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Title: Miss Fairfax of Virginia: A Romance of Love and Adventure Under the Palmettos

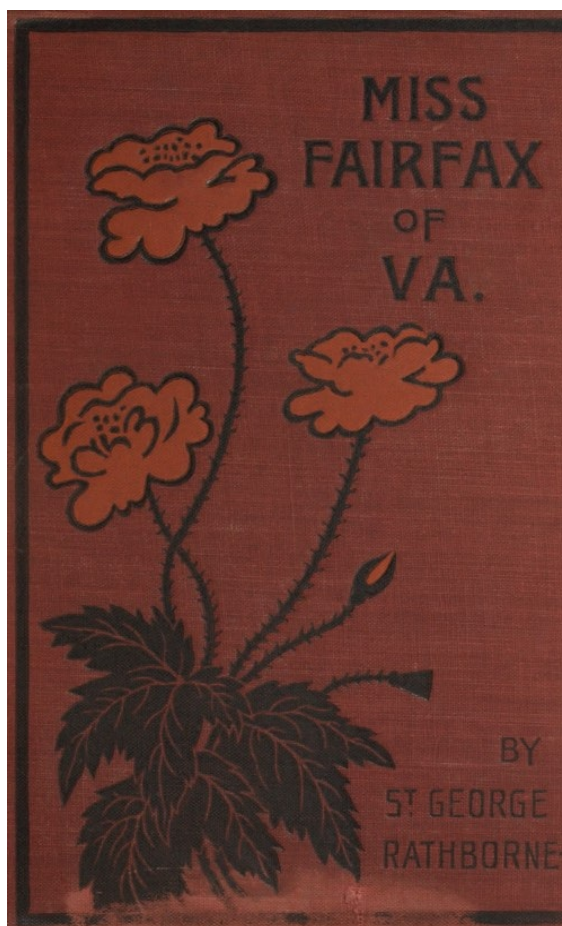
Author: St. George Rathborne

Release date: July 18, 2016 [EBook #52599]

Language: English

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## **Miss Fairfax of Virginia**

A ROMANCE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE UNDER THE PALMETTOS

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

AUTHOR OF

"Doctor Jack," "A Fair Revolutionist," "A Sailor's Sweetheart," "A Chase for a Bride," etc.



NEW YORK  
STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS  
238 WILLIAM STREET

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## CHAPTER I. PERHAPS LOVERS ONCE, STRANGERS NOW.

The genial summer sun had long since dropped behind the Irish hills, and the glowing lights of old Dublin were set like rare jewels upon the dark bosom of mother earth when Roderic Owen, with a fragrant cigar between his teeth, walked to and fro under the shadow of Nelson's column in historic Sackville street, now better known among loyal citizens under the name of O'Connell.

Owen only arrived from Liverpool on the Holyhead steamer that very day and had passed some hours upon various tramcars, surveying those portions of the famous city they traversed.

It may have given him a thrill of satisfaction to realize that he once more stood on his native heath, which land the exile had not seen since, a child of tender years, he left it in company with his heart broken parents; but two decades in the atmosphere of free America had made a full-fledged Yankee out of him, and his heart was wholly pledged to the interests of America.

Business had more to do with his flying visit across the Irish sea than a desire to look upon the scenes of childhood—these tender recollections might be all very good in their way, but when his country was at war with one of the old world powers, young Owen's heart and soul were wrapped up in the interests he represented, and the state mission that had taken him over the Atlantic.

[8]

The public will never learn more than a small portion of the unwritten history of the Hispano-American war, since these memoirs are snugly reposing in the archives at Washington, where they will rest until dusty with age.

Secret agents were employed in many European capitals in the endeavor to discover the true sentiments of the powers most interested, so that in case unhappy Spain seemed in a way to secure an ally, prompt measures might be taken to head off the threatened blow by a sudden *coup d'etat*, in which our good friend Great Britain stood ready to do her part.

Roderic Owen, being peculiarly gifted by nature with rare abilities in the line of diplomacy, had been remarkably useful in Berlin, Paris and Vienna, and was now suddenly transferred to another famous capital because it appeared as though Dublin might be the theatre of a little gathering where matters of intense moment were to be discussed.

It was evident from his manner that he had made the Nelson column a rendezvous. His eyes followed each tramcar that passed, and never a jaunting-car jogged by that he did not survey with growing interest. A hot blooded Spanish lover awaiting the coming of the black-eyed senorita with whom he had made a tryst could hardly have appeared more anxious.

He had just tossed away the remnant of his weed and was feeling for his cigar case to draw out another when the expected happened.

"At last!" he muttered, with a sigh of relief.

Still he made no abrupt forward movement—caution had been one of the fruits of long diplomatic service. "Everything comes to him who waits—and works," is the leading maxim of their craft.

[9]

A woman dismounted from a Rathmines car that had just arrived at the terminus of its journey. She was garbed in the sombre black habiliments of a religious recluse belonging to one of the many orders in Dublin. These nuns, serving often in the capacity of Sisters of Charity, come and go with the utmost freedom, respected by the humble classes to whom they are often angelic messengers in times of distress or sickness.

Just as he expected the sombre robed passenger came slowly toward him as though endeavoring to make sure of his identity ere accosting him.

Owen could *feel* a pair of eager eyes fastened upon his face, for there is such a sensation, and it surprised him to experience it.

Then came a low voice breathing his name, and somehow it had never before sounded just the same to him, nor had he known there was music in its bare utterance.

"I have waited about half an hour for you," remarked the American, complacently.

"Ah! *senor*, I am sorry. It was not my fault I assure you," she exclaimed, eagerly.

"I am certain of that, lady. Besides, I have no right to complain when one whom I do not even know goes to this great trouble in order to do me a service."

She moved uneasily at his words, and as if fearful lest his ardent gaze might penetrate beneath the veil she wore, one little white hand crept out from the folds of her sable robe to rearrange the crepe.

Owen smiled, for this act of caution had revealed much to him—upon those plump fingers shone rings set with flashing gems, such as no member of a holy order would dare wear.

[10]

Thus, without asking a question, he knew his *vis-à-vis* to be in disguise.

More than this, the unconscious desire to make sure that her face was concealed gave him the impression that they must have met before. As yet her voice had only sounded in low, whispered cadence, but it was rich and musical, and somehow seemed to arouse dim, uncertain memories which in good time after much groping, he would doubtless be able to place.

She looked around with some concern, for the locality being central was never quiet, upon which he said:

"Let us walk toward O'Connell bridge, and you can explain more fully the meaning of your note, as you promised. I assure you the interest taken in my welfare is appreciated, and if I can return the favor you have only to speak."

"You mistake, senor—I do not seek a reward. Chancing to know that you were the object of a base plot, I thought it only my duty to warn you."

"Because your vows constrained you?"

She appeared somewhat annoyed.

"Because heaven inspires every honest heart to desire the confusion of evil schemes."

"Pardon—I was foolish for an instant to believe my personality could have anything to do with it. Undoubtedly your love of fair play must have impelled you to do the same for any poor devil."

"Senor, you have no right to question my motives."

"I am a brute—you are an angel come to my assistance. Let us then proceed to business. From whence does this threatening danger come—in which quarter am I to guard against secret foes?" [11]

"You do not seem to be alarmed?"

"Does that surprise you, lady? Surely then you are not well acquainted with Anglo-Saxon blood. We who sup with danger, learn to despise it. I say this deliberately and without boasting."

"Ah! yes, I had forgotten your mission abroad. Your government would never have sent any but a brave cavalier to take such desperate chances. *Hola!* it is a pleasure to meet a man who does not shrink from a hazard."

"Pardon the curiosity—but are you not Spanish?" he asked, steadily—it was of considerable importance that he should know this fact, for the most able diplomat may well look to his laurels when pitted against a female Richelieu.

She answered frankly, almost eagerly.

"My people are of Spanish blood, but I have only once seen Spain. I am *hija de Puerto Rico.*"

How proudly she declared it.

"A daughter of Porto Rico—I am pleased to know it, for that lovely island will soon rest beneath the starry banner. A grand future awaits her under the new dispensation. I have been in San Juan myself, and shall never cease to remember that quaint city."

Perhaps the evening breeze brought with it a breath of chilly fog from off old Dublin bay—at any rate the wearer of the sombre nun's garb shivered a little and seemed to shrink back from the American.

"Now," continued Owen, cheerily, as though his quick eye had not noted with considerable surprise this peculiar action on her part, "we have reached the bridge. Tell me whence comes this danger?"

"There is one whom you have believed a friend, Senor Owen. Trust him not, for he has sworn to work your downfall." [12]

"Which is very interesting, to say the least. Am I to be arrested as a Fenian suspect, come over the big pond to duplicate the Burke and Cavendish tragedy of Phoenix park? Or is this sly schemer a Spanish sympathizer in the pay of Sagasta?"

"You have said it, senor—the last is the truth. But there is more—another reason why he hates you."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind mentioning it?"

"His name first—it is Jerome Wellington."

Owen seemed startled.

"Confusion—I never suspected that *he* was in Sagasta's pay. Luckily I have made it a rule to be as close mouthed as an oyster with regard to all state secrets. So friend Jerome has a private grudge against me. When have I trod upon his toes? Kindly enlighten me, good angel?"

"It is on her account—the dashing Senorita Cleo," came the muffled answer, and again Owen knew the eyes back of the veil were fastened intently upon him as though to read his secret.

Thereupon he pursed up his mustached lip and emitted a low, incredulous whistle.

"Cleo Fairfax, my independent cousin, the daughter of ten millions, what has she to do with the case? Is Jerome jealous—does he seek her hand—well, let him sail in and win. I shall not stand in the way, for it has never occurred to me to fall in love with my cousin."

"Ah! senor, that is very well, but this man who is as handsome as an Adonis hates you because he knows the American senorita loves you."

"What! Cleo loves me—incredible—impossible."

"More, she adores you."

[13]

"Senorita, you surely jest or dream."

"I speak what I know, and the fact is patent to everyone that you have but to declare a word to bring this lovely girl and her millions to your arms."

"God forbid that I should ever speak that word, unless I truly loved her as a man should the girl he means to make his wife. It is, I say again, impossible that such a thing can be."

"Few things are impossible, senior."

"But—there are impediments in the way."

"Perhaps none that might not be swept aside."

"Above all, I do not love her—it is ridiculous, and never entered into my mind. And so Jerome has conjured up a delightful hatred for me because, by Jove, he chooses to *imagine*—you see I lay especial emphasis on that word, for I can't believe it possible—that this favored daughter of fortune gives me more than cousinly regard. Well, if it pleases Jerome to indulge in such capers, I'm not the one to cry quits. My duty as well as my privilege is to meet him half way. I imagine you may be in a position to tell me how he means to strike. It is awful kind of you to take such trouble."

The thought had suddenly occurred to him that perhaps she might have come from Cleo, and he winced at the verbatim report of his declaration she must necessarily take back; but it was the truth, and Roderic Owen had always made a point to stick to his guns in action.

She was growing uneasy, as though fearful lest he might allow his curiosity respecting her identity get the better of his gentlemanly instincts. So when she spoke again it was hurriedly, her manner betraying a desire to end the interview.

"I have gone so far that it only remains for me to tell you the nature of the plot whereby this jealous fortune seeker hopes not only to ruin you in the eyes of the Senorita Cleo, but before your government as well."

[14]

"You are staying at the Shelbourne hotel. Your room overlooks the cascade in St. Stevens green. You have arranged to meet one at the park gate at twelve to-night, expecting to receive information respecting the clique of Spanish sympathizers at present sojourning in Dublin as a city least suspected of harboring America's foes. They have come here in the hope of arousing the slumbering Fenian spirit should Great Britain join the states against France or Germany.

"Your expected informant is in their pay—he intends to suddenly pounce upon you and, aided by allies in hiding carry you off. It will be made to appear that you have abandoned your patriotic mission, and fled with a well known adventuress to the gaming tables of Monte Carlo."

"The duse! This is a nice kettle of fish. And only for you I might have fallen a victim of the plot. But forewarned is forearmed. Some one shall take my place, since it would be a pity they should have their labor for nothing. It shall be diamond cut diamond from this hour. And now, believe me, I am duly sensible of the great service you had done me, lady. God knows it would give me pleasure to reciprocate should the occasion ever arise."

"I believe it—I know it, Senior Owen," she said, with some confusion.

"I do not ask your name—that you wish it to remain a secret is enough for me. But at least you will shake hands before we part. It is a part of an American's code, you know—add one more obligation to those you have heaped upon me. Do not refuse, I beg."

She had shrunk back as though alarmed at the prospect, but his *debonair* manner, together with the absurdity of the fear that almost overwhelmed her seemed to force her to meet his friendly advances, and a little hand crept shyly out from among the dusky robes, advancing half way.

[15]

Roderic Owen clasped it in his own, and was conscious of a most remarkable sensation that seemed to flash along his arm until it finally brought up in the region of his heart.

It may have been electricity, or some kindred element, but all the same he considered it exceeding queer.

Perhaps in his warmth he pressed her hand so that the setting of her rings inflicted pain. At any rate she gave a little exclamation.

"Forgive me; I forgot your rings, idiot that I am," and with a gallantry he must have inherited from ancestors who once ruled in this ever green isle he hastily raised the bruised digits to his lips.

This caused her to snatch away her hand and with a hasty "*buenos noches*" hurry to meet a tramcar coming from the monument.

Before Owen could fully recover from his surprise she had entered the double decked vehicle of transportation, and was lost to his sight.

He stood there, leaning against the stone railing of O'Connell bridge and looking after the car, a very much puzzled man.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as snatching out his handkerchief he waved it vigorously in response to the one that fluttered from the open window of the humble tramcar.

Then the man from over the sea mechanically drew out his cigar case, selected a weed, struck a match on the stone coping of the bridge, and began to puff away as though he might in this manner free his brain of the mental cobwebs that seemed to clog his clear reasoning. [16]

At the same time he started in the direction of Trinity College, swinging a stout cane, and musing upon the singular events that had on this night opened a new chapter in his experience.

And somehow it seemed to the adventurous Owen that they bore a definite connection with his past—again he heard that voice sounding as with the music of sweet birds—its dim echo, so familiar and yet eluding his grasp like a fluttering will-o'-the-wisp, how exasperating it was. Where had he met this seeming nun in the sable robe, and who was she?

Then suddenly he saw a great light—the confused memories drifted into one clear vision. Again he stood on the brilliantly lighted Grand Plaza of the Porto Rican capital with surging crowds of officers and civilians around him, while a really excellent military band played the beautiful, voluptuous airs of sunny Spain—again he heard a voice, sweet as that of a lark, floating upon the night air from an open window, and singing a serenade—Roderic was carried back two years in his life to scenes that had been marked by stormy passion, and the realization gave him a tremendous shock.

He had reached the vicinity of Trinity's bold Campanile when this bolt went home, and the effect was so great as to actually bring him to a full stop, with held breath.

"By Jove! to think I never suspected the amazing truth when talking with her. Now I know it, I can swear to it—the same voice, which I have never heard equaled. And she has done this thing for *me*, Roderic Owen, whom possibly she has reason to hate. Heavens! there is some fatality back of it all, and we are but puppets on life's great stage, playing our little parts automatically. God alone sees the end. Yes, that was Georgia de Brabant, the charming maid of San Juan, over whom half the Spanish officers raved, about whom more than a few duels were fought, and with whose fate my own life thread became entangled in a way that has forever prevented my loving cousin Cleo or any other woman. The past then is *not* dead—again she enters my life—she comes like an angel of light to save me from being made the victim of a foul plot. That would indicate anything but hate. What lies before me mortal cannot guess, but my duty is clear, and come weal come woe, I am bound to serve my country first, last and always, no matter what the sacrifice. And ye gods, I kissed the hand whereon perhaps dazzled *his* rings." [17]



## ALAS! FOR THE GAME THAT FAILED TO WORK.

Evidently Roderic Owen was disturbed by this meeting more than he would have cared to confess. When ghosts that are supposed to have been laid for all time come back to haunt us, memory plays havoc with the strongest resolutions. Owen lived again in the past—his ears seemed to drink in the music and merriment of the gay Spanish-American capital—he saw once more a face that had been enshrined in his heart as queen of the realm, and somehow the memory was not so unpleasant. Instead of groaning over the disasters of the past he found himself unconsciously building new *chateaux d'Espagne*. Hope ever abides in the human breast—though daily overthrown it rises again and again, Phoenix like from the ashes, and builds anew.

From the shadow of Trinity College and the Bank of Ireland, formerly the Irish House of Parliament, it was but a short distance to his hotel, the luxurious Shelbourne.

Having once entered the caravansary he cast his eyes around as though seeking some one. A number of gentlemen lounged near the booking offices, while on the first landing of the wide stairs among palms and flowers ladies could be seen.

It was a bright picture, entirely foreign to the usual run of transatlantic hotels to which Owen was accustomed.

A pair of bright eyes detected his arrival and a fair hand beckoned him upward.

Time was of value to him, but when beauty demands attendance other things may wait, and he believed he could spare a few minutes at any rate. [19]

She was a remarkable young woman, this Cleopatra Fairfax, and few men could have resisted her charms of person and fortune. True, in features she could not be called beautiful, but her eyes were glorious blue ones, her hair abundant and of a golden hue, while her skin was browned by exposure to sun and wind, since M'lle Cleo was a confirmed golf player, a bicyclist, and a voyager over many seas. Her form at least was enough like that of Venus to set many a famous painter anxious because his last models lacked those qualities which a lavish Nature had showered so abundantly on this child of fortune.

This then was Cousin Cleo, an impulsive, warm-hearted girl, with the better qualities of both Irish and American ancestors in her veins.

Her mother had been an Owen, while on her father's side she came from a long line of the famous Virginia Fairfax family. A better combination it would be hard to imagine; and in this coming together of old and new world blood lies the wonderful strength and marvelous ingenuity of the American people.

Miss Fairfax traveled withersoever her sweet will prompted, always accompanied by a spinster chaperone. Perhaps it was an accident that brought her to Dublin and the Shelbourne at the same time the English Ambassador's private agent took up his quarters there—these accidents, how often they happen, and how opportunely at times.

Besides the motherly chaperone, there was another in the party, a gentleman who in physique and handsome features far outshone Roderic.

Of course this was Jerome Wellington, a man of the world, belonging to a good family and now of a mind to settle down after having sown a magnificent crop of wild oats. [20]

Naturally when such a dasher thus resolves to give up his freedom, he looks around for a girl whose income will forever preclude any and all possibility of his ever being compelled to live upon his wits again.

With ten millions more or less at her beck and nod, Miss Fairfax of Virginia offered grand opportunities in this line, and accordingly the Adonis who had seldom known what it was to fail had sworn a mighty oath that ere twelve moons had waxed and waned M'lle Cleo would have changed her name to the equally aristocratic one of Wellington.

Then he struck a snag.

He discovered that Cleo had since childhood cherished a deep and romantic fancy for Roderic Owen.

They had romped together, and as years fled the stalwart young man became her hero. She blindly adored him, and being so frank and open by nature, her secret was easily read by such an acute observer as Jerome, though the object of this affection had somehow never dreamed that he was regarded in any other than a cousinly way.

If Jerome had a strong point of which he was particularly proud it was his connection with divers deep and dark plots. He regarded himself in the light of a modern Machiavelli, and was never really happy unless dabbling in mysterious affairs.

In his day he had been Carlist, Anarchist, Socialist, Nihilist and heaven knows what not.

Hence, it was to him a very insignificant matter to figure out how he should wipe this interloper from his path. Bah! it was almost too easy a task for one of his magnificent intellect, brightened by contact with the greatest schemers of the world. However, the stake was a glorious one, and even trifles must be carefully looked after if success is desired. [21]

So Jerome had set the machinery in motion which he expected would speedily eliminate his rival from the field.

Unfortunately for himself he did not consider that he was now up against a man whom Nature had abundantly endowed with common sense and shrewdness, and who as a secret service officer in charge of matters of state had gained considerable praise from the Honorable Secretary at Washington under whose direction he labored.

Besides, Jerome's objections had undoubtedly been hitherto conducted against European wits, and he might find wide awake Yankee minds constructed on a somewhat different order.

Roderic chatted and laughed pleasantly for a little time, as though on the best of terms with himself and every one else in the world.

Then, pleading business he tore himself away.

Now that his attention had been forcibly brought to bear upon the subject he could not but note the blushes that mantled his cousin's face upon his addressing any remark directly to her, and the look of reproach she bestowed upon him when he left the gay party.

All of which gave him pain instead of pleasure.

The happiness of this cousin was of much moment in his eyes.

She had always laughingly declared her intention never to marry whenever he broached the subject of the right cavalier coming along, and up to the present Roderic had been dense enough not to suspect the truth.

It was just like a man at any rate.

[22]

But at the same time it reflected on his extreme modesty.

Jerome called out a joking farewell after him, which appeared harmless enough, but with his knowledge of the man's evil intentions Roderic was able to read between the lines and see the malevolence exposed.

"He laughs loudest who laughs last, my dear Jerome," he muttered as he walked away from the hotel, "and it remains to be seen how your game comes out. Heretofore I have considered the man a mere every day adventurer, attracted by the glitter of Cleo's gold, and believing she knew how to handle such fellows without gloves, did not think it my duty to interfere. Now that it begins to look more serious I find I shall be compelled to throw my castor into the ring, and take up cudgels in her defense. God bless her, a man could not well have a stronger inspiration to do his level best. How the duse I have failed to fall head over heels in love with Cleo all these years I am at a loss to understand, yet somehow I have had an affection for the dear girl such as one entertains for a sister. Now my eyes are opened, and it is I fear quite too late. Destiny has already wrought out my future for good or evil."

He was thinking again of San Juan with its park, its glittering lights, its military music and the flash of many dark Spanish eyes.

Yes, Roderic was quite right.

It was too late!

He could never offer Cleo or any other woman the first passion of his heart, since that had gone out under the palms and flower scented bowers of the Antilles to a daughter of Porto Rico.

He sighed as he relegated these things, both pleasant and painful, once more to oblivion, and again rallied his forces to grapple with the game on hand.

[23]

Just around the corner he came across a man advancing toward the hotel, and whom he hailed.

"Well met, Darby—I was on the way to hunt you up, while you seem headed for my quarters."

"Just so, sir," replied the other, who appeared a man of few words, and evidently one in whom Owen placed much confidence.

"You complained recently of rusting—that everything seemed so dull and dead. As fortune has it I am now in a position to offer you a little excitement, and at the same time you may be of great service to me."

Darby nodded his head—he was a man of ice, whom nothing could excite, and yet to whom action was as the air he breathed.

Knowing the nature of the man so well, Owen struck directly into his story, and ere many minutes had flown the other was as well acquainted with the facts as himself.

One feature alone he repressed.

This was the attachment on Cleo's part for so unworthy an individual as himself—that was too sacred to be given over as common property.

Darby would have to guess a reason for the hatred of Wellington—perhaps he might lay it to the Spanish sympathies of the other, which induced him to seek Dublin in order to have a hand in the mysterious conference with pronounced Fenian leaders; or it might be his sagacity would suggest the only plausible explanation.

Thus the story was told.

"Quite a neat little affair," commented Darby.

"Will you take my place?" asked Owen.

The other's face showed no sign of emotion.

[24]

"Just so, sir."

"You may bring up in Monte Carlo or Hong Kong, with a fascinating adventuress professing to be madly infatuated with you."

This time the faintest flicker of a smile appeared.

"A dreadful fate, truly, sir."

"Still you do not shrink from it, Darby?"

The Sphinx shrugged his shoulders.

"Duty is duty, sir. I shall play the cards to win."

"You are to represent me—for the time you will look and act and think as Roderic Owen."

"I leave it to you whether I am able."

"My dear fellow there is nothing you could not accomplish, if you set your mind to it. I warrant that even Jerome will be deceived should he personally take a hand in the game of abduction."

"He will know the truth to-morrow when he meets you here?"

"True—and will be stunned, unable to comprehend the facts. Thus, you will be at liberty to do as you please after once reaching French territory. You know how to find me again."

"Just so, sir. Is that all?"

"Only that I wish you the best of success," taking the cold hand of the Sphinx and squeezing it.

There was actually a faint response.

And yet strange to say, this naturally reserved and passionless man was so great an actor that when duty compelled he could imitate even the most hot-blooded Spanish wooer, and sue with song and story for a dusky senorita's love.

That was genius rising above nature, a carefully trained gift such as few men possess.

"The hour grows late, and you will need some time to make your preparations, so there is no need of my detaining you longer. As to money—"

[25]

"I have more than enough, sir."

"Good. Besides, if you turn up at Monte Carlo you may have a chance to apply some of the tactics you once used in breaking a faro bank in New Orleans. It would perhaps be rare sport to you for a change."

Again Darby showed the limit of his emotion, this time it being a chuckle that escaped him.

"Then good-bye and good luck. Beware lest you fall in love with the charmer, my boy. Such a Lurline may storm the ramparts of your flinty old heart, and once lodged therein, heaven help you."

"Just so, sir. I am too old a bird to be caught with chaff. I have been through the mill. Don't waste any sympathy on Joel Darby, sir. But, there is an old acquaintance of yours here."

"Ah! who may that be—male or female?" for his mind instantly reverted to the girl from Porto Rico, and he wondered if Darby could have run across her by chance.

"You once showed me a group picture of a very delightful scene in a West Indian flower court, with the fountain and bird cages. Besides yourself and a young Spanish captain there were a charming girl and an old hidalgo with a fierce beard and a mass of iron gray hair—a man once seen never forgotten."

"Ah! Yes, General Porfidio de Brabant, the noblest Roman of them all, whose voice is like the thunder burst of his tropical home, and yet who obeys *her* slightest wish as meekly as a lamb."

"Just so—sweet Porfidio is in Dublin."

"I am not surprised, since I have reason to believe she is here. In fact the woman disguised as a Sister of the Holy Grail was Georgia, his niece, and the girl in the picture."

[26]

Darby's thin lips gathered as though prepared to emit a whistle, for like a flash he comprehended a very important matter in connection with his employer; but his will got the better of his inclination and not the faintest sound followed.

"More than this, sir, I am afraid he has some connection with these reckless schemers you have come here to watch."

"It would not surprise me—the senior general is of Spanish descent and doubtless loves the institutions of Spain, so that with his generous and ardent nature he is ready to risk all he has in order to help the wretched mother country in her great hour of need. It does not matter, since they will accomplish nothing here. These Irish plotters are master masons in the art of promising much and having some one else pull their chestnuts from the fire. Still, it is our duty to know the many strings perfidious Spain has to her bow."

"Just so, sir. I am going now."

"My blessing go with you, Darby. I shall anticipate a rich and racy story when we twain meet

again. Meanwhile, again farewell."

When he stood alone Roderic heard a clock in a not distant belfry chime the hour.

"Eleven—plenty of time for a man of his superior intelligence to accomplish it all. By Jove! I would like to see the result. I would wager he does it to the queen's taste, and that with two Richmonds in the field Warwick or Jerome or any other man would find it hard to tell the genuine from the artificial. Reminds me of Shakespeare's two Dromios. Well, there's nothing for me to do but take it quietly until morning, when I'll give my noble duke a run for his money. Ye gods, I can imagine his amazement. But he is not the man to let one failure daunt him. I rather imagine we two may yet face each other with sword or pistol in hand. That, gives me little concern just now, however much it may later on. All seems quiet around the hotel, so I presume the coast is clear." [27]

He found no difficulty in gaining his apartment unobserved, and there proceeded to woo the gentle goddess of sleep.

A methodical man, he was able to awaken at just the hour he desired.

Perhaps a somewhat superficial knowledge of Wellington's usual habits guided him in this matter quite as much as his own desires.

An observation convinced him that the day had broken fair and singularly cool, so that all nature appeared to rejoice.

He dressed with perhaps a little more care than ordinary and stood before the glass arranging the ends of his four-in-hand.

"I wonder if her eyes still glow with their old intoxicating light?" he muttered.

From which one might readily imagine the dreams that had accompanied his slumber must have dealt more or less with the owner of those heavenly orbs.

"And I kissed her hand again as of yore. Jove! how it thrilled me. Did that kiss wipe out the past—is it possible for us both to forgive and again be more than friends? The very thought gives my heart hope. And yet what a fool I am to forget—those magnificent rings—perhaps one or more of them came from the bolero dancer, the dashing Julio who took San Juan hearts by storm. Heaven only knows—in my mad jealousy I accused her of encouraging his attentions. Perhaps I was wrong, and again I may have been right, for I never heard more of either after I shook the red dust of San Juan from my feet. She may have wedded him, and now be wife or widow. Ugh! to the devil with such thoughts. Now to give dear old Jerome a shake up he will never forget." [28]

The idea afforded him some pleasure—at least it banished that other hideous nightmare.

Wife or widow were the words he did not care to hear used in connection with the owner of those magnificent midnight orbs.

Jerome breakfasted at eight o'clock.

He was clockwork itself in regularity, no matter where or under what conditions he spent the night, and when Roderic glanced into the breakfast room there was his victim busily engaged, his back to the door.

Jerome was something of a gourmand, and had a really remarkable fondness for all the good things that tickle the palate and appeal to a cultivated taste. He knew the value of every wine on the list, and could distinguish various brands of champagne with his eyes closed, for, tell it not in Gath, Jerome had once upon a time been reduced to making an honest livelihood as an expert wine taster.

Owen sauntered into the almost deserted room, and came up behind the dashing Adonis.

"Good morning, Wellington," he said briskly, as he dropped into a chair just across from Jerome.

The latter started to make a civil reply, but when his eyes fastened upon Roderic's face he turned as red as a boiled lobster and spluttered out:

"Owen still here in Dublin by all the saints!"

### CHAPTER III. AT DAGGERS' POINTS.

[29]

It was Roderic's intention to lead the other a jolly little dance before jumping upon him with both feet, so to speak.

In other words he pleased to play with the conceited beau pretty much as a cat might with a mouse that had fallen into her clutches.

Hence he observed Jerome's amazed expression with the air of a man who was puzzled.

"Still in Dublin—why not, my boy? This is about as comfortable a berth as one could find, and I shall only desert it when stern duty calls me across the big pond. Whatever possessed you with the idea that I had departed hence—why it was only late last night when I last saw you?"

Wellington was making heroic efforts to resume his ordinary cool appearance, but he had evidently been hard hit, and fluttered like a wounded pigeon, which was a rare thing with a man usually calm and sarcastic.

"By Jove! it must have been a bad dream, but, d'ye know my dear fellow, I could swear you came and told me you were off for Hamburg, Constantinople or——"

"Monte Carlo perhaps, since one place is about as likely as the other."

"Well, er, perhaps it was. Wretched dream at any rate. Must have been the Welsh rarebit I had about midnight—awful fond of toast and cheese, you know, especially good Roquefort. Glad to know it was only a dream, dused glad, my boy. Would have missed you very much—good men are too scarce, as it is."

[30]

Thus Jerome babbled on, his object being simply delay, in order to collect himself and grasp the situation.

At the same time possibly he hoped to pull the wool over the eyes of the man he addressed.

It was useless.

When Roderic mentioned Monte Carlo the schemer knew his game had been exposed through some blunder, and all he could hope to fight for was advantage of position when the assault came.

He therefore hurried up his reserves and proceeded to call all hands to repel boarders.

Owen had folded his arms and was coolly surveying him across the table—there was a curl to his mustached lip that told of fine scorn.

Some men can stand almost anything rather than to be made a mark for irony or disdain, and it was this more than anything else that brought Wellington furiously to the front.

"See here, Owen, all chicanery aside, how the devil do you happen to be here at the Shelbourne instead of on a yacht bound for Havre, and eventually to the gamester's Paradise?" he blurted out.

"A plain question and deserving an equally candid answer. To tell you the truth then, my dear fellow, I had decided objections to making such a hasty trip across to the Continent. Your preparations for my comfort were overwhelming, and while I appreciated all you did I was obliged to respectfully decline."

"Well, my own eyes tell me you are here, but I'll take my oath I saw one who looked enough like you to be your shadow sail out of Kingstown harbor at three this morning on board the steam yacht *Galatea*. And that was no hasheesh dream either, superinduced by Welsh rarebit or opium. Now, who the devil went to Havre?"

[31]

"A gentleman whose health needed the ocean voyage, and who believed he could enjoy the society of the gay set on board. I have no doubt he will be exceedingly grateful for all your trouble."

Jerome looked at first as though he could bite a nail with pleasure—Owen expected him to swear, but the other seldom gave way to such vulgar exhibitions of temper.

On the contrary he smiled, and his white teeth showing through his carefully adjusted mustache gave Roderic the impression of a grinning hyena.

Still, the application hardly fitted such a case, for Jerome was considered an extremely handsome and fascinating man, however much of a human wolf he might be back of the scenes.

"Owen, you have called the hand for the first round. It is on me, and devilish hard. I could ill afford the cold cash I spent to hire that boat. I sincerely trust your counterpart will choke upon the good victuals I put aboard or else make himself so beastly drunk upon the liquor that he will fall overboard in the bay of Biscay or somewhere along the French coast."

"Don't reproach me for doing just what you would have done had you been in my shoes, and the plot been revealed to you, Wellington."

The other brightened up a trifle.

"You may be sure I would—but evidently you received a pretty strong tip—who betrayed me?"

He spoke carelessly, but there was a devilish gleam in his blazing eyes that told the state of his feelings toward the unknown.

Owen would sooner have cut his right hand off than betray the source of his knowledge.

[32]

"I have means of acquiring information that are unequalled outside of Scotland Yard. For some time, Wellington, I had looked upon you as an agreeable acquaintance. That time has gone by. You have stripped the mask from your face, and I know you as a wolf preying upon society."

"Sir!"

"Oh! you needn't flare up and look ferocious. I say this to your teeth. If you desire the satisfaction one gentleman demands from another I am always at your service, whether it be with bare knuckles, a revolver or the sword. I believe I am equally at home with all, and will take great pleasure in puncturing your precious skin."

"Well, you are devilish frank, to say the least," declared Jerome, mastering his ugly mood, since he knew full well the disadvantage falling to the man who gave way to passion.

"I expect to be, since it is the only policy to use when dealing with such men as you. I might warn my cousin against your attentions, but it would be useless, since she has undoubtedly sized you up as an ordinary adventurer long before I dreamed of it. However, my dear fellow, one last word of warning before I quit your society. If you take it upon yourself to *annoy* Cleo—if she appeals to me for assistance I shall camp on your trail until I finally '*get*' you, as they put it over in my country."

There was no boastful spirit in his manner, only a grim determination that carried weight.

Wellington, looking squarely into those calm orbs that held his own in a species of thralldom knew he had the fight of his life before him.

Perhaps he saw with prophetic vision, some dim inkling of his own downfall—it is a long road that has no turn—success had visited him many times in the past, but there was for him as for all adventurers, a *dies irae* and it might come through Roderic Owen.

[33]

"I'll consider myself warned, Owen, and if trouble comes my blood be upon my own head. The only remark I shall venture to make is, that as yet I have never failed in any serious undertaking which engaged my attention," he said, sneeringly.

"Indeed. Then let us hope you are not very serious about this affair."

"I have made a vow. By that I mean to win, or fall. Have you breakfasted, Owen?"

"Not yet. I shall order a chop and a cup of chocolate."

"You won't join me then?"

