautious as far as his own safety was concerned and did not wish to involve himself any farther than seemed best for his own interests with Tessa, and, yet, he desired to have her assistance ready at hand in case he should have need of anything so feeble.

He had now fixed her previous regard for him upon a vital memory, so that she would not soon forget the few moments she had passed encircled by his arms, and this was all he cared to do in that line, at present.... Later on, in case Estrella still remained obdurate ... why ... that would be a far different matter; he had now arranged for himself a secret harbor in the simple heart of this uneducated girl, so that, if pursued too closely by cruel storms, out on the open sea, he could retire to it at will.

As for Tessa, after she had made her declaration of love for Estrella, she felt that she had performed her full duty in that matter, and went about her preparations for the affairs of that day, with an even lighter heart than before Manuello's short visit, for, after all, she had discovered that she was not at least repulsive to the man she had secretly loved for almost as long as she could remember anything, for they had grown up in San Domingo together and he had always been identified with her daily life; the beauty of her personal dream regarding the tall Cuban had been her motive in assisting in the liberation of the prisoners, mentioned in the beginning of this narrative, as she had small sympathy with Estrella's adoration of Victorio Colenzo, although she was willing to have her intimate girl-friend feel exactly as she had felt and pitied her with all her loving heart, now that she had lost, in such a terrible manner, the man she loved and who, as they both had believed, loved her.

CHAPTER VIII

When Manuello left the dwelling of the little woman of whose affection he was certain he hastened home to find out what attitude the woman he loved would take toward the new conditions in Cuba, as well as to ascertain what preparations she was making for the burial of the man whose earthly life he had, himself, taken, although she was far from imagining anything of the kind concerning either her dead lover or her so-called half-brother.

He found Estrella much perturbed as was to have been expected under the circumstances for he knew that she had been deeply enamored of the handsome stranger whose dead body was now being prepared for interment by the village undertaker to whom Estrella had given the money presented to her by old Mage, so that the man's body was being taken care of through the charity of his wife which had been bestowed upon his sweetheart neither of whom had been known to him at all a few months before.

As the hour for the funeral exercises drew near, a handsome carriage drew up in front of the humble door where Estrella made her home; from within it emerged no less a person than old Mage herself who had been sent by Ruth Wakefield to escort the sorrowing girl to and from the rude graveyard where the body of her own husband would be placed, that day; she had told good Father Felix what to do as to the simple services but had decided to absent herself from them, not being sure as to how much endurance she would have and being determined not to add to the grief of the innocent girl who had been deceived by the man whose name she had assumed but never been known by in her own family, even, as, at his especial request, she had kept the marriage hidden from all of her acquaintances except the few members of her own little household who were devoted to her and her interests and went about among the villagers very little, as what business they had was transacted in Havana instead of San Domingo.

Estrella was pleased and flattered by this attention from the lady of the mansion on the hill and entered the carriage to find Father Felix already there, for the carriage had been sent to the refectory before it came to her own home; she remembered the message little Tessa had sent to her so she asked old Mage to go to her dwelling for her, which was done, and completed the sad little group that rode directly behind the rude wagon which took the place of a hearse and which carried the body of Victorio Colenzo to its last earthly resting-place.

The grief of the young girl was very pitiful and, as they turned away from the narrow grave, old Mage felt moved to try to comfort her a little by distracting her attention from her sorrow; seeing Manuello lurking in the background as the funeral party were about to leave the cemetery, she said to Estrella:

"Will your brother ride home with us? I remember his face for he has brought fruit to our door and he told me, once, that you were his half-sister."

The poor girl stifled her sobs long enough to listen to the old woman's remark but made no other answer to it than to shake her head; little Tessa turned her face in the direction indicated by old Mage and saw Manuello with a look of diabolical triumph mingled with fear and hatred on his dark face so that, in spite of her love for him, his expression frightened her and made even her turn away from the sight of the great change in his countenance from what she had seen resting there only that morning.

Ruth Wakefield had spend the hour devoted to the funeral exercises of her own husband very quietly and in entire solitude; she was accustomed to the latter condition and there was no one among her acquaintances in whom she cared to confide except the good Priest who had done what he could to console and sustain her spirit through this trial that had been forced upon her by untoward circumstances and her own faith in humanity; she watched her own carriage descend the hill and pass into the little village ... she saw the small funeral procession as it wended its way along the palm-lined street ... she watched it enter the gate of the little cemetery and even saw poor Estrella as she alighted from the vehicle and leaned upon the arm of her small friend as she approached the open grave that was to contain the mortal remains of the man who had been, if only for a short space of time, her own husband ... and yet she did not faint ... she did not cry out ... she had had her fight with her own nature and she had won out after a hard struggle; all that was left of the love she had entertained for the handsome Cuban who had entered into her life so disastrously, was an open wound which time alone could ever heal.

When old Mage returned to the mansion on the hill she sought out her young lady and would have, in her usual garrulous manner, reported everything that she had noticed during her absence had she received encouragement to do so; on the contrary, she found Ruth, apparently, deeply interested in a large volume which she had placed on a table before her chair; she rested her head on her hands, from time to time, and only looked up to welcome her old nurse, then resumed the perusal of the page she happened to have open at the time of her entrance into the library.

Ruth Wakefield had always found her chief delight among her many good books; she browsed among them for mental sustenance and for spiritual solace and found rich pasturage; it had been said of her, while she was yet a small child, that, in case it ever became necessary to perform a surgical operation upon any part of her delicate body, an anæsthetic would not be essential, as all that she would need would be to have someone read aloud to her from some fine piece of literature.

So, in the terrible affliction that had so recently befallen her, it was as natural for her to go to her books for comfort as it would have been for another woman to go to some understanding friend, for that was what Ruth Wakefield found among her books ... understanding and safe friends who would never betray her secrets or her confidence in them ... who would never deceive and torture her and who represented to her the finest and best impulses in human nature as well as those higher sentiments to which she always clung and which, now, in this crisis of her life, carried her safely over what might have crazed a mind less well poised than hers.

The morning after the funeral exercises of Victorio Colenzo, Father Felix ascended the hill upon which Ruth Wakefield's home was located and sought her out, for the good Priest was much perturbed because of her present condition and went to see her with the intention of advising her to leave Cuba, at least for a time, as the situation with regard to her own country was almost certain to become acute, after the disaster of a few nights previous, and it seemed to him to be imprudent for a young woman to remain alone with only retainers about her among the wild people among whom he labored; for Father Felix knew far more of the nature of these people than many others possibly could and he realized that the wealth surrounding the Wakefield residence was in itself a menace to the fair owner of it; although he, himself, intended to remain among his parishioners under all circumstances, it did not seem to be a wise procedure for an unprotected woman to do so.

He had studied the situation over from many view-points and had settled on the best course, according to his judgment and knowledge of the situation, for her to pursue, and he, now, laid this course before her with the benevolent intention of assisting her to follow it in every way within his limited power:

"My dear Miss Ruth," he began, hesitatingly, for he was not sure of just what effect either her husband's violent death or the recent explosion in the harbor would have on her sensitive nature, "I wish that you would consider your own situation very carefully; you are now alone here except for those who are under your employ, and the people of the surrounding country are in a high state of excitement. At almost any moment, now, your own native land, to which you are devoted, may declare itself to be in a state of war with Spain, following the blowing up of the battleship; in that case, your situation, here, would be even more precarious than it is at present and it is far from being secure, even now; what I had thought of proposing to you is that you, at once, gather together what you consider to be the most precious of your worldly possession, here, and place

them in some storage building in Havana, leaving the house, here, with as few valuables as possible inside of it, then, with probably your old nurse as a companion and charge, return at once to your own country, anyway, until the war-cloud that is now hanging over Cuba has been lifted; it looks to me," he ended, "as if that would not be for some years yet ... of course America is a powerful country and if she takes this matter up in earnest, it may be that it will come to an end more quickly than I fear it may."

He waited, quietly, then, for Ruth to think over his remarks; she had regarded him earnestly while he had been speaking, and, now, sat with her hands folded in her lap for a few minutes before she spoke:

"Father Felix," she began, at length, "Father Felix, I appreciate the reasons that prompted you to come to me and advise me as you have just been doing; I understand that you consider me unfit to cope with the present situation under my circumstances and I wish to inform you that I do not intend to run away from my duty any more than you do. I take it for granted, Father, that you expect to remain with your people no matter what may come to them? I believe that the more need they may have of you, the more anxious you will be to serve them. Now I," she continued, earnestly and unwaveringly, "I have not done my full duty, up to now, among these people to whom you have devoted all of your energies; I feel that I owe my fellow-beings more than I have given to them in many ways, for I have been very much of a recluse, as you know, loving my books and enjoying my home and the natural beauties I have delighted in all around me; it may be, that, in the crisis that seems imminent, I may find some good work that will wholly absorb my energies ... it may be ..." she said, while a high resolve settled over her sensitive features, "it may be, good Father Felix, that I may be permitted to do almost as much good in our little world as you, yourself, are doing and have already done. Would you bar me from the proud privilege of sharing your labor and of receiving some measure of the rich reward which is awaiting you?"

Father Felix gazed upon her as if upon a being already translated beyond the common things of earth, and, realizing the firmness of her evident resolve, he extended his hands toward her in blessing. As she bowed her head to receive it there was a rapt look upon her face such as the holy angels who welcome the souls of the newly dead must have upon their features ... the inner consciousness of Ruth Wakefield shone through her earthly lineaments and transfigured them so that they were even more fair than they had been before.

"My Daughter," said the good Priest, "forgive me for proposing what I did; I did not fully understand you; from this time on, I hope that we may find much good work that we can do in common, for I would be proud and glad to be engaged with you upon our Father's business. Let us consult with each other in our plans for the betterment of the poor people among whom our lot in life has been cast. I was going to speak to you about the girl, Estrella," he went on, watching her face while he talked; "she is in need of different surroundings than she has at present, for she is not of the race of those with whom she has been staying; the young man who calls her his half-sister knows very well that she has none of his blood in her veins, and he is almost constantly tormenting her with offers of his heart and hand, when the poor girl is really a mourner for the man whom she believed, as you did, to be worthy of a good woman's love. The girl is strong and willing and capable beyond the common run of the people among whom she has spent her life thus far. I believe she would fully appreciate kindness and would repay it in every way in her power. What I have just thought of is, perhaps, impossible for you to do, at present, but it may be that, in the future, you may consider it. If you could bring yourself to have her in your home she would be safe from harm and might be a very great help to you if you carry on the work that is now in your mind to do. For," he rose to his feet and walked rapidly from one end of the room to the other, "if America declares war on Spain with a view to the independence of Cuba, there will be much heroic work for you and me to do, my dear Daughter ... there will be much work for us two to perform."

Ruth Wakefield also rose ... it seemed to her that the situation demanded that she meet it on her feet....

"Father Felix," she said calmly and softly, "Father Felix, have Estrella brought to me, today; let us begin our good work at once. There is nothing that my beloved country can demand of me that I would not be glad to give to its sacred cause. I believe that I can do more for my native land, here, in Cuba, at the present time, than if I should return to it, now. It may be that an American, with some degree of wealth and intelligence, can be of service, here, at this critical juncture in her country's history."

"Our native land could not have a better representative, my Daughter. As you know, I, also, am an American and I am proud, indeed, to claim you as a fellow-countryman. From now on we will more fully understand each other and I shall be glad to consult with you about many important matters. I will proceed at once to carry out your instructions with regard to the young girl of whom we have been speaking, for I feel that her case is one of peculiar importance, since I fully believe that she, also, is an American, although I have been unable, up to this time, to trace her parentage beyond the fact that a man, presumably her father, left her in the care of the woman who brought her up as one of her own children, in the little village below here. The poor girl has had a sorry life so far and really deserves better treatment than she has received, or so it seems to me from my finite stand-point. I do not presume to question the wisdom or justice of God, but, often, I am puzzled when I see the innocent suffer and the guilty escape punishment here in this world; I always trust in our heavenly Father implicitly, and, yet, at times, I am sorely put to it to furnish reasons for certain people having been placed in certain environments. I believe that all

this will be explained to us in good time, but many things are hard to understand while we remain finite beings with only the intelligence that has been bestowed upon humanity to reason with. Conscience," he went on almost as if talking to himself, "conscience is our infallible guide and was given to us so that we would never be without direction in whatever circumstances we may be placed. Now, in this instance ... I honestly thought that I was doing right to come here this morning and advise you as I did, and, yet, God, in His great Wisdom, guided you, at once, into the only path that you were ever meant to walk in ... the path that will lead you on to the peace that passeth human understanding."

After a little rather desultory conversation, with which he hoped to lighten the outlook of the lonely woman, the good Priest wended his solitary way down the hill and back to the scene of most of his labors among the ignorant people whom he hoped to help toward a better enlightenment, and, as he walked slowly down the path leading to the village, he turned and looked back at the mansion on the hill, crossed himself, and murmured:

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

CHAPTER IX

When Estrella reached the mansion on the hill she found its mistress quietly awaiting her outside the dwelling; she welcomed the young girl with out-stretched hands, saying:

"Father Felix has done well, indeed, to send you to me so quickly, Estrella. I want you to feel perfectly at home, here. Old Mage will take you to your own room and tell you what little duties you may assume if you wish to do so. When you have arranged these little domestic matters, come to me in the library and we will talk over some plans I have in which I think you will be interested when you have somewhat recovered from your recent loss. I know, from my own experience, that there is but one way to carry sorrow through one's daily life and that is to be busy. If one has enough physical energy and nervous strength, one can accomplish a great deal of good in the world in spite of personal sorrow. You are young and have not had an easy life so far ... it may be that I can assist you so that, from now on, you and I may be able to help each other in doing good work among those who are weaker than we are."

Old Mage was only too willing to take charge of the girl, for, while she did not really like the idea of having her in the family, yet, she was aware that Ruth needed companionship and she enjoyed having a goodly number of people around her as her life consisted, mainly, of what each day brought into it, for old Mage, while she was a good woman and a faithful friend, was not a thinker and made few plans for the future.

She led Estrella to the room that Ruth had arranged to have her occupy, and, having explained certain little matters to her concerning the daily round of life in the house, she began to question her as to what she had learned regarding the explosion in Havana Harbor and what she thought as to the probability of the United States declaring war on Spain on account of it.

The girl had little information to give to the old woman for she had been too much absorbed by her own recent grief to even think of any of the consequences that might follow the accident ... it seemed to her that if the whole United States navy were blown up, it would make small difference to her now that she had lost Victorio for he had represented to her everything that meant happiness for her in the future; she had yet to learn many things that would, eventually, bring to her the kind of happiness that is lasting and to be depended upon when all that is transitory and ephemeral has passed beyond knowledge and memory.

At length, old Mage wearied of quizzing Estrella and left her to her own thoughts which were confused and uncertain; she did not understand why the lady of the mansion had condescended to ask her to come to her for Father Felix had left her in doubt as to any reason, only telling her that Miss Ruth desired her to come to her, at least for a time, to act as a sort of companion as she was alone a great deal; he did not explain to her that there might be work for her to do in the near future, leaving that part to Ruth, very wisely.

Father Felix led his little flock into fresh pastures when he felt that they were ready for such a change but he reflected deeply before doing this and hoped, in the case of the girl under consideration, that companionship with one as unselfish and intrinsically good and noble as Ruth Wakefield would do more for her character than any counsel he could give to her; the good Priest was well aware that the handsome, young, dashing Cuban had fascinated both the women and he felt sure that, had he lived long enough in the same world with them, he would have broken both their hearts, for it was his nature, evidently, to gather flowers wherever he found them and throw them away to wither and die; Father Felix was a normal human being as well as a spiritual leader and he recognized facts with regard to human nature as he found them, not being deceived by appearances as a less intellectual person would have been, or as a man possessed of weaker masculine traits than those that had been bestowed upon him.

There was one among his parishioners of whose case he was doubtful ... he was very anxious concerning Manuello for he knew that the young man had some sort of guilty secret that he had confessed to no one and this was one reason influencing him in his endeavor to extricate the innocent Estrella from her immediate surroundings; he knew that, in the troubled condition of

the country, Manuello would be almost certain, with his wild and untutored nature, to get into some sort of tangle with authorities and supposed that the trouble he was well aware of as being on the young fellow's conscience had something to do with existing Spanish laws; he, himself, in breaking down the doors of the prison in order to liberate this man among the rest of the prisoners, had been guilty of violating a strict mandate and knew that he was liable to arrest at any time, but, now that America might come into the struggle on her own account, instead of simply through sympathy with the wrongs of the people of Cuba, he realized that his own case had taken on a new color, for, as he had told Ruth Wakefield, Father Felix was a native American and loved his own country devotedly, although he had been acting as a missionary in Cuba for some years of his active life in the priesthood; he was dwelling on the state of mind of Manuello, sitting quietly in his own place in the refectory, the evening after the events related in the preceding chapter, when he heard a hasty knock at his door and immediately opened it to admit the subject of his thoughts.

The young man entered as if upon a desperate errand and sat down in the first chair he found without waiting for the invitation of the Priest, a proceeding that, alone, showed the condition of his mind:

"Good Father," he began without introduction, "where is Estrella? She has not been home for some hours and none of the family seem to know much about her; all they told me was that I was to come to you for information ... and here I am."

The Priest looked into his eager face and pitied while he condemned him, for he could see that he greatly mourned the absence of the girl whom he had decided in his own heart to have for his own.

"Manuello," said Father Felix, at length, having regarded him with a sympathetic smile, "you must accept the situation as calmly as you can. I have to tell you that Estrella has found another home than yours and will, from this on, be under good care and will, I hope, find happiness later on in her career ... she is a good girl and deserves to be happy," he concluded, benevolently.

"Do you mean," demanded Manuello, "that I am not to see her any more? That I am to be shut out from her life? I want to know," he rose to his feet, "I demand to know what you have done with her? Have you placed her in some convent?"

His voice had risen as he added question to question and he faced the Priest with a fierce expression on his dark and lowering features. His attitude had no effect on Father Felix who was without bodily fear and knew that, in the present instance, at least, he stood upon safe ground, having, as he well knew, removed the girl from danger from the very being who, now, glared at him:

"My Son," he said, "my Son, compose yourself. I will brook no demonstration of vile anger from you. Estrella has been put beyond your power. I do not know," he went on, coolly, "just what it is that is upon your conscience at present, but I do know there is something that will not bear a close investigation by the authorities, and I advise you to have a care how you conduct yourself in the future. Cuba will have need of your strong arm and I hope that you will use it in her service."

Cowed by the sternness of the tone of voice in which he had been addressed as well as by his own guilty knowledge, Manuello, silently, and without thanks or regrets of any kind, left the refectory, slamming the door after him ... an indignity that few would dare to place upon their record; giving vent, inwardly, to the curses he did not dare to utter, he retraced his steps to his own home, intending to get what information he could from the other members of his family as to how Estrella went away; reaching his domicile, he, at once, began to ply his father, who had returned from his daily toil, with various inquiries, but found him not only uncommunicative but, apparently, also uninformed as to what had taken place during his absence; all that the other members of the family knew was that Father Felix had come hurriedly to the house and had a short conversation with Estrella when she had packed a few personal effects, of which, indeed, the poor girl had but few, and left the place, telling them she would see them again from time to time and leaving kind farewells for both himself and his father.

Then he remembered how intimate Estrella had always been with Tessa and decided his best course would be to go to her little friend, being well aware that any information she might have she would gladly give to him; he was hurrying along, intent upon this new hope of relief from his anxiety regarding the woman he imagined himself to be deeply in love with, when, all at once, he became aware that someone was following his footsteps, guardedly and yet with determination; immediately upon this knowledge, there stalked into the foreground of his consciousness the fear of discovery of his recent crime; the intimation of the Priest that he had suspected it had stirred within him the instinct of self-protection and he hastened his progress along the familiar and narrow street, hoping to out-distance his pursuer, whoever he might happen to be.

It seemed to him that he was succeeding in this last effort and he was congratulating himself upon his own celerity, when a hand was laid rather heavily upon his shoulder and a loud and insistent voice declared him to be the prisoner of the owner of it.

Instantly, Manuello became a beast of prey, cornered in its lair, and furious with all the animal instincts of self-preservation. He squirmed away from the heavy hand and whirled around to face his would-be captor and looked directly into the muzzle of a very capable gun held in steady hands that seemed well accustomed to its use.