"Well, under the circumstances, as we are to be mortal enemies, I hardly think it would be wise. I have some of the Arab's feeling about breaking bread or eating salt with an enemy."

"I would give something to know who betrayed my little game."

"Don't worry about it—my means are such that in order to learn what I wish I am not compelled to make traitors of those you trust."

"And the man on the yacht?"

"Oh! Darby is all right—you can depend upon it he will enjoy himself to the limit. If you read of a man breaking the bank at Monte Carlo presently, make up your mind it was Darby, and that your noble generosity is mainly responsible for his presence in that notable place."

Jerome scowled and muttered something.

"Perhaps it is as well you have decided to have your breakfast in another quarter. Somehow you have the knack of bruising me most savagely, and no doubt we should be at each other's throat like a couple of dogs, ere we finished. I wish to tell you distinctly that if you imagine you can frighten me off by such heroics you are chasing a mirage, a *fata morgana* as the deep sea sailors term it. I am not that kind of a man, and you will find that I sink or swim by my record."

[34]

Roderic did not care to bandy further words with the Adonis.

Deeds must tell the story as to which of them should win in the long run, and Owen preferred such a course.

It chanced that M'lle Cleo and her companion entered the room about this time, and joining them Roderic had his chop in merry company.

The daughter of ten millions looked fresh and full of life. As he chatted with her across the table Owen was wondering why she had never mated.

"It's the confounded dazzle of her money," he decided finally; "she has educated herself to believe no one can ever love *her*, but that the fortune draws them. By Jove! She should hide herself under an *incog.* and thus discover a lover who will worship her for her own dear self. I warrant there are many good fellows who would gladly go through fire and flood for her sake, if they knew her only as a stenographer or schoolmam."

Which line of reasoning did Roderic credit.

That same fortune had something to do with his own feelings in the matter, as it must with every honorable man.

"When do you leave Dublin?" asked his cousin, endeavoring to appear careless.

"I shall cross to Liverpool to-morrow and take the White Star steamer for New York—unless [35] something occurs to change my plans."

"Then you are compelled to go to New York?"

"Only as a means of reaching my ultimate destination."

"Which is——"

He lowered his voice.

"Porto Rico."

"But, the danger—that is a Spanish stronghold, and we are at war with Spain."

"Already troops are ordered to land there—perhaps General Miles is on the way. With the fall of Santiago our efforts are to be concentrated about San Juan. A portion of the work falls upon my shoulders—that is all. Besides, I naturally want to be in at the death, as do all ardent fox hunters in the chase."

"I wish, cousin, you would give up so dangerous a calling. Surely you are as well fitted for other pursuits in which your life would not be at stake."

There was real concern in her voice, and Roderic found his heart touched.

"I have been seriously considering that same matter myself, and concluded to make a change after the war is over."

"Why wait until then?"

"For many reasons. In the first place Western men have a saying that it is bad policy to change horses while crossing a stream. It is also a poor piece of business to desert your country while she has need of your services."

"Enough. I know that your motives are honorable. But about this trip across to the Antilles—I could tell you of a quicker way of reaching the shore of Porto Rico, that is, should you consider it worth your while to accept," with a tinge of color in her cheeks, and a sparkle to her blue eyes. [36]

"Indeed, I should like to hear of it. Time may be a factor in my game."

"I made a purchase in England—you know I am something of a yachtsman in my way, and the temptation was great."

"You purchased a yacht?"

"A steam yacht."

"Lucky mortal to be able to do such a thing with as little concern as I would buy a cravat."

"She is a beauty, Roderic."

"Don't doubt it in the least, else you would never have fancied her."

"She is called the Dreadnaught."

"Phew! a genuine English name. Of course you will change it to the Mayflower or Pilgrim or some strictly Yankee cognomen?"

"At present I must decline to do so, as she sails with an English crew and under the flag of Great Britain."

Owen looked puzzled, and then smiled.

"Oh! I see, a *ruse de guerre*. Very good, indeed. The Dreadnaught she shall remain as long as our war with Spain continues. Well, are you off for a delightful voyage along the Mediterranean, or perhaps, seeing it is summer, to the North Cape, the Land of the Midnight Sun. Jove! at another time I might be tempted to join you—that is providing I were invited."

"I extend a most pressing invitation and expect you to accept and be our *compagnon de voyage*."

"Alas! my duty lies amid sterner scenes."

"In ten days you can be landed on the shore of Porto Rico."

He eyed her in surprise. [37]

"Is your voyage a westerly one?"

"We are intending to see something of the war, that is all."

Perhaps uncertain but nevertheless alarming visions were conjured up in his mind.

"I am sorry to hear you say so. The conditions existing on those unhappy islands are terrible. Besides, an attractive woman would run risks among the lawless elements at large that I should grieve to see you exposed to."

She laughed, but at the same time his solicitude did not appear unwelcome in the least.

"Foolish boy, you don't suppose, I hope, that I have any Quixotic notion of parading across the island carrying the star spangled banner wrapped around me. My object is of a different character. For once in my life I am to play the Lady Bountiful. Cuba has been looked after as well as the conditions allow. I am informed there is also much suffering in Porto Rico. I have had my yacht stocked with provisions and medical stores, and shall relieve honest distress wherever I

find it, no matter under what flag."

"God bless you, Cousin Cleo. You will find plenty of it there. The Spaniards have tightened the mailed hand of late, and Porto Rico groans under the scourge. Soon freedom's blessings will be their heritage. Every man whose smallest act brings such a consummation to pass, should feel proud of the fact. Where is this boat of yours, cousin?"

"Entering Dublin bay this morning."

"And when will you leave old Erin?"

"When you give the word."

It confused him a little to realize how much she deferred to his judgment.

"Pardon me—will there be other passengers?"

[38]

"None."

"Then I will accept"—he had desired to make sure Jerome's hateful presence might not bring about a duel during the voyage.

"We will call it settled. An hour's notice will find us aboard, bag and baggage. Govern your own actions as your duty demands."

"This is awfully kind of you Cousin Cleo."

"The obligation is on your part, to put up with our dull society for ten days."

"You hurt me when you speak that way. It will surely be one of the most pleasant episodes of my life. I am smiling to think that after most positively declining one yacht voyage last night I have so readily accepted another."

"Some one else asked you to go to Porto Rico?"

"Well, no, I rather imagine the intention was for me to bring up in a hotter country than the Antilles. The trip contemplated a voyage to Havre and then across country to the later Monaco, the gambling palace of Monte Carlo."

"Oh! I am glad you refused to go."

"So am I. But the invitation was very pressing. However, rather than disappoint the gentleman I sent my representative to receive the honors."

"It was a *gentleman* who asked you then?"

His eyes opened with surprise.

"Certainly—that is he did not really ask me, you see, but arranged a neat little affair whereby I was to be a guest of honor."

"How stupid of me, to be sure, I begin to see now that you are speaking of a business engagement, not a social matter. And will your substitute serve as well as if you had gone?"

[39]

"Just as well, until they learn that it is not Roderic Owen they are entertaining with so lavish a hand, but plain Joel Darby. Then I imagine there will be an explosion of some sort and her ladyship will show temper."

"Her ladyship—then there is a woman involved?"

"It is true. I see, cousin, that having put my foot in it thus far I would do well to tell you the whole story."

"I should be pleased to act as Father Confessor," was the quick response.

They were alone at the table, Miss Becky having gone across the room to chat with a congenial spirit whose acquaintance she had made.

So Roderic told his little story as tersely as he could, and in his cousin he found an interested auditor.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked when the *finis* had been reached.

"It is very dreadful."

"Surely I came out all right, cousin."

"But—suppose you had not—you would have been hypnotized by the adventuress, and that must have been the end of you. Oh! I know the species and all their wiles, having made a study of them."

"Does that sweeping deduction include the male bipeds of the adventurer order also?"

"Why not?"

"Because I might offend if I told you the name of the man who planned my exodus."

"Oh! I have already guessed it was the Adonis."

"Yes, Jerome Wellington. I am glad you know him in his true light. He has made a vow."

"I'll wager it concerns my wretched millions."

"Just so—he longs to handle them."

[40]

"He will be a smarter man than he is now when that happens. But one thing puzzles me?"



"Now it is coming," thought Roderic, though aloud he said cheerily, "What might that be?"

"You received your warning from a nun."

"I was a fool to mention the fact," thought Owen, with one of these wonderful after inspirations that closes the door when the horse is stolen.

"Yes, from one who was dressed in the somber garb of a cloister," he replied.

"You evidently do not believe she was what she outwardly appeared?"

"You are a modern Portia, cousin," he laughed.

"Of course, a prisoner at the bar is not pledged to commit himself. If I am over bold forgive me and make no reply. But, you know, a woman's curiosity is proverbial."

"I shall answer frankly—she was no member of the Order of the Holy Grail—the garb was assumed to conceal her identity."

"From Jerome—from you?"

"Both, I presume."

"You recognized her face?"

"I did not see that—it was her voice. Even then I was in a maze until she had gone."

"Was it a *very* melodious voice, Roderic."

"The sweetest—well, yes, a voice full of melody," he replied, with evident confusion that did not escape Cleo's quick gaze.

"Ah! you have heard her sing?"

"Dozens of times—like a nightingale," he felt forced to confess.

"This was—where?"

"In San Juan, Porto Rico, two years back. I have not looked on her face since I fled those shores." [41]

"Ah!" and that one word expressed keen disappointment, for Cleo read the story of his lost love in his face.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MILLIONS MAY NOT PURCHASE LOVE.

[42]

"Would it be presumptuous if I asked to know her name, Roderic—this girl of San Juan who risked so much to save your reputation if not your life? I feel under obligations to her, for your name is very dear to those who know you—those bound to you by ties of consanguinity."

"She comes of Spanish descent, but her heart is now only wrapped up in the future of the lovely gem of the Antilles. Her name is Georgia Inez de Brabant."

Perhaps his manner gave evidence that she was treading on dangerous ground.

"Thank you. Perhaps some day fortune may bring us together. I shall try to love her, Roderic, because you call her your *friend!*"

Then she branched off upon the subject of the cruise, to which she seemed to look forward with almost childish delight.

It is not every one to whom is given the proud fortune to own a modern steam yacht, and this daughter of Eve could be forgiven a fair amount of exhilaration under the circumstances.

Perhaps, truth to tell, the prospect of ten days basking in the company of her athletic cousin had something to do with her light spirits.

Owen's time was not wholly his own, so that he was soon forced to sally forth upon the streets of the Irish metropolis.

When Cleo was alone she hastened to her luxurious apartments and searching the inmost recesses of an inlaid traveling writing desk which had been taken from a capacious trunk, she soon pounced upon a small photograph. [43]

It was wretchedly done by a tyro in Ponce, but even boorish work could not entirely conceal the fact that the face was that of a most lovely dark-eyed houri.

Cleo looked eagerly at it.

"I have had this now two years. Roderic dropped it in the garden, and I hid it away for a joke and then forgot to speak of it. This is the picture of a daughter of Porto Rico—is it the same who is now in Dublin, who last night at the peril of her name warned him of evil? I have reason to believe such to be the truth, for unless I am greatly mistaken I saw this same beauty coming out of St. Patrick's cathedral yesterday morning, when a gust of wind blew her veil aside. In this land where Irish gray or blue eyes abound I was immediately attracted by such a beautiful pair of melting dusky orbs.

"Heigho! this is Roderic's fate no doubt. Heaven grant that he may be happy whate'er betide, for he deserves it. I would give all my miserable millions for his heart's love, but it can not be. There is a startling story of the past connected with this girl, I am sure. Why did they separate—does she love him still? Well, perhaps the future may tell."

She put the photograph slowly back in the lodging place where it had so long rested securely. Even great riches had not the power to bring this young woman unalloyed happiness, for the one treasure she would have valued above all other earthly possessions seemed denied her by a cruel fate.

It were hardly fair that all the joys of earth were handed over to the disposal of one mortal.

While she rolled in wealth beyond Aladdin's dreams and sighed for true love, many who were blessed in this regard struggled for a daily pittance and groaned because their heart's devotion could not come between the object of their worship and cruel Want. [44]

Truly, this is a queer old world, and at times it seems unequally divided; but occasionally there is a shaking up all around that evens things up somewhat.

Possessed of a sudden notion Cleo dressed for the street.

When she went out it was with a laughing remark to Miss Becky, whom she intercepted upon the broad carpeted main stairway, to the effect that a number of little shopping duties had to be looked after.

However, M'lle Cleo's ideas of the shopping district must have become a little mixed, for she sauntered in the direction of that quaint mass of stone and glass with its spire and numerous minarets known as St. Patrick's Cathedral.

She looked through the iron fence at the flat slabs and few monuments commemorating illustrious Irish dead, she studied the architecture of the historic building, and cast many a curious glance at those who passed in to late mass or came out from the interior.

Her object seemed doomed to disappointment, for the face she sought was not seen.

Once she eyed a lady closely veiled, who came out in company with a military looking gentleman sporting a shaggy head of gray hair *à la* Mark Twain, also a ferocious mustache waxed at the ends and giving the wearer the fierce appearance of King Humbert.

As the couple passed Cleo she chanced to hear the lady make a casual remark, and two things struck the listener as singular.

First it was pure Spanish she heard.

[45]

Second, her voice was so very melodious it seemed to conjure up visions of rippling water, warbling birds and all those things of which poets love to rave.

Cleo remembered—could she ever forget the pain that shot through her heart at the time—how Roderic had grown suddenly enthusiastic when he declared the voice of Senorita de Brabant as musical as the notes of a nightingale—she had doubtless sung for him many times those passionate serenades and love songs for which dark eyed daughters of old Spain have ever been famous.

Cleo could imagine how those wonderful black orbs glowed with love's sacred fire when *he* sat near, upon a soft divan, or bent over the gurgling fountain's basin.

She felt sick at heart, but such a nature never reveals the pain that rankles within.

Though suffering tortures such girls will laugh and seem as merry as the lightest hearted among their comrades.

After that came the shopping, and yet Cleo was annoyed to find herself listening to every voice upon the street and in the stores.

Surely there could not be another in all Dublin that so fully filled the brief but graphic description Roderic had given of a woman's tones sounding like the soft gurgling of water over the mossy stones in the primeval forest.

"I wonder under what conditions we will meet, for something tells me this is bound to occur. And shall I too be drawn to her because he has given his heart? Will she love him—love my old play fellow Roderic as—as I could do, have done these many years? Perhaps, but I doubt it, doubt whether these hot blooded girls of the tropic isles can love so truly that they will sacrifice even their own happiness in order that *his* life may be filled with sunshine. Still, God forgive me for judging her harshly. I have other things—his love may be all in all to her. Come what will I shall do what is right and loyal and true as becomes a daughter of Virginia. But oh! it is hard to give him up, my hope, my boy lover, my Roderic. Now I am done!"

[46]

Having thus grimly dismissed the matter from her mind for the present the young lady proceeded to carry out her designs.

Numerous things were on her list to be added to the abundant stores aboard the yacht, and it would probably puzzle the honest steward, she imagined, to know what to do with the last arrivals.

"If I remained in Dublin three days more I am sure we would be swamped in the bay made celebrated by song and story, or else be compelled to charter a companion boat to share our cargo—there are so many things I see that could be made useful among the wretched people just escaping from Spanish rule, and these Irish storekeepers one and all, must have had an intimate acquaintance with the Blarney stone, they have such engaging ways and a burning desire to accumulate Uncle Sam's coin. This is an era of good feeling—of hands across the sea—Brother John and Brother Jonathan, and they all want to be in it as deep as possible. However, I think I am actually done. It would be impossible to accept all they offer."

So the purchasing agency went reluctantly out of commission.

Even the owner of millions must draw the line somewhere.

Roderic was not to be seen at luncheon, although Cleo purposely lingered over the meal, hoping he would turn up.

[47]

Jerome was there, handsome as ever, and apparently much sought after by a designing lady mother from Chicago who possessed two plain girls of a marriageable age.

No doubt they believed him a marquis, or at the very least connected with some noble family anxious to make a "connection" with pork.

These things happen frequently, and there really seems no remedy—the market is there and the goods offered for sale. Occasionally a genuine love match occurs which redounds to the credit of Old England and Young America; but for the most part they are cut and dried affairs entered into for position on one side and gold on the other. Such unions are beneath contempt.

Jerome bowed and smiled in his usual affable manner, and Cleo answered him just as though she had not been informed of his dark schemes.

This matter of fact young woman had traveled far and wide—she had rubbed up against all manner of people, and long since ceased to be excessively surprised at anything.

Wellington was simply carrying out the business for which nature had endowed him.

There were many people gifted with more money than brains—the reverse was true in his case, and he amused himself by endeavoring to bring about a more evenly balanced condition of affairs, to his pecuniary advantage, of course.

Cleo could even find something to admire about his bold piratical way of living by his wits—at least he had more of the man about him than most of the petted darlings of society on both sides of the Atlantic who fawned upon her in a sickly sentimental way from precisely the same sinister motives that influenced Wellington's bold attacks.

[48]

Let these parvenu mammas with daughters to sell pay the penalty for their sin.

As the day wore on and she saw nothing of Roderic she began to feel a little worried.

Could harm have befallen him?

She knew the unscrupulous character of those elements which he usually pitted his powers against.

Perhaps Wellington, that suave deluder, not one whit discouraged by his first failure, had promptly opened his secondary batteries.

Still, it seemed almost ridiculous to believe harm could have befallen a sensible man like Roderic in the open streets of Dublin while the sun was shining.

Had it been Algiers, Constantinople, Peking or some city of mysterious India, the case would have appeared far more serious, for uncanny things are liable to occur in such Oriental marts at any hour of the day or night.

As evening drew on apace she found herself watching the doorway beyond which lay the calm square known as St. Stephens' Green.

Her captain had come ashore for a comparison of ideas, and was still with her, since Cleo desired him to meet her cousin.

They would see much of each other during the voyage, and she particularly desired to bring about the meeting of two congenial souls.

Dinner passed.

Still no Roderic.

She confided her fears in part to the captain.

The worthy seadog was able to wrestle with any perplexing problem that might assail them [49] afloat, but when it came to mastering the wiles apt to beset a man's path ashore he confessed his ignorance.

Nothing could be done—they must wait till a sign of some kind was given.

That was the exasperating part, for Cleo was naturally a girl of decided action.

An hour crept by since dinner—two of them, and it was now drawing near ten o'clock.

No one entered the door but that Cleo's eyes were instantly upon them, and disappointment had as yet been the only result.

She endeavored to be her own lively self but it required a great effort.

Roderic might be in danger, but somehow she was possessed of the idea that it was more from a pair of midnight eyes than a murderous stiletto, for Cleo could not forget the face she had seen, the lovely original of her photograph, who was even now in Dublin.

Was her power of enchantment over Roderic still unbroken—could she draw him to her even after an absence of two years—had the bar that separated them been cast aside?

How these questions flashed before her eyes and seemed burned upon her brain like coals of fire. She suffered intensely, but the bluff old sea dog never knew it—indeed he believed her to be unusually brilliant, her wit was so keen and her suggestions as to their coming voyage so remarkably clever.

She dreaded the thought of having to retire in this state of uncertainty.

The hour drew on—it neared eleven, and the ladies had wholly disappeared.

Then Cleo suddenly gave a sigh of relief, for her eager eyes had discovered his well known figure [50] entering the front door of the hotel.

She noted instantly that he looked disturbed, and that his usually natty appearance was lacking—and practical Cleo knew Roderic had been through an adventure. Half rising as she beckoned to him, she awaited his coming with breathless impatience.

## CHAPTER V. RODERIC'S REPENTANCE.

[51]

Roderic had indeed been up against it good and hard since leaving his cousin at the breakfast table.

He had entered upon his duties of the day with a vim, desirous of closing his accounts so that he might get away on the next morning, if Cleo and her captain were willing.

During the morning he was haunted by certain facts which bore heavily upon the relations existing between present conditions and those that prevailed two years back.

The girl from Porto Rico occupied a prime place in all these reflections.

Every word that had been spoken by her on the preceding night came again before his mental vision, and underwent a revised scrutiny.

New solutions sprang up, for he was able to better understand certain things that were uttered.

Still there was much to puzzle him.

How came she to know of Cleo, his cousin—true, in times past, when paradise seemed opening to his feet—ah, what a fool's dream he had indulged in—he must have frequently spoken of his cousin, for she was often in his mind; but that would not account for her pertinent remarks concerning Cleo's attachment for him.

Was it jealousy prompted this?

Roderic flushed with pleasure at the very thought of such a thing, since the green-eyed monster can never lodge in a human heart unless there still remains love to stir the depths.

Then, somehow, he felt a strange shudder pass through his whole frame.

[52]

Would it bring trouble of any kind to this loyal cousin, whose welfare was certainly as dear to him as that of a sister?

He knew much of these southern women—their virtues and frailties—and realized what a serious thing it meant to be passionately loved by one of them, and how ill they brooked rivalry.

The love Georgia had given him was so entirely different from the pure, unselfish devotion of which Cleo was capable—he knew this as well as any one, and yet with his eyes open he had chosen the rush of the hurricane to the calm, steady current of never changing regard.

Love is a little god who will have his way despite reason and philosophy.

Once poor mortal falls under his sway and farewell to discernment—from that time on Cupid sits in the balance, and weighs things to suit his own capricious nature.

Thus our good Roderic found himself worried with a variety of new questions, such as it had not occurred to him before could ever come up in connection with his affairs.

They cropped up before him in his business and he found it utterly impossible to get rid of them. What was on the heart must have a place in the mind in spite of stern endeavors to banish his own private affairs from the front.

Thus the day wore on.

Things worked fairly well.

He sent some letters, and toward the close of the afternoon some telegrams in cipher intended for those connected with the government at Washington in whose special line he was working.

Finally he pronounced his work done.

[53]

Unless some late orders, which he did not look for, turned up to intercept him, he was free to shake the dust of old Erin from his shoes on the morrow.

He anticipated the voyage to the West Indies with considerable pleasure, for, as the veil of the future can not be raised by mortal hands, how was he to know what strange happenings might occur before the anchor was lifted, to change his relations to the owner of the yacht?

About sundown he visited a store on Lower Sackville street where he had been receiving his mail.

There was a message awaiting him.

It came from Darby.

How that remarkable man had managed to mail the letter was a puzzle to Roderic, but no doubt he had prepared the envelope with a stamp and found some means of getting it posted by bribing a sailor.

Darby could accomplish anything under heaven when he made up his mind.

The note was brief and epigrammatic, just as Darby's speech had always been. Time was worth money to him, and he used very few words.

"They got me as per agreement. We are on the way to Havre. Will touch at coast of Cornwall for private reasons of captain. Mail this there if possible. The French m'amselle aboard. Charming young woman. Think I shall be pleasantly entertained, as she has a voice like a bird. Do not pity

me, comrade. I may go all the way to Monte Carlo. Who could refuse such good fortune? More anon."

That was all.

Roderic laughed when he read it.

"What a sly dog that Darby is—outwardly an iceberg, a glacier, he yet possesses the capacity for adoring lovely woman. Perhaps he may yet be wrecked upon the same reefs that have been the destruction of so many. Alas! poor Yorick. But I am willing to wager that at least he extracts some fun out of this game before he gives up the ghost." [54]

And now, dinner!

The thought was delightful, since his appetite had become clamorous, and besides there was great pleasure in the anticipation of some hours in the society of his cousin. Cleo could chat so entertainingly of many things he had seen, for both were great travelers.

She had visited the frequented thoroughfares of ordinary travel. Besides, she had gone from Europe to India via the overland Afghanistan and Khyber Pass route, had looked upon the celebrated Vale of Cashmere, wandered in Cathay, and was at home in Japan.

It can be readily understood how much satisfaction Roderic found in chatting with her on these subjects, for the fever of exploration was growing upon him all the while—he yearned to delve amid the wild places of earth seldom or never gazed upon by the eyes of civilization—he had already ridden on elephants in Siam, mounted the Peruvian Andes on a llama, explored the Himalayas with adventurous officers, their only vehicle being drawn by yaks; and once Roderic had scoured the desolate Kirghiz steppes on a tarantas drawn by shuffling camels.

Secretly he aspired to some day make his way to the Forbidden City of Tibet, where the foot of a white man has never yet trodden, and whose gorgeous wonders yet remain sealed books to the world—a city which the bold traveler Harry Savage Landor recently endeavored to reach but was forced to abandon the task as impossible.

At present of course these things were hung up in abeyance, since his beloved country was at war with Spain, and called upon her patriotic sons to overwhelm the enemy, both in the field and under the guise of diplomacy. [55]

The pursuit of his business had taken him far out from the central part of the city and the river Liffey.

From Donnybrook he had crossed to the region of Rathmines, where in an interview with one whose word carried great weight among the Fenian brotherhood, he learned that the mission of the Spanish schemers had failed.

This was a matter of great importance to those faithful statesmen at Washington who labored to prevent any combination of European Powers against Young America—it meant that the great coalition would pull through and that poor Spain must take her drubbing.

He had mounted to the upper deck of a tramcar and was on the way back to the city, surveying with considerable interest the names of the many villas, places and terraces, for every householder apparently desired to mark his residence by some appropriate designation.

From this state of beatitude, superinduced by the clear consciousness of a day's work well done and the soothing effect of a good pipe, Roderic was without the least warning precipitated into a condition of tremendous excitement.

He had just noted the old name on a rough stone gate post "Lucknow Bungalow," and was wondering if some gallant retired officer who had seen exciting days with Havelock, or later with gallant Roberts, might live in cozy retirement here, surrounded by objects brought from the far distant realm of Her Majesty the Empress of India, when some magnetism seemed to draw his gaze toward the romantic house set back a little from the road.

Just at the same instant some one leaned out of an open window as if to close a shutter, some one whose personality acted upon Roderic very much as might a shock of electricity. [56]

Of course it was the girl from Porto Rico.

That she saw him and recognized him Roderic realized instantly.

It was another freak of Fate.

When the three sisters who weave our destinies with distaff and loom, conspire against a poor mortal, there is little use trying to dodge the snare, since the loop falls over one's shoulders on the most unexpected occasions, and usually without warning.

Roderic yielded, rescue or no rescue, at once.

He immediately arose from his place and made down the winding stairs at the end of the car. The vehicle had been progressing meanwhile as rapidly as two sturdy Irish horses could draw it along the rails, and by the time the gentleman from across the Atlantic reached *terra firma* they were half a block away from the bungalow and its stone posts.

Roderic had not developed any plan of action—what he did was from sheer impulse.

The sight of her face had spurred him on—nor might this be set down as the only instance where a woman's lovely countenance caused unpremeditated action on the part of a usually conservative and well balanced man.

When he reached the distinguishing stone pillars upon which he read the name of the villa, Roderic boldly turned in.

Prudence might have dictated another course, for there was reason to believe, as both Darby and himself had discovered, that the old Porto Rican general, Georgia's uncle in fact, was allied with those who had endeavored to work the grand scheme. [57]

Therefore, he would not be apt to look upon any Yankee, and particularly Roderic Owen, with favor.

General Porfidio to the contrary, the American strode past the sentinel posts, up the box bordered walk and directly to the front door.

This was his nature, bold to a fault, ready to walk directly up to the cannon's mouth if duty but half demanded it.

It was the Irish element in his blood, for where that strain goes throughout the peoples of the wide world, it carries with it devotion and gallantry.

Before he could lay a hand upon the knocker, that represented a bronze Hindoo god, the door softly opened.

A young girl stood there.

As he looked at her, framed in the opening, with the light of the setting sun falling upon her wondrous face, Roderic held his very breath, for he was again under the spell of her dusky eyes, that ever wove a web of enchantment about him.

Thus they stood, these two who had parted some years before—stood and stared and said not a single word for more than a full minute.

What they lived over in those sixty seconds of time God only knows.

Perhaps there came up before them a vision of Paradise Lost—of sweet scented flowers, flashing fountains, caroling birds—of a West Indian garden where the God of Love reigned, where the soft tinkle of magic mandolin accompanied songs of hottest devotion, where eyes looked into eyes and drank to the fill of heaven's nectar, where vows of constancy were fervently breathed and returned. Alas! how many times these same maddening memories arise to haunt broken hearts, for human nature is weak, and prone to wander afar after strange idols. [58]

Roderic recovered his voice, and while he still kept his eyes on her glowing face he said, quietly:

"You expected me—you knew I would come?"

"I believed you would when I saw you look this way," she admitted; and then added: "but I do not know why you are here, Senor Roderic."

"Perhaps to thank you."

"For what?" confused.

"Your garb deceived me last night, but I knew the voice which you could not wholly disguise. I wish to tell you how—"

"Stop. I do not desire to hear your gratitude. It was a duty with me. By chance I learned of the miserable plot. I could not bear to even see an enemy so badly used, much less one whom I once delighted to call—my friend."

"Once—are we then no longer such?"

"Senor, your welfare will always be regarded with interest by me," coldly.

"You have condemned me unheard," with a gesture of despair.

"Not I, senor, but yourself. The choice lay before you, and you decided to flee from San Juan—from Elysium. You were unjust—for once in your life. You alone, senor, condemned, not I."

"But—was there no reason—I beg of you, I implore, an answer?"

"Senor, this is a house where danger lurks for you—a house where plots are nightly considered against your people. It would be better for you to go away lest some of these hot headed Spanish sympathizers set eyes on you." [59]

"Let them go to the devil—what care I for all the Spaniards in Christendom. I shall stay here just as long as I like—as long as you allow me."

"Ah! senor, but you did not always exhibit that same spirit—there was *one* Spaniard you feared worse than Satan does holy water."

The spirit of coquetry ever lives in woman, and this girl could not resist giving poor Owen a little thrust even while her heart was wonderfully stirred by his presence.

"Yes, Julio, the handsome bolero dancer, who had once been a famous toreador in Spain. As I hope for salvation I believe you favored his advances—you laughed at me when a denial was what I asked. Words followed, for my part in which may Heaven forgive me, and we parted in hot anger, we two who had been all in all to each other. Georgia, will you answer that question *now*?" he asked, holding her eyes enthralled by his eager gaze.

She did not speak, only put out her hand and plucked him by the sleeve.

It was only a gentle pull, but to Roderic Owen the power of a giant steam engine could not exert greater force.

She meant that he should enter that East Indian bower—she would answer his passionate question—the doubts and fears that had haunted him lo, these many moons were on the eve of being forever put to rest.

Thus he followed her through the doorway and presently found himself in a little parlor where walls and mantles were almost covered with hundreds of strange mementoes of the land of Buddha and Vishnu—grinning idols, miniature elephants, tiger skins, queer swords and knives, and wonderful pieces of colored work fashioned by the cunning handicraft of those natives of Bengal and Ceylon.

[60]

Upon the floor were strewn very costly rugs from Dagestan and Persia.

There was an air of romance hovering about the apartment—even the peculiar Oriental odor that was so pronounced, seemed to be associated with tender scenes.

Roderic felt it, and a strange eagerness took possession of his heart.

Was such happiness as he had never allowed himself to dream could dawn upon him again about to become his guest?

Having led him into this apartment, the girl drew back the Bagdad curtains in order that more light from the westerly sun might enter, after which she advanced slowly toward him.

Her head was lowered, so that he knew not whether those wonderful orbs were filled with love or contempt, and the uncertainty alarmed him.

"You have surely not brought me in here to upbraid, Georgia—I cannot believe that. It would have been enough had you desired me to go, to have told me so outside, and while ready to ask forgiveness on my knees, if you assured me I was quite in the wrong, I would have turned away without one reproach, deserving all. I asked you the question that has burned itself upon my brain ever since that hour when I flung myself out of your presence so madly, and vowed never again to believe in a woman's love. Was dashing Julio anything to you *then*—is he *now*?"

Then she threw back her proud head and looked him in the face—he was answered even before she spoke a word.

"One finger of your hand, Roderic Owen, yes, even its tip was of more value to me in those days than a dozen bolero dancers with their graceful movements and threadbare love phrases. Julio sued in vain—I laughed him to scorn—I have not seen him from the hour you fled."

[61]

Then a glad cry burst from his lips—he opened his arms and would have seized upon her, believing that she had forgiven—that the old conditions could be thus easily revived, since the barrier that had separated them was swept aside.

He had lowered his pride—he had humbly cried "*peccavi*—I have sinned," and it was reasonable to believe that if she still cherished the love she once bore him, this girl of the Antilles would fall into his embrace to forgive and be forgiven.

But instead she stepped back, eluding his grasp, and while panting with emotion, said resolutely:

"Stand back, Senor Roderic—touch me not I command you!"



## CHAPTER VI. ON THE BORDERS OF PARADISE.

[62]

While Owen had doubtless encountered many rude shocks during his adventurous life he never had such a staggering blow dealt him as when this beauty from the Antilles so peremptorily ordered him to approach no nearer.

Unconsciously he obeyed, and yet seemed amazed at himself for not crushing her form in his embrace as he had done in times gone by when the whole realm of earth had been centered in her beloved presence.

Had she then ceased to love him—true, he had been cruel in his judgment, but since on his part time had effected no apparent cure, could it be possible that she despised where once she adored?

He searched for an answer, nor did he have to look long.

Under his troubled gaze burning blushes swept over her face and neck—she trembled with the intensity of her emotions, her breath came in quick, spasmodic gasps, and she looked like a beautiful fluttering bird facing its fate.

Love still reigned in her heart where he had once been king.

Then why this strange action—while yet loving did she mean to sacrifice this man who to her had been a god, however gross his material may have appeared to other eyes?

Was resentment, the desire to avenge her wrongs paramount to love?

While the ways of womankind were not wholly a sealed book to Owen, he had always frankly confessed himself unable to understand them. Yes, he had even drilled himself into the habit of being surprised at nothing the sex might do, either noble or otherwise—they were full of the unexpected to him.

[63]

"You say stand back—see, I obey you. Tell me to go, and I leave your presence forever. And yet I am wretchedly sorry and would do all in my power to wipe out the past, to make you believe in me as once you did. Is there any such way—shall I have a chance, Georgia?"

He knew the power of his voice over her—he could see her bosom heave with the intensity of her feelings.

Still she did not yield—this daughter of the Antilles was made of sterner stuff than to be swept along by every passing breeze like the fallen leaves of autumn.

"Perhaps," she replied, slowly.

"You would impose conditions—well, it is only right and fair. Let them be what they will I am ready to undertake them. The harder the better, since by that means I can prove the strength of my love, the bitterness with which I regard my conduct of the past."

"I said perhaps. Have you forgotten what I declared last night?" and her eyes dropped in confusion.

"You warned me—you saved me from a complication that was intended to injure me with my employers, with those whose respect I held dear. You risked much to warn me, and it was the thought of this that renewed my courage, my hope."

"It was something else—something of a more personal nature."

Then her meaning flashed upon him.

"You refer to Cousin Cleo—ah! what you said cannot be true—her regard for me is warm and cousinly, as mine is for her, but that is all."

[64]

"And if it were true—if she did love you—devotedly with all her heart and soul, Senor Roderic?"

"It would make no difference. I should deplore such an unfortunate occurrence deeply, on her account, for she is a noble woman in a million. But it would be utterly impossible for me to love another as I have you, Georgia."

And he believed what he said, showing that he was sincere, at any rate.

His words made her eyes glisten with delight, for who does not yearn to hear such phrases falling from the lips of an adored one.

"You solemnly swear that is true?" she asked, willing to believe, yet filled with womanly doubts.

"By everything sacred, by the memory of that happy past which my wretched jealousy slaughtered, by the grave of my revered mother I swear that I love and have loved no woman on earth but one, and she is before me."

"Then you shall hear the condition upon which you may wipe out the past—upon which I shall again believe in you with all my heart and soul, and forget the cruel wrong you did me."

"Name it, for Heaven's sake, Georgia. You shall see that I am in deadly earnest—that I abhor myself for the miserable way in which I fled from happiness and you. Yes, though it take me to the ends of the world, I shall go, proud to convince you that as once before I am above all others your *preux chevalier*. What would you have me do—all I ask is that it may not be to the prejudice

of my beloved country for which I have sworn to stand to the death against all her foreign foes."

"Find Leon for me!"

It was a marvelously strange request and quite enough to stagger the man of whom the imperious demand was made. [65]

"Find Leon"—the lover must set out on a quest for another man—who was Leon, what relation did he bear the belle of San Juan, and where had he become lost since he needed a voyage of discovery made in his behalf—Jason, starting with his bold Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece might not have had half the trouble that would come of looking for a lost man in the world wilderness of to-day, since traveling facilities were limited in those times, whereas one may now readily fling thousands of leagues behind him in a fortnight.

"Find Leon—for me!"

Evidently Leon was of considerable importance to the speaker—her voice seemed to dwell upon the sound with much tenderness.

But Roderic did not appear to be amazed on account of the name—it was something else that gave him cause for astonishment.

"Senorita, I declared my readiness to go to the ends of the earth to serve you, but now you ask me to seek the shades beyond, the world of spirits. How then could I claim the reward even if success attended my endeavor?"

"No, no, not that—you do not understand—it is Leon, my brother you are to find," breathlessly.

"Exactly, and as he is dead it would necessitate my becoming a disembodied spirit—"

"Ah! yes, but he is not dead."

"Pardon, you told me so many times, and I mourned with you on account of your loss."

"It was all a terrible mistake."

"And Leon is not dead?"

"At least he was alive three months ago. Oh! you do not know, you cannot understand the great joy with which I but recently learned how we had all been deceived." [66]

Her face glowed with enthusiasm.

Every atom of his old mad idolatry seemed resurrected, and Roderic was almost ready to bend down in order to kiss the hem of her garment, he felt so abased on account of the wrong his hasty action had brought upon her.

"Where am I to search?" he asked, eagerly, as though ready to start on the jump.

"He is in Porto Rico."

"Good. That is where I am going to-morrow."

"And whither we also expect to bring up as soon as steam can take us."

"Tell me what you know of him, this brother who was dead, yet lives. How shall I know him?"

"Ah! you would recognize him, Senor Roderic, did you but meet on the ocean as castaways, or in the midst of the Great Sahara."

"Then he looks like you?"

"They have always said it."

"That is enough—I shall remember always."

"And you undertake the mission?" eagerly.

His eyes met her glowing orbs.

"You have yourself named the condition, Georgia. If I find this brother you will forgive me the cruel past—you promise to love me again?"

"Ah, senor, I have never been able to crush that love from my heart—it is as strong there to-day as when we pledged our lives to happiness. Stay, do not misunderstand me," as he made a movement toward her, "until you have done something to atone for your desertion, Senor Roderic, we may not resume those relations."

"And should fate baffle my search—should Leon be actually dead, do I lose all, sweetheart—will you throw my love away like an old glove?" [67]

"I could not, for your love is life to me. I have hoped through these gloomy years, hoped you might learn how cruel, how unjust you had been, and return to me. If you search with all your heart, that will answer my demands."

"How eagerly I shall try let Heaven be my witness. During the long and dreary months since last I saw you, dear girl, I have lived ages. Many times rebellion arose within my heart, fermented by the love that lingered there, and could only be put down with an iron hand. Now I shall hope to make such poor amends as lie in my power for the wretched mistakes of that dreadful past. But tell what you know of Leon—why has he been dead to you so long, and what reason have you to believe he still lives and is in Porto Rico?"

"You think it strange—it is right to look at it in that way. I myself sometimes doubt whether I am

awake, it all seems so marvelous, so startling.

"Leon was my only brother—I have told you before how we once loved each other, and even described how he was drawn to join the brave Cubans under Gomez when they rebelled against the mother country.

"In one of the first fights that occurred Leon was taken prisoner, and carried to Havana where he was secretly confined in Morro Castle.

"Suddenly we heard that he had been taken out under the castle walls with seven other wretched patriots and shot to death.

"That was about the time I met you, senior, and my aching heart found solace in your devoted love. Then came the period of our happiness and the shock of your desertion. [68]

"Days, months, yes years have since passed. Then, as though the dark clouds would roll away together, I again saw your blessed face, and at the same time heard a wonderful story that Leon was alive—that he had been saved by the daughter of the officer in command of Morro Castle, who had fallen in love with his handsome face."

"That is not so wonderful, senorita, since you tell me he resembles *you*."

"Ah! flatterer; but you shall hear all, though the time is not appropriate. Strange things happen in Havana—in all Spanish speaking countries—romance has a home there, and plays a part you colder Anglo-Saxons hardly understand."

"You forget I have lived there myself—that I speak Spanish, and by direct association discovered the good qualities of these people who are almost enigmas to the common run of Americans. I believe in giving the devil his due. Yes, you cannot surprise me very much. I too have seen many remarkable dramas played under the crimson and gold banner of Spain."

"This daughter of the governor saved Leon. She bribed the prison doctor who pronounced my brother dead while in reality he only lay in a stupor caused by a subtle drug.

"He was carried from the prison in a coffin and buried just as the sun went down.

"Then darkness came as the grave diggers turned back to the fort.

"Hardly were they out of sight than from a chaparral where she had remained hidden sprang the governor's daughter, may the saints protect her as an angel of mercy.

"At her side was a faithful negro, and while the fire-flies spangled the darkness around, this man flung back the newly set earth. [69]

"When Leon had been snatched from the rude pine box intended for his coffin this was again buried in the ground.

"They carried the boy to the negro's cabin and there he was tenderly nursed through a long and weary sickness.

"There he lay while I mourned as only a loving, stricken sister could; for we believed the published account of his death before the guns of the avenging Spanish executioners.

"It was six months before he was well, and during that time he had become so mixed up in the great game of independence that he dared not let me know even of his existence—besides, he feared lest a breath of suspicion should be cast upon the girl who had risked all this for his sake, and whom he loved with heart and soul.

"Thus time passed on and under another name he fought with Gomez and Garcia—wherever the flag of Cuba waved in battle he was there, ready to lead the charge and die if need be for the cause in which he had enlisted.

"When your troops were first put ashore near Santiago and attacked by the Spaniards, it was Leon, now a captain in the Cuban army, who saved them from annihilation.

"The time had apparently come when he felt at liberty to send me a message, and this he did through one of the Americans. It is too long a story to tell how he accomplished it, nor does it matter.

"He also sent word, believing me to be still in Porto Rico, still in dear old San Juan, that he expected to be there sometime in the latter part of July or early in August and I must keep on the lookout for him.

"Between us, Senor Roderic, we must find Leon! If he comes to me I shall count it the same as though you had won your case, since the desire to do this service for me is there." [70]

"Ah! you are forgiving—you are an angel, dearest girl. No matter, I shall never excuse myself for my unfounded suspicions."

"You no longer believe in them?"

"I have not this long time back. Reason was fast driving me to again visit San Juan and discover how deeply I had wronged you."

"Would you have done that?"

"I swear that such a thought, amounting almost to a resolution, was in my mind, when I learned fortune was again sending me to San Juan."

She showed the pleasure that was rioting in her heart—the reconciliation seemed drawing very near.

"And you leave—to-morrow, señor?"

"Yes, the sooner I get away from Dublin the better for all purposes. I have discovered that the mission of those who sought aid here has been balked. Just now the sentiment of the Irish toward England seems softened, and it looks as though by means of kindness and justice, the wrongs of the past may be washed out. We who love the best interests of this green isle hope for great things."

"You go to New York, that great city of which you so often spoke, but which I have never yet seen?"

"No, direct to Porto Rico."

"Indeed. I did not know there were any regular vessels going to Spanish ports in the West Indies."

"This is a special trip."

"Ah! I begin to see. We too, leave to-morrow. Can it be possible you have taken passage on the same boat, the Sterling Castle, a fleet blockade runner?"

Eagerness was written on her lovely face.

[71]

Roderic could almost wish he had been lucky enough to have done so, believing that it must have proven a happy voyage for them.

He failed to take into account the elements that would naturally be in charge of such a vessel, and the strong probability that his form must grace a yard arm as an American spy, ere the voyage had been half completed.

"I am sorry to say that opportunity is denied me. My cousin owns a steam yacht, which she has loaded with stores and medicines to be taken to Porto Rico, which island she believes has been quite forgotten by Miss Barton and her Red Cross movement. I shall be a passenger on board, and be secretly put ashore to fulfill my work."

A sudden change came over the girl's face—there was a drop of fifty degrees in temperature. A smiling summer sky had been blotted out by a rude wintry blizzard—the smile gave way to a look of pain, almost a frown. These passion flowers of the south know little of the art that consists in concealing the emotions—honest love or hate flashes quickly upon the countenance, for they brook no rivals.

"Your cousin—Miss Fairfax of Virginia, the daughter of a fortune, who is ready to cast all she owns at your feet—and you are to sail with her—you will be in her company ten days, two weeks perhaps. Santa Maria! then you will forget me, forget everything but her blue eyes that look like the Porto Rico skies at sunset."

It was almost a piteous wail to which she gave vent, and Roderic, his heart touched, realizing that the chance for which he yearned had come, sprang forward and threw an arm around the girl.

She had repulsed him before, but with a fierce jealousy raging in her heart she was no longer capable of such heroics.

[72]

So she yielded herself a willing captive to his embraces—her heart had ever been true, why should she not enjoy a fleeting spell of bliss?

Looking down into her confused face upon which his kisses were yet warm, he said, with a quiet assurance that did much to convince her:

"Sweetheart, I have known Cleo all my life. I love her as a sister, for she is a noble woman; but I never have given and never could give her an iota of the idolatrous passion that has filled my heart for you. You have believed me before—trust me now. I live only in the hope of wiping out my shameful action of the past, and of winning you for my own. Are you satisfied?"

"But she cares for you, Roderic; your fair cousin!"

"You declare so—I can hardly believe it."

"But I know it—she would make a far better wife for you than might a poor daughter of Porto Rico," weakly, almost piteously.

"I am the judge of that, and I would snatch you to my heart against all the world."

"She has great wealth," watching him yearningly.

"I love only *you*, my darling."

"She is cultivated, refined, as you say a noble woman, while I am poor, with only my face and a worshiping heart to bring you."

"But I adore *you*—life without you would be a dreary waste," he steadfastly declared.

His simple argument convinced even the little skeptic.

"Then God's will be done—I am yours again when you have fulfilled your penance, Señor Roderic."

Just as he was about to ratify the treaty with a lover's kiss there was a tremendous bellow, as if some mad bull had broken loose from confinement, and into the half darkened apartment came the tall figure of General Porfidio, her guardian.

[73]

## CHAPTER VII. THE SWORD DUEL IN THE EAST INDIAN BUNGALOW.

[74]

Surrounded by a thousand mementoes of India as he was, in this quaint bungalow on the Rathmines road, Roderic Owen might well have been pardoned had he allowed imagination to have full sway, and looked for some offended satellite of great Buddha to appear with the advent of that bull-like roar.

But it chanced that he knew the sound of old, since the general and himself had many times enjoyed each other's society in San Juan when Cupid ruled the camp.

He was not particularly anxious to meet the Porto Rican officer just yet, but being a man who never showed the white feather when face to face with trouble, he wheeled to confront the hurricane just entering.

General Porfidio was a big man, and having a bushy head of white hair his appearance was unusually ferocious, nor did his fierce military mustache and his shaggy eyebrows serve to temper the naturally bellicose looks which a provident Nature had bestowed upon him.

The roar with which he usually spoke accorded well with his whole disposition.

And yet Roderic had seen this terrible man of war become as meek as a little lamb under the thumb of a pretty girl's hand—Georgia knew how to pull his heart strings and bring him to his knees.

He evidently entered the room in a tremendous whirl of excitement.

"*Por Dios!* so, I have discovered the villain. Roblado swore he saw him enter here, and ran to inform me three blocks away. I have galloped every foot of the distance, and with each yard I swore a fearful oath to have his life, that of the spy who seeks to ruin me in my own house. You hear, sir—I have come to rid the world of a viper. And yet, I would not have it said that Porfidio de Brabant, with the blood of cavaliers in his veins, descended so low as to strike an unarmed man. Turn about, Yankee, and you will see many swords upon the wall behind you. The light still remains good enough to allow us a few minutes grace. It is all I want—I have not learned my lesson for nothing. What! do you then refuse to defend yourself—then by Our Lady I shall be obliged to spur you on with the flat of my good blade, until I can beat some little courage into your shrinking soul."

[75]

He made an aggressive movement, as if about to instantly carry his plan into action.

This was more than Roderic could stand.

He was a fighter by nature, and no man ever had to shake a red flag in front of his eyes in order to arouse his ambition.

Even in the present instance, though he had no desire to meet the general in an affair of honor, the awful threat made by the Porto Rican was too much for his Irish blood.

Consequently he turned to the wall, remembering that his eye had been involuntarily attracted toward a particularly inviting looking slender Hindoo sword made of the finest steel in the world, tempered in Damascus, where the art has been guarded as a secret, lo, these hundreds of years, since the turbulent time of Saracens and Crusaders in fact.

Quickly Roderic snatched this blade from the wall.

It felt like a reliable weapon, and he no sooner clasped his eager fingers about the hilt than he knew he could depend upon it to the death.

[76]

Having thus armed himself he whirled about, for the dire threat of the old soldier still stung his ears, and he was mortally afraid the other might in his anger carry it out.

To a proud man like Owen, such an indignity would be worse than the danger of meeting an attack—and especially in *her* presence.

Thus, when able to flash the jewel hilted East Indian blade around so as to cover any possible attack from the old martinet, Roderic gave vent to an exclamation of satisfaction.

At home with a sword, he felt able to render a good account of his stewardship, since he had long taken a peculiar pride in learning the ways in which various nations handle the weapon—a grizzled old Turk had given him points in Constantinople—from an Algerian desert rover he had learned how they fought with the steel when robbers attacked the caravans—an expert Hindoo juggler who could place an apple on a man's cranium and with a fierce downward stroke sever it completely without harming a hair of the other's head had taken pleasure in teaching him a few tricks, while American cavalrymen had made him an adept with the sabre, and a French fencing master exhausted his *repertoire* in endeavoring to beat down his defense.

Taken in all, young Owen had no reason to fear any harm when thus given a blade with which to defend himself.

Nor did he mean to demolish the old veteran, with whom he had many times smoked the pipe of peace and good fellowship, exchanging stories of world wide experiences.

All he desired was a chance to defend himself against furious attacks.

[77]

Evidently Don Porfidio had not as yet recognized the man in the parlor of his bungalow.

For this, the growing shadows of coming dusk, together with the fury that made his eyes dance in their sockets might be held accountable, rather than any infirmities of coming age.

When the old fire-eater comprehended what the other's action really meant he gave utterance to a snort of satisfaction.

Nothing could please him better than a chance to air his masterly ability with the trenchant blade he had so proudly carried at his side—opportunities for so doing had of late been too few and far between to fully satisfy the vainglorious ambition of the soldier.

He had actually seen much stirring work in the military service of Spain, and was seasoned by a long and hazardous career.

"*Carramba!*" he cried, "have we then at last one fellow who shirks not the fray? Here's to your lung and an easier way of taking breath."

But somewhat to his surprise the unknown parried his quivering stroke with the utmost ease, and still stood there on guard.

Then the old soldier waxed wroth.

He had been stunned at first, when his blade was so contemptuously turned aside, for this action was not according to the usual way Dame Fortune served such a son of Mars.

Of course he gave utterance to a Spanish execration, such as falls so readily from the lips of these excitable people.

Then he hastily examined his sword, which was found to be in quite as good condition as before, proving that the fault did not lie in that quarter at least. [78]

Having awakened to the knowledge that he had a job cut out before him that would require his utmost endeavors, Don Porfidio braced his bulky frame for a prodigious effort.

As the two antagonists stood there facing one another, like a pair of Roman gladiators about to do battle royal the girl suddenly darted between.

"You must not, shall not fight!" she exclaimed.

The general let out a roar.

"Stand back, on your life, rash girl. This is a business in which I will brook no interference."

"But uncle, dear uncle, you do not know——"

"I know all I desire, and I shall make it my solemn duty to teach this rascal a lesson he will never forget. Therefore I command you, Georgia, to leave the room!"

"No, no, it would be a crime," she continued, endeavoring to cling to his sword arm.

But the testy old don's fighting blood was up, and in such a condition he would stand no interference even from one whom he loved so dearly.

So with his left arm he swept the frail figure of the San Juan belle aside, and at the same time thrust out with his sword.

The weapon met that of Roderic eagerly advanced to receive the thrust, and immediately there followed a clashing and rasping as steel continued to smite its like.

Georgia, finding her efforts to keep the two men apart futile, fell back in dismay from the flash of the writhing swords.

The spectacle appeared to fascinate her for a brief time, so that with clasped hands she stood and gazed, her breath coming in gasps, and with each breath a fervent prayer that the Holy Virgin would intervene to prevent these two men, each of whom was so dear to her, from shedding one another's blood. [79]

Then of a sudden she uttered a bubbling cry—it was not because one or the other had gained the least advantage, for they were still at it, hammer and tongs, the giant man of war trying all his tricks and clever thrusts with disheartening results—a bright thought had flashed into the girl's bewildered brain.

Since Don Porfidio refused to hearken when she attempted to explain matters, perhaps the same hoped-for cessation of active hostilities might be attained through another means.

"A light—let me find a lamp—please Heaven it may not be too late, and these hot heads slaughter each other while I am gone," was what she cried.

No one noticed her disappearance through the door where hung the Bagdad curtains, for both of the gentlemen had their attention fully occupied in another quarter.

When a ferocious old military hero with all his long pent-up love for bloody scenes bursting forth is diligently thrusting right and left with a keen pointed sword, his eagerness increasing with each and every defeat of his plans, there is little chance to observe what may be passing even in the confines of the same apartment.

That was Roderic's condition.

True, he considered himself in no actual danger, unless from an accidental thrust, but all the same the valorous old don was sending them in at white heat, and as the gloaming made it difficult to see with exactness, there was need of great caution.

The sparks flew whenever the hostile blades struck violently together, and taken altogether it was about as pretty and interesting a picture as one would wish to see. [80]

When he found his favorite blows turned aside with so masterly a hand, the general's rage began to partially give way to admiration, for he was an ardent lover of fine sword play no matter where found, in Arab, Moor or Cossack.

He still continued to bellow, for it was a part of his nature to do so, but mingled with his furious phrases were cries that betokened amazement, delight, suspicion.

Perhaps he recognized something familiar about the method employed by his antagonist in defending himself.

Swordsmen have their peculiar tactics or individualities, that crop out strongly, and doubtless in the good old days when Senor Owen was a welcome visitor at the hacienda of Don Porfidio the two may have crossed blades occasionally, if only to illustrate some point in a story.

In due time the Porto Rican must have puzzled out the solution of the mystery.

He was not given time just now.

Roderic, finding that the other was making a most wicked series of lunges at his heart, and fearful lest some accident might occur that would place him at the mercy of Don Porfidio, concluded to wind up the matter in a manner that was more to his liking.

So he let loose a few cards which he had, figuratively speaking, been holding up his sleeve—in other words he let out an extra supply of ability and forced the fighting.

It was all up with the general.

He knew full well he was in the hands of a master, and that while the duel was fated to be cut as short as he wished, the outcome might hardly be to his liking.

The old don had been over confident, and he now fell into something like a panic. [81]

True, he battled on with just as much vim as before, but desperation nerved his arm rather than the old time enthusiasm.

When Roderic discovered his chance he whipped the other's supple blade out of his nerveless hand with consummate ease.

Don Porfidio uttered a cry of rage and stupefaction.

"*Carramba!* you have done it—now take your revenge, Senor Spy!" he ejaculated, despairingly.

He folded his arms across his quivering chest and faced what he supposed would be immediate death without flinching.

Roderic drew back his sword, but the old warrior made no appeal for mercy.

A Spaniard may appear cruel according to Anglo-Saxon ways of looking at things, but no race of men has shown more splendid courage in battle or upon the terrible unknown seas of the fifteenth century.

Roderic turning hung his East Indian blade once more upon the wall, doubtless to the sore amazement of the soldier.

It was at this juncture Georgia came hastily into the room bearing an antique lamp which her trembling fingers had succeeded in lighting.

Upon her face was an anxious, almost terrified expression, as though she half expected to find one or both of the men lying there in their blood.

To see them standing there unarmed was a joyous revelation.

As for the old soldier, the truth flashed upon him with a shock, when his eyes beheld a face he long had known.

"Holy Father, is it *you* Senor Owen? Dolt, idiot that I was not to recognize the familiar swing of your cunning sword arm. I am pleased to meet you again—as, I am furiously angry because all these months you have neglected this sweet flower, and caused her much suffering." [82]

Thus he rambled on, halting between his natural affection for the young American, yet holding back on account of race enmity, since Spanish and American arms now clashed.

Roderic knew he had a difficult piece of work cut out for him.

It had been child's play to disarm the old gentleman, but to avoid an open rupture must tax his ingenuity.

Perhaps, with the help of the girl it might be made possible.

At any rate he was bound to try for the sake of peace in the family.

"General, that I have lost the sweet friendship, and society of your niece and ward during all these months is my misfortune. She has, like an angel of light, forgiven me. It was all a terrible mistake, caused by jealousy on my part.

"You as a man who has seen the world in all its phases can understand my position. I am humiliated in her presence. We expect to forget all that is bitter in the past, and start afresh, for no other has held the cords to my heart save Georgia—though I believed her lost to me forever, I have been always faithful to our love.

"General, our countries are at war, but that does not make us enemies. I would esteem it an honor to shake your hand again and hear you say you do not bear me malice where she has forgiven."

The veteran was touched.

[83]

He was human, and it flattered him to think that this young American, who had just disarmed him with such ease, should still yearn for his friendly interest.

Don Porfidio was genial despite his exceeding gruff ways.

"*Cospita, hombre*, you speak fairly. If the chit of a girl has forgiven what right have I to hold out, though truth to tell I have made many a vow to the Virgin to flay your back when next we met, on account of your wretched flight. Since you ask it so sincerely, and there was always a warm corner of my tough old heart for you Senor Roderic, I see no reason why we should not shake hands and resume our former friendship."

This pleased Owen, who was just in the act of putting out his hand when a rough voice outside was heard calling:

"Senor de Brabant, have you slain the pig of a Yankee spy—is it safe to enter?"

At which Don Porfidio uttered a choking exclamation and letting his hand drop to his side stared at the face of the young American as though the truth had flashed through his brain like an electric bolt.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### "ADIOS, BELOVED!"

[84]

The old Porto Rican dignitary quickly recovered his speech—indeed, it was seldom he could be found in a position where his vocal organs suffered a relapse, since it was almost as natural for Don Porfidio to fume and roar as it was to draw breath.

Suspicion, which had lain dormant in his breast during the last few minutes, on account of his surprise at discovering the identity of his opponent in the sword duel, now once more leaped into a fierce flame.

He remembered why he had rushed to his bungalow quarters with such hot speed.

"The spy, yes, the Yankee spy. *Por Dios!* I had almost forgotten him. He entered here—Roblado swore it on his honor. I have never as yet seen the rascal and I jumped to the conclusion that you were he. Was it all a mistake, Senor Owen—will you tell me you are not the party Roblado saw—the party he has sworn to tear limb from limb? I await your answer, senor, and give you my word of honor I shall believe what you say," he said, anxiously, eagerly.

Roderic smiled.

It was not because he lacked in respect for the doughty general, who had backed up his hot words with his sword as a brave man should.

The reference to Roblado amused Owen.

He pictured that fire-eater who was yearning to spill his blood, waiting outside the door of the house, where the click of the swords came as sweet music to his ear, waiting until these sounds were heard no longer, when in a mixture of hope and fear he called out:

[85]

"Senor de Brabant, have you slain the pig of a Yankee spy—is it safe to enter?"

Of a truth Roblado's heart was as stout as that of the timid lamb gamboling on the green, and when he roared it was as fiercely as a sucking dove.

Roderic was ever frank—it is a policy that pays best in the end.

"I do not claim the name of a spy, senor, but it would be foolish of me to deny that I am in the secret diplomatic service of my country—that my presence here has been to discover why Spanish agents congregate in Dublin. As to why I am under your roof, it is a purely personal matter that drew me. I chanced to be passing and saw your niece at the window. Resolved to make my peace with her I boldly demanded admittance, and she has been angel enough to forgive. Senor, that is all—you believe me?"

Roderic was a man whose very face was a passport among his fellows.

What he said usually carried weight.

Of old he had exerted great influence over the don, who had almost loved him as his own at the time jealousy broke up the combination.

This feeling was once more sweeping over the general—there is a fascination about some men that is very hard to resist.

Possibly he might have again thrust out his hand despite Roblado and his hatred for Yankees in general.

Other voices were heard outside—Roblado was endeavoring to explain to the new arrivals who had just appeared upon the scene.

[86]

Perhaps, not having received any answer to his frenzied calls to the general, he jumped to the conclusion that the boot was on the other leg, and the veteran had received his quietus at the hands of the miserable American "pig."

In numbers there is courage and strength.

Even Roblado could be valorous when backed up by half a dozen comrades.

The cramp in his abdomen, which had necessarily prevented him from rushing in and annihilating the Yankee, now left him as if by magic, and when the group of conspirators crushed through the doorway Roblado led the van.

Such valor! no wonder Spain has in ages past swept like a whirlwind over the known world—it was certainly worthy of the Dark Ages.

Roderic was taken at a disadvantage, for he had not expected such hostile measures.

He thought to again snatch the sword that had already served him so well, but ere this could be done one of the new comers had hurled his weight upon him.

Had these two been let alone, Owen would surely have done the other injury in short order, for his trained muscles were aching for active service, and the Spaniard was really no match for him.

This style of carrying on the affair did not seem to suit the others, however.

What was the use of having an advantage if it were not enforced?

Such logic carried the day, and when Roderic found the half dozen hanging upon him from all

quarters he ceased struggling, knowing the folly of such a useless endeavor to win out.

[87]

It was a great victory.

His captors surrounded him, every man holding on to some part of his apparel.

Their swarthy faces beamed with pleasure, as though this might be taken as a forerunner of the great triumph reserved for their nation when the somnolence of many years had been thrown aside.

Roblado was in his element.

He had a military or naval cut about his appearance, and no doubt could swell with importance when on the deck of his ship or at the head of his brigade.

"Tis well, comrades, we have secured the beast. What can prevail against Spanish valor? Those who are foolish enough to get in our way must pay the penalty, poor fools. Now that we have caught the great American eagle what shall we do with him?" he asked, still maintaining a consequential grip upon Roderic's coat tails.

"Clip his wings!" said one in Castilian.

Various other suggestions were offered, some amusing, others diabolical in their cruelty.

Roderic laughed good naturedly.

"Ah! gentlemen all," he remarked in that calm and pleasant way that indicates perfect control over the emotions, "you seem to forget you are not in Spain or Cuba, where such delightful little picnic parties as you mention are of daily occurrence. You are in the dominion of Her Majesty Queen Victoria—her officers are watching every move you make, and at this moment the shadow of Portland prison hangs over you, every man.

"Don't imagine for a moment my presence is not known to these men from Scotland Yard, for we are working hand in glove. I am in your power, and you may do as you please, but mark me, if a hair of my head is injured every man here will be in irons before two hours have passed. That is all!"

[88]

It was enough.

The Jack Spaniards were shaky at the knees.

Their respect for grim English laws and customs was bred in the bone—since the days when the Great Armada was destroyed by Providence and British valor, these people of the Iberian peninsula have seldom desired to pick a quarrel with Albion.

So, upon hearing what Owen had to say, they looked at each other fearfully and then eyed the doors and windows as though half expecting to see the officers representing good old English law bursting upon the scene.

Naturally a cock fights best upon his own ground, and this is particularly true of Spaniards as a people.

Handicapped by their presence under a flag that was known to be more friendly toward the Americans than any other among the Powers, they found their claws cut.

A hasty council of war was entered into.

Self preservation is the first law of nature, and they were clamorous as to the means to be employed that would best insure his safety.

No matter how wretched the cur, he has the same inherent love of life that nature gives to the finest created creature.

Several times Don Porfidio attempted to take the reins and drive, but a spirit of communism was rampant, and the others would yield to no dictation.

At other times perhaps they would give ready heed to all he had to say, since he occupied a high position in the councils of Spain; but just now all were on a common level and it was a case of life and death they had to settle.

[89]

At length it was decided.

Senor Owen should not be put to death, but held a prisoner until they could hastily leave Dublin bay on board the blockade runner as per their previous arrangement.

It was only hastening plans that had already been well arranged.

The young girl stood there an anxious spectator, while her lover's fate was being decided, and when the final ultimatum had been rendered she gave him a pleased smile of encouragement.

Roderic, wise man, had made up his mind not to resist the decree of fate, especially since it appeared that he would only be put to a little inconvenience and encounter small danger.

He had no desire to provoke the anger of these men further than was necessary—there would come a time when he might meet them face to face on equal terms, with weapons in his hands, and until that hour it was policy for him to laugh and let them have their sweet way.

A long lane it is that has no turning.

His time would come sooner or later.

Then the blustering Roblado might be made to sing more softly, and those who handled him so

roughly be compelled to take a turn themselves.

Surrounded by the voluble and excited group, the American was led down into the cellar of the unique bungalow on the Rathmines road.

Here they left him, with fervent hopes, openly expressed that the rats would feed upon his wretched porcine carcass, and never allow him to again see the light of day.

[90]

Owen was not in despair.

On the contrary it is doubtful whether in all fair Dublin that night a lighter heart could have been found than his.

There was reason for it too.

As to the danger menacing him, he laughed that to scorn—it was only a little adventure after all, one of many that marked his life.

He had won back the treasure that was almost beyond his reach, and the man who found himself secure in the love of that divine girl had cause for deep and heart-felt satisfaction.

Roderic could never tell how it ever came these fellows neglected to take what portable property he chanced to carry.

It was really a remarkable omission and might be laid to the fact of their being gentlemen though he himself was rather inclined to believe the truth rested in another quarter—that they had been ashamed in the presence of Georgia, and likewise confused by his positive statement about the Scotland Yard officers on their trail.

Having a deep seated aversion to English prisons, quite excusable, they had found their nerves unstrung.

Hence Roderic profited by their confusion.

He hunted up a cigar and a match.

That was comfort enough for half an hour.

The future could take care of itself.

Such is the philosophy of a dare devil who, from long familiarity has conceived a species of contempt for danger.

He could hear some one moving about above, and understood that the general must be preparing to leave the odd little furnished cottage which he had hired.

[91]

More time passed.

Owen was only waiting until they left the house, when he would undertake to get free from his prison.

No ordinary cellar was constructed that could restrain a man of his ability for any great length of time.

An occasional flash from a match kept him informed as to the flight of time.

These brief periods of illumination also gave him some conception as to his surroundings, and he was thus enabled to figure as to what shape his action should take in order to bring the most speedy results.

At length all seemed to become quiet above.

He had heard several doors slam.

Doubtless the doughty general and his lovely ward had sallied forth to board the blockade runner that was to take them across the ocean.

Roderic sighed to think he would not see her again for, Heaven alone knew how long.

Never mind, he had experienced a foretaste of Paradise on this evening which he would have considered cheaply purchased had he been compelled to meet ten times as many difficulties in order to win it.

It had brightened his life and given him something blessed for which to live.

Filled with zeal, as though inspired to prove himself worthy of the dear girl who had so readily forgiven his cruel desertion because of the great love she bore him, Owen arose.

First of all he stretched himself, as though feeling of his strength.

He had resolved to bend his energies upon the door of the subterranean prison, as offering the best possible opportunity for escape.

[92]

So he groped his way to the stone steps and made his way upward.

At length he touched the door.

Of course it was fast.

Those vindictive Spaniards had meant what they said, and really hoped he might be kept down below until so weakened by hunger that he could put up but a feeble defense against the great gaunt Dublin sewer rats.

Which shows how little they knew a progressive Yankee, and his inventive abilities that stop at nothing when the occasion makes demands.

Roderic knew how to assail such a door.

He smiled disdainfully when he found they had actually left the key in the lock.

What a snap it was.

Why these fellows were hardly out of their swaddling clothes when it came to outwitting a twentieth century Yankee.

He thought he would start operations upon that door immediately.

Then his mind changed for a sound reached his ears—some one was approaching—he could even see a gleam of light from under the door.

Now they stood without with only the door between.

He heard a key turned in the lock.

Roderic braced himself for a struggle, not knowing but what one of the most vindictive Spaniards, Roblado perhaps, had crept back, resolved to have a dark revenge.

Thus, half crouching on the steps, he awaited the opening of the door.

Now it moved.

He had a glimpse of a flaring candle held in a small hand, and then came sudden darkness, for a draught from the cellar had snuffed out the flame. [93]

But Roderic had in that one glance seen enough to arouse the most delightful sensations within his heart.

A voice, low and soft but sweeter than a breath from Cathay reached his ears and set the music throbbing in his heart.

"Senor Roderic—*hola*, it is I!"

"God bless you—I am here within reach. Hold steady and let me touch you, lest I believe I am only dreaming, my darling."

And he immediately held her little loyal form within the shelter of his arms, though when he rained burning kisses on her lips she struggled to be free.

"This is no time for that. Holy mother, what a rude man you are, Senor Roderic. Release me, I beg, I command. Remember he must win who wears. You have a duty to perform."

"Which shall be accomplished with Heaven's help. But I thought you were gone, sweetheart?"

"We are just starting—the cart is at the door, and uncle is waiting."

"Then he knows why you return?"

"Yes. He made only one stipulation."

"What is it?"

"Your promise not to move a hand until dawn, to prevent our sailing on the Sterling Castle."

Roderic breathed easier.

"Tell the dear old governor I give that most willingly. You know I leave here myself in a comparatively few hours."

"Then I must go."

"You leave me—we may never meet again." [94]

"The Virgin watch over you," she faltered.

"Will you go without one parting embrace—ah! the world is wide and danger lurks everywhere when people are at war. One kiss sweetheart, of your own free will—it may be a talisman to guard me against evil."

He pleaded not in vain.

A pair of soft arms were thrown around his neck, and not one but a dozen kisses rained upon his lips—then when he would have sought to detain her she eluded his grasp and flitted away in the dark, her gentle "adios, beloved," sounding like a benediction to his ravished ears.

A few minutes later he heard the roll of wheels, as the jaunting car took them to the distant quay.

"She is gone, Heaven bless her," he muttered—"lucky man that I am, thrice blessed to be beloved by two such charming creatures; to me there is only one who can fill the longing of my heart and she has just left me."

And this was the reason Roderic turned up at the Shelbourne late that night looking like a man who had supped with adventure.