"Up wid ye'er fists, ye dirty spalpeen ye!" commanded the man behind the gun, using his own rich native brogue in the excitement of the moment. "Hould 'em right there ..." he went on, as Manuello, instinctively, though sullenly, obeyed him, "til I snap these putty bracelets on ye'er wrists!" fumbling in his pocket with one hand while he held the gun in the other, steadying it against his shoulder, for he had come prepared, knowing his prospective prisoner to be a desperate character. "There, now!" having completed his search and placed a handcuff on one of Manuello's wrists. "Up wid that one and over to its mate!"

But his prisoner was indeed a desperate man and did not intend to yield to arrest as easily as it had appeared, at first; raising the manacled wrist, he brought the steel bracelets down on the red head of the Irishman, felling him to the ground; then it was but the work of a moment to secure the loaded gun, and, after that, the tables were completely turned for Manuello immediately became the master of the situation; looking hastily about him to be sure that he was unobserved, he was about to complete the utter defeat of the man who had given him such a terrific fright by beating his brains out with the clubbed gun, when he heard his own name spoken in a soft, low, scared voice; turning, he beheld little Tessa standing behind him.

"Oh, Manuello," she cried, breathing pantingly, "what has happened here? Are you hurt? There is blood on your wrist ... and ..." here she stopped in consternation, "what else have you here?" for the Irishman had done, at least, a part of his work well, having locked the handcuff which the young man had almost forgotten he was wearing, "Take the hateful thing off, dear Manuello ... do take it off ... I don't like to see it on your wrist."

"Easier said than done, my dear little Girl!" declared the victim, smilingly. "But we can fix that somehow; in the meantime, we will let this fellow lay where he has fallen. Someone of his tribe will, likely, be along, soon, and they can take care of each other. Come along, Tessa, we will see what we can do with this piece of jewelry ... it is rather unwieldy ... I don't like the look of it."

The home of the young girl was not far distant and thither they repaired; after repeated efforts to file through or break the manacles, Tessa bethought herself of one possible method of releasing Manuello and acted upon her idea at once; running out upon the street she approached the place where the soldier had fallen, for he wore the uniform of the Spanish army, intending to feel in all of his pockets for a key that would unlock the handcuffs.

As she drew near to the spot she heard low voices and crept along in the shadow of the shrubbery that lined the narrow street until she was within ear-shot; then she realized that two more soldiers had joined their fallen comrade whom they had resuscitated, so that he was relating to them something of the circumstances that had led to his present plight:

"Ye see, b'ys," he was saying, "I wanted to arrist the spalpeen myself because I think he is not only a revolutionist, but, also, a mhurderer ... a fella we arristed yesterday tould me that he thinks *this* wan killed the leader of thim all ... seems he was jealous of him ... they both wanted the same ghirl...."

Tessa, realizing that her errand was useless, turned to go back silently, but the words she had heard had burned themselves into her brain, and when she was again beside Manuello he seemed far different to her than he had before; she found him almost crazy from fear of discovery as he had failed in all of his efforts to free himself from the device that had been placed upon his wrist.

"Did you get the key?" he demanded, almost fiercely. "Where is it? This cursed thing is almost killing me!"

Frightened at his expression and regretting her inability to help him, the girl began to cry, lifting her apron to her eyes to wipe away her tears; as she did so, the young man said to her, angrily:

"Well ... *stand* there and cry while I am suffering ... you'll do a lot of good that way ... hustle out and see if you can't find some tool to get this thing off of me ... go to the village blacksmith and tell him some lie or other ... ask him how you can get an iron off your little sister's leg ... do something ... someone will come in and find me this way!"

"Even if they did, Manuello ... you are not under arrest ... the man don't know where you are, now; but I'll go and try to find some way to help you ... of course I will ..." said the generous-hearted girl, "I am *so* sorry for you, and, now, that Estrella is gone...."

She hurried out, then, leaving the young fellow in no pleasant mood, for he had much to reflect upon and a pair of heavy handcuffs hanging to one wrist is not conducive to a man's happiness.

Tessa soon returned and had to report that her efforts in his behalf were, again, unsuccessful, for the blacksmith had only said:

"Bring the child to me and I will do what I can for her."

Manuello was, now, almost in despair and he was wise enough to know that cursing, while it might relieve his feelings to some extent, would not really help the situation, so he pulled his sleeve down as far as he could over the manacled wrist and proceeded to find out what he could concerning Estrella.

Tessa would have felt much freer than she did had she not remembered the words of the soldiers concerning the crime of which they suspected the young man, and only told him that Estrella had come running to her, that morning, and had told her that she was going away for a while but that

she would see her again, soon.

Manuello had to content himself with this, hoping to find out more from Tessa within a day or so, and went away, divided between a desire to revenge himself upon the man who had tried to arrest him and self-congratulation upon his escape, but most of all he pondered how to get the hateful handcuffs from his wrist, for, besides being painful and unwieldy, he knew that they would attract attention to him.

CHAPTER X

Manuello was almost desperate regarding the manacles still clamped firmly on his wrist; it left his right hand free and he could use the fingers of the left hand, so he bound the wrist, placing the second handcuff above the one that was locked and laying it as close to the wrist as possible; he left his hand free as he could and simply told his family that he had cut the arm when engaged in practicing with the machete in the use of which weapon the Cuban insurgents were especially accomplished; this explanation of his supposed wound was sufficient and no one had any idea of the actual facts except Tessa and she was both too loyal to the young man and too frightened because of the reported crime he had committed to do anything but keep his secret inviolate; he depended upon her acknowledged affection for him and had no doubt that she would defend him if occasion required such a proceeding; his chief anxiety, at present, was to find out the whereabouts of Estrella, for he was of a fiery and passionate nature and the disappearance of the girl but added to his desire for her.

On the morning after the accident he had sustained he started out with the determination to discover where Estrella had gone, for, as she had said that she would soon see his own family as well as little Tessa, he reasoned that she could not have gone very far away; so he began his search by climbing to the top of the hill behind the village, intending to try to locate her hiding-place by the simple method of checking off in his own mind impossible localities for concealment and then deciding which of the probable ones to investigate; having reached the point of vantage he wished, he began by cutting out the refectory ... then his own home ... then Tessa's dwelling-place ... then numerous small houses where he knew it would be practically impossible for another human being to be entertained in.

Just as he had reached this point in his reverie, his attention was attracted to the mansion on the hill, and he began to observe, closely, the movements of every one who came to or went from the house; he did not really suspect that Estrella was there, but his mind wandered idly over the residences within his view and lighted upon the mansion on the hill as something different from the other dwellings he could see.

As he watched the gateway of Ruth Wakefield's residence, he noticed, emerging from it, old Mage whom he remembered as being there, in what he considered to be the capacity of an upper servant; he looked at the old woman because she happened to be in his line of vision and not because he had any curiosity concerning her movements; but the nature of the errand upon which she seemed to be bound not only surprised, but amused, him, for she carried in her hand a large basket of choice cut flowers, and, from time to time, as she walked along, she stooped to gather dried leaves that had fallen in the pathway with which she seemed trying to conceal the contents of her basket; she seemed satisfied, at last, and ceased to gather leaves, while she quickened her pace to a sort of slow amble which gait she maintained until she had passed beyond Manuello's view; he wondered, idly, why she covered the flowers, and was about to move to a point which commanded a more perfect view of the pathway, when his attention was again attracted to the gateway of the Wakefield residence.

This time, it was quite a different person who appeared between the high stone pillars ... a tall woman, evidently young and active, plainly but serviceably dressed, stood, for a moment, shading her eyes with her hand from the glaring sunlight, peering down the pathway along which old Mage had just been walking; she remained in this position but a very short time, however, for she was, soon, joined by another woman who seemed as much interested as she had been in watching the pathway; as the two young creatures stood there, side by side, Manuello could not but remark upon the similarity of their forms and general appearance ... both were evidently strong and agile ... both seemed possessed of bounding health and youthful vigor; it seemed to him that one of the women looked more sturdy than the other one did, but, as she was wearing a wide and drooping hat, such as many of the natives of the Island were accustomed to wear, he could not see her face; as she approached the woman who had first appeared in the gateway, there was something in her manner that seemed familiar to the young fellow, and, as she put one hand, gently, on the other's shoulder, he, again, seemed to recognize something familiar in the movement; then she spoke, and, although he was too far away to hear her words, he knew the tones of her voice, and realized that his search for Estrella was ended.

As this knowledge was fully impressed upon him he cast about in his mind as to what method of procedure to take to bring about his desired end which was to see and talk with the girl, himself, as soon as possible; first, he thought to approach the house as a fruit-peddler, but put that thought aside as unlikely to attain his object ... then, he decided to spy around the place until he located Estrella's own room, intending to bring his guitar and sing under her window some native love-songs, hoping to impress upon her his undying affection and imagining that, now that

Victorio was out of the way, his cause would be more likely to succeed than before.

He had started out to carry this intention into practice, leaving his original position among the heavy timber that skirted the hill, and going more into the open than before in order to more closely approach the house, when he became aware of another presence in the wooded section that he had just left; he could not make out just what this presence was ... his ideas concerning it were hazy and uncertain, but he felt sure that he was not alone and, now that he had left the timber, it seemed to him that the unknown presence was following close behind him; he turned sharply around but discovered nothing behind him and kept on in the direction he had been proceeding in, although his nerves were keyed up and ready to jump at the slightest sound; suddenly, directly in front of him, he heard a voice saying:

"Do not approach any nearer to her. If you insist upon doing so you must take the consequences which are freighted with bitter pain for you."

It seemed to Manuello that this voice was within himself and came from his own thoughts and, yet, it seemed, also, to be in the pathway ahead of him, separated from him and yet a part of him; he hesitated, as above everything else, the natives of Cuba are superstitious and Manuello was no exception to this rule; his own criminal record, naturally, made him timid; besides, Estrella's evidently favored position as a member of the household of Ruth Wakefield elevated the girl in his estimation, for everyone in that neighborhood had great respect, amounting almost to veneration, for the inmates of the mansion on the hill.

The young man stopped in his progress toward the house and turned his attention, for an anxious moment, to his manacled wrist, which gave him a great deal of uneasiness and some suffering as well; as he held this wrist with his free right hand, he had his back toward the path that led down into the village, and was unaware of the nearness of Father Felix until the good Priest touched him on the elbow; wheeling round, instantly, he faced the only man he was not afraid to meet among his neighbors; for, although the Priest had told him he knew that he possessed a guilty secret, yet he, also was aware of Father Felix' usual kindness and protection exercised over his people, so that it was with a feeling of relief that he discovered who the new-comer was.

"My Son," said the Priest, "you are abroad early ... what news have you heard in the village, this morning?"

Manuello looked at him searchingly as if to discover why he asked him this question, wondering if he had heard of his own encounter of the evening before, but failing to gain any knowledge of the secret thoughts of the Priest, he said at random:

"Everything is about as usual, I guess ... nothing startling seems to have happened during the night."

"I heard," began Father Felix, "I heard that a soldier had been struck down by some marauder shortly after the time of your leaving my society, last night, and I thought you might have happened to be in the vicinity of the crime. By-the-way," he went on, solicitously, "what has happened to your left wrist?"

"Oh ... that!" said Manuello, carelessly. "That is simply a love token from the machete of a friend of mine while we were sparring for practice; as you said, last night, Cuba may have need of us fighting-men soon, and we wish to be ready to take our proper place when the time for action comes."

"Well, be careful of your weapons, my Son ... save your steel for your enemies and those of your native land."

Speaking in this manner, the good Priest pursued his journey up the hill and disappeared within the gateway where Manuello had, only very recently, seen Estrella standing with the mistress of the mansion; he decided, under the existing circumstances, to retrace his steps toward the village, contenting himself with the thought that he now knew where Estrella was; he thought that he might as well impart this information to little Tessa, and, also, he wanted to find out whether she had heard anything more about his encounter with the soldier on the street, also if she had thought of any way whereby he might be freed from the manacles which became more and more distressing and uncomfortable.

With this thought in his mind, he was approaching Tessa's home when he was intercepted by the very individual he meant to inquire about.

"What the divil!" exclaimed the Irishman. "Sky-larking by daylight *this* toime, me foine high-way-mon?"

Manuello had drawn back, prepared to again bring the hated handcuffs down upon the poll of the man before him, if he offered any indignities, when he was surprised to notice a wheedling tone in the voice of his opponent of the evening before.

"Indade, mon," began the soldier, "I am in need of those putty bracelets I gave ye, last night; a prisint like them is not bestowed ivry day, I tell yees. The only thanks ye give me was a crack on me head wid em which took away but little of me sinse as I had but little in the beginning.... I might have known betther than to have tackled a foine, up-standin' fella like yees, single-handed. Yer a foine figure of a mon, me Frind, and I'd like mighty well to serve be the side of ye ... how would it *do*, now, fer ye to enlist in the army and give me back me bracelets if I spake a good

worrd fer ye wid me Captain?"

Manuello looked at him in surprise, but, seeing a chance to get rid of the hateful manacles, decided to agree to the proposition of the other, at least for the time being.

"All right," he acquiesced, "go ahead and take these cursed thing off me, first, and then tell me where you want me to go."

The wary Irishman watched the face of the Cuban, doubtfully, but, as he really wished to be able to account for the handcuffs, he took the key from his pocket and stepped a little closer to the young fellow in order to use it, being careful to keep a firm hold on his gun the while; just as he was about to unlock the manacles, he heard a slight noise behind him and looked out of the tail of his eye to be horrified by the near proximity of one of his superior officers; instantly, he changed his attitude toward Manuello, dropped the key, and pointed his Mauser rifle straight at the heart of his prisoner.

"Ye will ... will yees?" he cried out. "Oi'll see about that, ye Spalpeen! Shtand shtill unless ye want a bullet in yer gullet! Now, Sir," he said politely to the officer, "ef ye'll be ahfter clicking the other bracelet on his right wrist whilst I kape him covered, Oi'll be much obleeged to ye. He's a nasty customer, Sir," he explained, kindly, "and Oi've been havin' a rough toime wid 'em."

The Spanish officer stepped gingerly up to the prisoner, seized hold of the manacled wrist and reached for the other uplifted hand; but Manuello had had enough of their society and proceeded to rid himself of it by striking at the officer with his left wrist while he made a grab at the rifle of the Irishman with his right hand; the young Cuban was wiry and his muscles were like taut steel; the officer went down like an ox before the slaughterer but the Irishman discharged his gun regardless of the aim which had been destroyed by the action of the living target; the result was disastrous to all parties for Manuello felt a sharp, stinging pain in one of his legs, but, in spite of this, he clubbed the rifle and brought it down over the skull of the Spanish soldier, limping away, again a conqueror, but sorely wounded, for the bullet had passed clear through the injured limb, tearing through the flesh and bone as is the manner of the long and slender Mauser missile.

In this emergency, the young fellow, knowing that he would be hunted after the last encounter, not only because of the crime of which he had tacitly been accused by the soldier but because he had struck down a Spanish officer, and realizing that, with the manacles still locked upon his wrist, he was a marked man, bethought him of a deserted hut far back among the palms that grew all over the Island in tropical profusion; if he could but reach this hut, he thought, and first apprise Tessa of his new mishap, he might hide there while he recovered from his wound which was beginning to give him great pain as it recovered from its first numbness.

Walking as erectly as he could under the circumstances and keeping his left wrist well covered by the wide cuff of his jacket-sleeve, he was proceeding along the familiar street, when he met the girl he was in search of, strolling placidly along, little dreaming of the imminent peril in which he had just been placed, for the discharge of the Mauser rifle had been almost as silent as smokeless; telling her in a few hurried sentences of his great need and describing to her the location of the ruined hut he had in mind, Manuello retired from the scene.

CHAPTER XI

Tessa was very much distressed as to the condition of Manuello and, feeling that he depended upon her alone, cast about in her mind as to how she could assist him; to begin with, she was anxious about the heavy handcuffs hanging to his poor wrist, as she put it in her gentle thoughts of the man whom she suspected of being a murderer; if, however, the charge against him were true, she felt that the crime was committed in the heat of a jealous passion, and being what she was, herself, she excused it for that reason, for a Cuban girl is apt to love as madly and as unreasonably as any man ... to her, Manuello was almost a demi-god ... it had been a hard trial for the little woman to give him up to Estrella, even, and, now that he was in dire need and the girl of his first choice had deliberately deserted him, it seemed to her as if she had the right to let her own wild love guide her in all that she did with regard to him.

She was slowly retracing her steps to her own home with the intention of getting some supplies and managing to evade the vigilance of the rest of her family sufficiently to carry them to the man she loved ... her eyes were directed to the path along which she walked, idly, yet, all at once, those dark eyes lighted up with sudden joy and she hastily swooped down, like a fluffy little bird upon a morsel of food, and took into her hand a small and intricate-patterned key; she hoped that this was the key that would unlock the hated manacles from Manuello's wrist and, regarding this as a good omen, she concealed the little deliverer in her bosom, tying it in the corner of the kerchief that was crossed upon her breast.

When Tessa had secured what necessities she found available on the spur of the moment, she at once concealed them as far as possible and prepared to ascend the side of the hill toward the ruined hut where Manuello had directed her to come; her heart was fluttering wildly for this was her first secret mission, as she had always had someone near her during her short life on earth: she wound her way among the cactus plants that covered the ground in almost all directions, with an unerring instinct that was of more value to her than any education could have been for

the moment, for one unaccustomed to the wild cacti in Cuba might, easily, become bewildered, as it is necessary to walk almost in circles among the thick clumps of prickly foliage.

Tessa was young, but the women of Cuba, like those of most tropical countries, mature early in life, and she already had the strong maternal instinct that is a part of normal womanhood; this instinct now directed her to watch over Manuello as if he were, indeed, her child, instead of the man to whom she had given the first wild love of her fiery nature; for women are made that way ... no matter what their own body may demand of them, it is as natural for them to put all personal feeling aside and allow a higher, more unselfish love to rule them entirely, as it is for a man to, first gratify his own desires, and, then, if so be he can without inconvenience to himself in any way, minister to the wants of the woman in the case, all well and good, but if, on the contrary, to care for the woman would, in any way, cause him to exercise self-control and self-sacrifice, why, of course, he seeks another woman as soon as he can well rid himself of the one who has flouted him; I am now speaking of the general run of men ... there are exceptions to this rule, of course, just as there are exceptions to the rule just stated regarding women ... not all women are as little Tessa was, but most of them are and it is indeed fortunate for the world of men and women that this is as it is ... wonderful beyond the ways of human beings is the love of a pure woman ... wonderful and worthy of the highest respect and devotion of any man is the almost angelic love that women often bestow on most unworthy objects.

It was so in this case, for, while the girl was winding among the cacti that hindered her advance up the hill, the man was lying in a miserable heap in the corner of the deserted hut, cursing not only his own hard luck, but even the girl on whom he depended for sustenance and care; with maledictions on his tongue and the heavy manacles on his wrist, and with the increasing pain and torment of his undressed wound, the poor fellow was far from appearing much as had the gay peasant who had congratulated himself on having escaped from prison, and, at the same time, having rid himself of his rival in the affections of Estrella, who, now, seemed lost to him.

When the girl reached the ruined hut she found the object of her loving care under the circumstances described above, and it took all of her courage to face the situation alone and unaided by surgical skill for they both realized that discovery would be almost certain to be fatal to the man who now lay groaning and cursing by turns, even while his ministering angel in human form knelt at his side and unlocked the handcuffs from his wrist, for, luckily, she had happened upon the very means of deliverance from the manacles for which they had both longed; then Tessa gathered dead palm branches with which she fashioned a rude bed for the sufferer, after which she raised his head upon a small pillow which she had thoughtfully brought with her, for she was a sturdy little peasant and could act as a beast of burden without harm to herself; having fixed him up as comfortably as she could, under the hard circumstances, she insisted upon his eating and drinking some of the refreshments she had carried up the hill for him; she had used what skill she had in bathing and binding the wounded leg, and, as the bullet had gone clear through, there was little else to do so far as that was concerned; then they began to consult as to what method of procedure would be best for them to take; in this, of course, Manuello thought only of himself, as was natural to a man of his type, while little Tessa, as was also natural to one of her trusting and loving disposition, also thought only of his comfort and safety.

"I must come to you each day until the wound heals, my dear Friend," said the earnest little woman. "I must bring you what you will need and I must be very careful not to be detected in doing this. I wish ..." she ended, earnestly, "I wish that dear Estrella could come and see you for it would do you more good than anything that I can do for you."

"You are a darling little girl, Tessa," said her turbulent patient. "You ought to satisfy any reasonable man; Estrella don't care anything at all about me, and I am beginning to think that I can get along without her as long as I can have you."

The adoring look in his dark eyes as he said these words was like manna in the wilderness to little Tessa, for she could not help being pleased to think that, after all, maybe Manuello would fix his affections upon her small person, since Estrella had so often flouted him and shown him plainly by her great preference for Victorio that she did not love him; the name she had just used in her thoughts brought up the hateful suspicion aroused in her by the remarks of the Irishman who had seemed, at first glance, to be a Spaniard, but who, as soon as he opened his mouth to speak, proved his nationality beyond the shadow of a doubt.

But the loving girl put her thought aside almost at once ... she did not wish to believe the suspicion to be true and she did not intend to believe it—until she had to, if such a sad time could ever come to her; just at present all the strength of her being was concentrated upon the desire to aid Manuello in whatever manner she could.

To further this desire, she arranged a signal whereby he might know that she was coming up the hill and concealed, as well as she could the approach to the hiding-place as well as the hut itself, by throwing, in apparent disorder, as if blown by a strong wind, such branches and twigs as she could find by a hurried search.

She did not stay any longer than she thought was necessary for the comfort of her patient for she was determined to continue her care of him if possible and realized that a prolonged absence from her own home might bring suspicion upon them both; as she was leaving, she looked pitifully weak and small to cope with such a complicated situation alone; even Manuello realized, for a moment, the devotion of the girl, and called her over to his side to say a word or two at parting.

"Dear little Tessa," he began, "this is going to be a hard task that you have undertaken. I wonder if I am worth all this trouble. Perhaps you would just better turn me over to the soldiers and let them work their will on me; it may be that I will never be able to reward you for all your care; of course, it may, on the other hand, be possible for me to offer you help and comfort when you, yourself, may be in need of it. Now that you have freed me from those shackles, I begin to feel my old strength and courage coming back, and if I ever am again as I was before this last mishap, I will surely reward you somehow for all this sacrifice that you are making for me."

This speech, coming from a man in the condition of Manuello, appealed to the little woman so forcibly that she knelt beside his rude couch and laid both her small, dark hands on his brow as she looked deeply into his eyes; this position, being very favorable to the impulse that came over the man as he lay there, made it easy for him to draw her head, with its great mass of black hair, down upon his shoulder; as her cheek was laid against his own, Manuello held her small face closely with both his hands while he kissed first her trembling lips, then each of her eye-lids, for she had closed her eyes in a sort of blind ecstasy, then her low forehead, then the top of her small head and, finally, her quivering chin.

The impulse that prompted him to give these welcome caresses lasted only a moment for the pain in his leg was beginning to be very insistent and a groan of agony took the place of the loving words that had been upon his eager tongue during the moment when he forgot his wound, but the effect of those few wild moments of unbridled passion went with the little woman down the hill and covered her small body with a delicious glow that took away much of the terror and apprehension with which she viewed the situation in which she found herself.

Ruth Wakefield found Estrella to be much more of a companion than she had thought she would, and found that, in the innocence and naturally responsive disposition of the girl, she could almost forget the tie that had brought them together; had the girl suspected the truth as to Victorio's relations with the mistress of the mansion on the hill, the situation might have been strained or even acute, but, as it was, Ruth only pitied, while she almost envied, the sorrow of the sweetheart of her own husband.

On the morning when Manuello had discovered the where-about of Estrella, the two women had been watching for Father Felix, intending to consult with him concerning something that they both wished to do and yet were not sure of the wisdom of; when he came, they both waited, anxiously, for his first words, for they depended upon them for enlightenment regarding a question in which they were both much interested.

"Miss Ruth and Estrella," he began, addressing both women, "I have great news for you but we must be cautious in discussing what I have to impart to you; if, through our carelessness, the information I am about to give you, should miscarry, it might mean almost as great a disaster as the recent explosion in Havana Harbor. We must be sure that we are not overheard. I think we would better repair to the library, Miss Ruth, if that would meet with your approval. I think we would be more secure from eaves-droppers inside the house than here. I just met Manuello, my Dear," he said speaking to Estrella, "as I came up the path. I do not like to have him lurking around your dwelling-place. I am sure that he is in some sort of hiding from the authorities and I dread to have him near you, for he has an evil look in his eyes, lately. Be very careful, my Daughter, as you go about the place or into the village ... it might even be well for you to remain away from your former home for some time to come. I can carry any news of you that will be necessary for them to know or do any little errands that you may think should be done. By-the-way," he ended, turning his attention, once more, to Ruth, "I met your old nurse hurrying along down toward the village as if in great haste; as she does not often walk down the hill I noticed the circumstances."

"Old Mage!" exclaimed Ruth. "Why, I did not know that she had gone out. Do you know anything of this, Estrella? Did she tell you that she had work to do in the village? Was there something that had to be secured for the larder, at once, that would not brook delay? Dear me, I hope she will not over-tire herself. She is not very strong any more and I try to have her, always, take very good care of herself. As you may know, good Father," she went on, "old Mage is almost the only living human friend on whom I can rely and her fealty to me is beyond question. If I should find old Mage untrue to me," she declared, "I would not expect the sun to rise the following morning. I must look into this, and, if you will excuse me for a few moments, I will do so at once."

"Now, my Daughter," said the Priest when Estrella and he were left alone, "I wish to say to you, privately, that you must, from this time on, avoid meeting Manuello in any way, both for yourself and also for the well-being of your good friend, Miss Ruth; the fellow is evil-minded, lately, and I believe would not stop at robbery or even, though I greatly regret to think so, *murder*," he uttered the dreadful word softly but emphatically, "if he believed that he would benefit by either crime and I must urge you not to allow him to come here to see you under any possible circumstances. As I said before, I can do what must be done as between your former family and yourself."

Estrella gladly acquiesced in this good judgment of Father Felix and agreed to do all in her power to avoid meeting Manuello which she had no desire, personally, to do, as she dreaded his protestations of love as much as she would have dreaded his anger for any other reason in the common affairs of daily life.

In a short time, Ruth returned, explaining that old Mage had, indeed, gone down to the village, though for what purpose she had been unable, so far, to discover: they, then, repaired to the

library and carefully closed all doors and windows before Father Felix began to tell them what they were so anxious to hear.

"My dear Friends," he began, "the information that I have to impart to you is of a very delicate as well as secret nature and must be so regarded by both of you. Estrella, to you, especially, I wish to say that you must not, under any circumstances, breathe a single word of what I will say to you for it is of vital importance to the native land, as I believe, of all three of us. For I have reason to think that you, as well as Miss Ruth and myself, are an American. I know that all of your sympathies are with our native land, at least, and, in trusting you with this information, I am, in a measure, making you one of us in deed and in truth, whether you are so by reason of your birth or not. Before I go any further, I want your assurance of what I believe to be true."

He waited a moment for the girl to speak, then, seeing her evident embarrassment, he added, kindly:

"You need have no fear of either of us, Estrella. If you have friends in this wide world, you are with two of them at this moment."

At these earnest words, the expression of the girl's face changed somewhat and she replied to the implied interrogatory of the Priest:

"I, also, believe that I am an American, although I do not know anything of my own parentage beyond what my foster parents have told me. I do not even know," she blushed while she made the statement, "whether my father and mother had been married before my birth.... I have no means of finding out anything more of myself than that I am an honest girl and that I am deeply grateful to both you and Miss Ruth for your great kindness to me in my great sorrow. As far as my fealty to America is concerned," she ended, proudly, "I am as true to that great country as anyone who knows himself to be a citizen of it. I would, gladly, lay my feeble life upon the altar of what I believe to be my native land ... the United States of America."

She pronounced the words with reverence and bowed her head as if in prayer, so that Father Felix no longer hesitated, but proceeded, at once:

"At this moment, an American squadron is in Asiatic waters, ready to move, at the moment its Commander receives the cablegram from the President of our own country, against the Spaniard, almost on his own territory. By this move it is hoped to so cripple him that we, here, in Cuba, may, with the help of our soldiers and sailors, conquer and drive from the Island those who have so long usurped the places of great power among us."

When the good Priest had pronounced these fateful words, he found his two auditors sitting erect, as if at attention, with hands folded in their laps, and eyes fixed upon his face in breathless eagerness. Ruth was the first to break the silence.

"I pray the good God," she said, softly and reverently, "I pray God to strengthen the hands of those who are to do this great, good work! I trust that those who will be engaged in battle may be prepared to meet their Maker with clean hearts, if with bloody hands. War," she cried, suddenly, losing her attitude of prayer in the violence of her emotions, "war is a terrible calamity but it seems that, only through war can a nation be purged of such foul crimes as have been committed right here in Cuba."

Estrella watched her with flashing eyes and sympathetic expression and the good Priest crossed himself and clenched his fists at the same time, for, had occasion required such action at his hands, it was evident that Father Felix could have changed from the spiritual guide to the fiery enthusiast willing to take his place among the fighting men who would defend what he believed to be a sacred cause.

"Now, Father Felix," demanded the practical side of Ruth Wakefield, "what action can we take in this matter to help the good cause? Is there not some preparation that we can make to welcome our soldiers to Cuba, for, of course," she lifted her head, proudly, "our boys will win whatever conflict they may become engaged in ... it is only a question as to how many of them may be injured or even killed in the terrible encounter. Every man in America," said this American woman, "is a soldier if he is needed in that capacity, for every American, man, woman or child, is a *patriot* ... devoted to the sacred traditions and splendid example of those who followed *George Washington* to victory over those who had oppressed and insulted them."

"My Daughters," said Father Felix, rising, "I must leave you for the present. I will find out what we may do to assist our countrymen and will come again to let you know the result of my search for further information. All we can do, now, is to hold the information I have just given to you inviolate and prepare ourselves, spiritually, to meet whatever emergency may arise. My Daughters," he ended, stretching out his hands in blessing over their bowed heads, "we shall have work to do and we will do it with our might. May God, in His great Mercy, guide us into the path in which He intended us to walk."

CHAPTER XII

On the day of Manuello's search for the girl he had so madly and hopelessly loved, old Mage

made a surreptitious visit to the little cemetery in San Domingo where she had seen the body of Victorio Colenzo laid away in its final resting-place; she went among the new-made graves, of which there were a goodly number for so small a graveyard, until she found the one she sought: she stopped, then, took the dried leaves from the top of her large basket, removed a beautiful bunch of roses, tied, carefully, with a broad blue ribbon, and laid them, softly, upon the top of the mound of fresh earth; after having done this, she took a small object wrapped in tissue paper, from the very bottom of the basket, dug a small hole under the roses and buried it, covering it carefully, packing the ground over it, at first, and, then putting loose earth over the top of the miniature grave, so as to conceal its existence as much as possible, she again laid the roses carelessly over the spot.

Having performed this little ceremony, old Mage looked down at her handiwork and said, apparently addressing herself, as no other human being was in sight at the time:

"There! *Now* I hope that she will forget all about him ... she will think that she has mislaid the ring ... I had a hard time to get hold of it. I hope that it will never come to life again any more than him ... let them both lay there together. You lying pup, you!" she cried, shaking her trembling old fist at the grave. "You *lay* there and don't you ever try to come near my dear young Lady again! The *idea* of an ignorant thing like you ever daring to come near her, anyway. I wouldn't be so darned mad at you," she ended, "for you were a mighty good-looking fellow and any woman might have been proud of your appearance, once she could overlook your dark skin, but you even fooled *me*, doggone you! You *lay* there, now, and never do you dare to try to fool any more women ... three of us is enough in *this* neighborhood, anyway."

She drew a long sigh of relief after this speech and hurried out of the cemetery with her empty basket; she had slipped away when she thought no one was observing her and intended to tell Ruth after her return what she had done with the exception of any reference to the ring which, as the reader may have guessed, was the wedding ring that Ruth had, up to this time, kept always on her left hand or in her jewel-case on her little dressing-table before which she always sat when she combed and brushed her long and beautifully luxuriant brown hair; she had taken the ring off the night before, little dreaming that she was touching it for the last time, and sadly laid it among her jewels, thinking of the bright face and laughing dark eyes that had looked so handsome to her when he had put that little ring upon her finger, whispering of his undying love and of the fact that she and she alone was, and had been since his first meeting with her, the entire mistress of his hither-to untouched heart; she had even shed a few tears over the little ring, then, and old Mage, silently witnessing this fact, determined that she should never again have that opportunity; so, after Ruth was sweetly sleeping, the old woman slipped into her room and removed the object of her scorn; she lay awake almost all of that night, planning how to secrete or do away with the visible bond that had united her dear young Lady to an unworthy mate; at length, toward daylight, it seemed to old Mage as if someone had whispered to her what to do with the ring so that poetic justice would be done to the first youthful passion of Ruth Wakefield's innocent life; acting upon this suggestion, for so it seemed to her, feeling sure that she had solved the problem so nearly affecting the life of the one she loved best in all her world, she carried out the plan she instantly formed, and, while she was a very weary old woman, from lack of sleep and unusual exercise, when she again reached her much-loved home, she had within her spirit a sense of satisfaction that was beyond anything she had felt since Ruth had married the man whose grave she had, that morning, visited; she felt, in some sense, to blame for the marriage, as she had not strenuously opposed it, and found herself much in the position she used to occupy when Ruth had been a little tot and she had allowed her to do some small thing of which she knew her parents would not approve.

Now, she felt relieved because, as it seemed to her, she had sort of evened up matters, and, after informing Ruth that she had gone to the grave and put the roses there, she never intended to speak of Victorio Colenzo again, and, as far as possible, she intended to rid Ruth of his memory; with this thought in mind, she picked up many little mementos of him which she found lying about the place ... a guitar here and a ribbon there ... a photograph, perhaps, showing the dashing young Cuban in military dress, which much became him, or mounted on a fine horse which he, for the moment, had secured the use of ... even in one picture he appeared standing, proudly, behind Ruth as if protecting her; all of these and anything else that old Mage could find that would inevitably remind Ruth of the man she had married, she destroyed ruthlessly and with inward glee; her object in all this was, really, to protect her dear young Lady, and, yet, at the same time, she had as nearly a fiendish delight as it was possible for her ever to entertain, in, as she naïvely put it to herself, "getting even" with the handsome fellow who had "pulled the wool over" her own eyes as well as the brighter and stronger ones of her young Lady.

Ruth Wakefield was never enlightened as to this little by-play, but she reaped the benefits of it in many ways, for it is true that visible reminders are necessary to a great many people, and, even the strongest minds are affected by the sudden sight of something reminding them of some object formerly dear to them; it will give almost anyone a start to come, unexpectedly, upon a picture or almost any tangible token of someone once dear, no matter what may have happened to take away that quality; lovers, by preserving evidence, like withered flowers, pictures, songs and poems, often lay up for themselves future agony of spirit ... the objects that are so dear to them may turn about and rend their inmost souls; full many times, it were better had the love-tokens been destroyed in some such way as old Mage did away with the visible memories attached to the objects which her eager hands closed upon; this secret employment, necessarily long drawn out, as she did not wish to be discovered in her labor of love, took up a good deal of

the extra time she found herself in possession of on account of the presence of Estrella in the home, for the girl took up many household duties, gladly and naturally, knowing that in work she could, to some extent, forget her own sorrow, and wishing to lighten the labors of old Mage who was always kind to her.

After the information imparted to Ruth by Father Felix, regarding national affairs, she was very thoughtful and very busy, for there were very many ways in which she could make preparations to begin the duties which she expected to take up as soon as occasion would require them of her; she studied into trained nursing and found a sort of school in Havana to which she took Estrella and where they both learned many essential things pertaining to the calling which they were both trying to fit themselves for; in many ways they were both better prepared for the work of caring for the sick and wounded than many women would ever become, no matter how much they would be trained, for they were both earnest and helpful, tender-hearted and serious; in all wars, there are women who seek the familiar association with men which the calling of a nurse entails, with no better object than just the proximity to masculine humanity involved, but there are, also, such women as Ruth Wakefield who had no thought in the matter except to help where help of her should anywhere be needed ... to succor those who were not to blame for the accidents that had befallen them ... who were, indeed, entitled to the tenderest consideration on account of the very accidents which had laid them on the clean, white cots that are stretched along the wards and in the private rooms of the great, shadowy hospitals where tender women bend above the beds of pain and minister to those who lie there, suffering and weak, both in body and spirit.

On one of these numerous visits to Havana, Ruth met a man who was an old friend of her father's who was much interested in her lonely life and who came out to her home to consult with her regarding the prospects of her being surrounded by the din and pomp of actual warfare; at first, as he viewed the situation she was placed in, he felt as Father Felix had as to her staying in Cuba, in her immediate future, but listened to her patriotic resolve with high enthusiasm, as he was intensely patriotic himself and loved to think that she was every inch an American although her life had, almost all of it, been spent away from her native land.

Just as this man was leaving her home, one day, for he had been making frequent visits there, he turned to look at her as she stood between the pillar-like gate-posts at the entrance to the drive that led to her residence; the picture she made, standing there in the glow of the setting sun, lingered in his memory long after he had ceased to see her as he saw her, then; Ruth was very fond of flowers and often wore a rose tucked in among the coils of her beautiful, shining hair; that evening, her selection among her flowers for this use had been a bunch of English violets; the deep blue of the dainty blossoms accentuated the clear gray color of her star-like eyes ... her healthy skin reflected the sunset after-glow which was beginning to appear in the western sky; her small mouth, with its cute corners, puckered up as if, she used to say when a child, it had been too large to begin with and had been shirred at the corners to make it the desired size, registered each change of her inner feelings; her dress was elegant, yet simple, and her poise was splendid; there are few earthly women who have sufficient poise of manner and of nervous strength; most of them become excited and distraught under slight stress of circumstances, but Ruth Wakefield was an exception to this very general rule; there were very few things that could shake her from her serenity of purpose and intention; one of these things was being a witness to any injustice ... an indignity put upon a weaker creature by a stronger one, whether the creature be gifted with the power to express its feelings in human speech or not; those who knew her best, were well aware of her strong regard for the rights of so-called "dumb animals" ... her loving sympathy went out to every old or poorly cared for horse she saw; she had been heard to say that she would dearly love to have a good pasture, with waving grasses and running water and sheltering trees where she could gather together all the illy-used horses in the world and then just watch them enjoy their surroundings; the smaller creatures, also, were her friends ... little Tid-i-wats, to whom we have already been introduced, was a feline of very uncertain temper and most impulsive and nerve-racking little habits, yet to Ruth she could always go and be sure of a loving reception no matter to what lengths she had gone, for Tid-i-wats was far from being a perfect little cat; she very often reverted to her original type and did things that no cat with a civilized ancestry would have even thought could *be* done; but she knew that Ruth would only say:

"She is not feeling very well, today; she is beginning to show her years a little; I noticed a white hair only today, on her little neck; she is my own old baby-cat, anyway, and I will always take as good care of her as I possibly can."

She would watch Ruth, calmly, while she straightened out whatever she, her own self, had made it necessary to straighten, and, then, when the young woman would, finally, sit down, no matter where Tid-i-wats happened to be located at the time, she would very soon land on Ruth's lap with no fear of a scolding even; she took advantage of the gentle disposition of her care-taker, same as so many humans did.

Ruth's father's friend looked long and earnestly at the tall, straight, slender figure standing there at the entrance to her almost palatial home and the picture remained in his memory during the balance of his earthly life.

While Ruth Wakefield and Estrella were preparing themselves to assist their fellow-countrymen in case they should be needed, events were shaping themselves so that it seemed likely that Cuba would be the stage for the setting of as heroic a play as the world had ever witnessed:

Commodore Dewey had bottled up the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay and Naval-Constructor Richmond P. Hobson had executed his daring and unheard-of feat although the gallant *Merrimac* was sunk in Santiago harbor.