## CHAPTER IX. DOWN THE IRISH COAST.

[95]

When Roderic Owen saw the look of deep concern on his cousin's face give way to a radiant expression as he entered the door of the hotel, his heart reproached him.

Here he had been actually reveling in the realms of bliss for the last three hours or more, while Cleo, judging from her appearance, had been "plunged in a gulf of dark despair," or at least considerably worried over the fact of his singular disappearance.

It was really too bad.

Her faithful heart had yearned after him, just as a loving sister's might for the absent one—the two girls were so entirely unlike in looks and temperament that it never occurred to him to compare Cleo's affection with that of Georgia—and yet it was of the kind that lasts through life.

Feeling that somehow he had caused Cleo considerable anxiety, and being conscience stricken on account of his own present happiness, Roderic advanced hastily to ascend the broad stairs and meet her on the landing above.

"You were worried about me, dear cousin?"

"Naturally so—all day you have been away—and to-morrow we sail—unless something important has happened, to alter your plans," she replied, her face flushing at the eager manner in which he caught her hand.

"Something important *has* happened, but it will not delay our leaving Dublin to-morrow," he replied, mentally deciding that the time had come for him to confide his secret to this tender heart. [96]

If it brought pain, God forgive him, since he was unwittingly the cause, but sooner or later Cleo must learn the truth, and the occasion seemed to demand that he speak now.

They were alone, but it was very public—perhaps a quiet nook in one of the small parlors would suit better for a confessional.

"Come with me, dear cousin—I have much to tell you—much that concerns my past and promises to control my future," he said, earnestly.

"Ah," thought Cleo, as she followed his eager steps, "it is coming—he has seen her again, this Georgia whom he knew and loved in San Juan. I must crush down my own feelings in the matter and appear just what he believes me—an affectionate comrade, a loving sister."

That was a heroine for you—it is not given of all women to be Joan of Arcs, but occasion may arise in any life calling for as much determined spirit and heroism as the noble Maid of Orleans ever boasted.

The bijou parlor was entirely deserted, though still lighted, and over in a cozy corner where a pile of cushions invited Oriental comfort they settled down for a little private talk.

Some men would have opened up in an evasive manner and told as little as necessity demanded.

Not so Roderic Owen.

When a task was set before him, no matter how unpleasant or embarrassing, his method was to plunge squarely into it, neither sparing himself nor seeking glory from the recital.

So he told how he had met the lovely belle of the Porto Rico capital—the strange and romantic manner in which Providence seemed to delight in throwing them together, and how he was enabled to save her great inconvenience, if not her life—of the mutual attachment that naturally sprang up between them that rapidly ripened into a passion—of their engagement and the glorious weeks succeeding, when they lived in Paradise. [97]

Then came the serpent in Eden—coquetry on the girl's part, rank jealousy on his, without just cause it had proved.

After that, hot words, violent separation—the old, old story of wounded hearts, so many times repeated in the history of the world—of two souls intended for each other, wandering about the earth estranged, because of hasty temper.

To all of this Cleo listened with deepest sympathy marked upon her face.

What pain her heart experienced would never be known to the world, for she crushed this down with a resolute hand.

Woman was created to withstand most of the suffering in this world—Providence endowed her with a larger capacity for such endurance than man; just as the lord of creation was given the spirit of the chase, of battle, and as the bread-winner in life's strife.

Finally Roderic brought the story to Dublin and told how Georgia disguised as a Sister of the Holy Grail, warned him, though so well had she concealed her identity that he had not guessed it until after she had gone.

This brought him down to the time he was passing on the Rathmine car, and had a glimpse of the girl he loved in the window of the quaint East India bungalow.

He was a good story teller, and the subject one in which his whole heart was engaged, so that he quickly held the girl spell-bound as he described how the reconciliation was brought about. [98]

When he finally told how Georgia allowed him to take her in his arms, Cleo smiled to hide the aching heart she carried, and which she feared might betray its pain upon her face.

Of course she thought that was the end.

"You love her with a deathless devotion, cousin—she has become a *sine qua non* to your existence?" she remarked, to hide her little tremor, her pallor and any confusion that might appear.

"She is the life of my life—I had gone to the point of being an old bachelor, cousin, without ever falling in love—indeed, I had begun to doubt seriously whether my nature was capable of any passion, for my devotion to your cousinly self had been the only affection I had ever known—when she crossed my path like a brilliant meteor and from that day to this I have not known the old peace. Yes, I love her with heart and soul—as you say it truly seems as though this dark-eyed girl had become an indispensable condition to my existence. I tell you this knowing how much you care for my happiness—how you sympathize with my griefs and rejoice when prosperity finds me."

Perhaps it was cruel to say this, but remember that Owen found it almost impossible to believe Cleo entertained a passion for him beyond that calm, cousinly affection.

Besides, it was a part of his religion that heroic treatment was always best.

If he had an unpleasant duty to perform the sooner it was done the better for his peace of mind.

"You say this happened at about dusk?" she asked. [99]

"Yes, I was hurrying to the hotel to dress so that I might eat dinner with you."

"Possibly at seven," with an arch glance in the direction of a little ormolu clock upon the mantel, that was merrily ticking away the minutes.

Roderic laughed in some confusion.

"Pray, do not imagine I forgot the lapse of time, since it is now after eleven. Truth to tell I have been a prisoner all this time—not a captive held by Love's silken strands as you suspect."

"A prisoner—oh! Roderic, then that reconciliation was not the end?" she exclaimed, remembering that his appearance was hardly that of a gentleman who exhibited as a usual thing some fastidiousness in his dress.

"Rather it was but the beginning, for at that very moment the gruff old general, her uncle, rushed like a whirlwind into the house, bellowing for a chance to annihilate the Yankee spy whom one of his bold colleagues had seen enter."

"That was exciting enough—I am quite anxious to see that odd old soldier of whom you have spoken so much. But go on—he recognized you?"

"Not at all—the dim light and his passion blinded eyes prevented that. At once he demanded that I take my choice of the various swords on the wall and give him an opportunity to wipe out the insult my presence put upon his dwelling."

"What a ferocious old firebrand he must be. And did she not explain—you said she had usually such power over this uncle?"

"He would not let her say anything, but, wild with anger brushed Georgia aside and swore as only a furious Spaniard could, that unless I at once accepted his benevolent offer of a fair chance to defend myself, he would lay the flat of his sword on me, and use his boot in ejecting me from the premises." [100]

"The old brute—and of course after that, Cousin Roderic, you had to fight?"

"There was no other way of escaping the dilemma. So I snatched a sword from the wall and met his attack. Well, we had quite a lively passage at arms for some minutes. As I had fenced with the old governor often before I knew he was behind the times. Georgia had fled from the room to hunt a lamp. Just as she returned fortune allowed me to disarm the general."

"Ah! yes, it is always fortune and good luck when you manage to succeed, cousin mine," she exclaimed with some heat, "but I know what skill you possess with a sword—I have my own opinion on that score. But go on—Georgia returned with a light at this most interesting juncture?"

"And the general recognized me—he was almost paralyzed, and was ready to forgive my miserable treatment of his niece when he learned that she had done so. Unfortunately his friends rushed in at this juncture, and taking me unawares made me a prisoner."

"Not before one or more had suffered at your hands, I warrant," she asserted, stoutly, for since Roderic would not sound his own trumpet it was necessary that some one else blow it for him.

Ah! the man who has such a faithful heart looking after his interests is blest indeed.

"Well, I must confess I did not inflict much punishment upon them because they hung on like so many leeches, quite overpowering me. Besides, I knew they would hardly dare do me any bodily harm."

Then he told what followed, and how they put him in the cellar to clip his wings, as they said. [101]

Finally came the last scene in the drama where the door opened and he had Georgia in his arms again.

Roderic made little of this, for the conviction was now forcing itself upon even his dull masculine mind that such tender scenes might not be in the best taste possible, considering the circumstances.

"And thus you see me on deck once more, a little the worse for wear perhaps, but ready to sail with you to-morrow, if you say the word," he ended.

"You are happy, Roderic?"

"Yes, God has been very, very good to me. I don't deserve it, cousin."

"You look forward to meeting Georgia in the island beyond the sea?"

"She has already started there, and it would be strange if we did not meet, either before or after San Juan falls into American hands."

"Is she—*very* beautiful, Roderic?"

"You shall say for yourself when you see her, for it is my fondest hope that you may be the dearest of friends. You will promise me that, Cleo?"

Again she resolutely thrust self aside.

"Whom you love must be a sister to me, cousin. Yes, I give you such a promise willingly."

The rebellion in her heart was kept down with a firm hand—what was human might struggle and cry out, but it could not overcome the divine element that came from Calvary—the desire to sacrifice self for the good of one beloved.

Then they fell to talking of the contemplated ocean voyage and what pleasures it promised to souls that delighted in travel, and for which the ever changing boundless deep had charms that were invisible to the eye of the ordinary tourist. [102]

Finally Roderic realized the lateness of the hour, and declared he ought to be ashamed to keep his cousin from her beauty sleep, especially as it was all on account of his own personal business.

Possibly Roderic slept but little that night.

He had much upon his mind.

And yet he was far happier than the girl from Virginia, since there was a bright future to which he could look forward.

With her that future was a blank.

Many there are fated in this world to love without hope of a reciprocal affection, but few can bear their cross with the gentle happy spirit shown by Cleo.

When they met again at an early breakfast, while old Dublin was waking up, no one would suspect from her smiling face and dancing blue eyes that Cleo had ever known a serious sorrow, or that a canker lodged close to her gentle heart.

She took the deepest interest in all the contemplated movements of her cousin, and entered into the enthusiasm of his plans as though she had a reason to share in his future happiness.

Matters had been so carefully adjusted on the preceding day that little remained to be done save have their portable luggage taken down to the landing stage, and go through with a few forms necessary ere the steam yacht could depart.

Though Roderic was not sorry to leave Dublin, under the circumstances, he must always cherish a pleasant recollection for the bright Irish capital.

It was here the incubus that had pressed upon his shoulders for well nigh two years had been cast aside, and the sun of hope burst from behind the clouds of despair. [103]

Yes, the name of Dublin would ever be associated with pleasant memories, for the little encounter with Don Porfidio was but a romance; while his capture and imprisonment by the Spanish clique had only been the means of bringing his beloved sweetheart again to his arms, and he could not harbor ill feelings against any cause that had brought about such an effect.

By ten o'clock they were on board the yacht.

Roderic could not help casting many eager glances around at the various vessels lying at anchor in Kingstown harbor.

He was thinking of the Sterling Castle.

Already he had made inquiries concerning the steamer, and knew her build.

There were several marked peculiarities about her style, the painting of her funnel and other things that would stamp her individuality, so that he was able to declare after searching the harbor, that the impudent little blockade runner was not present.

Then she had about twelve hours the start and was doubtless far down the Irish coast.

The anchor was weighed with the usual cheery English chorus, and as the steam yacht headed into Dublin bay, Roderic, looking back to the beautiful city thus left behind, could not but be impressed.

It was a glorious summer day and the sight an inspiring one, for Kingstown harbor at this season

of the year is usually thronged with pleasure craft as well as those of business.

Going out they passed the Holyhead steamer just entering.

Roderic could not but reflect with deep satisfaction what a great change had taken place in his own life since he trod the hurricane deck of that same steamer a short time before. [104]

Truly events follow each other in rapid succession in some lives.

Providence seemed to be in an especially favoring mood with regard to his fortunes just at present.

If it would only continue.

He knew not what the future held—perhaps, could he have lifted the veil and obtained a glimpse of what adventures and perils lay in his path, the prospect might have appalled even his stout heart.

How mercifully the future is screened from our inquisitive eyes—could we but *know*, how idle would our struggles seem, and despair must often cause us to cease the hopeless contest.

It is this element of uncertainty that keeps hope alive in our hearts, and many times wrings victory from seeming defeat.

As they passed down the far famed Irish sea the tops of the green hills could always be seen above the haze that sometimes hid their base and the fishing villages nestling there from view.

Roderic spent much time in leaning over the rail and watching this everchanging panorama, while smoking his pipe—for Cleo had made it distinctly understood that she was very fond of tobacco smoke in the open air, and that he was at liberty to indulge when and where he chose; a privilege that caused Miss Becky to lift her eyes in horror, for she had a special aversion to this self same odor.

However, she never found Roderic other than a gentleman, and he would always move his seat in order that the fragrant smoke might not blow across her sacred person, so that in this way he made a firm friend of the old maid. [105]

When nightfall came they took their last look at old Ireland's green hills, for unless all calculations failed they would be out on the broad Atlantic by daylight, headed for the West Indies.

Roderic had by this time thrown off the reserve that weighed down his spirits at first and become his own sociable self, ready to enter into any game that promised relaxation and sport.

The shore line faded as the glow left the western sky, and presently only lights upon the hills told how near they were to the Irish coast.

Thus the voyage was begun, that would bring much of success or grief to his fortunes—before him like a will-o'-the-wisp flitted the blockade runner, having on board the beautiful maid of San Juan—and the game was transferred from the Old to the New World.



## CHAPTER X. FOR ONE NIGHT AT THE AZORES.

[106]

In heading for the Antilles there were several routes which they could take.

It was possible to make a bee line almost due south-west, stopping at the Azores on the way; or they could follow the plan adopted by Spain in sending her ships of war across, heading almost due south to the Canary islands, then on nearly the same course until the Cape Verdes were reached, after which a run to the west would bring them to the Porto Rico coast.

Roderic was much interested in this matter and held many consultations with the old captain as to what line he had marked out.

Perhaps—for somehow our purely selfish personal ends will crop up despite us—he was speculating as to what chances they had of overtaking the blockade runner, should they have decided upon the same course.

There are always so many possibilities governing these things.

Though the ocean appears limitless, there are times when people come together in a most remarkable manner.

Fate takes a hand in many a game and this seemingly boundless sea becomes as a veritable mill pond, where boys float their rafts and have collisions.

Roderic learned that their course was to be laid by way of the Azores, those sentinels of the vasty deep that lie far out in midocean between the two warring countries, the United States and Spain.

[107]

He spent a portion of the first morning afloat in examining the vessel from keel to truck so to speak, and was loud in his praise of her stanch abilities.

She had been built on the Clyde, and was of course put together to stay—those canny Scots have a faculty for making timbers hold together through hurricane blows and all manner of extreme usage, that is unexcelled in any other part of the world, so that the very name carries weight; as does the Belfast engine, some of which on old White Star liners have done noble duty a score and a half of years.

Roderic's praise was so unstinted that the old captain, who loved his craft as only a seaman may, was quite tickled.

He had taken a great liking for Owen, which was not at all strange, for they were both men built very much upon the same model, possessing sterling characteristics.

Perhaps it was apt to become something of a mutual admiration society, for Roderic recognized a kindred spirit—what he admired in a man and sought to exemplify in his own person was present in the composition of this rough and ready British sailorman.

It also pleased him to know Cleo had been fortunate enough to secure such a reliable mariner, and yet he realized this was as much the result of good judgment on her part as any luck.

At least he would never suspect that the Virginia maid had immediately fancied the grim old mariner because she discovered many of his sterling characteristics to be the same as those she had admired in Roderic from boyhood.

That was her secret which she would hardly have acknowledged even to her own heart.

[108]

The weather too was propitious.

A splendid breeze blew, and as they were provided with sails, these were utilized in order to further increase their speed.

Roderic gloried in the fact that he had never been sea sick a minute in his life, and he had also seen some pretty rough times afloat, from being caught in a dreadful typhoon in the China sea to being wrecked by a West India hurricane.

He had provided himself with Clarke Russell's latest ocean yarn, and as his own condition was fully equal to that so aptly described by this wizard of sea stories, he could doubly appreciate the vivid descriptions of storm and calm, hot chase and wreck, and all the manifold phases of life on the boundless deep, given in a manner that has never been rivaled.

They also played shuffle board, tossed deck quoits and amused themselves as pilgrims on the briny ocean learn to do when time hangs heavy.

Roderic read aloud some of the most remarkable passages which bore the witchery of pen genius, and glancing up at the swelling white sails or around at the watery horizon only marked by a wave crest circle, they were in a position to feel the vigor of the description such as no landsman, lounging in a hammock, far from the sea, which mayhap he had never gazed upon, could ever experience.

Numerous vessels were sighted during the first day, steamers and sailing craft.

There is always keen pleasure watching these pilgrims of the deep through the glasses and surmising what they are, the nature of their cargo, whence they come and whither bound.

[109]

After this day such sights would become more rare, for their course was out of the usual transatlantic run.

Doubtless in the good old days when galleons laden with silver and other treasures from the Spanish Main and Mexican mines were on this route to Spain, many a piratical craft bore along this self same course with men aloft and aloft on the keen lookout for rich prizes which could be looted, and scuttled with their wretched crews, their fate ever to remain one of the mysteries of the mighty deep.

Such romantic thoughts crept into Roderic's mind—the situation was conducive to their inception.

Besides, his own fortunes were really as much tinged with the spicy flavor of adventure and romance as any he could imagine in connection with those olden days.

Another day and they apparently owned the earth—at least from sunrise to sunset not a vessel was sighted going in any direction.

The spouting of whales, the gyrations of sharks indicated by the sword-like dorsal fin sticking out of the water, and such aquatic features were all that broke the monotony of the livelong day.

Roderic many times scanned the horizon ahead, and the sight of a distant steamer was enough to arouse his eager interest, for he could not get it out of his mind that the girl he so passionately loved was somewhere on that vast deep, and there was always a possibility of the speedy steam yacht overtaking the slower blockade runner.

Some people hang their faith on small things, lovers especially.

It is possible to find a needle in a haystack, and yet it would hardly pay one to devote a great length of time in the search. [110]

However, lusty hope buoys the heart up, and often leads to wonderful accomplishments.

A change came in the weather.

One can not always expect favoring winds and clear skies on the fretful Atlantic—the storms will blow in summer as well as during the cold season.

Cleo had assured Roderic of her faith in the Dreadnaught as a staunch boat in case of rough weather.

He found the yacht more seaworthy than he had believed possible.

She rode the mighty rollers like a duck, and at no time was there danger aboard.

Still, this was only a sample of what the old Atlantic could kick up on occasion, and no matter how good the boat, one who has experienced the horrors of a genuine hurricane while afloat, never feels a hankering after its repetition—there is a majesty about the mighty deep when aroused to fury that awes the stoutest human heart; and those who have sailed over its trackless wastes the longest have the greatest respect for its sovereignty.

Of course the storm drove them out of their expected direct route to the Portuguese Azores, and delayed their arrival at the sentinel islands.

Although these islands be along the short route from Spain to her West India possessions,—to be hers no longer—as a usual thing ships from the mother country prefer the longer passage, partly because the runs are more broken, the wind more apt to be favorable, and possibly for the reason that some of her fortified possessions, the Canaries lie off the coast of northern Africa.

Thus, not a great business has been done at the Azores under the best of conditions, and this was interfered with while the war lasted, as Spanish craft feared to sail so far away from fortified ports, lest some of the fast auxiliary cruisers of Uncle Sam, on the eager lookout for prizes, gobble them up. [111]

As they sighted land, Roderic could hardly conceal his impatience.

Was the Sterling Castle in port?

That would be a strange coincidence truly, and yet this sanguine lover had the nerve to believe it might be true.

Upon some men fortune showers favors so readily that they become rank optimists, and expect astonishing results from the most scanty scattering of seed.

Indeed, chance plays quite a part in their calculations.

The day was almost at its close when they drew near the islands.

With the rosy bloom of the setting sun shining upon their green slopes, the picture was one calculated to strike the eye as remarkably fine.

Especially would this be the case with an ocean traveler who for some days had looked upon nothing but a watery waste—the green trees and grass appeal to his heart. This is always the case after a voyage—land looks doubly inviting when necessity or desire for a change has taken us away from friendly shores.

The night fell before they drew close enough to port to give Roderic the opportunity of finding out whether the steamer he sought was among those anchored in the little bay.

Which was a keen disappointment to him.

As an ardent lover much allowance can be given so good a fellow.

Cleo was almost as eager—she felt a warm desire to look upon her successful rival face to face. There was no mean design in this, no hope of being able to find fault, or discover that Roderic had made a wretched choice. [112]

She realized how furiously in love with the girl from Porto Rico this cousin of hers was, and since she had been unable to arouse such a passion within his breast, naturally she experienced a genuine desire to look upon the lovely being who had awakened the sacred fire in his bachelor heart.

Then again, Cleo was honest in her expressed desire to be friendly with one whom fortune seemed destined to make her cousin.

Glasses were of little avail, since night's shadows had begun to fall.

It would not be dark, since a young July moon still held forth after a fashion, to show them the way into port.

A peculiar uneasiness had possessed Roderic.

It dated from the conclusion of the blow.

Somehow, when looking upon the last most violent efforts of the miniature hurricane, the thought had occurred to him, what of the Sterling Castle?

Was she also exposed to this storm?

The chances seemed to favor such a conclusion.

He began to make new inquiries concerning her sea worthiness.

Was her crew English or Spanish?

If the latter he had grave doubts.

Captain Beven was able to give him some information that eased his mind.

The steamer while mature in years was not an old hulk, by any means—Beven had himself once served on her as second officer during a voyage to Singapore, and he had reason to commend her seaworthy qualities.

As to her present outfit he believed it was mostly English and Swedes, though there might be a few Spanish among them. [113]

The captain was an ancient tar, a dare devil who had seen service all over the earth, been engaged in South American naval wars, was with China in her conflict against Japan, and bore the scars of a dozen wounds.

Such a man, afraid of nothing on earth, made an ideal blockade runner.

The bold Yankees would find that they did not quite monopolize all the valor on earth with their Hobsons and Deweys.

There were others, of the same strain and speech, whom no danger could daunt.

This was Captain Beven's tribute to the commander of the blockade runner.

Roderic was not sorry to hear it, since *she* would be safer in the charge of such a wonderful seaman.

He went down to dinner in this state of anxiety, but under the lively sallies of his cousin soon recovered his usual good spirits. Cleo could arouse him more quickly than any one else he knew—she seemed to appeal to some chord in his composition which responded just as the harp does to the touch of the musician. When they came on deck again after dinner, the little steam yacht was just entering the harbor.

Captain Beven, knowing how fond the Portuguese are of ceremony and display, fired his little cannon in salute as they passed the picturesque old fort and castle guarding the bay, and after a little delay, quite excusable with the Portuguese gunners, an answering salvo came from the frowning battlements that, seen in daylight were probably not one quarter as dangerous looking as they appeared under the tender light of the young moon.

They found an anchorage among other shipping, where they could swing at anchor. [114]

At the most only a short stop was intended here.

They would take on board fresh water, some fruits and vegetables, together with chickens and eggs.

During the few hours in the morning while this was being done, Roderic and his cousin expected to go ashore and see what the place of which they had frequently heard yet never seen, looked like.

They could easily give a guess.

There is a striking similarity among all ports under Spanish and Portuguese flags.

The picturesque struggles with disorder—from a little distance the view is entrancing, but familiarity breeds contempt.

Especially is this true with the rank odors that usually predominate.

With twinkling lights on shore, a balmy breeze fanning their cheeks, and the odor of flowers wafted over the water, it was very romantic to stand upon the deck of the yacht, anchored in still waters, after having passed so many days upon the heaving deep.

Nor was there any lack of sound.

Men's voices floated over the water, laughter was heard from parties of pleasure seekers in small boats, and from various quarters came the sound of music.

Sweet indeed do the notes of mandolin or guitar sound when mellowed by the water—there is a peculiar richness and sympathy to the strumming of the taut strings that cannot be produced under other conditions.

Besides, the poetry of the thing appeals to what is romantic in the heart.

Lovers delight to glide upon the moonlit water.

No wonder then that Venice with her canals and gondolas should be classed as a veritable Paradise for such devoted people. [115]

Roderic smoked his last cigar strong in the hope of replenishing his stock on the morrow.

A band situated upon some open plaza discoursed military music, and at that distance even carping critics found little fault.

The evening was gliding away.

It passed with leaden wings to Roderic, whose ardent spirit longed for the first streak of dawn, in the anticipation of being able to discover whether or not the vessel that bore Georgia was in the harbor.

There was something almost unendurable in the suspense, and it required considerable determination to crush down the spirit that demanded some immediate action on his part.

He had been compelled to go back to the comforts of his more plebeian pipe, nor did its solace fail to soothe his troubled spirit.

Thus time slipped away.

Four bells had struck.

Ere long they would be thinking of seeking their berths, and for one Roderic confessed that the summons would not come amiss.

He yawned several times as though he had not yet been able to make up the sleep lost while they were in the grasp of the storm, when all hands found it impossible to remain in their bunks.

Truth to tell he was thinking that sleep would bridge over the time until dawn, and cause him to forget his anxieties.

The lights still glimmered, nor had the sounds of music and revelry abated one particle.

Night to the average Spanish mind means a period for chasing dull care away in music, the dance and carousal. [116]

While Roderic sat thus, his thoughts flitting from one subject to another, since no one had spoken for quite some time, a figure approached which he recognized upon glancing up as belonging to Captain Beven.

As the mariner stooped over him he electrified Owen with the few words he softly uttered.

"Sir, I have reason to believe the steamer Sterling Castle lies at anchor just off our port quarter!"

## CHAPTER XI. THE LADY ON THE QUARTER DECK.

[117]

The news which Captain Beven communicated almost in a whisper to Roderic had as startling an effect upon that gentleman as though the guns of the battery that frowned upon their anchorage had suddenly and without the least warning opened full upon their jaunty craft.

He sprang to his feet as though urged by a shock from a concealed galvanic battery.

Instantly he remembered that Cleo had been close by a short time before, and his first act was to turn his head and look for her.

The ladies had however quietly withdrawn, doubtless finding Roderic very unsociable, and leaving him to the solace of his old pipe.

Which was a very sensible thing for them to do, considering his rudeness, he concluded.

At any rate it left the coast clear, and all minor things had to give way when this major passion that filled his heart, was concerned.

"That is what I have been waiting to hear, Captain. Show me the boat you mean?" he said, as quietly as the bounding of blood through his veins would allow.

"Step this way, sir."

Captain Beven knew *why* Roderic was so deeply interested in the Sterling Castle, and as a man who had a family at home in some quiet little English cathedral town he could respect these feelings of the ardent lover.

All the world feels an interest in the course of true love, and every decent man stands ready to lend a hand if by so doing he may assist in the anticipated happy outcome. [118]

In another minute they were leaning over the port quarter.

"Yonder she lies, riding at anchor. The light is very dim, for the moon you see sir, is just about going down, and presently we will be in the dark," said the man of navigation.

Roderic glued his eyes on the indistinct form of what appeared to be a steamer, but beyond this fact he was unable to hazard a guess.

"I see her plainly enough, but what makes you imagine or believe she may be the vessel I am so anxious about?" he asked.

Captain Beven was not at all offended.

He knew Roderic had no idea of questioning his ability to determine such matters, but was only curious to hear the clinching of the argument by such means as he might advance.

Hence, he made answer in the way Roderic most desired, laying down the logic of events in quick succession.

Beven, if he had any peculiarity, was rather inclined to speaking rapidly, and without any useless flow of language.

Like Grant and other great men of like calibre, of whom history is full, he believed in getting at the kernel of matters in the least possible stretch of time.

"Something familiar about her appearance, even seen under such disadvantages. Never forget the cut of a boat on which I have sailed. Then I heard her bell sound—do you know, there are bells and bells—some have a peculiar ring that you would recognize if you heard it on a camel in Egypt. The Sterling Castle had such a bell—I never heard one just like it until a short bit ago when it sounded four strokes. I tell you sir, it made me jump and rub my eyes, half believing I was officer of the deck again on board the stanch old Sterling Castle. And last but not least, there came a man from the shore rowing past and heading for some German ship over yonder. I hailed him, and as he came alongside asked him the question. As near as I could make out he said he believed she was called the Sherwin Castle, and had just arrived two hours before sundown. That settled it, sir." [119]

"I should think it did, captain. And so that is the boat. So near and yet so far. It is very aggravating, captain."

"Very, sir," solemnly.

"I have half a notion—" reflectively.

"Thought you'd say that, sir," rubbing his hands gleefully, as though anticipating something.

"To make a little run across to her."

"Yes, sir, with what object in view?"

"Oh! merely to ease my mind with respect to her identity, you might say," carelessly.

"Of course—quite natural—young blood—always impetuous," commented the Benedict.

"And incidentally to see whether I could find some golden opportunity to have a few words with one who is a passenger on board."

"Ah! yes."

The captain placed one finger alongside his nose.

It was a habit he had when engaged in serious consideration, and Roderic, who had studied the old sea dog to advantage, felt sure there would be some result to this incubation.

Nor was he wrong in his surmise.

"Well, it could be done, sir," he said.

[120]

"I knew I could trust you to help me out, Heaven bless you, old chap," said Owen, at once diving for the captain's hand and wringing it with impetuous ardor quite unlike his usual self possessed manner; but Cupid has wrought more marvelous changes than this in men.

"It would not do to go prowling around the craft at this hour of the night—we might be suspected of being Yankee spies and fired upon."

"That is true," assented Owen, knowing full well the captain would not stop there.

"Now, I know Captain Shackelford well, and it wouldn't be strange for me to run over to shake hands with the old war dog. Besides, a sailor has respect for another man's affection regarding a craft he has made several voyages on, and he'd understand why I want to tread the deck of the Castle once again. It revives recollections, you know, and throws a man back years."

"Just so," commented Roderic, encouragingly.

"Well, so far, good. Now, if so be you could change your looks a little bit——"

Roderic laughed exultantly.

"I might row you over and go aboard."

"Consider it done, Captain, and many thanks to you."

"Don't forget they owe you no good will."

"And would be only too glad to hang me up to the yardarm if discovered. Don't worry, my dear fellow. It has been my business to hide my identity from all sorts of inquisitive people. This comes right in my line. When will you go?"

"I can be ready in five minutes, sir, but——"

"In five minutes I shall be here."

Then he vanished.

The captain chuckled so hard he shook like a pyramid of calves foot jelly.

[121]

"A boy after my own heart, God bless him, and all them that loves the ladies, are my sentiments. My little woman at home came without any such hardships, but I honors them as think no danger too great, no price too dear, when true affection calls. Only I *am* surprised at his not falling in love with Miss Fairfax, for unless my old eyes deceive me she worships the ground he walks on. Well, this is a queer world anyhow, and remarkable things happen in it," with which sage remark the old sailor hurried away to fix up a little for his late visit on board the neighboring craft.

When he returned to the spot the five minutes had expired.

Roderic awaited him.

The captain would never have suspected his identity only that he spoke.

In that brief space of time Roderic had completely altered his appearance—instead of a gentleman, well dressed and desirous of only killing time, he had the look of an ordinary everyday sailor.

Even his face was altered—Captain Beven never could tell how it was done, and marveled greatly at the tricks of the trade—but in the semi darkness it did not look at all like Owen who addressed him laughingly asking if he would do.

"Most excellently. By the way I believe in being prepared for emergencies, even while not in the least expecting a display of force," significantly.

"Oh, that's all right," returned Owen, touching his pocket in a convincing manner.

The captain laughed.

"Very good. Now, I'll take a couple of men with us to do the rowing. They shall remain in the boat while we go aboard. You can act like my boatswain, if you choose. I know the men to select, smart fellows who will understand what we're up to, and I'll guarantee they'll not give the game away. Wait a minute."

[122]

The preliminaries were quickly adjusted.

A boat being lowered they dropped in.

The two men knew who their stranger sailor companion was, the captain having given them a few pointers, deeming it the part of wisdom that they should not be kept in ignorance, and as Roderic had quickly made firm friends of all the yacht's crew, by his cheery and hearty ways, they were genuinely interested in the successful outcome of his venture.

Poor the sailor who has not sweetheart or wife in port—indeed, they have been often accused, doubtless falsely, of a predilection for having a girl in every port.

The silvery crescent moon just hung trembling above the horizon, preparatory to taking the plunge that would hide her from view until another night rolled around.

Roderic was duly impressed with the witchery of his surroundings, nor did the romantic nature of his own errand fail to stamp itself upon his mind.

Thus they quitted the side of the yacht and headed directly for the steamer whose vague outlines could just be dimly seen through the haze and darkness.

Hardly had they proceeded five boatlengths than Captain Beven who sat beside him in the stern-sheets, turning his head to take a last loving glance at his own little craft, uttered an exclamation.

This of course caused Roderic to follow suit.

He saw instantly what had caught the old sailor's eye.

A woman's white duck dress stirred by the night breeze drew his attention to the quarter deck. [123]

It was Cleo, who had come on deck again, possibly to discover whether he had aroused from his state of dreamy forgetfulness.

Did she know where they were going—was she aware of his presence in the boat?

Impossible.

He might have called out, but that would hardly have been politic—she should hear the results of the adventure when they returned.

His attention was now entirely occupied with the craft which their boat, urged on by the strokes of the two men, was rapidly approaching.

As she loomed out of the water, even Roderic could see she was fairly well laden.

He could imagine the cargo would be one that might prove of great value to the forces of General Blanco, could it be landed at Havana in spite of the Yankee fleet lying off that city.

When they came close up Roderic saw the British flag floating from the stern.

Then his eyes sought the smoke stack, and as near as he could judge in the uncertain light it appeared to answer the description he had received of the Sterling Castle—the funnel was dark below and light above, probably buff, with the trade-mark of its line in relief.

It mattered little, since Captain Beven was about to settle this matter once and for all.

Their approach had been noisy enough to attract attention, and as they came up, a deep voice hailed them.

It was a decidedly English voice, and the salutation lacked the extreme courtesy that might have been expected had the vessel floated the colors of Spain, France or Italy. [124]

"Hello! the boat—what d'ye want?"

That was to the point, at least.

Captain Beven made immediate answer to the effect that it was his desire to come aboard and pay his respects to his old friend the skipper, upon hearing which the man who had hailed from the deck sang out his readiness to receive them.

It may be readily understood that Roderic found himself alongside the blockade runner with singular emotions stirring within his mind.

The remarkable had happened again, for it was quite out of the common that the two vessels thus came together in the Azores.

She was aboard this craft, the girl for whom his soul yearned.

Perhaps he would even see her ere the lapse of many minutes.

What bliss in the very thought—how could he help it if his traitor heart bounded tumultuously within its narrow confines?

Still, he could not count upon it, since "there is many a slip twixt cup and lip."

Perhaps she may have already retired for the night, since the hour was wearing late.

This hardly struck him as possible, for after the storm, and the necessity of being confined to the cabin, doubtless the senorita would be only too glad to pass hours on deck, especially when the night was so warm below.

Other things might also influence her.

The sounds coming over the water, how vividly they must remind her of dear San Juan, and after an enforced exile from her native city it would be a pleasure to once more sit and drink in the music and laughter and song that can always be heard in a Spanish or Portuguese town after the heat of day has given place to the cool of evening. [125]

Captain Beven clambered aboard and as though he had already received his orders to do likewise, Roderic followed suit.

A number of English sailors stood around as if in curiosity.

The captain had followed the second officer in the direction of the cabin, and Roderic moved in the same quarter, as though possessed of some curiosity regarding the vessel upon which his feet now pressed for the first time.

By degrees he thus shook off the inquisitive sailormen who had first kept an eye on him.

All the while he was getting closer to the quarter deck, knowing that here if anywhere, he would be apt to find the object of his search.