Soon after the formal declaration of war on April 25, 1898, President McKinley sent forth a call for volunteers to enter the United States army and navy. Instantly, almost, the ranks were more than filled with active, alert, capable men, anxious, each one of them, to do his full share of the work that lay before his beloved land.

It was while active preparations for a war carried on in the interests of humanity were progressing rapidly that Theodore Roosevelt became prominent as representing the highest type of American manhood; he threw himself, bodily, into the breach in the interests of his country; there was no personal sacrifice which he was unwilling to make ... no task too hard for him to attempt. He became, at once, an acknowledged and adored leader of the young Americans who crowded around him, loving him like a brother, and, at the same time, revering his quick judgment and his dauntless courage.

There is no figure in American history more heroic or more admired than that of Theodore Roosevelt, mounted on a noble horse, in the uniform of a United States Volunteer and wearing a wide campaign hat.

Ruth Wakefield was kept well informed as to what was being done by her own people, mainly through the kindness of Father Felix who seldom missed an evening's visit with her and her almost constant companion, Estrella; the two girls, for they were no more than that in spite of what they had passed through, had become the best of understanding friends; the younger girl seldom spoke of her dead lover and Ruth found that the memory of her husband had been forced into the background of her thoughts by the march of passing events.

One evening, Father Felix climbed the narrow pathway to the mansion on the hill and found Ruth alone as Estrella, who was her almost constant companion, now, had gone to the village on one of her infrequent visits to her little friend, Tessa.

The good Priest was glad to find Ruth alone as he had news of great importance for her ... news that would lead to great developments in the near future; after being assured of their entire privacy, he said:

"We will have work to do, my dear Daughter, before many more months have passed by. The American people have endured the sight of the injustice and oppression exercised by the Spanish authorities toward the helpless Cubans for a long time, now, and are becoming more and more determined to break the Spanish rule. You and I must be prepared to assist and succor our own dear boys when they begin to smite the enemy of right and justice, hip and thigh. My course in this work has been made plain before me.... I have applied for the position of Chaplain in the United States service and I trust that they will allow me to accompany my little flock right into the midst of every battle in which they will be engaged. It seems to me that your path in this matter, my Daughter, is, also, plain ... you can turn this charming home into a hospital to which the sorely wounded or those who have fallen ill from any cause may be brought and where they may receive the tender care which they will deserve from every loyal heart and hand. I am certain that you will find work for Estrella as well as for every member of your family, here, in this connection, also you will be ably assisted by many who will flock to your standard when they understand what you are doing. I, myself, will always assist you in every way in my power and I may be able to spare you some uncertainty and, possibly, also, some unpleasantness. My Daughter," he ended, "there will be work for us to do that will require all our strength and courage.... May God, in His great Wisdom, guide and help us."

Ruth clasped her hands and bowed her head as Father Felix prayed for God's blessing on whatever enterprise they should be called upon to undertake in the great cause in which they were both enlisted.

After the good Priest had disappeared down the narrow path that led to the little village of San Domingo, she sat, for a long time, in deep reverie, reflecting on the peace and prosperity that then covered the tropical Island upon which she had lived for so many years and trying to imagine what changes were likely to come in the wake of the probable conflict of two great nations, for Ruth realized that America was meeting a foe worthy of her steel in Spain whose far-famed Armada had been made the subject of song and story; she had no doubt of the final outcome ... whatever America attempted, that she would accomplish ... but how many splendid American men would have to lie upon the bloody battle-fields that would spring up all around her was yet an unsolved problem; and that, she thought, proudly and devotedly, would be her work ... to find those splendid American heroes, and to do for them as much as if each one of them had been her own blood brother ... to succor the wounded and bury the dead.

This line of thought led her, inevitably, to the grave already lying under the moonlight so near to her home, and, upon a sudden and almost irresistible impulse, she snatched a wrap from the rack in the hall and started down toward the little cemetery, thinking to bid an eternal farewell to the grave of the man who had been, if only for a few short months, her husband.

CHAPTER XIII

Ruth descended the hill with firm, sure steps for she was strong in body as well as in spirit; she had reached the gate of the little cemetery before the impulse that had prompted her action had had time to lose any of its power, but, as she opened the gate and realized the lateness of the hour, her natural caution led her to pause for a second and take in her surroundings; she at once became conscious of the sound of a low, sobbing voice saying:

"Dear God, I came here all alone hoping that You would forgive him for the crime that he committed if I came to you in secret beside the grave of him whose life he took ... the sin is lying heavily upon his soul and I wish to lift it from him by sacrificing my own peace of mind so that it may be bestowed upon him, for he suffers grievously from his wound, dear God, he suffers very grievously.... I pray that You will put the sorrow for his crime upon me instead of him so that I may help him, for he is greatly in need of more help than I can give him, being but a simple-minded, feeble, little peasant and unfit to carry this heavy load."

The supplication ended in a rush of sobs that shook the inner consciousness of her who listened to them, for Ruth was tender-hearted above all her other instincts; she advanced into the little cemetery, then, with far different feelings than the ones that brought her there.

The sounds that she had heard came from the same direction she had meant to take to reach the grave of Victorio Colenzo, so she proceeded along the little path that she had followed, in secret, more than once before, for, with Estrella in her home, she could not visit the last resting-place of the body of the man whom she had loved as very young and innocent women will, often, love a creature all unworthy of such affection, except surreptitiously; so that it was easy for her to wind among the simple little head-stones until she came to the grave she sought.

The form her eyes could just discern beside the tomb was small and slight and cowering down as if, indeed, in earnest supplication; Ruth advanced until she was standing very near the silent woman and, not wishing to startle and confuse her by a sudden word, she very gently touched her bowed head; instantly, the girl sprang up in wild alarm, for it had taken all her courage to come there at all; Ruth reassured her as quickly as she could by saying, softly:

"Do not fear, whoever you may be; I am but another woman like yourself and I wish to help you no matter what it is that is so troubling you; we women should assist each other in this world, for women, as it seems to me, were put into the world to suffer, mainly, so we ought to try to help each other. Tell me what there is that I can do to help you, now."

Tessa, for the reader has, no doubt, guessed that it was she, began to sob wildly and clung to the other woman who had come to her so strangely; she could not speak, at first, for crying, and, then, she could not speak for fear of injuring the man she loved, and, so, she did not speak at all, but ran away without one word of explanation, thinking in that way she might avoid discovery.

But the incident had shaken Ruth so that the memory of the man whose body lay within that narrow grave grew dim and far away; she knew that he had been unworthy of her love and must have scouted it in secret many times, for, if he had not done so, how could he have made such love to poor Estrella as he had while she, his lawful wife, yet lived upon the earth? Ruth Wakefield had often said that truth was truth no matter where it fell ... she'd even said that she would blame herself when blame was hers to bear, and, so, she could not shield the memory of the newly dead too far, and, so, she turned away from that low grave and never went there again, and, as she slowly climbed the hill that led her to her own loved home, Estrella overtook her in the path and, hand in hand with her who had been wronged as she, herself, had been, she left the memory of the handsome, gay deceiver lying there within the narrow grave that hid his fast decaying body from the world of living men and women; from that time, she did not suffer, in thinking of him, as she had before; there are turning points in every road no matter where it leads to, and this was a turn for Ruth in that sad road where she had strayed, but only for a short and most unhappy, if, at moments, wildly joyous, time.

When Tessa left the grave of Victorio Colenzo, she fled in haste and fright; she did not go at once to her own home for she feared that she might be followed; she had become a fugitive as truly as Manuello was, for, now, she was to him as if she were, indeed, his wife, attending to all wants of his that she could satisfy, and, secretly and silently, becoming but the shadow of the gay and pretty girl that she had been before; her friends, who saw her often, noted this sad change, but did not know its cause.

Father Felix watched the girl at times and pitied her, for he had learned that she had been devoted to the handsome peasant whom he also was assured was guilty of some crime and, since his disappearance, he had figured out some things that made him almost certain what the crime had been, for the good Priest was much alone and thought more deeply about many things than those who have not followed psychic lines of reasoning.

One morning, Father Felix went, again, to visit Ruth, and found Estrella with her, and he asked the girl about her little friend who had been dear to her from early little girlhood; Estrella told him that she had not seen her for some time, as, when she'd gone to visit her, she had been gone, and Tessa had not come to see her as she'd asked her to, for she had left word for her where to come to find her, knowing she could trust her, for she'd always been a true and faithful friend to her.

The good Priest pondered for a moment, then he said:

"I wish that you would go, at once, to see your little friend; I think that she is at her home at present, and I wish that you would try to discover what it is that is troubling her, for she is most unhappy over something and I wish that you would help her if you can for she is in need of understanding help at this time more than at any time during my acquaintance with her. Go, my Daughter, find your little friend and try to assist her if you can."

Estrella, having secured the permission of Ruth, followed the advice of the good Priest and departed on her errand of love and kindness.

When Father Felix had been assured of their privacy, he turned to his companion and said:

"I have information of importance to give you, my Daughter. We are drawing nearer and nearer to the goal we seek. Our compatriots are growing weary of blockading Havana and other harbors near to us and will very soon advance into the interior of Cuba. When that time comes there will be great suffering all around us and I think that it will be best for you and me to form a sort of secret society with passwords, which, while simple in themselves, will convey to us a secret meaning. You and I must act as one in this matter.... I am sure of your fealty and you can rely upon mine but how many others there are near to us upon whose loyalty we can depend I do not know. Estrella is discreet and thoughtful for an uneducated and untrained girl, but she would have no idea of what course to pursue under complicated or difficult circumstances, so that it may be necessary to keep many events secret from her. There are many spies already in Cuba and there are those among us who would be willing to exchange the lives and property of their best friends for personal emolument. I know one young fellow who has, as I believe, already sold his birthright of truth and honor for a mess of pottage and there are others of his ilk. I rely on you alone in all this village of San Domingo ... you, alone, are strong and capable ... you, alone, are thoroughly American and devoted to your native land. I rely on you, my Daughter, and you may rely on me. Let us now arrange a secret pact between us so that, should we be separated, we may be sure of any word that each may send the other. If I send to you a message adding to the body of it the word *pax* alone, then I will mean to signify that all is well with me and that I do not know of any secret danger threatening you, but if to the word *pax* I add *vobiscum*, then you are to be made aware that danger threatens you, while I may, yet, be safe from it, but if I say *Pax vobiscus* then I'll mean that we are both in danger of a similar nature; if I send these latter words, you are to use all means of safety at your command to seclude yourself from outside notice just as much as possible and to try to find me if you can do so without exposure to yourself; but if I say just *pax* then I mean what the word implies, and you may go to and from your home with freedom. I will come to see you just as often as I can and I will arrange to have the officers of our own army and navy visit you and then you will use your own good judgment combined with what knowledge they will give to you as to how you will proceed, knowing that my spirit will be with you even if my body cannot be ... even if I should be separated from this perishable body, my Daughter, I think that God would let me come to you to help you.... He would know our need and it is my belief He would supply it. Let us pray to Him for guidance, now, before I leave you for the night. Father in heaven, protect and guide our footsteps while we stay upon this mundane sphere of spiritual action. Help us do what we were meant to do and teach us how to walk in unknown paths which we are, now, about to enter on. May what is just and right be conquerors in conflicts that will, very soon, be carried on about us. May the souls of those about to leave this world be prepared for the great change from this world to another one, and may we, who are Thy humble servants, do the things that will be pleasing in Thy sight. Bless us, now, and guide us unto Thee. Amen."

When Estrella reached the home of little Tessa, she found her friend about to go somewhere but where she would not say ... she seemed so much distraught about it that Estrella did not ask the second time where she was going; she could see that she had made some preparations for the journey, for she had a small bag filled with eatables and a jug of home-made vintage in her hands; Estrella plainly saw how distressed she was and how wan and weary, too, and, so, she only stayed a very short time; but, when she went away, she only went just far enough to be where Tessa could not see her ... then she watched her little friend, but only with the kindest thoughts of her, and saw her take an unused, winding path a little ways, then hasten on without a path at all, so far as she could see; she wound among the cacti, fearlessly, as if upon a very important errand, and as if she feared that she would be too late to do the errand she was bent upon; Estrella watched her for a time, and, then, still with the kindest thoughts of Tessa, followed after her, but far enough behind her so she could not see her ... she would stoop behind a friendly bit of brush whenever little Tessa turned around and gazed about her like a startled little bird about to seek its hidden nest; so, unobserved, Estrella followed after her, and came, at length, to that small clearing where the ruined hut had stood for many years; Estrella knew about it, having found it at the same time Manuello had, indeed, for they two used to roam the hills together when they were but little children ... sometimes Tessa went with them, but, oftener, they were alone; and, so, Estrella peered within the ruined hut and saw its occupant as he lay there in bitter pain and wan and weary, too, like little Tessa was; she saw the other girl creep past the tumble-down old door that she had set up at the entrance to the hut to shield its inmate from the winds, and, also, to try to keep the fact that he was there at all unknown; she saw the little tender-hearted woman kneel beside the rude couch on which her restless patient lay and kiss the lips that only moaned her name in anguish and despair; she saw her smooth the black and silky hair back from the brow of Manuello, and, then, she heard the following conversation.

"Tell me, little Tessa," said her patient, eagerly, "are you sure you were not seen when you came

here, today? I greatly fear that you will yet divulge, in some way, my hiding-place. I could not move a step to save myself, no matter who came here to find me. It is terrible to be like this. I'd rather die than stay here like this for another day.... I wish you'd find a gun, somewhere, and bring it to me the next time you come and let me end the lives of both of us. You are like a little skeleton, yourself.... I wonder what's the matter with you ... are you ill or is it only just the weariness and fright that makes you look so? If you should fail me, I would surely die ... a wounded rat that cannot even run to save itself. Tessa, tell me," he cried out, peevishly, "are you sick? You look so pale today it seems to me you are about to faint away ... and what would I do, then?"

"I don't believe that I am sick," she said, cheerfully. "I'm sure I don't know why I'm pale.... It is very warm today, for one thing ... I hurried up the hill ... Estrella came...."

At that name, her patient roused again:

"Estrella! Are you sure she did not follow you? She could gloat about me, now, if she were minded to ... what did you bring for me to eat, today?" he ended, changing the subject, abruptly. "I'm almost starved to death; I wish you'd come a little earlier, tomorrow."

"I will try, dear Manuello, I will try," said little Tessa, gravely. "I always try to come as soon as I can come when I'm alone and can evade the children."

Manuello tossed a while in silence, then he asked again:

"Are you sure Estrella did not follow you? Look outside and see if there is not someone near the hut. I'm afraid ... I'm dreadfully afraid, somehow, today. I've lain right here, now, all these weeks, and have not been so frightened as I am, somehow, today. Look outside and see!"

And, then, Estrella crept away for she could do no good by staying, and she did not wish to harm either one of her old friends on whose distress she looked.

Estrella went back to the mansion on the hill, a sadder, it is true, and yet also a wiser woman for she'd seen poor little Tessa's secret burden and Manuello's sorry plight.

She went to Father Felix, the next day, to advise with him about what she had seen; he cautioned her not to mention it to anyone she knew, which advice she followed, strictly; it enlightened him to some extent and he pitied little Tessa more than ever, for he knew the sort of man her patient was ... he knew that he was selfish to the very core of him and had no gratitude for anyone who'd helped him; so he pitied little Tessa and began, in many little unknown ways, to help her bear the burden she'd assumed.

To begin with, when she came to the confessional, as almost everyone who lived in San Domingo did, he only asked her questions such as she could answer easily ... he did not touch on murder or on lies or on anything that might lead on to surprising her sad secret; he knew her for a simple-minded, loving, tender little girl and he pitied her and did not try to wring from her her secret, knowing that, in all human probability, she would go, some day, to the ruined hut and find no Manuello there to either curse or bless her: in fact, he looked upon this as the most likely of anything that could occur and, when he saw poor little Tessa fading with anxiety and dread, he went, one day, to see the patient in the deserted hut, and, after that, there was no patient there, for Manuello limped away, as he could stand, at last, and hid from even little Tessa for he thought she had betrayed him, after all, and, so, he cursed her with the balance of his rotten luck.

CHAPTER XIV

June 10, 1898, was a memorable day for Cuba, for, on that date, the glorious flag of our own much-beloved country was unfurled over Cuban soil, upheld and supported by United States troops, for the first time.

Father Felix had kept himself well informed as to military matters, and had often consulted with Ruth Wakefield concerning what would actually be needed by our armies when they were finally in the field; in pursuance of the purpose to which they had both devoted their lives and fortunes, these two had established a temporary hospital not far from the city of Santiago, as the good Priest had been informed that one of the next moves of our forces would be in that vicinity; so that, when our starry banner first floated in the breeze at Camp McCalla, Ruth stood beside the new-fledged army Chaplain, and watched, through tear-dimmed eyes, the emblem of our liberty and freedom as it was proudly raised.

That night passed quietly, but, for five successive days and nights thereafter, a bitter battle raged in which our blue-clad boys met and finally defeated the Spanish hordes that tried to drive them back or leave their lifeless bodies lying there beneath the blistering sun.

When Ruth had sailed from Havana she had brought her little household with her and established them in temporary quarters near the hospital, and, soon, she saw the little white cots filled with sick or wounded Americans and Cuban scouts.

Volunteer nurses were immediately in demand as, in many ways, our forces were unprepared to meet the enemy; there are no soldiers in the world as brave ... as fine ... as capable ... as are our

own United States Volunteers ... both men and women, and, so, Ruth Wakefield and Estrella, anxious to put into practice what they had learned to do, donned the clean white uniforms they had become accustomed to in the training they had taken in Havana for this very purpose, and, very soon, to the eye of a novice, there were two more trained nurses ministering to the many wants of the boys who lay there on those narrow cots, weak and suffering but triumphant in spite of their pain, for the cause of right had won in the first real conflict upon Cuban soil between the Spaniards and the Americans assisted by Cuban insurgents, who, mainly, acted as spies and scouts, a work to which they were adapted by nature and long practice in a country infested by those whose only object in ruling it had been to gain what they could, in resources and amusement, from the natives, with no thought either for their comfort or advancement along the lines of civilized living.

Among the Cuban scouts who had been wounded on that first day of actual combat was one who happened to fall under the care of Estrella for he had been carried in right after her entry into the work of the hospital; this man had been slightly wounded as he was about to give valuable information to one of our own officers, and, perhaps for that reason and because he had shown himself to be particularly useful, he had received even more than the usual attention on the battle-field, for his wound had been dressed more carefully than is customary when first aid is given in the midst of the fray, so that the attending surgeon had declared his condition such that all he needed was tender care, which was why his case had been assigned to a volunteer nurse.

Estrella gravely assumed the duty allotted to her, with some misgivings as to her own ability, it is true, but with a strong resolve to do the best she could; as she bent over her patient, she noticed, first, his almost deathly pallor, then a jagged scar that stretched across his cheek and had been lately healed ... the edges of it were yet red and angry looking; the girl bent over him pityingly, and, then, she started back for she had recognized, even in the dim light that pervaded the temporary hospital, the features of Manuello; remembering what she had seen in the ruined hut, she shrank from contact with her old admirer, but, with that memory came the knowledge that he had been wounded while in the performance of a service of benefit to her beloved country, and she did not falter in carrying out the instructions of the surgeon in charge with regard to her patient, thinking that, perhaps, before he had recognized her, she might be transferred to some other part of the hospital.

Ruth took her place among the ministering nurses with confidence and courage, for she was one who immediately altogether forgot almost her own identity when asked to help another human being, and, while her sympathy with suffering was remarkable, so that she actually suffered pain herself when witnessing it in others, yet she had always been able to do whatever was required of her in an emergency regardless of any bodily ailment that might be troubling her at the time; now, as she saw all around her strong men laid low by violence, her spirit rose to the occasion and she was, for the time, at least, the very personification of patriotic zeal and her love for her country rose to heights almost undreamed of even by herself; she moved among the little cots freely, lending a hand here and whispering a word of encouragement there; the nurses recognized in her a master spirit, at once, and the surgeons looked into her steady eyes, and, instantly, allowed her privileges seldom granted to anyone outside of their own profession; her very presence seemed to give the sufferers courage to bear their pain, for the light that shone from her clear, gray eyes was above the things of a merely earthly existence and lifted them out of their bodies, to some extent, making them impervious to what would have otherwise been excruciating anguish; surgeons, at that time, did not recognize the mental attitude of their patients, to any great extent, and they marveled at the influence of the mistress of the mansion on the hill, attributing it, in part, to the evident superiority of the young woman to those with whom she had been associated in Cuba.

In passing among the little cots, Ruth, at length, came to the one beside which Estrella was standing, anxiously looking into her patient's flushed face, for, with returning strength, Manuello's fever had risen; Ruth put one hand on the girl's shoulder and drew her away from the cot for a moment while she whispered to her:

"Do not weary yourself too much, my Dear, for we must keep our strength so as to be able to help others ... you seem distressed ... do you know your patient, personally?"

Estrella was only too glad to tell her kind and understanding friend just the situation in which she found herself, so that, when the young Cuban opened his large, dark eyes and looked about him in astonishment, it was upon Ruth's face he gazed instead of on Estrella's whom the former had sent into another part of the work of caring for the wounded.

"Where am I?" moaned Manuello. "What has happened to me, now?"

"You have been sorely wounded in the service of your country, my brave fellow ... you are now in a hospital where you will receive every possible care and attention," answered Ruth in a low, yet clear tone of voice. "You are in the hands of those who appreciate what you have done and greatly desire to assist in your recovery."

Having assured himself that he was among friends, he began to make inquiries as to the nature of his wound, wondering how long it would be necessary for him to remain as he was then, but Ruth only told him that he must not talk and must use every precaution he could to prevent increase of the fever that was now high enough to demand the use of the handy little thermometer that Ruth, in common with the other amateur nurses with whom she had studied, had learned how to operate; she promptly thrust this little fever-gauge into his mouth and told

him to keep it there quietly until she took it away; gazing at her as if she were a creature from another world, Manuello lay there quiescent and tractable, all his wild nature being centred upon his desire to again be the free, strong being he had but recently been.

Old Mage peered into the room where the cots of the wounded soldiers and sailors had been placed and caught a glimpse of her dear young lady as she stood by the bedside of Manuello; he had just opened his eyes, and, as he lay there with his black curls touching the white pillow, he reminded the old woman very much of another handsome, dark young fellow whom she believed to be lying in his narrow grave in the little cemetery ... the narrow grave in which she had buried the wedding-ring that had brought so much sorrow to the one whom she loved best in all the world: as the old woman looked at the dark face on the pillow she noticed the angry scar that disfigured it and thought that it might have changed the face she remembered as without a blemish so that she would have difficulty in recognizing it; her mind began to travel along the line of thought suggested by this possibility and she determined to rid Ruth of the necessity of attending to her former husband, at least, if her most dire suspicions should prove to be well founded; she at once remembered that she, herself, had not seen the corpse of the man interred as Victorio Colenzo and she knew very well how earthly death will change the appearance of a human being's body ... then she thought of what had been told to her as to how the man had died ... altogether it seemed to her very possible that the man she had seen in the little cemetery on the day of the funeral she had attended with Estrella might have been some one closely resembling Manuello, so that, perhaps, Estrella's foster brother had been buried in the supposed grave of Victorio Colenzo, who, wishing to be free from both entangling alliances he had made in San Domingo, had allowed the name under which he had entered into them to be placed upon the simple head-stone that marked the grave of another man.

As soon as old Mage had arrived at the conclusion above described, she acted on it at once by slipping stealthily up to Ruth and whispering to her:

"Come away, my Pretty; you are needed; there is someone outside who wishes to speak to you at once. I will take your place."

Ruth, thinking the summons important, yielded her place for a moment, intending to return within a very few moments, but no sooner had old Mage assumed charge of the patient than she began to devise ways and means by which she hoped to prolong the stay of her dear young lady, for it seemed to her to be too much for her to bear ... to care for her recreant husband under all the trying circumstances.

The first thing that the new nurse did would have been severely criticized by the head surgeon had his attention not been fully occupied in another part of the large room; to begin with, instead of smoothing back the dark hair from the man's forehead as it would seem to one observing her from the rear she was doing, she very deliberately pulled the handful of curls she was clutching, hoping to make him open his eyes so that she could continue her scrutiny of him in order to be as certain as possible of his suspected identity; this ruse succeeded, for Manuello's large, dark brown eyes flew open and were fixed in horror on the face bending over him; it was quite a different countenance than the one he had last seen beside him, for old Mage never had been a beauty and the loss of her teeth had not added to her appearance while the ferocity of her glance was accentuated by the multitude of criss-cross wrinkles which surrounded the light blue eyes out of which she was glaring at him; the words she hissed in his ear added to the confusion under which the helpless man was laboring:

"I thought that you were dead and buried out of sight ... you hateful, low-lived pup! How dare you be brought into her place, now? If I did just right, I do believe I'd choke the life out of you while you can't fight back! The girl's here, too ... you must be a devil in human form! You ought to be burning in hell!"

The object that had led old Mage to make this attack upon the wounded man was about to be accomplished, for, with a wild scream, he vaulted over the foot of the little cot and bounded through the open doorway as if he were pursued by demons; his temporary nurse did not try to prevent his exit which was what she had longed to bring about, although the manner of his going startled even her, as she had no idea of the effect that her hasty words would have upon the guilty spirit of the man whose crimes, it seemed to him, had found him out; the new wound he had that day received, was not of a nature to impede his progress for a short distance, and he almost instantly disappeared from among the nurses and surgeons; his wild expression so impressed all whom he met before he reached the outskirts of the hospital grounds that he was again a fugitive, hunted, this time, by both friends and enemies.

As Ruth was about to return to her patient, for she could find no immediate need of her presence elsewhere, she met an excited nurse who told her of having seen an excessively active young man flying out into the open, clad only in hospital garb.

Ruth was hurrying to report the circumstances to the head surgeon and to arrange to have searching parties sent out to bring back her pseudo patient, when, passing the cot where old Mage was still stationed, she noted that it was empty; stopping to inquire the reason for this change, her old nurse hurriedly related the facts concerning the exodus of the young man, while she secretly rejoiced at the success of her strategem, for so she chose to denominate the method she had taken of protecting her dear young lady from the nearness of the man she had married through mistaken confidence.

Estrella, having been sent to consult with her friend concerning some matter connected with the welfare of the temporary hospital, came along, just then, and was told what had happened.

"Why," she exclaimed, "where has poor Manuello gone? He is not fit to be outside alone. I am afraid I was a coward to leave him when he needed care. Poor little Tessa would have stayed right with him no matter what he said or did. I have not seen her," she mused, "for a long time, now ... not since a number of days before we came away from home.... I wonder where she is."

Could Estrella have seen her little friend at that moment, she would have lost all pity for Manuello and added to that she already had for poor Tessa, for she was then suffering from the last encounter she had had with the man who had just fled out into the night; although the little peasant would have been proud to have been made the wife of the man whom she madly loved, yet she resisted the idea of being merely his mistress for Father Felix had forcibly impressed upon the minds of the girls of his flock the virtue of chastity; the consequence of this resistance had been a blow received by herself which had rendered her helpless for the time being, as it had made it impossible for her to walk for any distance, and a slash across one of Manuello's dusky cheeks which she had made with a knife she had happened to have in her hand at the time of his attack.

The heart-sick girl was lying on the rude bed she had made for the man who had left her without aid, in the deserted hut into which Estrella had once peered, while her friend, so far away from her, was bemoaning the fate of her ungrateful former lover.

She had carried some food and water into the hovel upon the day of her last struggle with Manuello and she could creep about the inside of the small building, so that, being hardy and healthy, she had, at that time, subsisted upon the supplies she had on hand, for several days; she was just beginning to crawl carefully out into the surrounding brush where she was glad to find plenty of ripe cactus-fruit and other wild edibles; she was very lonely and frightened but she took her condition as a punishment for the sins she had committed since she had tried to assist Manuello in spite of the fact that she had known him to be a criminal; she told her beads, over and over, using the small rosary which she had always worn about her neck, and, as she kissed the crucifix attached to the beads, she often prayed for the man who was the direct cause of her pitiable condition, for she believed it to be her plain duty to forgive, even though she could not forget, him.

CHAPTER XV

When Manuello escaped from the temporary hospital near Camp McCalla, he directed his eager steps toward the place of his nativity, because, as it seemed to him, he would be safer there than he had recently been; it seemed to him that if he could reach the deserted hut where he had been in concealment before, he could rest and recover while he made plans for his future, for he had decided that it would be dangerous for him to follow the American army any longer, at least for a time.

In devious ways and through the use of means known only to such as he, he managed to reach a point midway between Santiago and Havana in a much shorter time than would have seemed possible to one unversed in the ways of the wilderness; here he encountered, suddenly and unexpectedly, the good Priest whom he had known from childhood, who, also, seemed hurrying in the direction of Havana.

The young man kept away from the habitation of men as much as possible after that, and, footsore and weary, but happy in the thought that he had reached his goal, he arrived, at length, just at sunset, in the outskirts of the village of San Domingo; from there he followed the winding path up which little Tessa had so often toiled in his service, he thought of her but did not regret the blow he had given her; in fact, his anger still burned at white heat whenever he remembered how she had disfigured his features, forgetting altogether what she had done for him, because she had not done everything that he had asked her to do.

At length, he reached the vicinity of the deserted hut and stole up to reconnoitre before entering the ruined habitation; he crept up to one of the small windows and peered within; the sight that met his vision startled him to such an extent that he forgot, for the moment, his habitual caution and remained at the window although he had discovered that the hut was occupied; the room he looked into was dimly lit by the rays of the setting sun which penetrated the dense growth of tropical verdure and found their way into the small western aperture that answered the purpose of a look-out toward the village; Tessa was lying, looking very wan and care-worn, upon the rude bed she had arranged for the man who was then staring at her ... in her thin hand was a crucifix which Father Felix had just given to her ... the good Priest was kneeling upon the rough floor beside the couch and the tears were rolling down his cheeks, for the sight before him would have moved far less tender hearts than his; the girl began to speak in a low voice and Manuello strained his power of hearing to catch the faint words which fell from her pale and trembling lips.

"Good Father," she began, speaking as if at confession, "I beseech you to have mercy upon your sinful daughter; I have done grievous wrong during my short life and I beg you to intercede with the God of truth and justice before whose judgment seat I will soon appear. I ask you to pray for

me, Father Felix, for I am in need of your prayers. I have been a wicked girl in some ways, though not in all, for I have resisted a very strong desire which was a part of my sinful nature and which I believe I have, now, through suffering, gained the victory over."

The girl ceased speaking from sheer weakness, then, and the Priest took the crucifix from her shaking hand and attached it to the cord at his waist, then he lifted his clasped hands in earnest and humble supplication:

"Father Who art in heaven," he prayed, "listen to us who are in Thy gracious Hands, both here and hereafter. Help me to guide this suffering soul aright and help her to walk where she was meant to walk, whether she regains her health and returns to the life she has had, formerly, or whether she passes out of this narrow existence and goes into eternity before another morning dawns. Look down, dear Father, in mercy on us who are Thy humble servants. Amen."

"Father Felix," began the sick girl, "I must confess to you something that has lain heavily upon my conscience for many weeks. I am rejoiced that you have found me for I will die easier to know that you have the secrets that I have been keeping in my heart, being unable to come to the refectory and tell you what I must, now, impart to you. A heinous crime was committed in San Domingo some months ago, as I believe by one whom you and I both know; I have withheld my suspicions from the authorities and, in so doing, I feel that I have done wrong, Father. I wish to tell you all I know, now, and let you do what you think best ... it will relieve my heart of a very heavy load to tell this to you. Manuello...."

Before her lips could utter the next word, the door of the hut which had been leaning over the opening designed for it as it had long been guiltless of hinges, was violently thrust aside and the subject of the remarks Tessa was about to make, rudely entered and advanced to the side of the couch upon which the girl was lying; the livid scar upon his dark face combined with the pallor that had followed the fever he had been having, the freshly bandaged wound, the limp that had followed the rough dressing of the bullet-punctured leg of the man, combined with the fierce determination that characterized each one of his movements, altogether made a most unpleasant appearance.

Father Felix quietly rose and stepped between the sufferer on the couch and the young Cuban who regarded the Priest with no respect in the expression of his countenance, but rather with contempt and lack of personal fear; he attempted to shove him aside so that he might again look down on the trembling occupant of the rude bed, but found that Father Felix was standing firmly on a sturdy pair of legs which had had good exercise in tramping about the hills and valleys in pursuit of his chosen profession of saving the souls of those who needed his ministrations; Manuello glared at him and snarled out:

"Out of my way with your sing-song prayers and your dangling cross! I am a desperate man and do not mean to allow even a Priest to balk either my escape or my vengeance! Stand aside and let me stop that mouth forever!"

He again tried to shove the Priest aside, when Father Felix hastily threw off his robe so that it might not impede his movements and closed with the young fellow, grappling with him with arms left bare from the shoulder upon which the biceps muscles stood out in great knots that came and went and rippled underneath the skin; Manuello was surprised at this onslaught for the good Priest's fighting prowess had never, so far, been tested in just this way; but familiarity with certain turns and twists told in the young villain's favor in spite of the freshness and vigor of Father Felix' attack; the poor girl on the floor was unable to interfere and watched the two combatants with horrified eyes as they struggled all over the rude room, sometimes one and sometimes the other seeming about to conquer; neither one of the contestants had a weapon as Manuello had come away from the hospital clad only as the other patients were; in his wild flight he had snatched an outer garment from among the many lying in a heap outside the door through which he had fled, but, with this exception, he wore only what had been put upon him by the surgeons.

Like two Titans, the two human beings struggled for supremacy, the one being actuated only by a desire to serve the right, and the other seeming to have been given almost satanic power as he felt that his own life and future freedom depended upon adding two more to his victims, for the Priest had already heard enough to make him find out more and Tessa had been about to confess all she knew to him, so, above everything on earth, the furious Cuban wished to slay the Priest and the poor girl whose only fault had been her yielding to his selfishness.

Twice, Manuello's fingers almost closed about the good Priest's throat, and twice did Father Felix lift the other man bodily from the floor and dash him down in a huddled heap in one corner of the room, but neither had quite conquered when an unexpected interference ended the conflict very suddenly.

Manuello had crowded Father Felix over toward the tumble-down door of the hut and was about to push him through the opening, or, at least, attempt to do so, when, all at once the young fellow felt his fingers lose their strength and his arms fell away from the body of the Priest ... he was conscious of a strange, tingling sensation all through his shaken nerves; had he been familiar with the action of powerful electric currents, he would have described it as a heavy shock of electricity but, although he could not have altogether explained his sensations, their effect was instantaneous and resulted in the release of Father Felix while his assailant dropped prone upon the floor of the hut and groveled at his feet in abject terror, for he thought the end of his life had

come and, in that thought, the murderer became the penitent and, with the fear of death before his mind, he began to mumble broken bits of half-forgotten prayers and to beg for forgiveness for his sins which he knew to be many and grievous.

As the changed attitude of his foe became evident to the good Priest he hurried over to the side of the sick girl with assurances of his desire to assist her in every possible way and, with the changed conditions surrounding him, he again put on the robe of his holy office, and, with it, seemed again to be the sedate and quiet leader of the flock he strove to lead into green pastures and beside pleasant waters.

Having ministered to Tessa, for the moment, he turned his attention to his late antagonist:

"My Son," he said, "you are wounded and spent with the loss of blood; your mind, perhaps, has been turned by your misfortunes so that you did not realize either your words or your actions. I hope that, from this time on, you will fix your mind on better things than thoughts of vengeance or of murder. To begin with, I have a favor to ask of you. Will you help me remove Tessa, here, from this place to her home? She is in need of tender care."

"I will do what you tell me to," meekly answered the recent antagonist of the Priest. "I see that I was wrong in imagining you to be my enemy. I think that this last wound has made me crazy for the time, as you have just said. From this time on I will try to be as I have been before ... glad to be guided by your higher wisdom. I humbly ask your pardon for what I have done here, tonight."

Manuello bowed his head for his spirit had been broken by the strange happening which we have described, and, at once, his hope began to rise again, that, after all, Father Felix would do him no real harm, for he seemed, again, the kind and loving prelate whom the man had known from his youth up.

When some simple preparations had been made, the two men lifted Tessa from the rude couch to the stretcher they had improvised, and, in turn, lifted it, with its light burden, to their shoulders, when, from time to time, they found an open space in the dense underbrush that hid the ruined hut from ordinary observation; thus they descended the hill that led to the village of San Domingo; having reached the door of the home of the girl, in the gathering darkness, they laid the stretcher down and Manuello disappeared as Father Felix knocked for admittance.

To say the young fellow was glad to be released from what seemed to him to be the custody of the Priest would be to put his feelings lightly, for, having cleared the ruined hut, he quickly returned to it and, lying on the simple bed Tessa had so lately occupied, he went to sleep, apparently, as sweetly as a new-born infant would.

Old Mage wondered, a little, at Estrella's remark concerning Manuello, after he had disappeared; but she finally set her mind at rest by deciding that, whichever of the dashing Cubans she had ousted from Ruth's help, she had done good work, for, as she said to herself, from her view-point it was "good riddance to bad rubbage."

The head surgeon made a note of the occurrence and went on about his work, for one man more or less, in time of war, cannot be reckoned as in civil life.

Ruth Wakefield had no doubt at all as to the identity of her former patient; when a pure girl has given herself to be the wife of any man she does not, soon, forget his personality, and Ruth knew very well the man she'd cared for had not been the one she'd called her husband ... that his body lay within its narrow grave she felt assured but what lay buried over him old Mage, alone, yet knew; she'd chuckled, many times, as to that burial, and it was hard for her to keep her secret as she longed for the approval that she felt she merited in this small matter, but the thought that Ruth might differ with her as to what she'd done had always, so far, sealed her lips.

"There is a time in the affairs of men that, taken at its flood, leads on to fortune," has been said by one who, justly, has been called a master in the art of putting words together; William Shakespeare did not know the actors in this story, but he knew the minds of men as few have known them since his time.

Manuello did not know that such a writer as this master of the English language had ever existed, yet he acted on the thought in the above quotation, when, the morning after the events related in this chapter, he again departed from the ruined hut and disappeared, effectually, within the fastnesses that only such as he could know about; every inch, or so it seemed, of territory surrounding Havana was familiar to the Cuban scouts and Manuello had grown up among the cacti and the palms and desolation that followed in the wake of Spanish oppression and injustice.

CHAPTER XVI

July 1, 1898, at sunset, the fair folds of our own stars and stripes were gently floating over San Juan hill.

On that day some of the most heroic deeds in American history had been performed by those who represent the highest types of American virility.

Roosevelt's Rough Riders had, that day, advanced behind their intrepid leader, into the very jaws

of death and very many of them never came again into the pleasant walks of life they'd known before that fateful day ... very many of them lay scattered over the different heights that led on to the very top of San Juan hill, inert and helpless human tenements that had once held the proud and willing spirits of the men who followed Roosevelt with love and daring.

Some of them were picked up and carried to temporary hospitals that had sprung up near the scene of active warfare; in one of these shelters for the wounded Ruth Wakefield stood, that evening, bending low above a little cot on which was stretched a manly form ... the form of one who'd ridden with the rest of those who followed him they called, in brotherly affection, "Teddy," and who was beside him when his horse was shot from under him.

"Nurse," he whispered, through the bandages that bound his head, "Nurse, it would have done you good to hear him say 'Forward! Charge the hill!' It would have heartened you could you have seen him, when he was unhorsed, grab a rifle and fire it as he went on up, on foot."

"You must not talk," said Ruth. "You must rest quietly, now. We won the hill," she added, proudly. "We won the hill and I'm as proud as anyone could ever be of Roosevelt and of you all who followed after him. I sometimes wish," she ended, "I sometimes wish that I had been a man to go into the battles instead of only caring for the wounded ... yet I'm thankful to be of some assistance to the ones who need the help that I can give to them."

"You should have seen," began the man again, "you should have seen our Teddy charge that hill! They do not make a man like that except about once in a century or so ... they do not make such men as that in every age.... I tell you he's a holy terror when it comes to fighting, Nurse! He mowed them down ... he made them crawl and creep.... I always knew he could do more on horseback than any man that ever lived but I never knew, until today, what he could do on foot."

"Our Teddy is a wonder.... I agree with you in everything you say of him, but, now," once more she was the nurse in charge, "you must be very still ... that is," she ended, with a happy little turn of thought, "if you ever want to go where Teddy is, again."