Beven had arranged for at least an hour's stay on board, so there would be plenty of time to accomplish what he wished.

When he heard the voice of Georgia near by it sent a thrill through his heart.

She was here within a dozen yards of him, this beautiful maid of San Juan whose presence affected him so strangely, and under whose potent spell his heart delighted to remain a prisoner, rescue or no rescue.

How was he to find an opportunity to address her with others near by?

That must depend upon the good fortune that awaits upon Cupid's devotees—and Captain Beven, who might be trusted to put in a few good strokes in order to favor his protege. [126]

As Roderic slipped closer up to the little ladder that led to the quarter deck he could plainly discover that besides General Porfidio there were two gentlemen present on the ground, and these he presently made out to be the redoubtable Jerome Wellington and a Spanish agent, possibly the same Senor Roblado, who had shown such a valiant spirit at the bungalow on the Rathmines road, Dublin.

Roderic was so eager to approach the girl that he could with a clear conscience have tossed both of these loquacious worthies overboard into the waters of the harbor, had he been allowed the chance, and could this bold move have secured the desired private interview.

He knew it would not—that he must possess his soul in patience and await the logic of events.

Don Porfidio was holding forth upon some favorite topic, and his gruff voice sounded like the distant boom of breakers on a lee shore.

Roderic bore no animosity toward the veteran—indeed, he had rather grown fond of him in times past, and the fact that he was of kin to Georgia added something to this feeling.

At the same time he wished the big senor anywhere else than here just at present.

There is such a thing as being in the way—at times even three can make a crowd.

You see, Roderic was no different from the same old general run of lovers—every man must be a law unto himself when he finds circumstances surrounding him with a network of this kind.

He bided his time and counted the minutes as though they were freighted with lead, hoping that the gentlemen might suddenly be assailed by a most amazing thirst that would demand their presence below decks. [127]

Such a thing was apt to happen at any time where Don Porfidio was concerned, as Roderic knew full well from previous experience.

Ah! some one approached.

With his heart beating like a trip hammer from mingled eagerness and anticipation, he slunk back out of sight and waited, hoping that this might be the earnestly hoped for deliverance.

It was.

Captain Beven had done his part well.

The second officer of the blockade runner appeared on the quarter deck with his usual bluff announcement.

"Gentlemen all, the captain has a visitor who desires to make your acquaintance in the cabin. He has brought over a basket of champagne with which to drink in memory of old days when he trod this deck in the duties that I now perform. Gentlemen all, will you be pleased to accompany me?"

Would they—Roderic could not but chuckle at the eager haste with which they bounded from their chairs, and apologizing to the lady for this necessity that tore them from her charming company, came down the ladder one after the other, to solemnly march toward the cabin.

The game had worked.

Roderic now had the coast clear and it would be his own fault if he failed to improve the golden opportunity a happy fortune had placed before him.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE MAN WHO MADE SIGNS.

[128]

It was no time for delay.

Enough precious minutes had been already wasted while he listened to the remarks of the trio upon the upper deck.

Georgia had made some laughing remark at the haste shown in their departure—she knew the weakness of Don Porfidio, and rallied them on their readiness to seek the confines of the stuffy cabin because forsooth a gentleman had come on board with a basket of champagne.

Perhaps, woman like, she was a little piqued because they beat such a hasty retreat.

Well, there was one ascending the ladder at this very moment whom a thousand baskets, each loaded to the brim with the finest of Mumms' Extra Dry could not tempt from the locality which she graced with her charming presence.

Roderic mounted eagerly.

Yes, the coast was clear.

The young girl sat quite alone, apparently lost in deep thought.

Around her were several steamer chairs, just as the gallant trio had left them when they made their hasty escape.

Roderic's eyes were glued on the girl.

She had one hand up to her head—her rounded cheek was poised upon the forefinger, and in the ravished eyes of this enthusiastic adorer she made the most charming spectacle on earth.

[129]

He drew near, endeavoring to calm the tumultuous throbbing of his heart.

Heaven was kind to allow him such an opportunity, so much more than he had expected or even hoped for in his wildest fancies.

Now he stood behind her—not more than three feet separated them.

It was a moment of intense suspense, since Roderic hardly knew how he should make his presence known without alarming the girl, and besides, wished to become entirely calm ere trusting himself to speak.

She evidently heard the slight movement he made—at least she seemed to be aware of his presence, for while she did not move she presently spoke.

"Well, you have returned?"

No answer.

"I said you had evidently come back, sir."

"Yes," replied Roderic, weakly.

"I don't understand why you should," she said, a little scornfully.

Roderic hardly knew himself, save that somehow for the life of him he could not help it—there was an attraction in her presence that it was utterly useless to resist.

"Nor I," he muttered in reply.

"Indeed, that is singular. I am sure I can spare your presence when there is a far greater attraction in the captain's chart room. Pray, do not deprive yourself of such enchanting society because I shall be left alone. I have quite consoling company in my thoughts of those far away. Leave me, therefore, I beg."

Then it dawned upon the benighted man that this little witch had been addressing him under the positive belief that it was one of the gentlemen who had made such a mad bolt for the cabin.

[130]

Her words too gave him a delicious satisfaction—could she refer to him especially when she thus spoke of those to whom her mind wandered with pleasure—those who were supposed to be separated by many leagues of water?

At any rate he hugged the sweet delusion to his heart—these lovers are voraciously selfish.

"Why don't you say something—have you lost your tongue, *amigo?*" she demanded.

He still hesitated, and overcome by the temptation of her dear presence put out a trembling hand and touched her raven hair.

At this the girl suddenly roused herself and as she turned her head quickly Roderic found himself looking into those wonderful orbs that long ago had so riddled his wretched heart that it might have done duty as a housewife's sieve.

They were filled with astonishment at first, then indignation and gathering anger, for this girl of the South had a temper.

"How *dare* you touch me?"

Roderic made a mute appeal, this time with both hands—while she was talking with gathering

emphasis, and really allowing him no opportunity to open with an explanation, he was thus going through a series of remarkable gesticulations that would have certainly amused an outside spectator could he have seen them.

Even Georgia became conscious that the strange sailor man was endeavoring to prove his devotion—he clasped his hands and wrung them, he held out his arms, entreatingly, he pressed one hand over his heart as he sank on his knee, holding the other as might a princely beggar soliciting alms. [131]

All of which at length aroused her feminine curiosity, and she ceased scolding him for his apparent impudence, to demand wonderingly:

"Are you mute—have you lost your tongue—why don't you answer and tell me who are you and what in the name of the Virgin do you mean by such operatic gestures?"

His chance had come at last.

"I want—*you!*" he managed to say, nor was he able to recognize his own voice.

"Indeed, you are modesty personified; but I must tell you, Master Impudence, that you cannot have *me*, and that unless you return instantly to the quarter where you belong I shall signal to the cabin and summon assistance. Instantly, do you understand, sirrah?" and she emphasized the command with an imperious little stamp of her foot upon the deck, that would have done credit, Roderic thought, to a queen.

"Yes, I understand," he said, his voice growing bolder as he began to use it.

"Then why do you not obey me?" she asked, as if surprised at the density of his intellect.

"Because I am bound in chains—because I live only in your presence—because it would require more resolution than I possess to voluntarily quit your presence," he declared, warmly.

Roderic was himself again, evidently—at least he had whipped his demoralized faculties into line and found his tongue, so that he might give expression to what was in his heart.

The effect upon the young woman was plainly perceptible—she seemed overwhelmed either by the warmth of the sentiments he expressed or some familiar tone in his ardent voice, possibly both. [132]

At any rate she no longer threatened to summon assistance from the cabin of the steamer.

On the contrary she advanced a step nearer the supposed sailor, and slowly, wonderingly stretched out an eager hand toward his arm, her eyes all the while fastened upon his dimly seen face as though she would there discover his secret.

"Who—who are you—what right have you to express such sentiments toward me?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

Roderic had now grown quite bold.

"By the right you gave me—by the love that has sent me aboard this hostile craft just to get one glimpse of your sweet face, to hear your dearly loved voice, perhaps if Heaven were very very kind, to even touch your hand reverently with mine. Do you longer question my right?"

"Sancta Maria! it is he, my Roderic!"

She held out both hands eagerly and he crushed them within his own.

What would he not have given for the privilege of taking her wholly within the shelter of his arms, and pressing her to his loving heart.

But such action might be seen—they were in a position where their figures would be outlined in silhouette against the sky, should any of those upon the lower deck chance to look that way.

Hence, the lover was forced to be content to press the two hands thus confided to his trust, though he did manage to bend his head and press a burning kiss upon each in turn.

"What wonderful mystery is this—why are you here in this deep disguise? They told me the Azores were islands of enchantment and surely I am beginning to believe it," she said, her voice thrilling with excitement. [133]

"It is very simple, and I shall quickly explain. But, dearest senorita, do not forget that I am in the enemy's stronghold. If caught death might be the price of my daring."

Then he proceeded to elucidate.

It was very natural, after all.

She blushed and thrilled with pleasure to know that she still held this man's heart in the hollow of her hand—that he had dared all in the mad desire to once again see her face to face.

That was a keen satisfaction to one who loved with every fibre of her being.

Besides, there was a strong touch of the romantic in his strange appearance, that was not without its effect upon Georgia—native of Porto Rico, with some of Spain's most aristocratic blood in her veins, it was not at all singular that such a deed, savoring of the days of chivalry when Knights sought peril for the sake of Love, should appeal irresistibly to her heart.

She had cherished the memory of how he rushed into danger in Dublin, impelled by this same magical motive power, and the thought of his daring had been very sweet to her when seated alone upon the deck of the steamer watching the rolling billows, or resting in her bijou berth

below.

No longer could she doubt the ardor of his love, when he showed such a willingness to risk life in order to prove it.

So Roderic related the little run of adventure that had befallen him since last they parted in the dark at the time he emerged from the cellar of the queer bungalow dwelling. [134]

It was not much, but as she had experienced the same storm there was at least a bond of sympathy between them.

All the while she maintained a nervous watch in the direction of the steep stair leading up from the lower deck.

He knew why she exhibited this zeal, and felt flattered.

It puffs a man up to realize that he is an indispensable condition to one woman on earth—that she is deeply concerned about his well being; and when Roderic knew the peril hanging over him caused Georgia such constant uneasiness he gloried in the fact, simply because it spoke eloquently of her abiding affection.

"I fancy Captain Beven will keep the gallant gentlemen enjoying themselves for some little time yet. He is a capital hand at a yarn, and with a box of prime Havanas which he says he secured from a trader who came out to our boat, to back up the basket of champagne Cleo sent aboard, I imagine he will hold them spellbound until the last cork is popped and the balance of the weeds sacrificed to the god, Moloch."

He knew from the uneasy movement of the girl that he had said something to arouse a new train of thought in her mind.

"Cleo—she is on yonder boat which I can see through the darkness—your cousin Cleo. And after having passed days in her society, how do you find your heart, Senor Roderic—has she still failed to creep in?" she asked, with a peculiar quivering spasm of pain in her voice.

"My God, Georgia, how can I make you believe I love, can love no woman on earth while you live? Is not my presence here at this moment proof sufficient? You fill my heart to absolute completion, so there in no room for another. Will you believe that I live and breathe and have my very being centered on *you*, heart of my heart and soul of my soul?" [135]

These words, spoken in a low but tense tone, seemed to persuade her—the magnetism of his presence, the beloved tones of his voice, the very fervor of his impassioned gaze all served to convince the senorita that this man whose love had once been sufficient to kindle the fires of jealousy in his breast, was incapable of deception.

"I *do* believe—yes, I trust all my hopes of future happiness in your hands, for oh! Roderic if your love ever fails me, if it fades away like a dream, I shall surely die," she made response.

Of course he felt it his privilege and duty to swear by everything he held sacred, by the graves of his ancestors, after the Japanese fashion, that so long as earth held them both, he could neither change nor his passion grow cold.

And she believed him from that hour; implicit confidence dwelt within her trusting heart, and if this man ever did aught to destroy the faith she placed in his affection let him be accused from that day.

This was what Roderic was telling himself as he stood there holding her hand, the magnetic spark flowing from soul to soul.

He was ordinarily quite a matter of fact man, but even the most prosaic can be counted on to give way to unheard of romantic tendencies under the spur of such conditions.

Time flies with extraordinary swiftness when the moments are freighted with ecstatic bliss.

Roderic endeavored to keep his wits about him even while exchanging these sentiments with the girl of his heart. [136]

He knew he had enemies near—he had not forgotten the bitterness with which Jerome hated him and the ardor with which the Spanish plotters would have sacrificed him when he was held a prisoner in the Dublin villa.

It would be a decidedly unpleasant episode in his checkered career should they capture him on board the Sterling Castle—he was a marked man in the minds of those whose sympathies were enlisted for Spain, and they could imagine nothing finer than an opportunity to lay him by the heels.

Georgia too was on the watch for danger, since any injury to her lover must cause suffering in her own devoted heart.

She imagined the three brave gentlemen when they returned after finishing the wine and cigars would come as they went, in a bunch.

If this were the case she would receive ample warning of their approach—when the voice of the siren was heard rumbling afar it would be time for Roderic to say good bye, and to get down from that quarter deck with all due alacrity.

A chance was given them to speak of the future in the land where fate was taking them as fast as steam could drive, and Roderic improved the opportunity to arrange it so that he might be sure of meeting Georgia should fortune allow him to enter San Juan ere it was surrendered to General

Miles or those under him.

It looked rosy enough just then while her loved presence beamed upon him—perhaps later on, with lowering clouds of misfortune shrouding his future, Roderic might have cause for doubts and fears that it would require all his personal valor to scatter. [137]

The warning she counted on failed them, for Don Porfidio knew better than most men when he had discovered a good thing, and could not be prevailed upon to leave it short of an earthquake or a simoon.

Thus it chanced that Jerome returned alone, returned smoking a prime weed, and possibly filled with the thought of a quiet little flirtation with the general's charming niece, whose cold treatment of his Beau Brummel advances had rather piqued his spirit of romantic interest, and aroused his manly desire for conquest—returned so quietly that his approach was quite unobserved by the two lovers among the steamer chairs on the quarter deck until his head and shoulders loomed dimly into view above the top of the short ladder.

## CHAPTER XIII. ADONIS ON A NEW TACK.

[138]

Ordinarily it took considerable to surprise Jerome Wellington—he had such good control over his nervous system that he could take in a philosophical manner much that might have rattled a less collected customer.

In plainer words he had studied the art of appearing cool under all conditions.

As an adventurer with an enviable record for successful achievements behind him he had many times found this accomplishment very useful in carrying out the bold designs necessary to the fulfillment of his game.

For once at least Jerome was obliged to confess to weakening—for once his confidence appeared to have overshot its mark, and he even doubted the positive evidence of his senses.

He could have sworn that, as his head arose above the level of the quarter deck he positively saw a common fellow in the dress of a sailor, standing very very close to the beautiful niece of General Porfidio—more than this, that he actually had the audacity to raise her hand to his lips and kiss it—Jerome knew full well what a kiss was like, and could not be deceived in the sound of one, even when simply pressed upon a lady's hand.

Indignation filled his noble breast.

Since Don Porfidio, gallant son of Porto Rico, was absent from his post of duty, the pleasant task of defending his ward must fall to others.

Undoubtedly this fellow must have used some ignoble means of gaining the mastery over the young and innocent girl's mind—Jerome had exhausted his own matchless resources for the last few days in the endeavor to arouse a responsive feeling in her heart, and possibly felt considerably piqued just now to discover that what he had failed to accomplish this son of Neptune had apparently brought about with ease.

[139]

Of course he possessed some wonderful power that aided him in this revolutionary work—Jerome had read and heard considerable on the subject of personal magnetism, of hypnotism, the astonishing control one mind may have over another that nature has so constructed as to make it subject or tributary to the first.

What was needed, therefore, was the sudden introduction of a third resolute body in order to break the magic spell.

Jerome would be this public benefactor—he was always ready to sacrifice his own comfort in order to restore natural harmony.

Having thus quickly decided that it was not only his privilege but a duty as well, to step between this necromancer and his intended victim, Jerome set the ball rolling by continuing his upward movement.

By this time his presence seemed to have become known to those in whose mutual affairs he was taking such a remarkable interest.

Strangely enough it was the girl who first detected the fire of his cigar appearing above the line marking the quarter deck—the girl who uttered a choking little Spanish exclamation of mingled alarm and consternation—the girl who even sprang back a step as though to make it appear that she and the sailor were but engaged in an ordinary conversation.

All of which was noted by the newcomer with no little surprise.

[140]

It did not alter his determination to inject his personality into the game.

As has been said before Jerome was not a coward, whatever else he may have been.

True, it did not require the dashing soldierly qualities of a D'Artagnan to advance upon a solitary sailorman who had broken the rules of the ship and pushed his inferior person upon the deck space reserved for superior beings.

Jerome solemnly walked toward the fellow.

He noticed that the chap had not stirred an inch all this while, but seemed to be awaiting his masterly approach.

Had the tables been turned, and he been made the subject of the girl's mesmeric power he could not have stood there more rigid.

Perhaps he meant to exercise his hypnotic powers upon the new arrival.

Unconsciously Jerome braced himself against such a dreadful influence.

Again, it might be fear that paralyzed the fellow—surely, the spectacle of Jerome striding angrily forward was enough to strike alarm at the heart of the most valiant—so the said Jerome himself thought.

Such a thing as even the glimmer of the truth had not as yet even dawned upon his benighted mind—how was it possible, when he believed Roderic to be a thousand miles away?

The situation was exceedingly dramatic when these two men faced each other, with Georgia

hovering near by, ready to invoke the god of peace if matters grew too stormy, although her last effort in that line, when Don Porfidio and Roderic crossed swords in the bungalow had not been much of a success. [141]

"Well, sir, what do you mean by breaking the rules and thrusting your unwelcome company upon the quarter deck? If Captain Shackelford was made aware of this he would use the cat over your stupid shoulders, do you hear?"

The sailorman answered not.

This increased the other's kindling passion, for he foolishly believed his ferocious appearance had awed the man, and that possibly he could not reply because his teeth were rattling together like Spanish castanets.

He raised his voice higher.

"Don't imagine I didn't see what was going on. I understand the power you have exercised over this young lady—the miserable hypnotic influence you have exerted to control her actions.

"And let me tell you, fellow, that power ends from this moment. Acting in the place of her natural guardian, who is unavoidably detained below just at present—serving in his stead I, Jerome Wellington snap the chain you have dared to throw about her sacred person. She is free from this hour, free from your miserable, devilish power. And as for you, fellow——"

He stopped as though not yet quite certain as to the extreme course of punishment that by rights should be meted out for such a condign offense.

"Well?" muttered the other, anxious of course to have the agony over with and the worst known.

"I am inclined to amuse myself in kicking you off the quarterdeck—perhaps it may have the effect of also scattering some of your wonderful magnetic charms, since I have heard that the hypnotic power is shattered by a shock to the seat of the nervous system." [142]

These were brave words, truly, but if the man who gave utterance to them expected the other to show any symptom of fear, he certainly counted without his host.

Perhaps he imagined the alarmed sailor would put up a plea for mercy, would even drop on his knees in suing for pardon.

Such a melo-dramatic action would be a rare spectacle for the gods—in order to appear the more heroic in the sight of this fair girl Jerome might even have magnanimously declined to carry on warfare when the enemy sued for peace—he was a man who never neglected an opportunity to pose as a magnificent figure before feminine eyes.

Contrary to his expectation, however, the affair did not take on this guise.

Instead of showing the white feather the enemy at once hoisted signals of defiance.

He began to coolly and deliberately roll back the sleeves of his flannel shirt.

The act was intended for supreme scorn—it meant that he snapped his fingers contemptuously in the face of the Adonis—it meant that he prepared himself in nautical language, to "resist boarders."

There was trouble in prospect.

Jerome had gone too far to back down—he must either put his words into execution or give evidence of cowardice.

The girl, seeing how matters stood, now endeavored to prevent a rupture.

"Senor, this is a friend of mine, one I have known a long time. If I choose to receive him on the quarterdeck that is surely an affair to be settled with my uncle and the captain. I will relieve you of any anxiety and responsibility, senor," she said, with pointed emphasis. [143]

"Pardon, senorita, but it has already gone too deep to be dropped. There is an issue between this a—humble friend of yours and myself, which can only be settled by an appeal to arms, not to Caesar. Therefore, my fine fellow, look you out, for I intend to toss you down where you belong, since you have positively refused to go there voluntarily when I gave you the chance."

He took a step toward Roderic, who calmly awaited for hostilities to begin.

There was good reason too why the latter should have become nervous over the matter.

It was at this juncture that several violent sneezes were heard ringing over the vessel, and in this signal Roderic recognized a part of Captain Beven's design to warn him that he should only be able to detain the gentlemen a few minutes longer, so that it might be essential for the lover to make his farewells without further loss of time, if so be he had been fortunate enough to find an opportunity to see his charmer.

Roderic however, was hardly in a position to carry out this programme.

Jerome showed fight, and it was really too much to expect a man of Roderic's character to withdraw in ignominious fashion under the very eyes he adored.

Plainly he was in for a miserable struggle.

He deplored this on several accounts, since it might jeopardise his mission, and moreover place him in a poor light before Georgia, for what man desires to engage in an ordinary brawl in the presence of the being he adores.

There are times however when "needs must when the devil drives," so that it was not a question of choice but necessity with Roderic. [144]

About this time the first faint suspicion broke in upon Jerome's mind to the effect that things might be other than they seemed.

He had no opportunity to gather up the fragments and link them together in a chain that might reveal the entire truth—some invisible power flashed a little thought into his brain—it may have been the attitude assumed by the sailor as though awaiting his attack, for there was that about it suggesting the trained athlete and not an ordinary Jack Tar, clumsy with his fists.

At any rate what did Jerome do as he came close up but bend his head forward and fix his steadfast gaze upon the other's face.

Roderic had deemed his disguise secure, and so it was under all ordinary pressure.

It had resisted curious glances from the crew of the blockade runner, and even Love's eyes had failed to penetrate beneath the surface.

There is no sight one half so keen as that of burning Hate, which seems capable of piercing all obstacles set in the way.

So it came home to Jerome with the rapidity of the lightning's flash, with whom he had to deal.

No wonder the man's attitude seemed familiar—no wonder he dared defy attack—no wonder the lovely Porto Rican belle called him her *friend!*

And the sudden knowledge galled Jerome.

Under it he waxed wroth.

Baffled in his endeavor to secure Miss Fairfax and her millions because forsooth she chose to fall in love with this traveling agent, he was now to be beaten in his other little game of occupying Georgia's heart because Roderic had centered his affection there. [145]

Ye gods, it was enough to anger the coolest and most diplomatic of men, and Jerome could not be blamed for letting passion run away with his better judgment.

"So, it's *you?*" he grunted, sneeringly.

Roderic knew his identity was no longer a secret, and that he might as well throw off the mask he had assumed.

All he desired now was to so conduct himself in *her* presence that she might find no occasion for reproach.

"Yes, it's no other, Wellington. How is your health these days?" he said, carelessly, hoping the other might cool down and thus avoid friction, for if given his own way Roderic would have wished to leave the steamer peaceably, though ready to do his share in any action that might be unwisely precipitated by a hot headed antagonist.

"Better than yours will be presently," was the stinging reply from Jerome, who accompanied his words with a grin as though in anticipation he could already see the object of his dislike receiving punishment at the hands of stern old Captain Shackelford, whose greatest *bete noire* was a traitor or a spy.

"What may that remark mean?" asked Roderic.

"That you shall be denounced as a spy—that you have crept aboard this vessel under false colors to learn her cargo and destination in order that she could be seized by your accursed cruisers on the blockade—that you have spent these days to advantage in prying out these secrets and should therefore suffer the usual fate of any common low spy."

Roderic still preserved his temper—perhaps the occasion would presently come when he could repay these insults with interest—it might be even closer than Jerome suspected, but for the present his policy was to keep the peace just so long as it could be done with honor. [146]

"You seem to imagine I have been on board during the whole voyage?" he remarked.

"How could it be otherwise?" demanded Jerome, looking for some secret trap.

"Because as you happen to know, I was left behind in Dublin when the Sterling Castle left the harbor at Kingstown—because I have come on board to-night with Captain Beven, who so royally entertained you in the cabin just now, at the expense of myself and my Cousin Cleo, the owner of the steam yacht Beven commands. As to my motive in boarding your boat, I am not ashamed to admit it to you, sir—it was to see and converse with this lady, who holds the first place in my heart, and whom God willing, I expect some day to claim as my wife. That is all, sir."

It should have been enough.

Had Jerome been as sensible in this game as he had proven himself in various others he must have realized that this determined act of Roderic took him once and for all out of the chase for the Fairfax millions and virtually left the field to him.

But something had occurred to make a change in the schemer's plan of campaign—he was not as hot after those millions just now as he had been in the past.

Truth to tell a face had bewitched him and even the elegant Don Juan found his Waterloo in the daughter of Porto Rico—yes, he had to admit the stinging fact that after playing at love all these years he was now actually smitten.

"You are mistaken, Owen, that is not all. I have serious doubts concerning the truth of your story —I rather imagine you are bent on killing two birds with one stone, and intended learning all about this boat—that your seeking an audience with the senorita"—bowing in her direction—"was but an afterthought. However, it does not matter. I have an unpleasant duty to perform." [147]

"Indeed! What might that be?"

"Arresting you, and taking you before the captain charged with being a spy."

"You wouldn't try that, Wellington?"

"Oh! I wouldn't—perhaps you doubt my ability?"

"I simply warn you against it. I should hate to offer violence in the presence of a lady—"

"Don't mind me, Senor Roderic—you have my permission to defend yourself even if by so doing you are compelled to spoil the gentleman beau's classic features!" cried the little senorita, ready to display her colors.

"That settles it—will you come with me peaceably or forcibly?" demanded the enraged Jerome, stretching out a powerful arm.

"Neither, thanks," replied Roderic, stepping back.

"Then here's at you for keeps," and Wellington plunged forward with impetuous zeal.

Senorita Georgia had great faith in the individual prowess of her betrothed, whom she had seen come out victor in other affairs, yet Jerome was no stripling, and besides, assistance for him might arrive at any moment—so she stood behind the barricade of steamer chairs and fervently besought the Virgin to favor the cause of the brave man she loved.



## CHAPTER XIV. A CHASE TO THE YACHT.

[148]

Possibly Jerome Wellington had made a study of the tactics employed so successfully by the great and famous general whose name he bore with so little lustre.

At any rate he believed in a quick and masterly attack, whereby the enemy might be demoralized, providing said enemy chanced to be inferior to him in power or endurance.

Roderic did not deceive himself with any false hope that the game was not worth the candle, nor that his opponent intended only a gigantic bluff. He had prepared for business, and meant to be in the game from start to finish.

Besides, deep down in his heart he realized that the handsome Adonis had been playing his cards with the idea of centering the affections of the charming Georgia upon himself, and this alone was a positive crime in the eyes of the man who lived only to win her for his own.

That rampant spark of jealousy has much to account for in this world—kingdoms have fallen, principalities been sacked, and countless homes been broken up because of it; while on the other hand it has urged men to great and noble deeds in order to win in the game of hearts.

Roderic, therefore, rather enjoyed the prospect of a little bout with this dashing cavalier whom he had once called his friend—he believed it would do him a world of good to embrace Jerome—he had more than once suspected that the modern Beau Brummel was guilty of the awful crime—[149] in a gentleman—of wearing stays inside his coat, so that he might appear more military in his figure; and the opportunity was at hand to ascertain the truth.

Thus he stretched out his arms and took the man who leaped forward, to his heart.

Such an embrace as he gave the Adonis—Georgia thought she heard his ribs crack under the anaconda-like strain, and his tongue certainly did protrude from between his teeth.

Again Captain Beven's accommodating sneeze sounded like a trumpet through the vessel.

It was the last call—the little party was in the act of leaving the cabin—he had exhausted all his resources in the endeavor to hold them back a while longer.

Roderic was hardly in a condition to carry out his part of the programme, nor did he care very much, now that his secret had been juggled with, and the truth must be made known to all.

First Jerome should be attended to.

His ardor had really run away with his usual discretion—it must be cooled off, and Roderic for one knew a means of accomplishing the same.

Time was a factor in his calculations also, since at any moment General Porfidio and the others were apt to appear on the scene.

The little De Brabant had ceased uttering confused prayers to the Virgin for her lover's safety, since he had thus speedily reduced the blustering hero to a state of "innocuous desuetude"—she was now more deeply concerned in the manner whereby the said Senor Roderic was to free himself from the incubus that held on with such a tenacious grip.

"Drop him over the rail, *amigo*—a bath, give the handsome Adonis a bath—it will surely be good for his complexion. The rail Senor Roderic—it is close at your hand and *so* convenient. Besides, better such a soft fall than broken bones on the lower deck!" [150]

Thus she cried in her excitement, modulating her voice until it was hardly more than a tense whisper.

And Owen knew it was not so much resentment against Jerome for his persistent attentions as the eager desire to serve the man she adored, that actuated her course.

The voices of the gentlemen could be plainly heard as they emerged from the chart room and sauntered toward the side of the steamer where Beven had left his yawl—no doubt the visitor was still cracking some of his old chestnut jokes, for the laughter of Don Porfidio bubbled over almost continually—besides; that champagne had been very extra dry.

At any rate the suggestion advanced by Georgia coincided with Roderic's own views on the subject.

Perhaps Jerome, had he been given a voice in the matter, as the party most interested, might have strenuously objected—baths he liked, indeed, was very partial to, in their proper season, but to be thus unceremoniously tumbled from the deck of a steamer into the briny deep, with his most elaborate evening garments on his person was really too much of a good thing, and he must have protested earnestly could he but have found wind with which to clothe his argument.

That luxury was in a great measure denied him, and the best he could do was to make a feeble kick against the decision of the fair court being carried into execution.

It counted for nought.

The American having started could hardly be restrained—once the match is applied to a train of powder it is difficult to prevent the fire from running its entire length. [151]

So Jerome was dragged ignobly over the deck to the rail, past the beauty who had ordered his ducking—he endeavored to so wind himself about the affections and also the limbs of his intended executioner that the latter would have to change his desperate plans or else take the plunge in his delectable company; but Roderic knew a trick or two that might be used with profit under such conditions, and he readily broke the hold of the desperate and vanquished beau.

Then came the finish.

Wellington took a tumble.

He exhausted what breath he chanced to have in his lungs with one awful whoop as he went plunging down, arms and legs outspread after the manner of a gigantic frog.

Perhaps he found some satisfaction in the fact that he made the greatest splash ever known in that lovely harbor, a splash that would go down in the annals of the Azores as beyond all precedent, and which suddenly quelled the merry laughter, together with sounds of music that had floated across the bay.

It is worth considerable to excel in *something*, even if it is only a ducking.

Roderic had crossed the Rubicon.

He knew his summary treatment of the Adonis would create tremendous excitement on board the blockade runner.

There were English sailors in charge and these men could not be treated with the same measure of scorn that he might have bestowed had they one and all been Spaniards.

Nevertheless Roderic was far from being panic-stricken in any sense.

[152]

He had no sooner dropped Jerome over the rail than he turned to Georgia, and as the noise of the splash still sounded, said grimly:

"He has been disposed of as you suggested, sweetheart. Let us hope the temperature of the water will be sufficient to cool his ardor."

"But you must fly—*sanctissima!* they will harm, perhaps murder you, and I should never forgive myself for having been the cause. Go, Senor Roderic, go with all haste!" she exclaimed, her hands on his arm, her lustrous midnight orbs glowing as they filled with intense excitement.

The man either had a contempt for the peril that threatened or else hardly grasped its serious nature—at least he showed a recklessness in dealing with the situation that might possibly have been expected when the fact of his having Irish blood in his veins was taken into consideration, for seldom have Ireland's sons been in battle without leading some forlorn hope in the van.

"Not until you tell me again that you love me," he declared, eagerly.

Some men would have called him a fool, but evidently they could never have adored a woman—to the man who loves, all else gives way before his passion.

So nature has constituted him.

"You already know it," she said, quickly, endeavoring to push him towards the ladder, and even her eagerness to insure his safety was a source of deep satisfaction to the lover.

"But I must hear you say it—consider, weeks may elapse before I see you again and I shall be exposed to all manner of danger. Tell me," he insisted with a determination nothing could move but acquiescence.

[153]

Perhaps there was one particular danger in her mind that would hover over him constantly, and against which she in her innocent, loving heart prayed that he might be delivered—Cleo.

However, she realized that he would accept no half way compromise.

The sailors on board were shouting and running to the rail to ascertain what species of porpoise or shark kicked up such a fiendish racket alongside their vessel, for the wretched Jerome, unable to shout, and actually half strangled, was threshing the water like a young steam engine in the endeavor to keep himself afloat and frighten away the voracious monsters of the deep.

"*Carramba!* foolish man to risk so much for a woman's word. Know then that I do love you with all my heart and soul—the good Father above preserve you, for me!"

It was all he asked.

He snatched one burning kiss and then with a hasty "adieu, beloved," sprang to the ladder.

It was time.

The ship was heaving with commotion.

Had the startling cry of "fire," always dreaded above all else at sea, been sounded aboard the blockade runner, loaded as she was with much ammunition, it could hardly have created greater excitement than now reigned.

Roderic remained quite cool, which was an advantage to the success of his venture.

Garbed as he was as a sailor any one might have taken him for one of the crew hastening to his station, since the boatswain's shrill whistle had called the sailormen to man one of the boats.

It was easy enough work dropping down the ladder, but as some one chanced to be ascending it at the same time an unavoidable collision ensued.

[154]

Consequently Roderic and the unknown came to the lower deck in a bunch, and being above, the American found a comfortable lodging place on the body of his confrere.

He did not linger.

One ejaculatory Spanish swear word from the ascending figure as he swooped down upon him gave Roderic a pretty good idea as to his identity.

Wretched Roblado, fated to again endure all the flings of outrageous fortune at the hands of the man from over the sea!

Roderic halted not neither to assist the damaged Spaniard to arise nor to offer apologies for such unceremonious conduct.

At such times men cannot be particular as to their *modus operandi* in conducting their retreat—the end justifies the means.

Happily he had not been at all injured by the fall.

He heard an anxious exclamation skyward and had a glimpse of Georgia looking over the edge of the upper deck.

It was just like the man to wave his hand and even kiss his fingers to the girl ere resuming his course toward the spot where in all probability Captain Beven anxiously awaited his coming.

A splash announced the launching of a boat.

It was fortunately on the other side of the steamer, since Jerome had gone over to port.

Even such a small matter might count in the end, should pursuit be inaugurated when Wellington was rescued and managed to regain enough breath to splutter out the facts. [155]

At any rate Roderic made a note of this point which was all the more singular because he had other fish to fry just then.

Fortunately no one attempted to stay his flight—fortunately for them perhaps, as well as his own success, for Roderic was just in the humor to handle any interference roughly.

What he had just passed through had the effect of arousing the lion that lay beneath the surface in his nature, and he was in a condition to do more than his share of battle.

Passing the groups of sailors hurrying to the rail, he crossed the deck to where he believed Beven awaited him, for a glimpse of one or more figures in this quarter announced that it was not deserted.

To his surprise he saw two men.

Captain Beven had company, and Roderic at first glance guessed the identity of that tall figure.