That was enough to silence him and he lay very still and fixed his eyes upon her face, and, finally, he slept, and rested from his labors for a time; but what he'd said stayed in Ruth's inner consciousness and the heart that throbbed within her beat more proudly after that, because she was, as was the man his comrades praised, an American; to her that title was enough to fill with pride a human heart ... to be a true American ... a citizen of the United States of America ... it seemed to her meant more than any royal appellation ever could; no crown adorned with priceless jewels could replace that name to her; at one time in her life, this question had been asked of her:

"What would you do if you must choose between all that you love on earth and fealty to some other than your native land, and this one country that you call your own?"

"What would I do?" she answered. "I would not renounce my fealty to my native land.... I would keep God and my conscience and my country ... no one could take them from me ... all the rest I'd leave behind and cleave to them."

Ruth Wakefield meant this statement and she proved it later on beyond all shadow of a doubt.

When her first patient slept, Ruth went to stand beside another cot for she was always privileged to go wherever she might choose; her help in many ways, including financial aid, had made this hospital possible and she went at will among the other nurses who looked up to her as women will to one who is a natural leader of the ones with whom she associates.

She came, at length, to a cot that was apart from all the rest because its occupant had needed to be isolated for good reasons; he was violent, at times, the nurses said ... when his fever rose he soon became delirious and they had hard work keeping him under any sort of control; he was a native scout, they told her ... he had done good work that day upon the side of right, and, so, Ruth went to care for him, for it was just as natural for her to take heavy work as it was natural for the rest to let her do it.

Soon after she had taken charge of him, he stirred uneasily and mumbled in his restless sleep ... he spoke a name she'd hoped to never hear again ... the name of him whom she had loved enough to marry....

"Victorio Colenzo," moaned the man, "Victorio Colenzo is dead and I ... I am his murderer ... it was my hand that took his life.... I am a murderer, good Father Felix.... I am the murderer of the man I hated, for he took the girl I loved from me.... I killed him with my own machete and he is dead.... I am the murderer of Victorio Colenzo ... shrive my soul, good Father Felix, for I am about to go before my Maker."

The moaning ceased then, and Ruth bent over him to see if he still lived, for she could see his very lips were livid and his eyes seemed set and glazed as if with death's own dews; she put her hand upon his head and looked into his face with earnest pity in her tender eyes, for she was very pitiful and even lenient when faults of anyone except herself were to be considered.

"The poor fellow is delirious," she thought. "He does not know what he is saying. Odd that he should use that name. Poor fellow ... he will not last long, I fear. I wonder if Father Felix could come to him."

With that thought, she turned to go to try to find the Priest, for he almost always could be found where there was suffering and need of him, but Manuello (for the reader has discovered who her patient was) snatched at her hand as she was just about to go away and said to her:

"Please intercede for me, good Angel ... tell them I have never had a chance in all my life ... tell them ... intercede..." and, then, his weak voice died away in moans, again, "Tessa, please," he said, "don't look at me that way!"

Again Ruth leaned above his bed, for in his eyes there was a look that seldom comes except when death is near. She felt a gentle hand upon her arm and knew that Estrella stood beside her ... she had come to seek advice from her superior.

So they stood ... the widow and the sweetheart, and the murderer of the man they both had loved, as virgins love, lay there before them.

Suddenly, he roused himself, as with a last and desperate effort, from the lethargy of death itself ... he looked upon them standing there beside his bed ... the woman he had loved as wild and rough and lawless men will always love a woman and the one who seemed to him as if she were an angel straight from paradise ... he imagined he had passed from life as he had known that word, and was beyond all earthly help; and, so, he did not call for human help but cried aloud on God to save his deathless soul. It was horrible to hear his human lips cry out to God as they were crying then, and Ruth regretted that Estrella stood so near to him whom she had called her foster-brother, for she'd whispered Manuello's name at once, so she sent her to find Father Felix if she could and to bring him there to help this suffering soul.

After the girl had gone away, Ruth stood alone beside the cot and looked with great commiseration on the almost senseless clay before her ... on the staring eyes and sullen, dark-skinned pallor of the heavily scarred face ... on the lips that once wore careless smiles but, now, were drawn and pale ... on the broad shoulders and powerful muscled arms. As she gazed at him it seemed to her a very pitiful condition under which he labored; she wondered why it had to be as it was with this strong, untutored man; she wondered why he had to lay his strong, young body on the altar of his passions and see it consumed as it had been by hate and treachery; and, then, she remembered the service upon which he had just been bent ... and her heart yearned over him for that alone; she leaned above his face and searched it for a sign of returning strength but found none there; his eyes stared into hers, it seemed, and then they sought the moving shadows on the canvas overhead.

Ruth raised her head from gazing into Manuello's eyes and seemed to see, above the cot on which he lay, another and a different form yet like to that she saw inert before her; it was as if a glorified replica of the man were floating over him; in many ways it was exactly like the Manuello lying there upon that little cot, and, yet, the form was more ethereal ... more delicate ... more beautiful than he could ever be and live upon the earthly plane where he had found so many things to lead him down and seldom found a single thing to lead him higher, or, at least, found anything that he could fully understand, for, although Father Felix tried to show him how to go to climb to better thoughts, he had not seen the steps at all but blundered on along the path he found himself upon.

As Ruth began to realize the change that she had seen take place, a rosy flush crept over her fair face, she clasped her hands and bowed her head in silent prayer:

"Father in heaven," she thought, "look down in mercy on this soul about to come before You for Your judgment. Have pity on his faults for they were very many ... have mercy on him, for his sins were very heavy in his human life. He did not know the way to go, dear Father ... he could not see the steps at all. Have pity on him for he will have need of pity such as only You can give to him. Amen."

And when she lifted up her face again, good Father Felix stood beside her, crucifix in hand. His head was also bowed in silent prayer for he had witnessed many earthly deaths and knew, at once, that Manuello, as he had been known in human life, had passed beyond all human judgment and gone on to his reward or punishment in another world where everything that he had done upon the earth would be accounted for by him and him alone; the good Priest knew, however, that God is good as well as just and he remembered Manuello's ignorance and superstition, too, and hoped that, after he'd been purged of earthly sins by deep repentance, he would come into the light that is God's Smile and shines for all who seek it honestly, no matter what their sins on earth have been, but only after long and terrible remorse for harm that they have done while in the body that God gave them to use and not abuse.

The road that leads into the light that is God's Smile is often hedged about by thorns and bitter herbs instead of delicate and fragrant flowers; sometimes poisonous reptiles lurk along the way and strive to strike their fangs within the heart of him who toils there; sometimes, human passions guide a strong man into devious and sinful acts as Manuello had been guided, more than once; he'd yielded to them just because he had not learned the way to handle them and they had mastered him and made of him their slave instead of being what he ordered them to be; he'd thrown the remnant of his human life into the balance in the cause he really loved ... the cause of freedom for his native land.

And Ruth and Father Felix thought of him as of a patriot only as they stood beside the cot on which his lifeless body lay; they covered up his face as gently as if they had not known of any sin committed by the hands now lying still and cold and helpless ... they closed his staring eyes as

softly as they would have closed the eyes of any human being who will read these words had he or she been left for them to care for when the soul had left its earthly tenement; disembodied Spirits often linger near to such as these who stood beside that cot, for they know that they are like to them in very many ways, though yet abiding in a human frame ... they know that such as Ruth and Father Felix feel the same, sweet, almost holy joy that comes to those who meet and make welcome the ones who leave the earth-plane, newly dead; though death, I trust, is only just the change that frees a soul from earthly burdens and releases it from earthly darkness, so that it may climb, when it is purged of earthly sins, into the light that is the Smile of God and shines for all who seek it earnestly.

I do not think that there can be an everlasting hell except for those who wish to dwell in darkness. I do not think there can be perpetual punishment except for those who do not wish to climb beyond it. Ruth and Father Felix felt that this was so, although the good Priest tried to think far otherwise, and, yet, deep down within his inner consciousness, he felt that God, although He is so just, yet pities those who err and welcomes all who wish to put their sins behind them in the path they find themselves upon, no matter whether they may find that path upon the earthly plane or on a higher one. They turned away from that white cot with almost God-like pity in their inmost hearts for him who lay there, or for him who had just left his body lying there upon that little cot.

Ruth sought Estrella so that she might not, again, behold the face of him, who, for the love of her, had done a fearful crime; she wished to save the girl for she had been as innocent of wrong as she, herself, had been; both had been led away by human passion, it is true, but led within the bounds of human law, and, so, according to that human law, neither one was culpable ... the man, alone, had sinned, and whether it had been because he had been stronger, every way, than were the women in the case, we cannot judge. 'Tis God alone must judge us all, and may He guide us all, at last, into the light that is His holy Smile.

CHAPTER XVII

When Ruth had left the cot where Manuello died, she, first, found Estrella and told her what had happened after she had gone, and, then, as she had liberty to go where she desired, she started out, just as the dusk was falling, to drive along an unknown road, which as she thought must lead away from the battle-field; she felt secure for armed men of her own race and nation were patrolling all the roads surrounding the hospital; the freshness of the coming night appealed to her and, under its enticing influence, she went much farther than she meant to do; her horses often shied at little heaps that seemed to take on most fantastic shapes with the increasing darkness.

She knew full well of what these little heaps had been made up, and, yet, surrounded as she was by horror, she did not feel afraid, for she was lifted up by patriotic fervor and a great desire to help where help of her was needed as were so many of the Red Cross nurses whom she met; splendid women volunteered their services as nurses during the progress of the Spanish-American war, and wore, with pride and reverence, the brilliant cross that indicated what the calling they had chosen was; Ruth Wakefield served her country with her might and wore her uniform as proudly and conscientiously as any General could; she drove along that lonely, unknown road as quietly and fearlessly as if her horses trotted over the finest boulevard in some populous city of her own United States and firmly held within her strong and steady hands the lines that guided the high-lifted team she had secured for her own use since coming to take charge of the hospital which she had endowed with her own funds.

Suddenly and without warning, her team was startled by a man who rose to his full height and stood erect and tall beside the road as if he'd risen from the heaps of dead that lay beside the way; the horses soon became unmanageable and overturned the vehicle, so that Ruth suddenly found herself thrown against a slight embankment lining the road, while her frightened team turned back toward the hospital; her first thought was of them, but, remembering that, only a few miles back, she had passed one of the patrols, she hoped the team would be secured and taken into safety; then, shudderingly, she realized that she was all alone in a strange and hostile neighborhood, and, acting on a sudden impulse, she hastily climbed over the embankment as she thought she heard a noise approaching on the road; she turned and started back but kept herself concealed as much as possible behind the friendly embankment.

As she proceeded she began to feel a sort of faintness, almost amounting to nausea, creeping over her and dreaded the long walk to the hospital, but decided to go on until she saw an armed man dressed in the uniform of the United States army; she wondered, at first, why she felt faint and almost sick, and, then, she realized that the offensive odors that assailed her sensitive olfactory nerves were those that rise when material bodies have been deprived of the higher life that gave them animation ... that the horrors of a bloody battle-field surrounded her, and, as she advanced slowly and with dreadful anticipation ... as she even stumbled over more than one unconscious form, that, only a few short hours before, had been as full of bounding life as she was then, she thought of what the suffering must be of those who lay among the dead, perhaps for weary, pain-filled hours, alive yet helpless; the thought was a terrific one for any tender-hearted woman to entertain, and Ruth had always been particularly thoughtful of the comfort of

anyone who happened to be near to her, and, so, she soon became enthused with the idea that she might search among the heaps of dead and find, maybe, someone who lived and might, if he were rescued, yet be happy in the world she lived in, and, so, she softly called to see if anyone could hear her voice and guide her to the object of her search:

"Are any here who are in need of earthly help?" she asked. "If any here can hear my voice, pray answer me and tell me where to come to find you."

She waited for an answer but none came, at first; and then it seemed to her as if she heard a far-off whisper far away ... she listened breathlessly ... it came again and, then, she followed it until she found the one from whom the whisper came.

He lay among a heap of bodies tossed about as if they had found death together; one whose body lay across his own, Ruth lifted, though she shuddered while she did it, for the stark, stiff form was that of one who'd, only lately, been as full of life as she was then; she laid it softly down and sought the one whose whisper she had heard; her hand crept up, along a rough and blood-soaked uniform, until it found a face and found it warm with sentient life; she was electrified by joy at finding one who lived among the dead, and hastened, then, to separate him from the other bodies lying all around him; it was as if they'd followed after him ... as if he'd been a leader of the rest ... for he was well in front of all of them and yet they were so near that, when they fell, they fell together, all around the one whose life she sought to save.

She was intent on saving life and did not shrink although her gentle hand found many bloody wounds in searching for the one from which his life-blood flowed full fast; she found the place, at last ... a deep flesh-wound that touched an artery in his right arm ... she had a silken scarf about her throat, and, wrapping this about the arm above the wound, she made a tourniquet by using a small surgical instrument which she always carried for that purpose in the pocket of her nurse's apron which she still wore; this stopped the flow of blood at once, and, as the brachial artery was untouched, the man gained strength enough to whisper:

"Tender Heart ... I'm going to name you right away. Tender Heart, how did you happen here ... at night ... alone?"

"I think I came to find you," answered Ruth. "I thought my horses ran away and dumped me on the ground, but, now, I think I came here just to find you and to bind that poor arm. Now I'll go to bring assistance to you just as soon as I can do so."

"Tender Heart," he whispered, for his voice was growing fainter, "if I should not be here when you come again, good-bye.... God bless and keep you safe from harm."

She knew the meaning of the words and almost flew along, although she often stumbled as she went among the bodies lying there upon the blood-soaked ground; she reached the hospital at last ... the time seemed long to her ... and, there, in front of it, stood her two frightened horses, looking all around as if in search of her; she soothed them with her reassuring voice, and then she found a vehicle adapted to the use she wished to put it to, and two assistants from the hospital staff; thus equipped, she took the lines again and drove along the road again but with a different object than the one she'd had before; turning off the road, she found the object of her search and the assistants lifted him upon the stretcher they had brought and, very soon, the man lay, white and spent with loss of blood, but conscious, in a little cot, and Ruth, forgetting her own needs, stood there beside it.

"Tender Heart," said her new patient, after he had been refreshed and bandaged thoroughly, "Tender Heart, I'm very grateful to you. Let me introduce myself to you ... your name, you see, I know. I am one of the five men who answered Roosevelt when he asked for volunteers to follow him to gain the very top of all the ridges that cropped up about San Juan hill." He smiled, "I think you know me, now, as I know you. We're both Americans.... I know that, too ... we both love Teddy.... I could see your eyes flash at the mention of his name. He is a man among men. I wish you could have heard him when he said 'I did not think you would refuse to follow where I would lead.' I stood beside his horse as he said those sad words ... the others followed, then. They followed Teddy up that hill ... they took it, too. We won the day. The Spaniards fled before us. You know me, now," he ended, whimsically, "just as well as I know you."

"Yes," said Ruth, "I know you, now, and you know me ... we're both Americans and both of us love Teddy and are proud of him and what he did this day. And, now, you'd better go to sleep and rest up for we still have work to do ... the Spaniard is not conquered, yet. They'll need us both and so we must do all we can to keep our strength. I'm going, now. Good-bye until tomorrow."

"Goodnight, Tender Heart," he said. "Goodnight."

Ruth went, then, to the little cottage where she found old Mage and Tid-i-wats awaiting her; Estrella stayed on duty in the hospital where she had learned to do her work with neatness and dispatch.

Ruth always told old Mage the happenings of the day as they were seated at their evening meal; her old nurse loved to listen to her animated account of every little thing that she remembered that she'd seen or heard about; she had an unusual memory of small details and a most graphic power of description; these she employed to interest and amuse her old nurse who had been alone with little Tid-i-wats, almost all day; in recounting recent events she passed as lightly as possible over the occurrences of the battle-field where she had found and rescued one who had

been left as dead among the lifeless bodies of the slain; she did not wish to shock old Mage too much and, somehow, she did not wish to speak of him she'd rescued ... somehow, she feared that her auditor, who was always eager for romantic episodes would, maybe, choose to enter into rhapsodies concerning the possibilities of her own future if she talked too much about the handsome stranger, for remembering how he'd looked resting, as she'd seen him last, upon the little cot, his dark-blue eyes regarding her with whimsical tenacity, she freely acknowledged to herself that he was handsome and distinguished in appearance; so she changed the subject when old Mage began to question her too closely about him, and, in the changing of the subject, the rosy flush that was so much a part of her expression, crept over her fair face and lighted up her deep gray eyes until her countenance was glorified, as if her inner consciousness shone through her delicate and expressive features; old Mage observed this blush and speculated on its cause and wondered whether Ruth had found another man more worthy of affection than the one she hoped she had almost forgotten.

When Ruth returned, the next day, to the hospital, she went among the little cots until she came to that one where he lay ... the man she'd helped to rescue from a slow and very painful death; she found him lying wide awake and very thoughtful:

"Tender Heart," he said, "Tender Heart, you've come to me, again; I've longed for you and now you're here beside me."

She rested one of her soft hands upon the cot and his hand searched for hers and found it; then their fingers intertwined and clung together for a moment only, but the memory of that hand-clasp lingered with them forever after; it was as if their very souls had intermingled in that clasping of their hands ... it was as if their spirits swung, together, out ... far out ... beyond the things of earth ... and, then, still farther out and on and up into eternal peace and lasting joy and gladness ... it was as if they had been translated into disembodied spirits while they still remained on earth ... as if a higher and a holier love than any earthly love can ever be had sought them out and found them there within that shadowy hospital ... it was as if they had gone on into the astral world and left their human bodies where they seemed to be themselves ... as if they had been separated from the material surroundings that seemed to be about them.

Ruth blushed until the rosy flush crept up to her brown hair that seemed to frame her face, and looked at the soft fingers that his hand had held and then she smoothed his pillow with them as she said:

"I'm very glad to find that you are better than you were last night. I surely hope that you'll recover very rapidly. I'm told that men like you will soon again be needed. It is reported that another battle will be fought not very far from here."

"I surely hope," he said and said it very earnestly, "I surely hope that I'll be able to take my part in whatever engagement is entered into by our troops, and if, perchance, I should be left again upon a battle-field, I trust that you will come and find me, Tender Heart, I trust that you will find me and, if it pleases you, I hope you'll keep me, Tender Heart."

She blushed again at that and simply said:

"Now you must go to sleep and rest and gain what strength you can, for men like you," she ended, archly, "for men like you are almost always needed very badly."

Ruth Wakefield was no flirt and never had been one; she was quickwitted and she had a wide command of language, and she smiled as she went on upon her rounds among the little cots when she remembered that neither of them really knew the other's name; she liked the name he'd given to her ... she liked the way he said it ... she liked the fine expression of his speaking countenance ... she liked his eyes ... she liked his manly way of meeting whatever came to him with courage and with cheerful readiness to serve the country they both loved ... her heart went out to him in very many ways, and, then, she looked again at those soft fingers that his hand had held ... she seemed to feel again the subtle, unexplainable, electric thrill that crept through all her being at his touch ... that seemed to answer to the look within his eyes ... the accent on his tongue, and, then, she blushed again and went about her work within that shadowy hospital where many strong men lay in bitter pain with renewed courage and with a new and hither-to unknown tenderness.

She stood, at length, beside a cot whereon lay one whose face was hidden while surgeons dressed a gaping wound he had received upon his head; Ruth stopped and gave her scissors that she always carried in the pocket of her apron to the one who needed them for use in cutting away the dark hair that grew along the edges of the wound; it clung in tiny ringlets and was black as night and very soft and thick... Ruth could not help remembering, that her hands had often strayed among such soft and dark and clinging ringlets, but she shuddered as she thought of them and of Estrella who had deemed herself to be the only woman Victorio Colenzo had ever loved, and, then, she wondered if all men were like to that one she had married thinking him to be as he professed to be ... judging him to be as truthful as she was ... she wondered if the man she had just left would be like that under similar circumstances ... he was ready in his hints at tenderness ... was he, too, perhaps, a gay deceiver?

While her thoughts were rambling on in this way, her eyes were idly looking at the man who lay upon his face and writhed under the stitches that the surgeons took to close the gaping wound upon his head; he turned his face an instant toward her and she recognized him as a Spanish officer she'd seen in San Domingo under most distressing circumstances; she had gone, as she

had often done before, to minister to the needs of those who were among the poorer classes in the village, one day, and found before a hovel a most richly caparisoned horse held by an orderly; inside, there knelt upon the floor a young and pretty peasant girl; she was imploring this same officer who lay upon that little cot not to make her go with him to be his helpless slave; Ruth rescued her and told the man to go his way in no uncertain language; now, he lay there dressed as if he were an American soldier; she recognized him perfectly for his face had often haunted her, it was so sinister and devilish.

She sought out Father Felix, then, and told him what she had discovered, and he took what steps were necessary in the matter, for he who'd named Ruth Tender Heart had named her very well indeed; it seemed to her she could not bear to turn this Spanish spy over to the proper authorities, and, yet, she knew it was her duty to do that very thing, so the good Priest helped her to do her duty as he'd promised her he would, and, after that, there was a wall at sunrise and a platoon of armed men, and, then, that Spanish spy soon disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII

We intimated when we first began this tale that Father Felix was a man to be admired, not only for his strong religious zeal, but for his great virility and patriotic fervor.

Never had he shown these qualities more fully than during the naval battle of Santiago which engagement took place shortly after the events narrated in the last chapter; there was work to do on land as well as on the water at that crucial time; more than 18,000 helpless persons ... men, women and children ... marched out of the beleaguered city seeking safety in the open country surrounding it; among these were many wealthy women of the higher class whose delicate silken garments were bedraggled and torn by the hardships of the journey which it was necessary to make on foot over muddy roads and through barbed wires which had been stretched irregularly all around Santiago and its vicinity by the Spanish soldiery for the purpose of turning back the invading Americans who were advancing upon them.

Among these women there was one who reached the hospital over which Ruth Wakefield presided; she was bespattered and weary and sick at heart, but there was a light in her dark eyes and a steadiness in her firm hand that appealed to Ruth at once and made her single this one woman from among all who came to her that day for help; as soon as she had changed her apparel and washed the grime of travel from her person, she asked to be allowed to assist the others who were at work among the little cots that were now filled with suffering humanity; she took her place so quietly that it seemed to those among whom she moved that she had almost always been right there and would always continue to be there; Estrella liked her from the first of their acquaintance and the older woman found the girl so pleasing that whenever she could do so, she gave her hand a little squeeze or patted her upon her shoulder to make her know that they two were congenial and going on, together, toward the same loved goal; this silent association became at once a bond between these two who, in their nurse's uniforms, looked enough alike to be twin sisters ... they had the same dark eyes and sensitive and drooping lips ... they had the same fair skins, although Estrella had been tanned by more outside exposure than the other had ... they moved in the same way and both were tall and straight and lithe and quick; Ruth noticed them together and at once began to wonder why they looked so much alike ... then she thought of what Estrella'd told her as to what she knew of her own family, and, immediately, Ruth began to speculate and piece together little circumstances and then she soon began to hope that poor Estrella, maybe, might, in this way, find her own people; so she asked some kindly questions of the woman who had come to them that day, and she found that she had had a little sister, long ago ... a little sister who had disappeared and whom they'd mourned as dead for many years; Ruth told her all she knew about the girl ... all except her intimate association with the man whom, she, herself, had married; she did not feel that she could speak of him to this dark stranger ... anyway, it would not matter, now, and if Estrella wished to speak about it later on, then she could do so; they called the girl, then, and found she had a little dainty cross of gold that she had always worn about her neck.... Manuello's mother had preserved it for her while she was an infant thinking it might prove the child's identity, so that the ones who'd cared for her might be profited thereby, and, since she knew about it, she, herself, had held it sacred as the only link that bound her to her unknown family ... and so it proved, indeed, the link that proved her as the sister of the lady who had come to them that day from the beleaguered city of Santiago.

Estrella's blood, it seemed, was Spanish ... she had descended from the ones who knew the roses of Castile ... she'd always seemed far different from the peasants among whom she'd lived until she met Ruth Wakefield who recognized in her a higher strain ... a higher nature ... than she found in any of the peasants whom she met in San Domingo; old Mage, even, looked upon Estrella differently than on the other servants whom she always treated with great condescension, for she felt herself above the most of them as she was always nearer to her dear young lady than any of them were; Ruth trusted her with Tid-i-wats, for one thing, which separated her from all the rest, for Tid-i-wats, was most abrupt in very many ways, and, sometimes, even went so far as to just sink her long, sharp claws right through whatever garments anybody wore, so that they found and often even penetrated the skin beneath the garments; she would do this deed in such a loving way that many who were sadly scratched by her would try to smile and take this punishment as if it were but joy and gladness ... old Mage

squirmed sometimes, 'tis true, beneath this discipline that Tid-i-wats gave very freely, but she never put her down or turned against her,—only saying:

"Tid-i-wats! Good land! Your blessed little claws are very sharp indeed," and, then, she'd often turn to Ruth and add, "I tell you Tid-i-wats is just as young and spry as she ever was ... no one would ever think how old she is if he could feel her claws."

When Estrella found that she was not alone, but had a family, and a loving, wealthy sister, old Mage was very glad indeed ... she'd found the girl a little in her way for many reasons; Ruth deferred to her a little, pitying her so much, and old Mage knew that if Ruth pitied anybody very much she might, in time, begin to love the person whom she put her tender pity on, and, then, to the old nurse, Estrella always brought up the memory of the man who had deceived her ... made her think him to be far better than he'd ever been ... and, so, altogether, Estrella's good fortune pleased old Mage in very many pleasant ways.

To say that Ruth was glad to have Estrella find her people was to put the case too lightly altogether; she was far too unselfish not to rejoice in her good fortune even though her going might mean great human loneliness for her: she had in her own inner consciousness a kind of spiritual and lasting strength on which she always leaned when outside companionship failed her in any way ... she never was alone although she often seemed to be so ... in fact, Ruth Wakefield often found herself to be alone among a crowd of human beings ... it seemed to her their many diverse thoughts disturbed the peace of mind she always longed to have ... her pity was so great ... her sympathy so broad ... and sorrows and sore trials are so common to the entire race of men and women ... that she seldom found much joy among the people whom she met; she gave most liberally to all she came in contact with ... she gave encouragement and comfort and sympathy and help ... but seldom did she find a human being who could give her anything at all for any length of time, at least:

"They come and they go," she often sadly said. "It seems to me that there is nothing steadfast in this world except the God on whom I always lean when all else fails me.... I wish I *could* find something strong enough to tie my faith to ... I *wish* I could ... it would be wonderful to know that I could always find good, solid ground beneath my human feet ... it would be wonderful to feel that nothing mattered between another human being and myself ... to feel that nothing, good or bad, could ever really change our feelings toward each other ... but I'd have to know for sure that it was so ..." she'd add, "I'd have to know for sure, I'd have to try it out somehow ... so many things have slipped away from me ... so very many things ... I'd have to know for sure, somehow, before I'd dare to trust too much."

While these personal matters were taking the attention of some of those within the shadowy hospital, Father Felix was undergoing an altogether different experience.

The good Priest had, more than once, covered the entire eight miles of entrenchments around Santiago on foot and with a heavy pack containing supplies on his broad back; during the time that elapsed between the naval battle of Santiago and the surrender of the city on Sunday, July 17, 1898, he had marched with his little flock of soldiers over many stony trails and through many miry passes, and, while the engagement itself was in progress, he had performed many heroic deeds and, more than once, he had fervently thanked God for his sturdy strength of arm and limb because he was thereby enabled to give material as well as spiritual aid to those who came within the reach of his hands; had anyone been watching a certain shady spot near Santiago on July 3, 1898, he might have witnessed a peculiar scene.

A rather short thick-set man, dressed as an army Chaplain and wearing a crucifix attached to a strong chain around his neck, was bending over one who lay there in the shade; he seemed to be examining the man to see if life remained in his body, and, yet, he always held the crucifix before the face of him who lay there as if he wished him to behold it, in case his earthly eyes should evermore see anything; he tried in every way he could to gain some recognition of his holy office from the man over whose earthly tenement he was then bending, but, as he did not succeed in this, he gently laid the crucifix upon the apparently pulseless breast, and went his way to find, perhaps, another one to whom he might administer the final consolation of the church whose dogmas he believed in.

The man he'd left behind him stirred uneasily, and, as he writhed and twisted there, the crucifix slid off his breast and fell upon the ground; it lay where it had fallen until Father Felix came again and brought with him another sufferer; he looked upon the breast of his first charge and did not see his crucifix ... it lay beneath the body of the one he'd left it with; he gently said:

"I left my crucifix with you, my Friend ... I thought it might be a consolation to you if you came to life again at all. I do not see the crucifix ... could anyone have taken it during my absence, I wonder?"

"I'm sure I don't know anything about your crucifix, good Sir," the man replied in a weak voice. "I have other things to fix my mind on than anything like that. For one thing, I am wounded and I need a surgeon more than I do Priests or crosses."

"I'll supply that need as far as I am able," Father Felix said. "I know I am an amateur and yet I have set broken limbs and tied up arteries and sewed up wounds full many times because there was no one better near enough to do it. Where are you hurt, my Friend?"

"I am not hurt at all, you blundering old fool, you ..." the man began. "I'm dead and buried ...

killed completely ... that is all ... and I don't want any old woman's work. Go get a surgeon for me ... quick! I'm losing lots of blood ... I need a surgeon, I tell you ... go get me one!"

Father Felix did not say a word in answer to this tirade for he had heard full many such remarks since he had been at work among the soldiers, and, so, he bound the wounds of the second sufferer he'd brought before he stopped the flow of blood from his first charge, for, well he knew the loss of some good red blood might make it easier for him to help the man ... he was too full of life and anger ... too full of unrepented viciousness ... for the good Priest to help him very much, and, so, he let him lay there in the shade and curse and fume and rage until he worked his evil temper off a little; then he gently said to him:

"Now, if you think that I can help you any, I will do all I can for you, Friend, but if you'd rather lie there on the ground and take the name of God in vain, why, I must let you do so. There is no one within hail except myself, who knows a thing about surgery, unless this man, here, does; I do not know about that part but he is wounded, too, so that I guess I am your only hope here on the earth at present. May I see your hurt and maybe bind it up and make your suffering less than it is, now?"

Sheepishly, the man looked up at him, and moved a little so the crucifix became exposed; Father Felix quickly picked it up and put the chain around his neck again, and then he added to the things that he had said before:

"I'm sure I'm very glad I found my crucifix ... it is of value to me for it has been the means of consolation to a great many sufferers from this sad war; it seems to help so many to behold the sufferings of One Who gave His precious life to save the lost and suffering souls who wander on the earth. He loved you, Sir, and, in His Name, I love you, too, and wish to help you, though you flout my work in your behalf. I am an amateur, but I can bind the only wound I see about you, Sir. Shall I do it, Sir, or not? I'd like to do the work the very best I could, but, if you say me nay, I'll leave it as it is."

The man grinned like a bashful boy, but he bowed his head in assent and Father Felix went to work and bound his wound and left him lying there beside the other sufferer and went to find another man to help; his stocky legs and muscular arms came in quite handily, that time, for, when he came back to the shady spot, he bore one on his shoulder who looked and seemed as if already dead and gone beyond the things of earth but Father Felix laid him gently down and knelt beside him while he gently laid his recovered crucifix upon his almost pulseless breast; the first man watched the operation silently, and, then, he moved a little farther from the deepest of the shade and said:

"Better bring him over here. It's better in the shade. I'll make a little more room here beside me and maybe I can help some in the dressing of his wounds."

"I thank you, Sir," the Priest replied. "I surely thank you kindly, but this man has gone, I fear, beyond our earthly aid; and, yet, I could not bear to leave him lying out there in the sun; the heat is terrible out there and flies and insects gather round and many lying out there suffer from their stings. I'll leave my crucifix, here, on his breast, and, if he moves or speaks, will you please tell him I will be right back?"

And then good Father Felix made another solemn trip to that sad battle-field and brought another man into the shade; and he whom he had brought there, just before, lay silently ... the silent crucifix upon his breast. The priest leaned down to listen for his breathing, then, and raised his head with joy depicted on his countenance.

"He lives!" he cried aloud. "This poor fellow is alive! Perhaps it may be possible for us to bring him into consciousness again. Now, Sir," he addressed the man he had first brought into the friendly shade, "maybe you can help me. Take one of his hands between your own and rub it just as hard as you can rub it, Sir; that's right ... now, take the other one and do the same with it. Your strong vitality will maybe help his weakness, Sir. We two together may be instruments in God's Hands to bring him back to earthly life again."

He put some drops of cordial on his tongue and chafed his limbs and turned him over many times until he saw some signs of returning consciousness and then he raised him up and rested his head upon his helper's breast and held the crucifix before his face so he would see it if his eyes would open; and his helper held the hands of him who seemed about to die and gazed with eagerness into his countenance.

The good Priest saw this look upon his helper's face and joyed to see it there instead of the malevolent expression that had rested on his rather handsome features only a short time before.

At length, the sufferer resting on the other's breast opened his wide eyes and gazed upon the crucifix and motioned that it be brought nearer to his dying lips; he kissed it, then, devoutly, and his deathless spirit passed to Him Who gave it life at first.

Father Felix gently laid his body down upon the ground and placed the crucifix upon his cold, still breast, and, then, he said to him who watched it all in silence:

"You see, Sir, some are happier to have the crucifix to kiss before they go to meet their Maker; I did not know that you felt as you said you did about it. I beg your pardon, Sir ... I humbly beg your pardon."

CHAPTER XIX

On July 17, 1898, United States troops marched into and took possession of the city of Santiago, thereby completing the assurance of independence to Cuba.

On that auspicious day Ruth Wakefield closed her temporary hospital and turned over to its new owner the little cottage which she had built to shelter her small family during her stay near Santiago; with tears of joy as well as sorrow, she had said good-bye to Estrella and her new-found relatives who were about to return to the home of the latter; Father Felix had decided to return to his little flock at San Domingo as he felt that his work with the army was finished, so that, in his company and with old Mage and Tid-i-wats safely ensconced near to her, she sailed upon the first steamer going toward Havana after there was no longer need of her help among the American soldiers.

It was with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow that she left the scene of her recent activities ... she was carrying with her many sad memories of heroism and of suffering borne with patriotic patience ... her heart was heavy when she reflected upon the horrors she had witnessed, but her spirit was loyal to the sacred cause for which so many splendid lives had been sacrificed ... she could see, with prophetic vision, a happy and prosperous race of people taking the place of the down-trodden and pitiful company of cowering peasants with which she had been all too familiar ... it seemed to her that she could see the smiling faces of many happy children crowding along the narrow streets of the small villages of Cuba ... it seemed to her that she could almost hear old men relating the long-past horrors that had been common under the iron heel of the Spanish oppressor ... relating these remembered facts to those who shook their heads, half doubtingly, as they listened to them.

Ruth herself, was looking forward with bright anticipation to her return to her own beloved home ... dear to her, not only because of its intrinsic attractiveness, but also because of the precious memories it held of her parents whom she constantly mourned for and kept alive within her loving heart; for so it is, as I believe, that those who are beyond the earth yet live among us who are yet in human form; I think that those who are made welcome in the hearts of men and women continue, often, their stay within the circle of humanity; so long as mortals remember and long for them, so long will they care to wander among the hills and mountains and along the pleasant valleys and by the oceans and the rivers of the earth; if they should be forgotten by all humanity, it does not seem to me that they would often wish to look upon the moonlight or the sunlight of our world; if nowhere in our world their spirits could find a resting-place, it seems to me they would not care to stray among mortal men and women.

Freed souls, as I believe, are not compelled to associate with those who are uncongenial to them; they do not have to yield their finest taste and dearest wishes, as so many mortals do, to what is far beneath them ... far beneath their inner consciousness of right and wrong. They do not, as I hope, just because they made some sad mistake, go on suffering for dreary years, as many women have, because they saw no way of sure release except through death itself.

It is a pitiful but well-established fact that many wives and mothers have borne long years of martyrdom because, in their first youth, they made unfortunate matrimonial alliances.

There are so very many ways to put on binding-chains in human life; there are so many changes common to most mortals, steadfastness and truth are such rare qualities, that I sometimes wonder how men and women manage even as well as they do.

Sometimes, we criticize our fellow-men and fellow-women pretty harshly, but, then, perhaps, we only see one side, and if we could look down from some great height, perhaps we, then, would marvel that they do as well as they do, now, with human life.

There have been those who honestly expected that, when they would leave their earthly tenements, they would go to sleep, when they had gone across the unknown river that they knew as death's cold stream, and, maybe, sleep a thousand years or so; they must have dreaded that last, long sleep, especially if they, as might have happened, had never been very sound or very quiet sleepers ... if they had always seemed to be on guard and wakened at the slightest unfamiliar sound ... the thought that they would just lie silently within the narrow grave they must have known it was intended they should be put in must have been a most unpleasant one; they must have edged around it all they could and seldom mentioned it to anyone around them, and, yet, that horrid thought ... that last, long sleep ... must have, often, been present in their waking thoughts, and must have, even, sometimes, haunted them in their dreams.

But I believe that we go right on living when we leave the earth-plane; I believe that most of us will be wide awake and conscious from the very start of that larger life that we will, then, begin to live. I hope that we will find that we do not have to sleep at all unless we choose to do so.

Ruth Wakefield kept the memories of her parents in her heart and so she always had them with her where she went, and, now, that she was going back where they and she had spent so very many happy years together, it was natural that she should think of them even more than common; a feeling of deep sadness stole across her mind whenever she reflected on her parents and their home, somehow; she could not account for this at all ... she could not satisfy herself that she had any real reason for this feeling of sadness ... but it would creep over her in spite of

her efforts to banish it from her mind; old Mage felt this and tried to cheer her dear young lady up ... little Tid-i-wats felt it and rubbed against her lovingly and purred her little happy song of comfort and content ... and, yet, Ruth Wakefield dreaded, while she longed for, her own home, and, as the vessel they were on drew near to Havana, this feeling of unaccountable sadness deepened with the girl ... she drew her breath in sharply and a deep and heart-felt sigh broke from her lips as they reached the landing-place and left the wild and treacherous waters far behind them.

Father Felix wondered if this evident sadness and dread were due, in part, to the experiences through which they had both passed, and also, the thought of the man whom Ruth had married surreptitiously would often cross the mind of the good Priest, for he knew well she often must remember him and his dashing, dark and manly beauty; old Mage almost cursed him in her fierce old heart when she noticed that Ruth was sad although she'd always been so glad to come back home.

"It's that fellow's fault!" she grumbled to herself. "It's all his fault ... I hope he's good and dead by this time! I'm sure I'd help to make him so, most willingly! What did he want to come into her young life and almost ruin it for? The low-lived pup!"

They started out, as dusk was falling, the day they reached Havana, to go to San Domingo, and, then, home; Father Felix went with them as far as his refectory, and there he bade them a cheerful good-bye and said he'd come up, soon, and see them in their home again.

Ruth, somehow, feared to say good-bye to the good Priest and kept his hand in hers much longer than was her wont with any man ... he was a bulwark for anyone who clung to him for strength ... his was a nature strong and good and clean and kind.... Ruth felt this more than usually, that evening, and dreaded to go on without him; he noticed this strange mood in her and said with cheery acquiescence:

"Perhaps I'd better go on up the hill with you, my Daughter. I can as well as not. No one awaits me except my little choir-boys and they have managed a long time without me. If you will wait a moment while I look about a bit, I'll just go on up with you and see you nicely settled in your own old place and then I'll come back here and settle down myself."

Suiting his actions to his words, the good Priest looked around and climbed the hill with Ruth and her small retinue; the path seemed so familiar with the shadows falling all around it, that she laughed and said to Father Felix:

"I am a coward, after all ... afraid of friendly wind-mills like Don Quixote ... having had to do so much with Spaniards may have made me like them in some degree at least.... I wonder if Cervantes was afraid, himself, of things that no one ought to be afraid of! I wonder if Sancho Panza was afraid, too ... was Rozinante...."