It was Don Porfidio.

He had walked with the captain to where his yawl awaited, instead of proceeding to the quarter deck; and now he was also able to resist the temptation to rush across to the other rail in order to gratify his natural curiosity.

It meant something.

Don Porfidio had somehow guessed the truth, or been let in on the ground floor by Beven.

Was it war, or peace?

Roderic should have disliked the job exceedingly had he been compelled to administer any sort of drubbing to his excellency the good and gruff don, but nevertheless had the fates demanded it he must have obeyed the call to duty.

On the whole, therefore, he was well pleased when the big Porto Rican soldier suddenly thrust out his hand, saying: [156]

"*Por Dios!* I honor a brave man who risks much to see one he loves. Senor Owen, success to you!"

Roderic took the hand that was offered—he had much respect for this patriot and veteran.

"Thank you, senor," he replied.

"All is well?"

"Delightfully so."

"*Cospita!* good. And pray, what is the cause of all that wonderful splashing yonder?" asked the don, as if suspecting that the Yankee knew.

Roderic, already in the act of following Captain Beven down the rope ladder that stretched to the yawl below paused long enough to look up at the general, and laughing say:

"Ask Jerome!"

"Aha! it is as I thought—ask Jerome—undoubtedly Senor Wellington has met his Waterloo."

But Owen had already dropped down the side of the blockade runner and into the boat.

Hardly had he gained the yawl than Beven, who was in the stern sheets said huskily:

"Push off, and away. Pull like tigers, my hearties, for unless all signs fail we may have a chase before we reach the yacht."

The men needed no urging.

Once clear of the steamer and they began to ply their ashen blades with an energy that sent the little boat flying through the water.

It was a period of suspense.

Roderic kept his eyes fastened upon the stern of the steamer, for in this quarter would the pursuit be inaugurated, should one follow. [157]

The shouts had ceased.

An ominous silence seemed to rest upon the scene.

All depended upon whether the wretched Jerome, upon being rescued from the bay, was in a state to disclose what he knew, and the readiness that bold Captain Shackelford would show in following up the clue thus given.

And as he looked, too soon he saw the boat shoot into view propelled by sturdy arms.

"Faster!" cried Beven at the same moment.

There were six pair of English arms against two, but the little yawl was light and trimly built, so the chances seemed pretty evenly divided.

Roderic surveyed the chase as calmly and critically as though it were a college regatta, with an ordinary loving cup as the stake instead of his own liberty, perhaps his life.

"Captain, we shall make it," he said, quietly.

"Undoubtedly," replied laconic Beven, whose practiced eye had also measured the distance yet to be traversed, and the slow if steady gain made by their pursuers.

"Steady, boys, do your level best," he added, and the sturdy tars grunted as they strained at the oars until the veins stood out like whip cords on their brows.

Meanwhile from the pursuing craft came a variety of oaths and exclamations characteristic of the bold adventurer Shackelford, and by means of which he doubtless expected to secure better work from his toiling men; while Jerome, having recovered his tongue, and boiling over with rage, joined his shrill voice to that of the captain, promising fabulous rewards—which he would doubtless pay in notes if called upon—should they overhaul the will-o'-the-wisp boat that tauntingly kept just so far ahead.

It was quite exciting while it lasted. [158]

This romantic harbor in the peaceful Azores had seldom known a more remarkable scene.

Pity it was the darkness robbed those who might have enjoyed the spectacle, of such a rare sight.

The steam yacht was now close at hand and while those who pursued still kept up their mad pace it must have been painfully evident to them that the chase was hopeless.

Perhaps the daring spirit who led them on had desperate designs of boarding the yacht and dragging away the object of their vindictive spleen.

Captain Beven was holding the tiller ropes and under his skillful guidance the yawl turned the yacht's stern, coming up alongside.

Instantly a hand clutched the painter.

"Aboard with you!" called the skipper.

Roderic was the first to spring on deck, but the others were at his heels.

To sight the oncoming boat was now their design, and accordingly they leaped across the deck, believing Shackelford would head direct for that nearer quarter.

Nor were they mistaken in this surmise, for as they reached the rail the boat from the blockade runner shot under them and hauled up alongside.

## CHAPTER XV. CAPTAIN BOB GUESSES NOT.

[159]

Shackelford was a daring spirit, one of those Britons who have carried the flag into remote passes of the Indian border, and whom the desperate fortunes of war never daunt.

He had doubtless led charges into the jaws of death, and passed through adventures enough to fill volumes.

In this case however, it was Tartar against Tartar—British bulldog vs. British mastiff. When he rubbed up against such men as Beven and Roderic Owen, he met those who were of his own calibre, and should the affair come to blows it promised to be a pretty sight.

When our friends reached the side of the yacht, the sailors were already there, at least those on deck; and some signal must have been given below as the boats approached, for the watch off duty was tumbling out quite ignorant as to what might be required of them, but ready, like all seamen of their nationality to do their duty with vigor.

"Hold off—our orders are not to receive visitors after ten o'clock!" cried Beven, as he saw Shackelford rise to his feet.

"We mean to come aboard," said that worthy.

"Then you go back quicker than you come."

"Beven, I am surprised."

"At what?"

"Your deceiving us."

"Nonsense, my visit was in good faith."

[160]

"You came with a secret object in view—you kept us engaged below while your confederate examined our vessel."

"It was prime champagne, Shack."

"Granted, but"—and here he relieved himself by a tremendous expletive, "why did you put that spy aboard of us?"

"In the first place Mr. Owen is no spy. He cares little or nothing what cargo you carry, but he is deeply interested in petticoats—your young lady is his betrothed, and he vowed he would go with me on board just to see her. Shackelford, that's a man after your own heart."

And Shackelford, realizing the truth of this point blank assertion could only growl.

"Interrupted in his *tete a tete* with the young lady by your gentleman there, they had words, being rivals, and it resulted in Mr. Owen tossing the elegant Adonis overboard. Shack, that is just what you would have done, confound you."

Shackelford could not deny it.

Really Captain Beven should have been a lawyer, since he knew so well how to draw the fire of his adversary, and leave him not a foot upon which to stand.

"For you to force your way to the deck of my craft under these conditions I should consider a high act of piracy and I assure you my men stand here ready to back me up in all I do. Is it so, men?"

A hearty "ay, ay sir" came ringing from the crew.

"Now Captain Shackelford, if you choose to board me you do so at your own risk. There be English arms and hearts here just as stanch as your own. Come by daylight and by Heavens I will receive you as an honored guest—yes, and open another basket of champagne for the occasion; but I beg of you let discretion play the part of valor now."

[161]

Shackelford knew he held a weak hand—that any attempt to board this craft flying the British jack and drag from her deck a subject of the United States foreign diplomatic service would not only embroil him in present difficulties and probably result in a broken head, but future results promised to make things exceedingly lively for him.

Great Britain was going out of her way to bring about an era of good feeling between America and the mother country—she had shown in many matters how sincere her sympathies were and that blood was thicker than water.

Hence, he might expect severe handling from the legal and military authorities of both countries.

Although Bob Shackelford had always been accounted pretty much of a dare devil he really drew the line at throwing his gauntlet into the ring and sending a defiance to two nations—that would probably be a little too strong for his blood.

Here was a chance to draw out with honor.

Shackelford accepted the olive branch.

"Well, Beven, you put the matter pretty strongly, and I am inclined to yield. Give me your solemn pledge that this gentleman boarded us as a lover and not as a spy, and," here he expressed himself very forcibly in the genuine Shackelford style—"I'll draw off and spare you the gore of

battle that must come when Greek meets Greek."

"I give you that pledge," replied Beven, readily.

"Why did he go in disguise then?" was the final query from the other, who had not as yet grasped the full significance of affairs.

"Because he had enemies on board yonder boat—you carry Spaniards, and his country is at war with Spain. They want him badly, and he is no fool. Captain, I am under obligations for your courtesy. Come and see me to-morrow and I'll keep my promise." [162]

Shackelford smacked his lips.

"By Jove! I'll try and oblige you, my boy," he declared, enthusiastically, as he dropped down upon the thwart.

The incident was closed.

There would be no broken heads, no old time boarding of the craft, no hot time in the harbor *that* night.

Reason had resumed her sway, pushing valor and blind passion into the background.

One there was whom disappointment cut to the quick.

A figure arose in the boat, a bedraggled figure, with one arm of his evening coat almost divorced from its moorings on account of the vigor shown by the British tars in dragging the owner aboard—a figure that was just the opposite of the usually dandified Jerome, the pink of neatness, the epitome of current style.

"What," he ejaculated, "you decline to go aboard and drag the fellow away? I am astonished beyond measure—I did not expect this of you, Captain Bob."

"Well, I'm satisfied with the explanation given. If you still object, sir, we'll hold the boat here and let you go aboard and get him. Of course you'd have to shoulder the whole responsibility—"

"Pull away," muttered Jerome, suddenly dropping back to his seat and endeavoring to look as small as possible.

Roderic guessed the reason.

The Adonis had discovered that he was the cynosure of bright eyes from the cabin—all this excitement had not passed without arousing Cleo and Miss Becky—the former had not really retired at all, but awaited her cousin's return from his mission of love—perhaps her earnest prayers had followed him, even to the arms of her successful rival. [163]

The blockade runner's boat shot quickly over the darkened water toward the lights that indicated the spot where the steamer was anchored.

Thus the coast was again clear.

Captain Beven turned and shook Roderic's hand.

He was bubbling over with suppressed laughter.

"Congratulations, sir, over your success. A miss is as good as a mile, they say," he declared.

"Ah!" remarked the satisfied lover, "in this case it is a senorita, and she is worth many miles. My thanks are due to you, captain, for the able assistance given. May all our future plans be founded on as firm a basis."

"Amen," said Beven, solemnly.

He was thinking of that basket of very Extra Dry, and the taste still lingered as though its memory would haunt him for many a day.

For once he stood ready to immolate his comfort on the altar of friendship every night, providing the emolument came in such pleasant fashion.

They chatted a short time, and generally upon the subject mostly in evidence.

Beven was naturally curious to hear how the Adonis, who was no milk and water warrior himself, came to take such a fearful plunge into the bay.

He could give a shrewd guess that the act had not been a voluntary one on his part, and desired to hear what share Roderic had in it.

This was soon told in the most matter of fact fashion by the modest young man—indeed, one might almost imagine from his manner of putting it that Jerome had fallen overboard instead of being tossed there. [164]

Beven knew how to put his own construction on the incident, and could guess just what his principal had done.

Roderic was really unfitted for sleep after such an hour of intense excitement, and thought he would walk the quarterdeck for a time until his pipe had soothed the excited nerves and brought him to a condition where slumber might be possible.

He had not been back and forth a dozen times ere a girlish figure joined him.

Of course it was Cousin Cleo, who desired to share his walk and mayhap his confidence, even though what he might relate would cut keenly.

The moth will persist in fluttering about the bright flame of the candle even after its wings are slightly singed.

Silly moth—wicked candle!

And yet the world goes on, new moths come and the same old story with variations, is repeated.

Roderic professed to be displeased at the idea of Cleo coming up to join him in this midnight tramp.

Secretly the man was delighted, for he felt the human desire to confide his hopes and fears in a sympathetic ear, and though he would rather it had been some one else than Cleo, still, she knew much of his love affairs, and had promised to be a sister to him—he would be egotistical and foolish to ever believe that she cared for him other than a dear sister might.

"My dear cousin, why do you come on deck—don't you know that at this hour in this semi-tropical climate the dew is falling, and it is very unhealthy for one to be exposed to the night air?"

She laughed in his face.

"Well, you are to blame. I should have been in my little bunk and probably far away in the Land of Nod had you been content to remain aboard and not start out on a very Quixotic errand. But I am only joking, Roderic. You have met with adventures, of that I am sure from what I saw and heard. Poor Jerome has once more crossed your path and found it one of thorns. Now, you must tell me all that happened, do you hear, Sir Galahad?" [165]

A little hand slipped through his arm, and Roderic found himself obliged to surrender.

So, as they walked up and down he told the story of what had occurred; several times they paused at the rail to look at the riding lights that marked the position of the blockade runner, and while one sighed in rapturous satisfaction at the thought of the beauty aboard the Sterling Castle, the other experienced quite a different emotion.

Cleo asked questions, and seemed bound to know all, so he felt compelled to tell her.

Her interest in Georgia grew with each passing day, and strange to say the yearning to meet and know this daughter of the tropics became an absorbing dream—she felt as though destiny drew their life lines in the same channel, these two who both loved Roderic Owen.

Perhaps he was wise enough to refrain from entering into minute particulars when describing the interview with Georgia—even men head over heels in love are given a small amount of common sense on occasions of this kind.

Finally Roderic persuaded her to retire.

The hour was late and he himself now confessed to drowsiness.

By this time the town had given up its mad merriment—gone were many of the lights and the music of the band had long since ceased to be a factor in the mighty drama.

Even in the romantic Azores men must take a portion of the night for sleep—it cannot be given wholly over to song and amusement. [166]

Captain Beven was a wary old sea dog.

He believed an ounce of prevention to be much better than a pound of cure.

There was no danger in sight, and probably it would be an act of madness on Shackelford's part to attempt to board the steam yacht under cover of darkness and secure the person of the man who had been aboard the blockade runner in disguise.

All the same, chances or not, Beven did not intend to neglect any precaution, for he was a man who did not believe in being caught napping.

To shut the door after the horse was stolen might be good policy with some men, but his idea lay in securing it ere this event happened.

Before retiring Roderic had an interview with the captain, and learned that worthy's views.

Then he sought his little stateroom.

As fortune would have it he was situated on that side of the boat nearer the steamer, and from either one of the bulls-eye openings he could see the uncertain dark mass that told just where the blockade runner lay, as well as her twinkling riding lights which must be kept burning the livelong night in order to prevent accident should arriving vessels enter the snug harbor.

And Roderic stood there a long time, his eyes fixed upon the inchoate outlines of the Sterling Castle, as one might gaze upon a vessel that bore his fate.

Many thoughts occupied his mind—he lived over again the past with its joys and sorrows, and even attempted to raise the veil of the future to see whether it held a gleam of Paradise; but this must all remain surmise and uncertainty, since it is not given to mortal vision to see beyond the present. [167]

The night passed without an alarm.

Evidently Shackelford was a man of discretion as well as astonishing boldness, for there is such a thing as uniting the two qualities.

Roderic aroused early enough.

The morning had just broken and the glowing eye of old Phœbus was glancing above the horizon

when he proceeded to dress.

This operation had been about completed when, by chance of course, he looked out of the port hole to see just how far they were from the steamer, since darkness had been upon land and water during the little drama of the preceding night.

To his surprise he failed to behold the object of his solicitude.

He rubbed his eyes and looked again—surely he must be dreaming, or else with a change of tide the steam yacht had headed another way, cutting him off from the view he had before obtained.

And yet, so far as he could tell his lookout still faced the town and port, and he could swear the blockade runner should lie between.

Mayhap Shackelford had taken his craft in to a dock for some purpose.

Roderic snatched up his marine glasses and scanned the shore line.

There was only disappointment awaiting him.

The yellow and black funnel of the Sterling Castle was conspicuous only by its absence.

One chance remained—that the steamer had changed her anchorage.

He hurriedly completed his toilet and rushed on deck.

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A sweeping glance around told the story, for the blockade runner was no longer in the harbor.

Captain Beven saluted from a point forward and beckoned him to approach.

"Looking for the steamer—left port an hour or more before crack of dawn—yonder she goes, headed straight for the Antilles."

Following the captain's extended finger Roderic saw the smoke of a steamer hanging on the horizon. Somehow his heart gave a leap after it, for the girl he adored was aboard the vanishing craft.

"When do we follow, captain?" he asked, composedly.

"Within six hours at the latest," was the reply and when that time had expired they too were moving over the trackless Atlantic headed due south west.



## CHAPTER XVI. THE INVASION OF SAN JUAN.

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Upon a stormy night, when the moon was utterly concealed by dark ragged masses of clouds that rolled up from the south in serried columns like an army advancing to battle, Roderic viewed the prospect from the deck of the Dreadnaught with the philosophical coolness that seemed a part of his nature; and yet he knew what one of these summer storms in the tropics meant as well as any man.

It came in an unfortunate time, just when they prayed for fair weather, since it was Roderic's design to be put ashore on the coast of Porto Rico not many miles from San Juan, before the little steam yacht entered the fortified harbor.

The situation had been carefully studied by Owen, and his plans altered to conform to the new arrangement of affairs.

There was a pretty good chance that the Sterling Castle would put into San Juan ere attempting to run the Havana blockade.

In fact this was almost a certainty, since she carried as passengers those who were desirous of landing on Porto Rico soil.

This being the case it was reasonable to suppose that Jerome and his Spanish allies would take advantage of the first opportunity to warn the officials at the capital regarding the presence of a Yankee secret agent on board Cleo's yacht; and that the entry of the Dreadnaught into the fortified harbor where Admiral Sampson's guns had played havoc earlier in the game would open a system of annoying espionage, even if it did not result in a bold search for the spy.

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There was one way to avoid this.

He must go ashore secretly and enter San Juan by the backdoor.

His acquaintance with the city and its surroundings would serve him in good stead, as must also his knowledge of the Spanish character and language.

Roderic had his bold plans all arranged and was therefore a little annoyed when fickle Nature threatened to interfere with their smooth sailing. If the tropical storm had only held off another hour all would have been serene.

They had had glimpses of Porto Rico's fair shores during the last few hours, and Roderic might have landed in comfort.

Two things restrained him—the lack of suitable transportation facilities to the capital, and the presence of Spanish soldiers scattered along the shore, and revealed through the glasses.

Night was absolutely necessary for the successful carrying out of his plans, and even then there had been danger from discovery on account of the moon.

The storm obviated this, while it bred new perils of its own.

Roderic decided to risk it.

Delay meant more danger for Cleo, since every hour spent upon that coast in a gale of wind, during the hurricane season of the year was tempting Providence.

Once he was off their hands he could run away from the coast or else make for the shelter of San Juan harbor, which would surely not be refused any friendly craft on such a wretched night.

So Roderic made all his preparations and transformed himself into a dark visaged Spaniard.

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Cleo looked him over carefully, and tried her best to appear satisfied, though there was a haunting gleam of dread in her blue eyes, and her lips trembled, despite all attempts to show a resolute front.

She knew what risks he was taking for his country.

The same bold spirit that influenced Hobson and Blue and Wainwright in their desperate ventures grew rampant in Roderic Owen's breast—a strong desire to strike a blow for his beloved flag, to cripple the power of the proud Spaniard and hasten the day of his final departure from the Western Hemisphere.

Captain Beven had anchored his craft and now came to announce the boat in readiness that was to take him ashore.

Roderic took his cousin's hand in both his own.

"Your pure heart will pray for me I know. It is a greater satisfaction to me than words can tell. Remember what I promised of San Juan. We will, God willing, soon meet again. As your cousin, your brother, dear Cleo, allow me a brother's loving privilege."

He kissed her farewell.

Nor as he turned hastily to follow Beven to the waiting boat, did he see the glowing flush that instantly suffused her face, to as rapidly vanish, leaving her deathly pale and trembling like an aspen leaf.

The ride ashore was exhilarating to say the least.

Great waves rolled on the beach, and none but practical, experienced seamen could have managed so light a yawl without disaster.

But Roderic had no fear—he knew what these trained muscles could do.

Several times they seemed threatened with dire disaster, but on each occasion the second officer's judgment in manipulating the boat averted destruction. [172]

Thus the cockle shell craft entered the white crested breakers, where they surged upon the shore with a roar like unto that of thunder.

This was the most interesting moment of all, as riding one of the rollers they rushed in like a race horse on the home stretch.

Then Roderic saw the palm trees against the sky line almost overhead, and he knew they were almost ashore.

A grating sound under their keel announced the receding of the billow.

Instantly every sailor leaped overboard, up to his knees in salt water, and the boat thus lightened was run ashore.

And in this manner Roderic Owen once again found himself on Spanish soil—two years had passed since in anger he had kicked the dust of Porto Rico from his shoes, and registered a solemn vow never to tread its shores again while his good sense remained.

This occurred to him now as a very grim joke, for here he was once more landed on that same fated soil; and what was even more singular as fully bent as ever upon his chase after beauty.

Time alters many cases, resolutions fade with age, and circumstances govern our actions to a remarkable degree.

Of course it was absolutely necessary that the second officer and his men should return to the yacht without delay.

Roderic squeezed the bold fellows by the hand and watched them launch their boat through the surf.

Twice they were driven back.

It was a ticklish job.

Such men could not be daunted by difficulties, even when out of the common, so they made a still more resolute attempt. [173]

The third trial was a grand success—sturdy British muscle had conquered over the forces of Nature, and Roderic knew they were off.

He waited and watched until he saw a light flash up three times far out on the stormy waters, which was the signal agreed upon to announce the safe return of the yawl.

Then with a sigh he turned away.

His business was now to enter San Juan.

It must prove one that would necessitate great caution and considerable endurance on his part, for since the bombardment of the ports by the American fleet as a bluff intended to disclose the presence of Cervera's squadron in West India waters the Spanish authorities had taken extraordinary precautions to guard every avenue of approach to the capital.

Roderic did not doubt his ability to enter without discovery—he had not frequented the cafes, the Spanish Club, and taken many horseback rides through the suburbs of San Juan in company with Georgia without gaining a thorough knowledge of the ground that promised to be of great advantage to him now.

Putting his best foot forward he soon struck a military road over which he had spun many times behind a good horse.

He could in an hour's time catch glimpses of the many lights that marked the city.

The sight caused him considerable satisfaction, for he knew destiny had in store for him events of considerable importance connected with San Juan.

And doubtless *she* was there—that simple fact had in it the elements calculated to thrill his very heart to its core. [174]

About this time there arose features connected with the case that temporarily drove these sweet reflections out of his head.

They were of a most disagreeable nature.

It began to rain.

This might signify a drizzle in a more northern clime, but such a thing is almost unknown in Porto Rico.

When the clouds open there it means a deluge.

The boys in blue who were in the trenches at Santiago could tell some pretty tall stories of tropical downpours, and how in the rainy season a cloud appearing no larger than one's hat can spread over all the sky and fairly soak the earth.

Roderic had anticipated this—indeed, his preparations had been made with just such a ducking in prospect.

He took his medicine in a philosophical spirit such as only a traveler in many strange lands learns to cultivate.

Every step brought him nearer the city, and once he was soaked through it was impossible to become any wetter, so why complain?

Besides, this deluge might serve to his advantage, since in all probability the guards stationed along the military road would naturally seek refuge in their shelter huts, and leave the way clear.

This was what actually occurred.

Spanish system lacks many sterling elements that make the German and British armies so thorough in their duties.

Roderic after a miserable tramp through mud and water finally brought up at the city gates an hour before midnight.

There he met with an apparent obstacle, since in Moorish fashion no one was allowed to find ingress or egress during the period between sunset and sunrise. [175]

This he had been aware of ere landing, and all his plans were shaped with an utter disregard for the edict of the governor-general.

Avoiding the gates discreetly he made his way along the dilapidated wall that marked what had once been the land defense of the city.

It was now in decay, like many other antiquated battlements connected with Spain's possessions throughout the world—relics of bygone days when muzzle loading guns marked the highest epoch in the art of war.

Of course this guarding of the gates was more or less of a big sham, since the people of San Juan could go and come in scores of other places.

And Roderic remembered this fact.

When by turning this way and that he finally surmounted the difficulty, and found himself among the houses near the barracks of the troops in the eastern end of the city, he felt as though he deserved congratulations on account of his good generalship.

Still this was but a beginning, one step in the long and difficult ladder he had laid out to climb. It could only be ascended a single round at a time, but he had really made a good start.

He found himself in a portion of San Juan which he had really never looked upon under similar conditions, the quarter where the poorer element herded, where houses were thronged with black and white, Spaniards, and reconcentrados of Porto Rico who endeavored to remain neutral, negroes from Jamaica and Hayti and a mongrel population.

Seldom even in the rainy season does such a downpour come at night—they look for it in the afternoon, when it cools the sultry atmosphere and with the sea breeze renders the evening delightfully refreshing. [176]

Just then the streets were swimming in water, and almost practically deserted—even the dolorous cry of the "dulce" vendors had ceased to echo along the narrow thoroughfares.

But the cafes and concert halls and shops appeared to be doing a land office business to judge from the crowds that had collected.

Roderic's one desire now was to reach a little den just off the breathing place for the poor, known as the Plaza Cristobal Colon in honor of Columbus.

Here he believed he would find the opportunity he craved for rest, and a chance to dry his reeking garments, under the humble roof of a devoted friend.

Two years had passed since last he had seen this party, and two years is a long time—much may occur during such a period—people change their residence mayhap their country, and sometimes even die.

Still he was ready to take the chances.

No one halted him as he pushed on, and yet these narrow, illy lighted streets could not be reckoned the safest places in the city for respectable people to walk after a certain hour.

One thing he noticed—San Juan was full of Spanish soldiers. He could see them prowling everywhere, and each crowd within the cafes and halls had its quota of these small sized swarthy faced, boyish looking exiles from sunny Spain.

"They evidently mean to give the Yankees a warm reception when the time comes," was what he concluded upon noting this important fact.

The point was well taken—it was one that would prove of considerable importance to General Miles, who had already landed on the southern coast with his army of Americans, and was beginning to advance upon Ponce and the neighboring towns. [177]

After being compelled to retrace his steps several times, on account of getting off the track, confused by the narrow *calle*s that seemed to have no beginning and ended nowhere, Roderic at length broke out upon an open place where the rain beat upon stone flagging, and trees moaned dolefully in the fierce gusts of wind.

Despite its funereal aspect now he recognized this as the Plaza Cristobal Colon, and was able to take his bearings afresh.

"Thank Heaven, I am near the end of my night's pilgrimage," he muttered in Spanish, for he had determined to even do his thinking in that language while within the enemy's lines, so that the danger of discovery might be reduced to a minimum, for if Jerome, Roblado *et al.* were in San Juan he was well aware of the fact that hundreds of keen eyes belonging to the Guardia Civil would be on the lookout for one Roderic Owen, and that discovery would be a serious matter for him.

It was really time his wanderings ceased for this night at least—he had covered miles of ground, he had faced a raging storm that at times almost brought him to his knees, he was soaked through and through, and beginning to feel weak in his limbs.

But relief was close at hand.

The hardest part of his mission he believed had already been passed over.

At least, in all probability he would be able to conduct the remainder of his work with a dry skin—he might not see another deluge in the early night during his whole stay in San Juan.

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He fervently hoped so, at least.

Crossing the public square he dodged into a certain dingy and crooked lane that took him to the most desolate and God forsaken locality within the city walls.

There are such places in Paris, London, New York—why not in San Juan?

All cities, whether of ancient Babylonian days or of the present enlightened age have had their plague spots as well as their palatial quarters, and so it must be while rich and poor go hand in hand, down to the end of time.

Only in San Juan the squalor seemed to be a little more pronounced than anything Roderic could imagine outside of Havana, where the wretched reconcentrados were dying of hunger by thousands.

The war was partly to blame, he knew—that and the natural savage instinct which prevails so strongly among Spanish speaking people, and induces them to always go to extremes, whether in love or conflict.

Picking his way along in this delectable neighborhood Roderic finally gave utterance to an eager exclamation—his eyes had fallen upon the little whitewashed cabin for which he had been on the *qui vive*.

Another moment and his fist was beating a tattoo upon the door, a summons that was loud enough to arouse the dead—from within a movement was heard, and then the door opened cautiously a few inches. Roderic uttered some talismanic words in Spanish that brought a delighted exclamation from the hut's occupant—a brown hand reached out and when the door closed it shut out the awful clamor of the storm, for the Yankee had found a warm reception within the walls of old San Juan.

## THE BOLERO DANCER WITH THE GYPSY BLOOD.

Porto Rico as a territory of the progressive American republic will soon be transformed—while advancing with giant strides along the material road that may lead to statehood, the island must gradually lose those picturesque and distinctly national features that have marked Spanish rule for centuries.

Never again will San Juan be the same gay, careless, pleasure seeking capital of the past—the business loving, bustling Yankee shopkeeper banishes such folly, or at best makes it play second fiddle to his trading.

San Juan will be swept and garnished, her streets paved, her narrowest *calles* lighted, and within a few years she may vie even with Boston in regard to the conditions that make life worth living to the average American.

But the halo of romance and the worship of military heroes that has been her portion during these long centuries—alas! they have fled, to return no more.

Many will sigh as they raise the curtain of the past, and take one more peep at the gay bright scene stamped upon memory's tablets.

There is a peculiar fascination about Spanish and Oriental cities, a barbaric splendor that attracts the eye, even while our common sense tells us of its tawdry nature.

Many have described the San Juan of the past, and as a picture that has been turned to the wall, let us for the last time see the Porto Rican capital through the glasses of a clever newspaperman, whose pen paints its colors just as might the faithful camera. This was as Roderic saw it the day after his safe entry into the town:

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San Juan wakes early.

By seven o'clock the shops are open, and a stirring of wide shutters in the upper stories of the houses shows that even the women are about. Hundreds of men are having their coffee in the *cafés*. Probably a band is playing somewhere, which means a detachment of troops returning from early mass in the Cathedral.

By ten o'clock this early activity has worn itself out. The sun has got well up into the sky, white and hot. It falls in the narrow, unshaded streets, and the cobblestones begin to scorch through thin shoe soles. It is a time to seek the shade and quaff cooling drinks. Business languishes. About eleven shop shutters begin to go up, and soon the streets are as deserted as at midnight.

This is breakfast hour, and until well after noon not a shop or public building will be found open. About one or two, whether the *siesta* is long or short, people begin to reappear and the shops reopen. Gradually traffic revives. By four o'clock, when the Palais de Justice has cast its cooling shadow over half the blazing plaza, loungers begin to appear to occupy the numerous benches and blink idly at the guards about the gloomy Palais entrance. With each passing hour the city presents a livelier appearance, until at six o'clock it is fully awake and ready for dinner, the principal meal of the day.

In the evening is when the inhabitants of San Juan really live. These are the pleasant hours of the day. From the sea comes a breeze, cool and fresh, to whisper to the few shade trees in the plazas and revive enervated humanity. Twice a week one of the military bands plays in the principal plaza. Then it is worth while to go, hire a comfortable arm chair from a *muchacho* for ten *centavos* in Puerto Rican silver and sit and observe and listen.

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These military bands—there are three stationed in San Juan—are equal to Sousa or Herbert on a considerably smaller scale. They play beautifully voluptuous airs of sunny Spain, the strains swelling and quickening until they entice an answer in the livened step and unconsciously swaying bodies of hundreds of promenaders; then slowly dying to a sweet, soft breath, borne to the ear from distant guitars and mandolins. Italian, French and German composers are not neglected, while occasionally there will come a spirited bit from some modern light opera, or even a snatch from a topical song of the day.

On band nights San Juan may be seen at her best. The concerts begin at eight o'clock. Prior to that hour the private soldiers are permitted the liberty of the plaza, and hundreds avail themselves of the opportunity for an airing. At eight they must retire to their barracks, leaving the plaza to the officers.

The music racks are set at one end of the plaza, and the musicians stand during the two hours of the concert. By the time the second number on the programme is reached the plaza is thronged with the wealth, beauty and fashion of the Puerto Rican capital. A row of gas street lamps, thickly set, encircles the Plaza, while at each end rise iron towers, upon which are supported electric arc lights.

All the houses surrounding the plaza are illuminated, their bright coloring and Eastern architecture giving an Oriental effect. The balconies—every house has a balcony—are filled with gaily dressed women and officers, and through open windows glimpses of richly furnished interiors can be obtained. On the street level, the Grand Central and other *cafés*, the Spanish Club and a dozen brilliantly lighted drug stores and shops help flood the plaza with light and lend

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life and gayety to the scene.

The throng is characteristic of San Juan of to-day—of the San Juan which will soon cease to exist. There are Spanish officers, hundreds of them, clad in an immense variety of uniform—to use a perfectly truthful paradox.

There are officers of the Guardia Civil, in dark blue suits and caps, their cuffs red and gold, the rank indicated by eight pointed stars, and with small spurs sticking out from under the long trousers.

There are officers of the line, usually in light or indigo blue, sometimes with broad stripes along the trousers and with cuffs and facings of green, red, blue or black, according to the branch of the service, their rank indicated by gold and silver stars on the sleeve above the cuff. These wear tall white caps, with gilt bands. There are naval officers, in dark blue uniforms of distinctly seafaring cut and without colored facings.

All the officers wear some kind of sword invariably, usually during the day the regulation sabre, and at night substituting a slender rapier with a cross hilt. They also carry walking sticks with silver and gold heads, according to rank.

As they mingle with the crowd, walking together in groups, now bowing to some passing female acquaintance or turning to promenade with her, they unconsciously dominate the entire assemblage and give to it an indelible imprint of Spain. Plainly they are favorites with the women, who receive their polite attentions graciously.

And the women. They are out in force, dressed in the latest fashions of Madrid and Paris. Here and there some gentleman walks with his wife and family, but usually the women promenade alone until joined by male acquaintances. A group of girls will be accompanied by a duenna, who keeps discreetly in the background if any men approach. Often, however, two or more señoritas will promenade entirely alone, with a freedom which would be considered unbecoming in the United States. [183]

This is one of the occasions when rigorous Spanish etiquette is somewhat relaxed and the unmarried women enjoy a fleeting glimpse of social freedom. So the crowd, constantly swelling, until progress is almost impossible, moves in a circle back and forth along the length of the plaza. Mingling with it are scores of police, in their bright uniforms, who seem to have no business there except to accentuate the crush, and hundreds of civilians in their best dress. And so it goes, until the concert ends. The band, preceded by an escort of cavalry, marches away to a wonderfully quick quickstep, the lights fade and slowly the crowd disperses through the shadowy streets.

Not all San Juan, however, is to be seen in the grand plaza. Only fashionable and official life centralizes there. In other sections of the city the evenings pass differently. Take a stroll from the brilliantly lighted plaza into the eastern part of the town, near the barracks.

There the whole lower strata will be found in the narrow, badly lighted streets, or in the plaza Cristobal Colon and the smaller breathing places of the densely populated city.

Here hand organs and dirty wandering minstrels, who perform semi-barbaric music upon cracked guitars and raspy mandolins, accompanied by the "guero"—a native instrument made of a gourd—furnish the music.

Venders of *dulce* squat beside their trays of sweetmeat, dolorously crying their wares. Non-commissioned officers and privates mingle with the people and chat with the women. Everybody smokes cigarettes, even children hardly able to toddle. The shops and meaner *cafés* are open and crowded. [184]

Further no one can wander through streets more narrow and darker than alleys to where the massive gray battlements of the ancient city walls lift their sombre, jagged towers to greet the moon.

Inquisitive sentinels, Mauser rifle in hand, walk here to turn intruders back, but by exercising discretion glimpses may be obtained of tiny balconies ensconced in nooks and crannies high up in the wall and overlooking the sea and the twinkling city. Perhaps a peep may be had into the odd habitations within, with dusky señoritas gazing out through a curtain of flowers and vines. This is a different San Juan from that which promenades in the plaza: but not less interesting.

All this Roderic Owen saw, nor was it the first time he had wandered through the streets and byways of the strange old city.

How vividly these scenes brought back to his mind the days and nights of the past, when he had lived in a glow of love's young dream—still, why need he sigh—the experience through which he had passed, bitter though it had been, must have taught him a lesson, and since Love had again taken up an abode in his heart, he could profit by it to forever debar the little demon Jealousy from entering this holiest of holies.

He wandered over the whole city.

He even found means to enter some of the forts that frowned so ferociously, and yet were but hollow mockeries, mounting few modern guns.

Here were evidences still of the damage inflicted by Sampson's fleet many weeks before—Spanish dilatory tactics had allowed dismounted guns to lie where they had fallen, and Roderic was of the opinion that it must have been rather warm around those regions at the time. [185]

There was something of a bustle of preparation in the city, since it had become known that General Miles and an American army had landed on the south shore of the island.

Still the Spaniards did not expect to make a desperate resistance like Blanco had declared Havana would show.

When the Yankee army reached San Juan and the terrible battle ships appeared again in the offing doubtless they would gracefully submit to the inevitable and yield up their arms.

Meanwhile there was the usual bluster and braggadocio as to what they meant to do with the Yankee pigs once they were induced to enter the trap which the Spanish commander had so cunningly spread.

They would be extravagantly comical, these bold soldiers of Spain, if they were not so very serious in what they declared.

Roderic laughed in his sleeve at the awful threats so openly made in street and cafe, wherever two or more soldiers came together—in imagination he pictured the overwhelming rush of regulars and volunteers in blue, just as they had gone into the Spaniards at Caney and San Juan hill—one such mad swoop and he was ready to swear to it that the Porto Rican capital would be carried.

Brag is a good dog, but Holdfast a better.

Roderic did not use his whole time in tramping about the city.

He made several visits to people who had been in communication with the Washington authorities, influential English residents or even native Porto Ricans who knew what was written by Destiny upon the wall, and longed for the blessed day to dawn when Liberty would descend upon the sons and daughters of the Antilles. [186]

His object was not to get information concerning the resources of the garrison.

All those points he was able to pick up for himself in his round of the city and forts.

As a government official he had come to San Juan, and it was in this capacity he conferred with these influential citizens.

When he had finally accomplished all that was expected of him in this direction, Roderic threw off the burden of responsibility.

He was now free to think once more of his own personal affairs, to let the vision of Georgia's lovely face occupy his mind as it had his heart.

How he longed to see her.

How fitting it seemed that the romance of his life, that had obtained its first lease in San Juan, should complete the circuit there, amid these well remembered scenes.

It was concert night.

Even with a hostile army marching against the capital these Spanish soldiers, who, as old campaigners laughed at fate, did not mean to be cheated out of their usual pleasure.

Among the throngs on the plaza Roderic sauntered, looking eagerly for the face his heart yearned to see.

Some few discreet people had left the capital and gone away, pending the anticipated bombardment; but the grand rush of panic stricken fugitives would not begin until the first shell from the Yankee fleet came screaming into town.

It had been so on the previous occasion, and those who for five hours that morning saw the steady, jostling, excited, almost demoralized stream of humanity that poured along the one road leading out of San Juan, many carrying their most cherished household possessions upon their backs, would never forget the remarkable spectacle. [187]

Roderic's search was however, not without some result, for he had several glimpses of his cousin Cleo in the crowd.

She hung upon the arm of Captain Beven, and Miss Becky was of course along.

Having heard so much of the gaiety to be found in Porto Rico's capital the ladies had had curiosity enough to come ashore.

Who could blame them, when listening to the delightful strains of melody, and amid such enchanting and romantic surroundings as the many tinted houses fronting the grand plaza afforded!

Not Roderic, surely.

He thought it wise not to make his presence known, as it might seriously compromise his safety in this hostile city.

Nevertheless his eyes were frequently drawn toward the trio, and somehow rested upon the face of his Virginia cousin with a peculiar satisfaction.

If Cleo was not divinely handsome like Georgia she had a fine figure and carried her head like an American queen, so that any man might feel proud to claim kinship with her.

Roderic noticed how eagerly she looked around.

At first he had the assurance to wonder whether she could be seeking him in the crowd, and man-

like was beginning to even feel flattered at the idea when he noticed that those whom she scrutinized so eagerly were of the gentler sex, wives and daughters of San Juan's better class of citizens. [188]

Then it flashed upon him that she hoped to discover Georgia in the midst of the throng.

He dared not follow out this thought to its legitimate conclusion, lest it make him appear egotistical even in his own eyes.

That Georgia must have reached the city he knew full well, for with his own eyes he had seen the Sterling Castle in the harbor.

If that were not evidence quite sufficient here was Jerome as big as life, sauntering about the plaza, the object of adoration on the part of the whole female population, and of malice, envy and black hatred on the part of the military beaux who saw in this Adonis a rival to be feared.

Roderic mentally pictured the inevitable outcome and in anticipation enjoyed Jerome's downfall.

"He will discover it a different matter flirting with the daughters of Porto Rico. I am ready to swear my dandy Lord High Admiral will ere long find himself ducked in some fragrant frog pond, if no greater evil befalls him," was what Owen concluded.

Nor was he a particle sorry, since Jerome had long played the heartless role of an adventurer, and many had suffered because of his belief that the world owed him a living.

The evening wore on, and Roderic began to imagine he was doomed to disappointment.

Lovely faces he had seen, but not the one for which his heart yearned.

Some of the ladies wore veils, their exceeding modesty preventing them from showing their faces in such a mixed assemblage, a custom that undoubtedly descended from royal blood desirous of being distinguished from the plebeian. [189]

Still Roderic had full assurance that his eyes could discover the girl he loved, even though she stood among a score of veiled companions—there is an individuality in the carriage, little peculiarities about the movement of hands and head that appeal to the keen eye of Love, and cannot be mistaken.

So Roderic, wise man, reasoned, as with a single glance he decided that this one or that was not Georgia.

So others of his sex have decided in times past, and mayhap paid the penalty of their folly.

As the secret agent was cruising around that side of the plaza where the band had taken up its quarters, while making a last selection, he received a shock without the least warning by suddenly coming face to face with a dashing looking Spaniard whose gay dress proclaimed him some public performer.

Roderic gritted his teeth at sight of his yellow skinned adversary of the past, for this was no other than Julio, the handsome dancer of the *bolero*, a man whose life had been one long succession of conquests in the arena of Love, and over whom half the town had at times gone wild.

He had *gitano* or gypsy blood in his veins, through his mother, which doubtless accounted in a measure for the *diablerie* of his appearance, and his success among the fair sex, for there is to many women a fascination in anything bordering upon the tempestuous, the wild and eerie.

It was only natural that Roderic, coming thus upon the man he had hated so bitterly in the past, should grind his teeth and feel a mad desire to plant his fist square between those black dare devil eyes that had wrought such accursed mischief for years back.

Then he remembered that it was all a mistake—that he had no valid reason for assaulting the idol of San Juan save in the capacity of a general defender of the weaker sex, a modern Don Quixote, and that would hardly be politic. [190]

Drawn by an attraction he could never explain, he sauntered after the *bolero* dancer, who had evidently come out of some casino near by, after his performance was done, in order to enjoy the music of the military band—come out without changing his garments, which gave him the picturesque swagger so admired among those of his blood; and the red silk sash that was knotted at his left hip, the ends trailing almost to the knee, did not Roderic remember it well, and had he not once vowed to some day use the same in strangling the gipsy dancer with the devilish handsome face?

Pshaw! that was long ago, when he was a poor fool, whom love had made insane.

Now he had learned his lesson well, and never again would he allow such miserable suspicions to find lodgment in his breast.

Georgia was as faithful as the stars, and the only reason he felt a little bitterness toward this fellow was in sympathy with the past.

As to jealousy, thank Heaven that evil weed had been forever plucked out by the roots from the garden of his heart, and—

But there was Julio, up to his old tricks, flirting with one of Eve's daughters.

Roderic, still remembering the past, found himself indulging in a wild hope that some indignant lover would set upon the gypsy dancer and give him a taste of Spanish vengeance.

Such however, did not happen. [191]



The girl who had answered his signal with a wave of her snowy kerchief soon joined him, and together they pushed through the crowd as though heading for a street that broke away from the plaza.

Roderic had been close at hand, and his eyes were not closed—indeed, just about this time they seemed to be unusually wide open, as though a sudden avalanche of jealousy had swept over him.

It was not because the companion of Julio was veiled that he watched her so eagerly, so breathlessly—other women wore mantillas, and chose to conceal their patrician faces from the common herd when walking the plaza.

What then?

Love is not blind—Roderic had just now been declaring to himself that he would easily be able to pick Georgia out from among a score of girls whose features were hidden from view—and it was on this very account that he shook from head to foot as though with the palsy.

Dead—that old demon Jealousy once planted in the human breast is hard indeed to slay.

And Roderic again ground his teeth in fury, and followed in the wake of Julio the *bolero* dancer of San Juan because this veiled senorita who took his arm and clung so confidently there as they dodged through the crowd had apparently the familiar figure and actions of the girl he loved, the girl he had once jilted on account of this self same Spanish heart smasher—Georgia de Brabant, maid of San Juan!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JULIO DECLARES FOR WAR.

[192]

In this fair city of the Conquistadors, where Ponce de Leon laid a foundation for the future Spanish colony, there may have been men who for various causes felt the heat of anger surging through their souls on this August night in the year of our Lord 1898; but it is exceedingly problematical whether one among them experienced such a terrible volcano raging in their heart as did Roderic Owen when the first suspicion burst upon him that Julio's companion was the beautiful girl who had after estrangement again promised to be his honored wife.

The shock almost took his breath away, it was so keen, so cruel, and found him so unprepared.

Then came a revulsion of feeling—it could not be so—Georgia was true, she was loving and faithful—this was only a wretched coincidence—surely there were women in San Juan who possessed figures on the same order as hers, and who even made those familiar little gestures—women were pretty much alike with regard to such things, just as a dozen cats may all make the same graceful leaps, together with the peculiar little motions so characteristic the world over.

Still he followed Julio—for the life of him he could not help that, no matter how thoroughly convinced he might be that it was no affair of his—there was a terrible fascination in the game, as though he were playing with dynamite.

And so the pendulum swung again, his eyes being still glued upon the girl, once more he found himself the prey to suspicions. [193]

In vain he endeavored to throttle them, as his better nature arose in arms—like Banquo's ghost they would not down—every movement the girl made that reminded him of Georgia was like a wicked stab in the region of his heart, and when he saw the daring Julio pick up her kerchief which had fallen from her hand, and press it to his lips very cavalierly ere returning it, Roderic had a great desire to rush upon the *bolero* dancer and knock him down—indeed, just at that minute he thought he had good cause for hammering him in lusty Anglo Saxon style.

But Roderic was not jealous—oh! no, he had cast that monster out of his heart for good, and meant to have no more of him—only he had a very queer sensation seize upon him, and felt as though it was only just and right, both to Georgia and himself, that he should settle this matter then and there.

This could only be done in one way, by looking upon the girl's face.

He was firmly resolved to do this, come what might—Julio would doubtless resent the impertinence, for Julio was a fighter, having once been a *toreador* in the bull ring—what of that, if only he could discover the truth one way or the other?

A fellow in his frame of mind thinks little of danger, the careless snap of his fingers perhaps.

What fools Cupid does make of men—even those who would appear to be the best balanced go quite off the handle when the little god finds lodgment in their bosoms.

At any rate Owen had now thrown away all other fancies and was studiously following this couple as might an Indian his intended prey.

Given a little time and he recovered, at least in a fair measure, the coolness that usually characterized his actions. [194]

He even lighted a cheroot, realizing that a Spaniard such as he represented would appear singular without a weed of some sort dangling from his lip.

Apparently Julio had lost all interest in the military strains that throbbed and pulsated upon the night air—when lovely women entered the game the *bolero* dancer threw other thoughts to the four winds—he might be a lover of music but above all else he was a beau.

The couple evidently intended quitting the plaza, and plunging down into one of the streets that would lead them to that other section of town, where fashion never troubled, and where the poorer element had their quarters—a section that would especially appeal to the eye of the artist and the newspaperman seeking quaint scenes for the portrayal of Spanish characteristics.

Roderic was quite ready to follow—indeed, in his present frame of mind it would not matter whither he went so long as that lithesome figure tantalized him like a will-o'-the-wisp.

All he wanted was an opportunity to see her face, to satisfy himself one way or the other, to quell this devilish spirit raging in his breast, or failing that to let the fury find an outlet.

One way or the other, however fortune might decide it, he felt that a result must be reached.

Having taken the reins in his hands again and curbed the unruly team that would have carried him headlong to a speedy rupture of the peace, Roderic became outwardly cool.

He aroused his old professional instincts to action, and endeavored to forget that the case was more to him than the usual run. [195]

Thus he noticed that while Julio could never be anything but a gallant and a beau, he did not attempt any familiarities with his companion—that there seemed to be a certain amount of respect on his part such as he seldom showed toward those who had succumbed to the charm of his fascinating presence.

Score one point in favor of Julio.

It might be of advantage when the curtain was rung up for the final act, for should this desperate, jealousy-racked lover who followed at his heels be given an opportunity to get at that long throat of his, the Maccarena dancer would have ample need of every prayer his guardian angel could bring forth.

When the plaza with its gay crowds and its dashing music had been left behind, Roderic knew his task had assumed new risks.

The Spaniard is a suspicious mortal at his best, and Julio had been embroiled in so many affairs with lovers, perhaps husbands also, that he had to be constantly on the *qui vive* lest one of these jealous minded gentry lie in wait around a lonely corner, or creep up from behind, dagger in hand.

When one plays such a game as that of this fascinating beau, one must accept the consequences, no matter what they entail—it is the price of popularity among the fair sex.

Hence, it might be expected that after they had been traversing these narrow thoroughfares for some little time, Julio from frequent glances thrown over his shoulder, would begin to notice how the shadow kept upon his trail.

This would arouse suspicion, and he might either vanish suddenly from sight or else employ his popularity among a certain class of men to bring Roderic into hot water. [196]

So far as this latter contingency was concerned, Roderic cared little whether he were thrown up against a dozen of the unwashed of San Juan, if he could only previously have the blessed knowledge that his fears regarding Julio's veiled companion were groundless.

In other words, such an assurance was of so great a value in his eyes that he stood ready to accept the gravest of danger with a smile on his face if only Georgia were true.

He employed his usual tactics to prevent the other from suspecting him, and being an adept at the business was able to be out of sight on nearly every occasion when Julio twisted that long neck of his for a glance toward the rear.

This was all very well, but so far he had not advanced a single step toward the elucidation of the mystery.

Well, patience—everything comes to him who waits.

Under ordinary conditions he could have applied this time-worn but nevertheless true axiom to his own case, just as he had done on many a previous occasion; but it was a different matter when his eyes were eagerly watching each movement of the girl, and in his heart he prayed that the bitter cup might pass from him.

But something must be done.

At any moment Julio and his modest companion might pass into one of the houses in this quarter, and the door of which would consequently be shut and barred in his face.

It would serve of little avail then for him to suddenly be electrified into action—he could pound upon the panels of the sturdy door and demand admittance in the most lusty of tones, but the only answer he might expect would be in a shower of dirty water from the upper windows, a favorite method in vogue among the lower classes of Spain when the tax gatherers or some other unwelcome visitor is knocking for admission. [197]

Desperation often hurries a man to action—the need of results one way or another spurs even a laggard in the chase.

Having now determined to assume all the risks with the expectation of placing them upon a single die, Roderic changed his tactics.

It was his desire to overtake the dancer and by a bold movement snatch the veil from the head of his companion.

Of course this would be the signal for war, since Julio always had a chip upon his shoulder; but Roderic was willing to accept the consequences, so long as the terrible suspense was ended.

He began to slip up on the Spaniard, and with all his faculties aroused Roderic was able to carry this part of his programme out to perfection.

The streets were far from deserted—in places even crowds could be seen, doubtless eagerly discussing the great events overhanging San Juan, with an American army landed on Porto Rico soil—for by this time the dreadful news had come of Santiago's fall and the total destruction of Cervera's fleet, so that Spanish respect for Yankee valor was rising fast—first Dewey, then Sampson and last of all Shafter, to be followed by Miles. [197]

Owen was now but three paces behind the couple, and could almost hear what they said, though their voices were exceedingly low.

His former diagnosis of the case was strengthened by a closer survey—in height, and figure Julio's companion was exactly a counterpart of Georgia—add to this the peculiar little individualities such as usually mark a woman's personality and the fact that this man had once before come between them, what fault could be found with Roderic for suspecting? [198]

Well, the time had come for action.

That miserable gauze had baffled him long enough, and he was determined to know the worst,

Julio to the contrary.

Before the Spaniard could guess what was in the wind Roderic had darted to the side of the girl, while his eager hand reached out and seized upon her veil in a ruthless grasp.

He heard her give a little scream as though terrorized at his boorish act.

For this Owen, being chivalrous by nature of the blood that had descended from Irish kings, hated himself most earnestly—nevertheless this feeling did not prevent him from following out the design that actuated his movements, even as it had become a very part of his existence.

Though the fate of nations hung in the balance, yes, even should his own life pay the penalty for his rashness—and this is by all odds the highest stake a man can play—he was resolved to settle this question once for all.

So he snatched away the veil.

He no longer breathed—in that dread moment when his hopes of a whole future hung in the balance he seemed actually to have been changed into stone.

So Lot's wife must have been petrified as she turned to look back at the burning city.

When Roderic's eyes fell upon the face that had been concealed by the veil they discovered rare beauty that was now stamped with alarm, although some show of spirit flashed from the great midnight eyes as indignation struggled with maidenly fear. [199]

But, praise be to Heaven, the girl though so beautiful as to vie with his Georgia, was a stranger!

His demon was laid!

For that at least, thanks.

And now the consequences of his daring act must be boldly met.

Apologies, however profuse, do not count for much with hot blooded Spaniards, with whom an insult demands a blow.

Knowing this Roderic fully counted on prompt action on the part of the *ex toreador*.

Julio had met the rush of many a maddened bull in the arena, and could himself do a little of that same when the occasion arose.

He was naturally a trifle confused by the unexpected move on Roderic's part, and this delay, short though it was, gave the other a chance to pull himself together, to put the girl out of his mind altogether and face Julio.

The latter was trembling with fury, and thus far weakened his cause just when he needed all coolness and a clear vision.

He rattled out a shower of expletives, each one of which was as hot as a live coal; but even this did not appear to annihilate his enemy.

Julio had not been entirely idle while thus giving vent to his spleen—the glint of steel in his hand told Owen that he had snatched out a ready dagger, possibly concealed in his voluminous scarlet sash, and was ready to sheathe it in the bosom of the unknown who had thrown down the gauntlet.

Roderic saw the point, and had already gone him one better, since he held a blade more than a match for Julio's dagger, and moreover, knew how to handle it like a juggler of India. [200]

"Senor, it was a mistake—I am ready to make ample apologies or fight—just as you decide," he said in Spanish.

The wolf would not be appeased by this sop.

He demanded blood.

It had been too grievous an insult to be forgiven, and besides, what business has any self-respecting Spaniard to forgive anyhow?

So Julio set out for war.

When any man on earth seeks a disturbance, and selects an American citizen for the object of his assault, he usually gets all he desires, and very frequently good measure, pressed down and running over.

So Julio, the pet dancer and one time idol of the San Juan bull ring, brushing his female companion aside almost rudely, flung himself upon the stranger with the ferocity of a panther, doubtless resolved to make him pay for his audacity with his life.

## CHAPTER XIX. BY WAY OF THE BALCONY.

[201]

Julio had doubtless made other calculations during his life, only to find them turn out Dead Sea fruit.

In this case his confidence was on a par with the natural ferocity of his disposition, but as frequently happens, he overshot the mark.

Roderic met his assault and went him one better—he turned the Spaniard's eager blade aside with the quick movement of one to the manner born.

No doubt Julio was surprised, but he never let anything interfere with business.

A second rush, another rebuff.

This was growing monotonous—really, it began to look as though the unknown cavalier might be playing with him.

Nothing could arouse the devil in a Spanish heart quicker than this suspicion.

Humiliation is to the proud don worse than any other ill save death—relieve him from this indignity and you can have all else.

So Julio, instead of taking warning from the ease with which his assaults were turned aside, instead of calling upon his patron saint for protection should this master of the steel turn the tables and begin to assail him, only swore the harder and went recklessly into the push.

Their little imbroglio had by this time attracted considerable attention.

Men called out to one another and came hurrying pell mell to the scene—fond of cock fights and the meeting of bull and *toreadors* in the arena, these fellows hailed a street brawl as a special dispensation of Providence on their behalf.

[202]

Already a ring was forming, a ring composed of dark visaged men, some Spanish soldiers, others natives of the noble city of San Juan, but all desirous of observing the exciting drama that was being played as if especially for their particular benefit.

All of which was bad for Roderic.

No matter what measure of success followed his engagement with Julio, he was apt to find it a serious matter to escape an encounter with these hangers on, whose sympathies seemed to be with the dancer, judging from the way in which his name was coupled with cries of direct encouragement.

These same bravos urged Julio to make a third vicious attack where prudence might have suggested that he cover his weakness by falling back on the defense.

Roderic thought the farce had gone far enough—he was desirous of leaving the locality ere it became too hot for a man of his description; and besides, there was at least a small chance that this impassioned athlete who struck out so blindly, regardless of his own uncovered condition, might inflict an accidental wound.

So he locked horns with the Spaniard and tripped him up.

Julio never knew how it was done, for he was a pigmy in the hands of a master.

He felt some tremendous power seize upon his person so that he was borne irresistibly backward; at the same time a sudden acute thrill of agony in his right wrist caused him to drop his knife as though it had been scorching his fingers.

[203]

"Senor Julio," said the voice in his ear, "again I say it was all a mistake—again I apologize for my hasty action. You have defended your honor as became a true son of Spain! There is no need of our seeking each other's life. I am satisfied that I have met a brave man. Let us separate in peace."

This was said with such fervor as became a loyal subject of young Alphonso—it carried such a subtle vein of flattery in the adroit words that even the fiery son of Mars Julio was proving himself to be might have been mollified, only that a discovery flashed upon him at this critical juncture.

It was singular enough that he should set his eyes upon an odd looking seal ring worn by his late antagonist, and at this particular moment too of all times.

Julio had never forgotten that ring—indeed, he had carried a rough impression of it upon his cuticle for a week or more, as a gentle reminder of Roderic's ability as a boxer, for it seems that the two rivals had indeed once come to blows in those days of old, though separated quickly by mutual friends.

However, such an impression is apt to be lasting—Julio had seen the queer device of that signet ring many times in his dreams, so that its unexpected appearance just now and here was a rude shock.

Roderic saw the stare and while at first he could not comprehend its import, when he too cast his eyes upon his hand he remembered.

This was worse than he had expected—his identity known to Julio what would prevent the hasty tempered Spaniard, who still owed him a grudge for the blow received long ago, from publicly announcing his name to the soldiers, who would pounce upon him like mad dogs. [204]

He had expected at the worst to be treated as a Spaniard—now the bubble had burst.

Was it to be flight?

Involuntarily he looked around him—the circle had doubled, aye, even trebled, and to break through such a compact mass would require the battering powers of a giant.

What then?

Must he draw his revolver and simply sell his life as dearly as possible?

It may be sweet to die for one's country, but most men much prefer to live, especially when health and wealth and honor are their inheritance by right of birth.

Roderic never felt less like giving up the ghost in all his life than he did just then.

He had been far down below zero up to the moment when he discovered that it was not Georgia who accompanied Julio, and then of a sudden his spirits took a bound that sent them away above fever heat; life assumed a rosy hue, and happiness came again within his grasp.

A man of remarkable resources in emergencies, Roderic felt no dismay paralyze his limbs when he discovered how next to impossible it was that he make his escape through the crowd.

There were other methods.

He had made it a rule in life never to depend wholly upon one source of income—to avoid the mistake of putting all his eggs in one basket.

Julio's scattered wits came back.

He even smiled, but there was a devil in that smirk; a gleam in his eyes that told of gloating triumph.

He had been easily beaten in the little game of the knife, but there were still trump cards up his sleeve—he laughed loudest who laughed last, and the time had come for him to settle that long standing debt—the scar of that wound had burned like wild fire every time he looked at it, but it would cease to cry out for satisfaction after this August night. [205]

"Aha! Senor Owen, 'tis thus we meet again. You thought this lady was your sweet Georgia—you took your life in your hands when you set out to discover the truth. Again you have crossed my path—this time it is your last. I shall turn to these brave soldiers of Spain and tell them who you are. They will be very affectionate Senor Owen, they will love you so well that every mother's son will want a portion of your precious body to remember this night by. Have you anything to say before I give the word?"

Roderic remembered how the judge when about to pass sentence of death used words like this.

He was mute—it would avail nothing after all, and he did not intend the Spaniard should have the satisfaction of hearing him plead.

This trouble had come upon him through his own stupidity—the burning in his chest, the unjust suspicions that found lodgment in his mind urged him to take drastic measures in order to learn the truth; and now that he had found out just what it all meant he should not complain if it came hard.

"Ho! he has lost his tongue—or his knowledge of the noble Spanish language fails him. *Por Dios!* we shall see how he can be made to lift up his voice, to cry like a dog, to squeal like the pig he is, to beg for mercy. Now Senor Hero of the Knife, take notice that it is I, Julio, the Maccarena dancer and bull fighter who contemptuously tosses you to the tender mercies of these gentlemen as I would a yellow cur." [206]

He turned to bawl his intelligence to the gaping crowd, to proclaim the seeming dark faced stranger a wolf in sheep's clothing, one of the hated Yengees who were coming to destroy everything.

Before he could burst out with his startling tale however, the girl who had accompanied him took a sudden part in the drama, springing forward and catching hold of his arm as she cried:

"You speak of Senor Owen, of Georgia—and a light breaks in upon my mind. Julio, you *must* not go further—this man should be safe from your malice. He has not injured me—see, because of Leon I forgive him—I even extend him my hand. Why not, when he loves the sister and my heart belongs to the brother?"

Then Roderic's turn came to be amazed, for these words informed him of a strange fact—he remembered the story Georgia had told him of her brother, and how Leon had been saved by the daughter of the Spanish governor in charge of Morro Castle—fate had brought him face to face with that devoted girl, and through her might he not learn where Leon could be found?

Julio was the only obstacle, and Julio, having been several times thwarted in his designs for a personal vengeance upon this man who was so closely associated with his past could not be easily placated.

A pretty woman might have considerable influence over him under ordinary conditions, but just now he wanted blood and was bound to have his desires fulfilled.

Accordingly he brushed the girl aside in an ugly manner that betrayed his nasty temper—brushed her away as carelessly as one might dispose of a fly that persisted in annoying the early morning nap of a sybarite. [207]

Then he gave tongue, denouncing the other in unmeasured terms as a Yankee spy come to wreck their forts, to betray the city, to do anything and everything that was dreadful in the eyes of good loyal Spaniards.

It made quite a striking scene, with the picturesque Julio in his dashing garb thus violently shouting his private opinion of Yankees in general and the one before them in particular, while the beautiful daughter of Morro's governor was clinging to his gesticulating arm and endeavoring to overcome his mad language, the crowd meanwhile beginning to shout answering cries that announced their quick grasp of the situation.

Roderic would not soon forget that picture, if he lived through the adventure.

Again he owed much to that love of fair play predominating in the breast of gentle woman.

It had however, gone beyond any power on her part to prevent an explosion.

If he escaped with a whole skin it must be through his own exertions.

Fortunately he was able to grasp the situation and bring order out of seeming chaos.

The one sweeping glance which he had taken around had told him of an avenue where a desperate man could find a chance.

As in many parts of San Juan the houses in this narrow *calle* were rich in the possession of balconies—Spaniards would be lost without some such addition to their homes, for the women live half of the time upon these overhanging galleries.

The sound of angry voices in the street had brought a number of people out, and they were curious spectators of what followed. [208]

Chance, or Providence, as you will, had taken Roderic directly underneath one of these balconies.

By raising his hands above his head he could just touch it.

To an agile man it was a small matter to give an upward leap and secure a firm grasp above; nor did he consider it any extraordinary feat to draw himself over the railing after the manner of an athlete.

Cries of astonishment announced that his intention had become known to the crowd, and almost paralyzed them.

Mingled with these exclamations were shouts of rage from those more disposed to action.

Julio, being the nearest was the first to make a spring for the swaying body of the Yankee, but miscalculating the pendulum movement of his body he was just in time to receive the full impetus of his forward swing.

As a consequence he took a sudden tumble, bringing up in the arms of the nearest soldiers.

Roderic had good intentions, and was not to be thwarted by such minor disturbances.

This must be looked upon only as an incident, one of those petty affairs which, when grasped in the general run of events are to be throttled and cast aside.

He continued his movement as unconcernedly as though it were a private instead of a public exhibition, which feature was one of the strongest points in Owen's general make up.

Several of the soldiers seemed to have some common sense about them, or at least found inspiration in the action led by Julio, for they too made a forward movement, intending to clutch hold of Roderic's swaying body ere he could snatch it out of their reach. [209]

That they were unsuccessful in this endeavor was not so much their fault as their misfortune, since no one could doubt the hearty enthusiasm with which they meant to pull the Yankee's leg, an undertaking in general at which Spanish regulars are usually proficient, especially those who have attained officer's rank.

The girl came between them and their intended victim—she had saved one Yankee from barbarous treatment at the hands of her people, and having thus entered the field as a champion of the oppressed, considered that she might as well continue her labors.

Of course she could not effectually bar the enthusiastic rush of the military forces, but for a few seconds she served as an obstacle to their forward movement, and even that brief time was enough for Roderic.

He completed his deal.

There was at least some satisfaction in the knowledge that he stood temporarily out of the reach of those who would destroy him.

A partial success brings with it new difficulties, new problems to be solved, and one must be always ready to grapple with the forces that are thrown to the front.

Owen did not consider that he had taken more than the first step toward safety.

The wolves were just below, clamoring for his blood, for his sudden flight had crystalized the various shouts into one mad outburst of rage.

So far as he knew there was nothing to prevent some of them from copying his example; he

judged there must be athletes enough in the throng for this business.

It was not his purpose to remain there upon the balcony, and meet all comers in a Greco-Roman [210] wrestle for the mastery.

He had started to escape, and it were useless lingering longer in view of the rapidly growing throng.

One way was open to him, through the house to which the balcony was attached.



## CHAPTER XX.

### A RENDEZVOUS AT THE TOBACCONIST'S.

[211]

Some men have a passion for the uncertainties of chance—they delight in wagering all they possess in the shape of filthy lucre on the turn of a die.

Doubtless such inveterate gamblers might have found some satisfaction in Roderic's position when, upon turning from the friendly balcony he pitched himself and his fortunes through the open window of the house.

All was uncertainty before him, and the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter would have found it extremely difficult to declare just what turn fortune's wheel was about to take for him.

Roderic himself experienced no pleasure in this groping in the dark, and would have been much better satisfied could he have known just what lay before him.

However, there be times when one must accept philosophically whatever favors the Fates choose to toss us as they go swinging past—times when action is the only resource left, and even at that one needs be wide awake in order to take advantage of the opportunity.

When he burst into the apartment Roderic heard a feminine shriek, but his only thought was a door of some sort that would give him egress.

Fortunately he found this, more through good luck than anything else.

It brought him to a hall.

Few though the seconds had been since his departure from the balcony, he could already hear the lusty blows that were being delivered upon the door of the house, which, unless of far better material than the average doors in San Juan must speedily succumb before the vigorous assault. [212]

This meant that should he descend to the lower strata in search of an outlet by way of court or garden or rear exit of some sort he might be just in time to be overwhelmed by the inflowing tide of eager hustling citizens and soldiers.

At the same time it would never do to stand still and lose what little advantage he had gained.

Perhaps even now some of his enemies were clambering up to the balcony, since he had shown them the way.

Roderic had at least retarded pursuit from that quarter by closing the door after quitting the apartment from whence the dismal shrieks sounded in a high pitched female voice, and the others might not prove so successful in finding the opening as he had been.

He knew the peculiarities of Spanish houses.

In all probability there was some means of reaching the roof, though he hardly expected to find an *azotea* with its flowers and place for lounging, as in the better class of more isolated dwellings.

Thus it came to pass that Roderic found himself crawling through an opening at the top of a ladder, and thus reaching the outer air.

His enemies were giving tongue with all the eagerness of a pack of hounds, and the quick and thrilling pulsation of blows announced that as yet the stubborn door had failed to yield before their vigorous assault.

Just then, however, a crash followed by a chorus of whoops and much laughter declared that success had finally rewarded their efforts.

Immediately the house would be swarming with the seekers after Yankee blood—like rats they would dart hither and thither, leaving no stone unturned in their eagerness to find that which was lost. [213]

Roderic gave them his blessing.

He had surveyed the situation and laid out his plan of action like a wise general.

It was necessary that he crawl over a number of roofs before he could think of endeavoring to touch ground again.

This he managed to accomplish without discovery from the street, and on the whole he had reason to be thankful that no curious eyes had fastened upon him from neighboring buildings.

Meanwhile the searchers were having a merry time of it in the house that had been made the object of their assault—it sounded as if Bedlam had broken loose in that quarter, and the shrieks of the terrorized maiden lady formed but a small proportion of the chorus that arose.

Roderic had found his opportunity to leave the roof and reach a friendly deserted balcony.

From this to the ground was but a small undertaking, and he managed to accomplish it with the utmost ease.

Thus triumph had followed his line of action.

He was now free to return to the plaza or seek the humble abode of his friend, under the roof of which he could rest in peace.

This should apparently have been his first thought, but his action indicated that it was far removed from his mind.

Not that he was in such a reckless mood as to invite a fresh attack from these desperadoes of the San Juan streets—Roderic had simply become impressed with a bright idea and was bent upon carrying it out. [214]

He had not forgotten that a wonderful fortune placed him in communication with the very girl whom he desired to meet—the only one who could tell him where to find Leon de Brabant, because she had fled with him and was in all probability his wife.

Such a golden opportunity should not be neglected.

Fortune had been kind but the same chance might not occur again.

To have a few words with her, to appoint a place of future meeting, was the magnet that held Owen to the spot even when ordinary discretion should have demanded that he leave the dangerous neighborhood post haste.

It would not be the first time on record that a charming woman's presence has nailed a man to danger's cross, and so long as the world lasts will the story be repeated.

He did not believe there was much chance of his identity being discovered, especially if he could avoid the keen eye of that same Julio who had penetrated his disguise before.

In appearance he did not differ to any material extent from the majority of those to be seen in the streets of San Juan.

Besides, all attention was at present centred on the luckless dwelling that was being overhauled by a miscellaneous assortment of soldiers and civilians. Some of these enthusiasts had even clambered out upon the roof and were eagerly searching for the fugitive in that quarter.

Wise men have before this time been known to lock the stable door after the horse was stolen.

Roderic was now among those who stood in the calle and chattering like a collection of magpies, kept their regards fastened upon the wretched house whose balcony had tempted the Yankee and thus precipitated trouble. [215]

His one thought of course, was the girl—had she flitted from the spot because the clamor had alarmed her soul?

Perhaps she was not so unfamiliar with scenes of confusion, since her father had been the governor of famous old Morro Castle, under the walls of which many a remarkable event has occurred since the days of the Virginius affair, when American filibusters were shot down by order of the Spanish authorities.