And, then, she stopped, for they had reached what had been, once, the outer gate of her palatial residence; there was no gate there ... there was no residence ... there was no life there ... it was the tomb of hope and home for her; the dwelling had been razed completely ... in its stead were only smouldering ruins ... all her precious memories ... her visible and tangible reminders of her parents ... had been swept away ... she had paid an awful price for helping those who needed help from her.

Father Felix stood beside her with his hand upon her shoulder ... he could not say a word of consolation or of any sort of help ... he was dumbfounded by it all; old Mage sunk down upon the ground and wept, and Tid-i-wats came close to Ruth and rubbed against her garments; stooping, then, she picked her little pet up and held her closely clasped within her sheltering arms; then she went to her old nurse and said to her:

"Do not despair, my dear old Friend. God will provide for us, some way. This is a dreadful thing, but we must make the very best of it that we can possibly. I will try to think of some way whereby we may be sheltered for this one night that is before us and then I hope to find some way to rebuild a portion of the residence we used to have here on this blessed spot. Let's bear this, dear old Friend. Let's think we gave our home to save this country for the people who inhabit it and may their homes be just as full of peace and comfort and joy and gladness as this one that is gone has been for all who came beneath its friendly roof."

The Father Felix stood beside her and said:

"My Daughter, come with me; I'll house you all for this one night at least; I'll find a way tomorrow, somehow, for you, so that you may go on in the path that you were meant to walk in. My Daughter, let us pray for guidance in this unexpected sorrow. Let us pray."

They knelt there underneath the friendly stars and the good Priest prayed, earnestly:

"Dear, kind and loving Father," then he said, "look down upon us as we kneel before Thee, here; direct us with Thy holy Wisdom, for we falter and are cast down with the burden of this day. Direct the feet of her who has been sorely stricken, here, tonight; direct her feet so that she may go on upon the path that Thou hast pointed out to her. Help her to go on with courage and devotion to the cause for which she has made this great and almost overpowering sacrifice. Help her to show in all her acts, henceforth, the same sweet resignation to Thy Will that she has shown so far. And help me, Father, help Thy humble servant who is but feeble and who often fails in doing all he should for Thee and for Thy children, help Thy humble and most unworthy servant to

stand as if he were a pillar, so that she may lean upon him if her courage falters, or if she should stumble or grow weak in walking in the path that she was meant by Thee to walk upon. Look down in mercy on Thy servants as we kneel before Thee here. Amen."

Tid-i-wats endured this, patiently, until he went beyond the common run of prayers for him when they had been together, then she squirmed and twisted in Ruth's arms, and, finally, escaped her altogether; then old Mage corraled her and the two of them had quite a little conversation on the side:

"You naughty little thing! You must behave yourself and be a nice little lady. Can't you see what's happened to us without making us a lot of trouble, too?"

And Tid-i-wats said, plainly:

"I'll do just as I please, you mean old thing you! Don't you *dare* to hold me when I want to get away! I'll show you what my claws will do to you, old Mage! You let me go this minute!"

Then she used some language only known to cats and those who know the devious ways of little petted cats.

Then Ruth turned to her and whispered:

"Little Dadditts! Little Tid-i-wats! Be a nice lady, now ... be a very nice little lady, now. Dadditts ... little bit of Dadditts...."

Then she held her close and tried to comfort her and gain some comfort for herself, but her tears would come to think how happy they had always or most always been in that fine home which seemed so much a part of life to Ruth that, now that it was gone from her, life seemed a sordid and a sorry thing.

But she went with Father Felix, quietly, to the refectory and there they all found comfort and refreshment, for the good Priest always had prepared himself to entertain some unexpected guests, and, with returning security and peace, his parishioners had brought some supplies to welcome him on his return; so they fared quite well considering what had met them when they reached the place where Ruth had thought to find rest from her arduous toil; instead, she had to meet renewed unrest and many problems to be solved in her near future.

CHAPTER XX

When Ruth Wakefield awoke the next morning after her arrival in the village of San Domingo, she became conscious of her surroundings with a sudden start; at first, she scarcely realized just where she was, for her long trip on the boat following her strenuous and nerve-wracking labor of the past few weeks, had left her very weary in mind as well as in body, so that her sleep had been profound and restful; she looked about her wonderingly and did not recognize anything near to her except little Tid-i-wats who was cuddled up in a little soft round ball right beside her pillow; then, from the adjoining room, she began to hear old Mage, who was, evidently, making her customary strenuous efforts to continue her slumbers.

Gradually, Ruth remembered the desolation to which she had returned, and, hastily dressing, she left the refectory intending to go at once to the spot where her much-loved home had been, and ascertain, under the light of day, the extent of her loss, also, she wished to make some plans, while she could do so quietly and unobserved, as to the future of her little family, who, as it seemed, was now without a roof to shelter them.

She slowly and cautiously ascended the hill; the pathway was almost obliterated by the growth of the wild things that had been allowed to run riot over it and she followed it more by instinct than anything else; as she gained the point from which the proud edifice she had so loved used to become visible to anyone approaching it, the fact that no buildings of any kind were in sight pressed upon her inner consciousness, and it was only with great effort that she proceeded at all; somehow, she had hoped, she now found, that the hasty survey they had made the night before might have been overdrawn in some respects and the corroboration of her worst fears was hard for her to bear; but she had become accustomed, from long endurance, to meet whatever came with calmness and courage; so she straightened her slim, tall figure to its full height, and advanced with the air of a soldier marching forth to meet the foe.

She had passed the spot where the entrance gates had been; the pillars on either side of the entrance were almost entirely demolished and there was nothing to be seen of the gates themselves; all along the driveway débris was piled in disordered heaps; evidently, no one had been here, or so it seemed at a first glance, anyway, for some time; vegetation had even partially covered a part of the ruins of the dwelling itself; with repeated gasps of horror, she ran from what had been the front entrance to her home to first one side and then the other; finally, she sat down, disconsolately, like Niobe, amid the ruins of her former happiness; she knew that she was where her library had been; here she had found her most satisfying, lasting happiness, surrounded as she had been by the books she had loved; she could see the half-burned remains of many of her favorites lying all around her; thinking to save some portion of one of these, she picked it up, fondly, and laid it in her lap, while she bent over it searching for some word of

comfort or some sustaining sentence; it seemed to her that some of the authors she had so dearly loved and almost revered, would surely come to her aid in this dire calamity ... it almost seemed to her as if one or more of them would actually speak to her in such a way as to impress her mind with their fine thoughts.

Suddenly, she became conscious of the nearness of some human being; looking up, surprised and even alarmed, she beheld the man whose life she had been instrumental in saving after the battle of San Juan Hill.

"Tender Heart," he said, softly, "Tender Heart, what have we here? Why are you so sad? You came to me in grievous trouble and I, it seems, have found you under similar circumstances. Tender Heart," he pleaded, "Tender Heart, let me help you as you helped me if I can do so."

She turned and looked into his eyes ... she rose to her feet and took one hesitating step toward him ... she stretched out both her hands, and, somehow, then, she felt his strong arms fold themselves around her yielding form ... she felt his heart beat very near to hers ... she felt his lips against her hair ... and, then, she turned her face from his broad shoulder where it had found a resting-place, and, as her lips met his, it seemed to her that, after all, she had come home; a feeling of deep security and sweet peace crept over her:

"Tender Heart," he murmured very near to her small, shell-like ear, for she had, once more, put her head against his shoulder, "Tender Heart, you do not know my name.... I am, to you, but one of those five men who volunteered, at once, to follow Teddy up San Juan Hill.... I am, to you, but only him you rescued from almost certain death upon that bloody battle-field. Are you sure you are not making a mistake, sweet, trusting Tender Heart, to grant me this great privilege, knowing as little of me as you do?"

He waited for her answer, for some time, but, then, he waited willingly indeed, for her soft nearness was enough to make him very happy; when her answer came she spoke in such low tones he had to listen very closely ... he had to put his arms about her a little closer than they had been yet ... he had to lift her from the ground and bring her soft, red mouth upon a level with his head, indeed ... and then, he heard her say:

"I know you just as well as you know me. We do not know each other's names ... we do not need to know them ... now ... I only know I love you, Dear ... and, now, I know that you love me."

And, then, he set her feet upon the ground again and looked down into her clear, gray eyes, and found within their shining depths the very things he wanted most to know; and she looked up and saw a man who was a man indeed ... a man on whom she knew that she could lean ... a man whom she would love to walk beside ... a man of whom she could be always proud.

Standing there, they gazed into each other's eyes and read their future in them ... read the happiness that they might know together on the earth, and, then, they saw beyond the chance and change that seem to govern earthly things, and saw themselves together in some higher, better sphere. They plainly saw, there, in each other's eyes, the promise of another, more ethereal world, where they might spend long ages of eternal joy and gladness in each other's company.

Father Felix found them so, for he had followed Ruth to see if he could help her meet the problems that confronted her; the good Priest hesitated for only a moment before he said:

"My Daughter, I trust that you have found true happiness. Sir, I do not know you very well, but I can give you most profound assurance that you have found a jewel among women; if she has any faults I have not found them, yet, and I have spent full many happy hours in her society; my work is to find faults, if so be I can trace them out; I am a hunter, and a most successful one, of human frailties, and, when I give you my most profound assurance that I have not found a fault in this one woman, the statement is worthy of respect.

"Your coming at this time is most propitious, for I was almost at my wit's end as to how to help her bear the direful calamity that has just come upon her. She has not remembered half she's lost, and, now that she has found you, Sir, I trust that she will nevermore remember much of it, but that she will go on, with you beside her, leaving far behind her in her earthly path sad memories of happy days that nevermore can come to her."

The man, then, gave to Father Felix his right hand and kept his left arm round Ruth's slender waist:

"I do not doubt your word," he answered the good Priest. "I feel that every single word of what you've said is strictly true, and, yet, I have some fault to find with this young lady, here; she came away and did not leave a message behind for me, and I have had a weary, most disheartening time since she departed. I came to San Domingo, I traced her that far, easily, and, then, I found a little girl named Tessa something, who said she knew the very place to find her in ... she said she knew she'd go where, once, the mansion on the hill had stood ... and, so, I came straight here, and, so, I've found her. Tender Heart," he asked, "have you told the good Priest how we met?"

Then Ruth blushed her pretty, fleeting, characteristic little blush, and said:

"Father Felix knows me even better than I know myself, for he has told me many times what I would do before I did it. Father Felix knows me better, even, that *you* do," then she turned to Father Felix, laughing like a happy little child, and added, "He don't even know my name and I have no idea what *his* is; he calls me Tender Heart because I am so easily misled by tenderness

and I call him ... why, I have never called him anything at all."

"Yes, you have!" he interrupted, eagerly. "You called me 'Dear' just now ... so she is Tender Heart and I am Dear and that's enough, I think, don't you?"

The good Priest smiled upon them almost condescendingly, for he was far above such little human twists and turns, or so he seemed to be at least, and so he was in very truth, for he had had his romance ... he had seen the grave close over the bright curls of one he dearly loved who loved him just as dearly as he did her; it was after that that he had taken up the work he did so well; he left his human happiness behind him in that narrow grave and looked beyond it to a higher, better kind of happiness; Ruth knew a little of this romantic sorrow for the good Priest had imparted it to her, and, so, her tender eyes filled up with sudden tears and her low, sweet voice trembled into even softer cadences than usual as she said:

"Dear Father Felix, you are more to me than any loving brother that a woman ever had ... you are the only one who ever understood my human sorrow and I think that you will fully understand my human happiness. I wish with all my heart that you could be as happy as we are," her fair face flushed again, "for you deserve far more of happiness than I do ... as for him," she added, archly, "as for him ... do not be too sure of perfect human happiness for him.... I am but a mere child in very many ways.... I have so very much to learn.... I'm sure I'll always do the very best I can, but whether that will be the very best that could be done, of course I do not know."

"I'll risk it, anyway, and I will risk it gladly, joyfully," the man averred. "I'd go again upon that bloody battle-field if you'd be sure to find me, Tender Heart," he ended, "if only in that way we two were meant to meet."

When Ruth went back to the refectory she found old Mage and Tid-i-wats as lively as two crickets and as cheery as could be ... she introduced the man whose life she'd saved, or so it seemed, to them, and each of them acknowledged the introduction in her own peculiar way; old Mage stared at the man and sized him up most shrewdly, and, then, she gave her verdict very plainly by her manner of addressing him:

"I'm glad to see you, Sir," she said. "I'm surely very glad to see you for I've often heard my dear young lady speak of you; I hope you'll stay around here near to us for we will have another home to build and Tid-i-wats and I are not much help to her.... I'm growing to be an old woman, now, and Tid-i-wats is so peculiar that she never is much help to anyone."

And, then, the little cat came close to him and smelled his hands and rubbed against his legs, and, finally, when he sat down, she jumped up in his lap and settled down and twisted round and licked herself and washed her face and made herself entirely at home; and then she looked up at old Mage and Ruth and whispered to them that she liked him very well indeed, and, so, he was adopted into that small family.

CHAPTER XXI

An author who has been considered by very many people to be a most successful writer, one whose words have set before very many eyes vivid pictures of individual characteristics and national events as well, whose Indians are known all over the world, and whose historical novels will be eagerly perused as long as there are American eyes to read the pages of any book at all, used to make a sort of summary of the principal events in the lives of his very interesting characters: it always seemed to me that there was something very wholesome and satisfying in the way he finished up his books, and, so, I'd like to relate just a little more about the people I have tried to picture in this little book of mine.

Ruth Wakefield found her earthly mate when she found him whose life she helped to save upon the battle-field at night, and spent full many happy years in his society; they built a modern home upon the site of the mansion on the hill and did much good among the peasants living near to them; the man became the author of very many books, and Ruth assisted him in very many ways.

Old Mage and little Tid-i-wats lived out the span of earthly life allotted to each one of them, beneath the tender eye and ready hand of her who loved them both, and, when the time that had been set for them to leave this world behind them, came, Ruth Wakefield staid beside them to the very last, and ministered to them as no one else would ever do.

The man she'd found had named her well when he said "Tender Heart!" to her, that night upon the battle-field.

Her heart was very tender, always, except with reference to herself; she often did upbraid herself and never gave herself much credit; she often mourned, in secret, over her few brief memories of the wild, impulsive, almost insane, so-called love of him she'd married in her untried youth; she often said:

"Poor Boy! Poor, lost and misled Boy! I ought to have treated him far differently than I did; his earthly path crossed mine for some good reason, I presume; and I did not do all the things I might have done, when I was near enough to help him, for him ... yet ..." she always ended, "I did the very best I could do for him, it seemed to me, at the time I had the opportunity, and I always

meant and prayed to do just right. I went wrong, somehow ... or he had gone too far along a certain road before I ever met him for me to turn him back ... anyway, I pity him with all my heart and hope that he is happy where he's gone.... I hope he's found the very place he belongs in.... I know I always think of him with tender pity and no resentment, although, according to the standards of the world, he did me grievous wrong. Poor lost and misled Boy! He often looked so sad and desperate ... I wish I had done better by him while I had the chance."

Her tender heart was uppermost in almost all she did except when she was doing for herself, and, then, she'd say:

"My tastes are very simple ... I do not need very much of this world's goods ... it takes so very little happiness to make me almost wild with joy.... I've had to look on sorrow often, and, when I come to Joy, I bask in it as if it were God's holy sunshine."

But, if it should be that old Mage or Tid-i-wats or anyone of all of those who were dependent on her, from time to time, for she, somehow always seemed to accumulate those who needed her help round her, why, then it was quite different to Tender Heart ... then, she'd say and say with vigor:

"Of *course* I can arrange to have it that way! Why, certainly, if that would bring happiness, I'll fix it right away."

And sure enough she would arrange it, no matter what it meant for her of loneliness or labor ... no matter if she had to go along a lonely road that had been full of peace and happiness for her before the one who left her lonely had come into her daily life and made it hard for her, in that way, while the days were going by, yet made a grievous change again, in going; she set her teeth and did the things she had to do to make the other person happy, or to do the things he said would make him happy, then she turned her face toward her own life, cheerfully, although her hours were often very sad and lonely.

But this was all before she met the man whose life she'd helped to save upon that battle-field ... all before she'd lost her cherished home and built another one. From that time on unto the end of earthly life for her, she found sweet satisfaction and content, for she had found a steadfast love to lean upon, a strong and true and virile human being, whose tastes were similar to hers, who loved his native land, America, with all his heart, as she did, too.

It heartens all humanity to meet a happy pair who are congenial.

It gives all other human beings courage to go on upon the path that has been set for them to go upon, to know that there is happiness if only they could find the way to reach it.

Estrella soon forgot the handsome lover over whom she mourned so bitterly; the memory of him soon became a wild, sweet dream, and had she met him as he was in San Domingo, after she had found her proper place in life, it is probable that she would have turned away from him; life's contrasts have so much to do with early love that it is often difficult to know what love is really like; Estrella, when she was an unknown waif, was differently placed than she was later on. Victorio Colenzo would not have seemed the same to her that he did when she was but an unknown, simple girl; education made a change in her ... her sister looked to that. She grew to be a splendid woman, in very many ways, and married one who was her peer.

Poor little Tessa seems the most forlorn of all the characters in this book. She tried so hard and failed so utterly in almost all she ever did. But Father Felix watched her tenderly, and helped her on, and, finally, one day, he married her to one who loved her truly in his own rude way, to one who was a sturdy peasant like herself, who had no romance in him, but who was true to her, and kind, as kindness goes among his sort of people; he provided for her and their children; she had many more necessities and even luxuries than most of those who were associated with her. She, sometimes, dreamed of Manuello; she never knew how his life ended.

Ruth Wakefield looked her up, from time to time, but did not tell her very much about the Spanish-American war or those who entered into it; she knew she could not really understand much more than would the helpless baby at her ample breast, for Tessa did not stay the slim, small person that she was at first; she grew to be as wide, almost, as she was tall, and seemed to be quite happy as she was. She always limped a little from the blow that Manuello gave to her; the deep, sad scar he left upon her gentle heart could not be seen, and it, somehow, grew over as her flesh and family increased.

Estrella always remembered her and sent her many costly and curious things which were her constant delight. She loved to display these mementoes of her girlhood's friend; her children, and her heavy husband, too, were, always proud of them.

It seems to me that, when such souls as animated little Tessa's form leave this world behind them for all time, it must be that they find some soft, warm places, where they can sit at ease and watch dear little children play, and, maybe, join them in their play, and dream of happy hours, and forget all the trials of their lives upon the earth.

The course of human life will, sometimes, like a placid river, flow along for many years without a single change that is any more disturbing than a little, gentle ripple or an easy turn; then, all at once, like the water, that has been so clear and still, when it has reached the rapids and becomes a raging, turbid torrent, so human life may, suddenly, be stirred to its very depths; something may transpire that will call for the most sublime courage and the most strenuous endeavor,

combined with the most harrowing self-sacrifice.

Like a stroke of lightning out of a calm summer sky, more than one great event in our national history has thrust itself upon our startled consciousness. At these times, leaders have appeared who have taken their places at the head of affairs as naturally and as calmly as if they had been, always, guiding those who followed after them, although, perhaps, before the time that they were needed, they were, comparatively, unknown. And so, it seems to me, it will be always. There is a Plan, an infinite, a just, a universal Plan, to which all things, mundane or otherwise, must, in the end, conform. To keep ourselves informed as to the part that we were meant to take in this great Plan, it seems to me, should be our constant study and our constant strong desire.

The light of truth and understanding, that is God's Smile, looks up into our faces from the heart of every flower, whether bathed in moonlight, or shining underneath the sun; the simplest soul or the grandest intellect, alike, may bask beneath this light and feel its healing power.

I love, above all else, the God of truth and right and justice, Who rules all worlds and watches over everything that lives and moves and has its being in His whole universe.

It seems to me that there is implanted, although it may be completely covered up, at times, in the nature of every human being, a reverence and a most affectionate regard, that rests upon implicit faith, for Him Who gave to us, at the very beginning of our human lives, an infallible guide ... conscience, or inner consciousness of right and wrong ... which, if always heeded, will show us where to go and what to do, no matter what vicissitudes, disappointments or sorrows we may meet.

And, next to God, it seems to me, it is both natural and right to love the land of one's nativity.

I know I hold in my regard, above all personal advantages, above all temporal happiness or praise, America ... the great United States ... *that one fair land whose single boast has always been that it was free.*

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