At any rate she was still there, watching the house where so much clamor arose, twisting and untwisting her little hands in nervous anxiety.

Thanks to Roderic's vandal hand her pretty face was no longer screened by a veil, and more than one rough soldier drank in the outlines of her charming features with avidity.

She was evidently deeply concerned in the outcome of the search.

Roderic should feel flattered at this evidence of approval from so sincere a source.

It was no time, however, to indulge in any foolish speculations, or allow his masculine vanity a chance to arise.

Julio was still on deck, and since his eyesight was apparently as sound as ever, despite his rough treatment at the hands of the Yankee, it would be a wretched mistake to again come under his withering observation, for on this occasion no friendly balcony might offer him an asylum from the outstretched hands of the bolero dancer's excited allies.

So Roderic approached the spot where stood the girl—he must exchange words with her, no matter what the risk or the consequences—at least it was necessary that some rendezvous be appointed where he could engage her more fully in conversation. [216]

With this set object in view he drew near, and watching his opportunity whispered:

"Senorita—Leon's sister—turn this way!"

She must have heard him, for she immediately forgot to watch the house that was being searched, and fastened her eyes on him.

Roderic, fearing lest she might by means of some unwise exclamation draw Julio's attention to him, had a finger on his lips, indicating caution.

He saw her start and knew she immediately suspected his identity.

Time was most valuable, and it was utterly out of the question for him to learn what he desired while laboring under such serious disadvantages.

Besides, it was folly to run any more risk than was absolutely necessary, and with such a good hater as the dashing *bolero* dancer only three yards away, every second he remained there increased his danger.

At any rate he could not blame Leon for falling in love with such a charming creature as the governor's daughter—Roderic considered himself a fair judge of beauty, even if he were not a connoisseur, and he saw a vision of loveliness before him that might easily have disturbed the sternest old anchorite.

Another thing—he discovered traces of distinct resemblance between this girl and the handsome Julio, so that a suspicion as to their possible relationship flashed into his mind.

"Never mind how I escaped—I am here to speak to you. My object in entering this city is to find Leon—you must take me to him—it is the price of my happiness with Georgia—when and where can I see you again—appoint a *rendezvous*, I pray you." [217]

This is what he said hastily almost in her pretty ear—she was quick of comprehension, and by the look upon her face he knew she had grasped the situation.

One glance she shot toward Julio, who just at the moment seemed deeply engrossed with the antics of the men who were running over the roofs like a lot of monkeys.

Roderic pressed even closer, eager to hear what she might say, since it concerned his future state as connected with Georgia.

"At Senor Pedro Sanchez the tobacconist, on the Grand Plaza—at eight o'clock—to-morrow—*Madre de Dios* protect you, senor! Do not longer delay!"

It was enough.

He knew he could find the place and keep the appointment. Her warning was well timed too, for just as he turned away Julio came to her side.

It was a rare piece of good fortune that had kept him away thus long.

Julio seemed uneasy and suspicious—he even glanced sharply at every one near by as though some inward monitor warned him he was being outgeneraled.

The bystanders were to all appearances quite innocent of wrong intentions, and he could not run after the man who walked away so composedly, demanding that he then and there give an account of himself—those in whose veins bounds the hot blood of Spain stand no such peremptory challenges as that, and the answer just as likely as not would be the drawn arm, the glint of polished steel, the thud of a *cuchillo* striking home—ugh! he wanted not of that sort. [218]

Oh! yes, Julio knew all about this, for his education while neglected in some other particulars was quite up to date when it came to the stir and danger of war—he had been through many a little engagement himself during his checkered career, and knew just what he would do under similar conditions.

Wherefore his exceeding caution.

It was the development of this trait that had given Julio so long a lease on life in spite of his many entanglements.

Roderic now made it his business to quit the stirring locality.

Little he cared to what lengths the mob went in their vigorous search—they could tear the old town wide open; but he had good reason to doubt whether they would receive any reward, since it was himself they sought, and he had high hopes of continuing to avoid their clutches.

The morning would find him on the plaza, with his eyes fastened upon the tobacconist's jaunty little shop—did he not know it well, for had he not many a time in the past loitered in that same queer establishment, selecting prime weeds from Senor Pedro's carefully arranged stock, and discussing the affairs of the universe with the white bearded philosopher who guided the destinies of the *rendezvous* where men met and formed plans and sought advice.

Ah! that was in the good days of long ago, before San Juan had heard the deep growl of hostile Yankee guns, before it was a capital offense to be known as an American in Porto Rico—halcyon days when Love's brush painted all around him a rosy hue, when life's horizon knew no cloud.

Since then he had suffered much, but thank heaven it seemed as though the old state was about to once more come upon him, and gold is doubly precious when refined by fire. [219]

The clamor and confusion was left behind as he passed along various narrow streets, heading once again toward the Plaza Cristobal Colon.

Minor things attracted him as in the happy past when he knew no care—he even stopped where the sound of guitars announced some entertainment under a canvas shelter, and found his old acquaintances the gypsies in their weird dance, dark skinned sons and daughters of the warm Sierra Morena valleys.

Other scenes, common enough in this section of the capital, drew his attention, and he found a peculiar joy in watching two humble lovers, he with his sturdy arm about the maiden's waist, strolling along just beyond.

Well satisfied with what had come to pass on this particular night Roderic reached the cottage home of his Cuban friend, and giving the signal knock was admitted.

Wearied in body yet with a mind relieved from all care he sought and found rest in sleep.

With the coming of morning he was astir.

Every one rises early in San Juan, for there is life and vigor in the bracing air, a tonic that becomes a necessity to these people who live in a semi-tropical region that has never known frost, and where midday is stifling.

Roderic had more than ordinary reasons for rising early on this morning—one can look with considerable pleasure upon that day whose dawn promises to usher in the greatest blessing on

earth for him, and this was the extent of his hopes in connection with the governor's daughter who had saved Leon.

When he issued forth he found that an unusual stir pervaded the town.

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Some military movement was on the *tapis*, and he presumed that it could only be one of considerable importance, judging from the bustle that pervaded even this portion of the town.

Maneuvers were usually confined to those sections where the streets were wider and a better class of citizens could enjoy the brilliant spectacle; for no soldiers like appreciation more than those of Spain.

Curiosity might have led Roderic to look into this matter a little more deeply, but just at present he had his time well occupied, and besides, it mattered very little to General Miles what the soldier garrison of San Juan did, since they were doomed to capture at no distant day, squirm and struggle as they pleased.

Breakfast first, and this he secured at a cafe where many men had gathered to drink their coffee and talk over the exciting events about to transpire in the Antilles. They had no hesitation in expressing sympathy with the American arms for this was not Cuba—even the Spanish soldiers in Porto Rico had a leaning toward the Yankees—there was far less bitterness shown than in Havana, for the people were more independent. The sensation of liberty was in the air, and men seemed to feel the new strength that was soon to make them a section of the Western giant—they had known for some time what Destiny had in store for Porto Rico, and patiently awaited the glorious dawn of that blessed day, instead of the useless struggles of years, that would sap their powers, and blight their beloved land, even as Cuba had been, with the incendiary's torch and the bushwhacker's rifle.

The day for their reward was coming, and once the stars and stripes had been planted on Spain's colony's sacred soil, it was there to stay, whether that land be Cuba, Porto Rico, the Ladrões or the far away Philippines.

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It was now near the hour when he had agreed to meet the girl, so Roderic made his way toward the plaza. While this place lacked much of the charm that is always associated with myriads of lights, moving gayly dressed throngs and stirring open air concerts, it was full of people about this hour of the day since the summer sun would chase people indoors long before noon.

He came down in the quarter where the quaint little shop of the tobacconist was to be found, and kept his eyes eagerly on the alert for a figure that would, as he remembered, remind him of Georgia's.

## CHAPTER XXI. THE MONSTER COMES AGAIN.

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At first Roderic only met with disappointment, for while people were continually passing, and some even went in and out of Senor Pedro's little shop, none upon whom his observation fell seemed to bear any resemblance to the one for whom he sought.

This suspense only increased his eagerness.

No doubt it would have been stronger had he expected to meet Georgia; but his business on this August morning was closely connected with her after all, since in the governor's daughter he saw, not a beautiful girl who had fascinated him but a messenger bringing hopes of a bright future.

For once Roderic was unconscious of the fact that he seemed to be an object of deep interest to some member of the fair sex seated on a balcony not far away.

She had her face partially concealed by the filmy lace so thoroughly a part of a Spanish woman's toilet, and this she manipulated in such a way that even a dear friend passing by might never have suspected her identity.

Something about Roderic appeared to have attracted her attention—perhaps it was the fact of his haunting that immediate vicinity, perhaps his manly showing that appealed to her heart, it might even be possible that she believed she knew him.

Many opportunities were given for a careful examination of his walk and carriage, and the more this unknown senorita looked the deeper grew her interest until at last she exclaimed softly, yet with no little rapture:

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"*Madre de Dios!* it is no other than he—there cannot be two men so fashioned by Heaven, so perfect in figure, so brave in movement, so altogether charming; but what does he seek—what the object of his tramp back and forward?"

Evidently milady of the balcony entertained the warmest affection for the party whose identity she thought she had discovered under Roderic's disguise.

Her curiosity being aroused she began to cast about for some object that would explain this sentinel tramp of the man on the plaza.

It was not long before she decided that his interest was wholly taken up with the little shop of the plaza tobacconist.

Now doubtless the quaint establishment of Senor Pedro was a gem in its way, and worthy of considerable notice—she chanced to know it well and that many lovers were wont to designate it as a point near which they appointed a rendezvous—indeed, certain tender memories even made her gentle bosom heave, and a sigh escaped her lips as she looked again at the shop.

But there must be some other reason why this man of the striking figure, and walk so energetic, so different from the usual run of Spaniard or native Porto Rican should haunt the vicinity.

"Ah! he expects some one—he has friends in San Juan he said—it is a rendezvous for business. How little does he dream that eyes filled with tender love are on him. I do not think I can much longer refrain from letting him know—our old signal, ah! how he would hasten thither did I but dare to give it. The temptation is irresistible. *Carramba!* I love him so, why should I resist since he is mine. How he will turn and look around, and when I make one beckoning movement, ah, me, with the speed of love he will fly to me. All else is forgotten—my hungry heart clamors for the sound of his voice, which is life and light to me. Yes, I will cast prudence to the winds—the spell of his presence is over me—to feel the warm clasp of his hand, to hear his voice that has haunted my dreams tell me again how he loves only me—ah, that will be Heaven on earth. And to think I can enter Paradise just by one little bird whistle—ah! what delightful suspense while I linger and anticipate; but it is cruelty to him I love. So then, the signal that has often in the past called him to my side."

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It chanced, however, that whatever this signal may have been she did not make it just then.

On the contrary, bending forward she watched the man on the plaza with new interest, a different feeling having crept like an icy hand into her heart.

There was reason.

Roderic's slow saunter had become a quick walk, and in his whole attitude could be seen an eagerness that animated his frame—in a word he had become electrified.

No signal had been given, but his eyes had fallen upon a veiled female figure that came along the plaza.

They would meet in front of Senor Pedro's establishment, just as scores of couples had met time without mind.

This fact appeared to stamp itself upon the mind of the looker on—it was apparently one of the first things she thought of.

"The same place that was so sacred to me, and he goes to greet another there. Am I awake or is this some terrible dream. See, they meet, he holds out his hand—how eagerly he takes hers and

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raises it to his lips. And she—I cannot see her face, but what is this—so like in figure in her walk—surely my soul remains here on the balcony while my human form has gone to meet its king. And yet—and yet, how can it be so? Would to Heaven she might but remove her veil if but for one moment that I might see whether I dream or really see him with another. Could she have heard my wish—she raises her hand, she brushes aside the veil as though he but had to ask the favor. Be still, treacherous, sorely wounded heart. What beauty, what ravishing charms be in that face. And how I could hate it if, perdition take the thought, it has come between *us!*"

All desire to give the signal had now fled.

She simply crouched there in the balcony with a bruised heart, smothering her groans, and watched the couple sauntering about the plaza.

Roderic, poor fellow, utterly unconscious of the fact that he was giving pain to a heart that yearned for him, continued to promenade with the governor's daughter.

There were others on the plaza, and the couple attracted no particular attention save from this one interested quarter.

Of course he was deeply interested in what his companion was saying.

It had a very intimate association with the happy and glorious future he had mapped out for himself and the girl he loved.

Perhaps his manner appeared devoted according to the film that jealousy cast upon the eyes of she who watched from above.

But surely Roderic did not mean it to be so.

The governor's daughter came to him as a messenger, an angel bearing good news, and as a gentleman how could he be other than attentive—who could be a boor when his companion was a pretty woman? [226]

Alas! he little suspected how in the eager effort to further the cause of his happiness he was heaping up coals of fire with which to inflict torture upon himself and she whom he loved.

When all had been told and arrangements made for a future meeting, the girl left him.

Roderic had imbibed some of the courtly ways of these people, and it was not at all strange that he should again raise the hand she gave him to his lips.

The action however, might be misconstrued.

He had heard much that interested him, and besides found desperate work cut out ahead, if he hoped to save Leon, who was in deadly danger.

Hence, when once more alone he thought to indulge in a cigar so that he might consider the whole case, and form plans for the immediate future. To those who are accustomed to the solace of a weed the necessity of this step can be understood and needs no apology.

Roderic, having a glorious destiny opening before him, and being in the possession of unbounded health and strength, enjoyed the first part of that cigar immensely.

He never knew what the balance was like.

For a shock came upon him, a shock that was entirely unexpected, and which left him so stunned that a Wheeling stogie would have appeared as a prime Havana in his estimation.

What more could be said?

As he turned in his walk he suddenly discovered a veiled figure approaching—walk and figure declared that it could be no other than the governor's daughter—she had forgotten something and had returned to tell him. [227]

Roderic's step quickened as he hastened to meet her now faltering advance.

Naturally enough he smiled pleasantly—why not, under such conditions?

Alas! that one's motives may be misconstrued—that a fever raging in the heart may distort even the most common-place action.

"Ah! you have relented—you will not tear yourself away so soon—you have thought of something else that may have an importance bearing upon our plans—plans that if properly carried out mean happiness for both of us. Yes, I rejoice to see you return, as I was in something of a dilemma and perhaps you can help me out."

He had extended his hand impulsively but she refused to see it.

"You are not angry, *senorita*—I have not offended you in any way, I trust: I should never forgive myself if it were so," he said.

Perhaps the anxiety in his tone was strong—at any rate she seemed to tremble with half suppressed emotion and shrank back.

Roderic became more impressed and concerned.

"You do not speak—you *are* offended, clown that I am to have said or done something unwittingly that has hurt your feelings. *Senorita*, pray pardon me—restore me to your favor, I beg."

While he was thus apologizing, for what he himself did not have the least idea, Roderic could not refrain from thoughts of an altogether different nature, and which must have run something in this vein:

"Now bless my soul if I know what to do in such a case. Ten minutes ago she left me full of spirits and as warmly disposed as one could wish—now she returns and deigns not to even accept my hand. Duse take it, women are all alike, mysteries to me. What have I done in the interim—lighted a cigar and wrapped myself up in thought. It's a good enough cigar, too," casting a dubious glance at the weed as if some vague and monstrous suspicion had arisen in his mind that the inoffensive weed might have something to do with the matter. [228]

Then light broke in upon him—it came from her.

"I do not speak, you say—it is because I am overcome with surprise, mortification, despair—because I have learned that you have deceived me, that you are a traitor!" came from under the veil.

Roderic was almost paralyzed at first.

The figure, the walk might be that of the governor's daughter, but the voice was no other than Georgia's.

Over his face flashed a look of joy, for his heart leaped to meet its mistress.

"Georgia—is it you—I thought, I believed—"

She stopped his stammering exclamations of mingled delight and explanation.

"I do not care to hear what you would say, Senor Owen. After this day, this hour, we must meet as strangers," she said, with difficulty controlling her emotion.

"This is cruel—you cannot mean it, when I am risking my life here in your cause. You say that but to prove me, Georgia."

"I mean every word of it. Think not I have no eyes, Senor Owen—I have seen all. Doubtless your risk has been considerably ameliorated by the pleasant company you are forced to seek."

Then he knew what she meant. [229]

The shoe was on the other foot—it had come her turn to show jealousy.

"Georgia, I can explain everything—"

"I refuse to listen, knowing how weak I should be under the sound of your voice."

"I swear you wrong me."

"Senor, I saw everything—you might tell me a wonderful tale, but I could never forget."

"Georgia, for the last time I implore you to give me a hearing—that girl—"

"Stop, do not dare to mention her to me, sir. I refuse to hear even her name."

She had thrown back her veil, showing her indignant face, her blazing midnight eyes and Roderic, who had never yet seen her in this mood was appalled.

"Since you command it I shall say no more. Once I condemned you unheard and God knows I paid dearly for the error. Now, with even less reason you have accused me, and refuse to let me explain. Very good, senorita, I too can be proud—it must be you who bridges over this abyss if it is ever accomplished. Meanwhile I shall go my way and find Leon, thanks to the lady you have so bitterly condemned."

He turned with a bow and left her there.

Roderic was cut to the quick to think that she could suspect him of being unfaithful after all he had given up for her sake.

It might seem as though he would have great patience with one whom he loved and who was passing through the same bitter error that had once engulfed him.

Alas! human nature is not so constituted.

His pride was touched and he believed he had gone far enough to explain.

Ten words, had she allowed him to say them, would have removed the cause for doubt and suspicion; but as imperiously as a young queen, she had forbidden him to speak, and therefore like a lamb led to the altar he would not open his mouth again to plead his cause. [230]

The hour would come, when Leon was restored to her, and she saw in his devoted wife the lovely woman whose association with Roderic had so aroused her jealousy—that hour would witness his triumph—it would balance the account and thus they could start afresh.

So Roderic indulged in philosophical reflections to bolster up his courage.

But he smoked no more that morning.

Georgia had stood there where he had left her as though incapable of action—once she stretched out a hand after his retreating form, and a low cry bubbled from her lips, now hidden by the veil; but by no movement or outcry did she attempt to recall him.

"It is better that I should die than live to be deceived. He would explain, but how could my eyes deceive me? And she was so beautiful, when he kissed her hand. Oh! it was cruel, and he, my Roderic is like all men, a perfidious monster. I may not forget him but I shall try to learn to *hate* him."

Evidently she believed she had a big contract on hand. Then her better nature, urged by the love that nestled in her heart, had an inning.

"He kissed her hand—true, yet since when has that become a crime that men should be condemned because of it? Last night did not General Parrado raise my hand to his lips respectfully. I wonder whether he was pilloried for it this morning by the Lady who Must be Obeyed. What did he say—"find Leon, thanks to the lady you have so bitterly condemned." Have I done wrong—is he still true? Oh! weak heart, how you cling to your idol—oh! yearning soul, with what power may I tear your clinging tendrils away from the oak around which they have grown? It will be death to the vine—death to poor wretched me."

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She returned slowly to the house, hoping that Roderic would repent his rash resolve and return to give her another chance.

But alas, he came not, for the wound was too fresh, and the salt that had been rubbed into it smarted too fiercely.

Upon the balcony Georgia spent all of the day save the hours for *siesta*—she watched eagerly those who went up and down the plaza, yet no sign came from the one beloved.

By degrees the full realization of her desolation came upon her.

"I have chased him from me—with scorn and bitterness have I sent my Roderic away, and he will come no more. Woe is me, wretched Georgia. He swore by the stars, by everything he held sacred, yes, even by the grave of his sainted mother that he loved only me. And I have refused to hear him. He will never seek me again. Night's shades are falling and without his assistance I must venture into the jaws of danger—for Leon's sake. Heaven forgive me and crush my haughty heart because it has made him suffer. Heaven give me a chance to atone for my pride, for the insult put upon him."

And thus lamenting the prettiest girl in all San Juan saw the lights begin to gleam in the island capital.



## CHAPTER XXII. TO THE OLD FORTRESS.

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There was one remarkably good trait about Owen—he had a powerful will, and when he chose could concentrate all his abilities upon a certain subject, to the exclusion of everything else.

It pleased him to nurse his grievances for a time—what badly used biped would not be addicted to the same luxury.

Then, with a mighty upheaval he cast the whole load from him.

The public weal demanded his full attention and private woes must take a back seat.

For the present, therefore, he effaced cruel Georgia from his mind, and resolutely set his shoulder to the wheel.

Roderic was himself again, calm, shrewd and with a contempt for danger that might take him to the border land of reckless endeavor, though he usually knew how to check this in good time to make it a servant rather than a master.

The day had gone.

Alas! he had thought to mark it down with a white cross as one that would take him a long step nearer Elysium; but instead it was to be distinguished by a red mark.

Was there a fatality in his love for Georgia?

Were they doomed never to know happiness?

That was the last uneasy thought that came to him ere he shut the whole scene out of his mind, as a rain squall envelopes the landscape. [233]

It was no ordinary affair which Roderic now took up; at least it promised to afford considerable danger, and would call for a display of energy on his part, of no mean calibre.

He went into it with a grim feeling such as he could not remember experiencing on any previous occasion.

Perhaps this was caused in part by the dead weight upon his mind, for it was singular that he should be placing his life in jeopardy in order to please a girl who had jilted him, cast him aside like a worn-out glove.

It added to the piquancy of the thing, but Roderic could not say he hoped for a repetition.

The governor's daughter had given him strange information about Leon.

This brother of Georgia seemed fated to see the inside of more than one Spanish prison. His experience in Morro Castle, from whence he escaped through the assistance of the girl who had fallen in love with him, one would think must have been quite enough in that line; but he had somehow or other again fallen into the hands of his foes.

Thus it happened that he had been in the San Juan prison, condemned to exile, on the morning of the memorable twelfth of May, when about daybreak Sampson's powerful fleet opened on the forts and were in turn barked at by the bold Spanish gunners, who showed their bravery if they did no damage.

It happened that the prison was probably the most exposed building in the city, lying as it did between the fleet and the pulverine, the gallery of it fronting on the harbor.

Without warning a shell exploded in the wall, and that side of the building became a wreck. [234]

Bricks and *debris* flew in every direction, and all who were in the apartment with Leon found themselves on their backs.

Such a chorus of frightened shouts went up—demoralization reigned supreme.

But Leon, who had not been seriously injured, was quick to see that once again the Providence that seemed to watch over his fortunes had interposed in a miraculous manner to save him—the Yankee shell in its inquisitive search for the most available Spanish property to destroy had torn out almost one side of the prison, and through the gaping aperture freedom beckoned.

So he had crawled out, covered with dust and bearing several wounds where the flying bricks had come in contact with his person.

Two days later he had been again seized, being betrayed by a negro in whom he and his lovely wife had unwisely placed confidence.

From that day on he had been kept in close confinement, and finally again brought to trial. This time conviction was followed with a still more severe penalty—he was doomed to be shot.

Roderic learned the whole story—it would not pay to take time to give the details—one who had sought the governor's daughter's hand and been coldly received had been elevated to a high military position in Porto Rico, and found himself in a way to visit his miserable displeasure upon the man who succeeded where he failed.

Perhaps he hoped to win the widow—Heaven only knows, for some knaves have assurance enough to offer a hand red with a husband's blood to the heart-broken beauty who mourns his

loss.

At any rate this was the situation that demanded Roderic's attention.

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It was serious enough to call for determined effort on his part.

True, he had never as yet met Leon, but somehow a deep interest in the young Porto Rican's fate had taken possession of him—when a man has supped many times with adventure, he experiences a sympathetic feeling for one who had also rubbed up against the hard side of life.

Besides, Leon was *her* brother, and anything that was in the remotest degree connected with Georgia appealed to his chivalrous nature.

Last of all he had promised, aye, taken a solemn vow, that he would find Leon, and this being interpreted meant that should the young man be in a predicament of any sort it would be his business and his pleasure to succor him if such a thing lay in the bounds of human possibility.

Roderic had means of communication abroad.

A cablegram sent from Europe to a certain correspondent in New York would be immediately transmitted to another point in the West Indies, possibly San Domingo, where the message would be put in the form of a letter and sent to an imaginary Spaniard at San Juan.

Thus it happened that when he returned to the humble roof that sheltered him, when evening drew on apace, he found there a well thumbed missive which upon being hastily opened contained this sanguine message:

"Have broken the bank at Monte Carlo. Will sail to join you to-morrow."

Roderic laughed—he could not help it.

Darby had longed for a chance to try some peculiar combination he had hatched up upon the great gambling centre, and this opportunity had appeared a wonderful favor.

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The chance was one in a million, yet it had actually come to pass.

"I've heard the song about the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo, but never dreamed I would in any way be instrumental in sending a representative there who would do that same thing. Good for Darby, lucky fellow. By the way, I wonder does that charming adventuress sail with him—if so the chances are ten to one the fortune he has won will not be in his possession long. Well, it must be some time before he can join me, unless he manages to board some Spanish steamer, taking the guise of a don; and such vessels are exceedingly scarce on the high seas now."

With that he lighted the paper and destroyed every trace of Spanish chirography.

Once again he turned his full attention toward the rescue of Leon.

Other elements were working toward that same end, yet of this fact Roderic was of course profoundly ignorant, and he labored on as though only through his endeavors could the man condemned to be shot find a chance for safety.

He had laid out his plans after the manner of a general who goes to war.

Every little detail had to be looked into, and arrangements made whereby a secondary battery could be brought to bear, should the first fail to prove effective.

It was perhaps unfortunate that he would have to work single handed, because he knew of no one in all San Juan whom he could thoroughly trust in this matter of life and death.

How he missed Darby—what a tower of strength the man would have been to him just now.

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Roderic however, never sighed for the moon; when he could not have what he wanted he was philosophical enough to drop the subject and content himself with what he had.

The man with whom he had taken up his temporary abode in San Juan was a faithful fellow, but lacked the ability to serve him in this emergency when so much depended on the move of a hand or the exact carrying out of prearranged plans.

Roderic had indeed asked numerous questions, and the information received, added to what he already knew from personal experience, placed him in a position to "carry the war into Africa."

Leon was confined in an old fortress that presented a most picturesque appearance by moonlight, and would have made an excellent subject for amateur photographers, yet possessed few elements of modern strength.

Like St. John's church, it had received a few compliments from Sampson's fleet, which gaping apertures, together with accumulated *debris*, only served to add to the picturesque confusion.

Roderic had prowled about this neighborhood considerably during the day, careful not to attract attention, yet with the desire to learn the actual lay of the land, so that even under cover of darkness he would be able to move with at least a fair degree of certainty.

It presented a good view of the bay and harbor, the governor general's palace on the point and the few vessels in the harbor, chief of which was the Spanish torpedo boat destroyer Terror.

Roderic had cast longing looks toward the trim steam yacht anchored there, from the stern of which whipped the Union Jack of England—he would have given much for an opportunity to interest Cleo in his daring scheme, and in Captain Beven he knew he could have had an able coadjutor, for the sailor liked nothing better than adventure.

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Still, Roderic had believed it was best not to seek an audience with his cousin—he did not wish to drag her into the risky game if he could help it.

Perhaps—who can tell—some peculiar sense of honor held him back—perhaps he reasoned that as this desperate move on his part, this contemplated rescue of Leon from a Spanish dungeon and death at sunrise, was but a link in the chain of his suit for the love of Georgia, it would be adding insult to injury did he endeavor to enlist Cleo's services in behalf of the venture.

One thing he had determined to do—it was really forced upon him as a *dernier ressort*, since there was no other means of getting Leon out of the country after his escape from prison had been effected, if he were so fortunate as to accomplish this.

He had a note written to Cleo in his pocket and this he meant that Leon and his wife should deliver in person aboard the yacht.

That Cleo would find means of hiding them on board until the Dreadnaught sailed for Jamaica he never once doubted.

With some anxiety he studied the heavens and the conditions of the weather, for what this August night brought in its train was a matter of considerable importance to him.

There would be a moon, very near the full, but clouds promised to shut it from view, at least the major portion of the time.

Roderic counted this as an especial favor in his direction.

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He meant to take advantage of it.

All minor matters had been positively arranged, even to the boat in which they were to be carried to the English yacht, and this was in itself a very important factor in the game, one that by any neglect in making up the programme might have proved a fatal error.

He killed time in the early evening by loitering around the coffee houses and hearing the various opinions expressed by Spanish soldiers and San Juan citizens regarding the immediate future of the city, for it was generally known that Ponce had fallen into the hands of the aggressive Yankees, and that the "thin blue line" was advancing across the country in the direction of the north coast, capturing everything *en route*, even to the hearts of the people, who hailed the Americans as their deliverers.

It was a distinct pleasure to Roderic to know that the army of occupation had landed on the soil of Spain's finest colony, for he realized that the glorious flag of liberty once planted would never be taken down again.

San Juan did not worry.

Indeed, the city probably never looked more gay than on this August night, when, after an unusually torrid day the cool ocean breeze, following the rain, invited every one to loiter out of doors, and join in the characteristic Spanish holiday season.

To Roderic these light hearted people were the greatest of all mysteries.

If New York city were threatened by a hostile army, and its speedy capture as good as insured, he could imagine the fearful panic that must take place, how white faced women, and men too, would throng the streets laden with precious household goods, seeking some avenue of escape.

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Yet here was a city that had already experienced some of the horrors of a bombardment and with another in prospect, probably of a more drastic nature, giving itself up to pleasure as wholly as though peace ruled the camp, the fleet and the grove.

It was astonishing, marvelous!

Roderic of course knew the reason—he had made a close study of Spanish character, and found that like the Southern plantation negro these sons and daughters of Iberia never worry save over the troubles of the immediate present.

Let the future take care of itself—on with the dance—what if trouble does come, that will be "*manana*," to-morrow, and why should they worry until the time arrives?

Bah! when the first shell from the monitors and battle ships goes shrieking over the forts to explode perhaps among the houses of the town—that will be time enough to show anxiety, and once started they can make up for wasted opportunities.

Such is the settled policy of these people, no matter where found, and it is the main reason why they are outstripped in the race by such energetic, wide awake, ever ready to seize an open opportunity nations as the Anglo Saxons and Teutons.

Spain has accomplished her work on the earth, a savage and cruel one in many respects, yet fraught with much daring—she it was who centuries back sent her bold navigators to the ends of the little known world to plant the yellow and crimson banner there—her barbarous methods of government led each of her numerous colonies in turn to revolt and declare the shackles broken from their limbs, but Spain never changed her policy as did Great Britain after losing the United States.

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With the end of her late war Spain found herself virtually stripped of colonial possessions, and from this time forward she must live within herself—her cruel but in one sense necessary work in opening the world to light has been finished and she will never again know the glory that has been hers in the past.

Roderic often thought over these things, for they were very pertinent to the subject, and every true blue Yankee must at times consider the future of these glorious islands thus coming into possession of the great republic.

Thus he killed time while waiting for the night to move on.

It was best that he delay his desperate work until San Juan had at least in a measure quieted down, since there was more chance of the sentries being careless, and less fear of running against citizens in the street after the rescue should have been effected.

The minutes dragged, for he was eager to get to work—like a war horse that paws the ground and tugs at his halter when the distant booming of guns and the pungent scent of burnt powder announce the battle to have begun.

At length his patience gave out.

By stretching a point the time had come for him to advance on the outer works, for which he was extremely grateful; with a sigh of genuine relief he threw off the incubus that had borne so heavily upon him during this delay, and set his face toward the ancient fortress that had seen almost every event of interest happening in San Juan from the days of that gallant adventurer and seeker after the Fountain of Youth, Ponce de Leon.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HOW THEY WENT IN.

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The battlements and towers of the old fortification stood up grimly against the clouded heavens when Roderic drew near—just as they had reared themselves for centuries, and looked down upon many of the strangest scenes marking the history of new America.

Roderic had considerable respect for antiquity, and yielded the palm to none when it came to holding in reverence such wonderful mementoes of the past; but common sense triumphed over such feelings, and when necessity demanded that he should push the sanctity of age and tradition into the background, he never hesitated.

Should the success of his avowed undertaking be in peril he would feel it incumbent upon himself to walk roughshod over the range and even destroy if necessary the finest and most venerated relic of olden days.

Such is the price of American progress—a musty disease breeding old palace must be transformed into a modern hive of industry or be leveled to the ground in order to make way for some edifice of more value to humanity; for these Americans are a practical people of to-day, seeking not to perpetuate the evils of the dead past, but to raise up the masses to a higher plane where they may enjoy the fruits of their labor, reap the benefits of free education and worship God in their own way, irrespective of church and state.

It was well known to Owen that Spanish sentries, Mauser in hand, patrolled the walls and corridors of the old building. [243]

He had even marked as minutely as possible where each soldier's beat began and ended, for it is such little things as this that count in the long run, often most unexpectedly.

It appeared to be a formidable task for one American to undertake—seldom had a heavier load been placed upon a single pair of shoulders; but fortunately this man was singularly well equipped for the task, since his previous work for years had always been in this same line.

He therefore viewed the great ragged pile of ancient masonry, over which the banner of Castile and Aragon flapped in the night breeze, with something of the gladiator's spirit when he was wont to face a tiger in the arena—the immensity of the task aroused every atom of determination, quickened his blood and caused him to feel an eagerness to open hostilities.

All seemed quiet.

Not far away lay the great barracks of the Spanish soldiers, and he could even hear them call out at times.

This lent additional piquancy to the game—when it became necessary to snatch a condemned prisoner from the very heart of the Spanish camp, the glory attending success would be all the greater.

Not that Roderic sought additional sources of danger—he would have been satisfied with much less, since his one purpose was to save Leon and win his sister.

A clock in the city boomed the hour.

"I am on time—now to see if my fellow laborer has reached the rendezvous," Roderic muttered.

At one point the shadow of the corner tower fell athwart the white road and here he turned.

A little birdlike trill greeted his ears—it might have proceeded from some feathered songster ensconced among the leafy vines that covered the rugged wall, and which had been disturbed by his stealthy advance. [244]

The American seemed to believe otherwise, for he quickly imitated the sound.

Whereupon there appeared a figure from behind a buttressed base of the tower wall, a figure that approached him at first eagerly, then coyly.

Roderic took several steps forward to meet the half unwilling advance of the other.

"Senora, is it you?" he whispered, eagerly.

"Si, senor," came the low reply from the figure dressed in masculine garments.

"Good. We are both on time. The night favors us as much as we could hope for. Let us then go to work without delay."

"Heaven bless you, senor—"

"Not a word in that line—it is useless, and dangerous as well, since sentries are on the ramparts and they have keen ears. I feared you might not come, for the danger would appall many."

"Ah! senor, what is danger to me—what would I not risk if by so doing I could save *his* life, my beloved Leon? Fire and blood could not hold me in check if *he* called. My life is his alone, for without him all else would be dead. That is the love a Spanish woman gives, senor. Do not forget it when you think of Georgia."

Roderic was thrilled by her words, so intense so full of devotion—yes, few nationalities can love with the fire and enthusiasm shown by Spain's sons and daughters, and if their affection does not

always stand the test of time, lay it to the burning zeal that eats up the heart.

He remembered that he too was beloved by just such an impulsive, beautiful girl, who at this hour was doubtless wrestling with the deep wounds wrought by jealousy's fingers; and the recollection gave him both ecstasy and keen pain. [245]

At least he said no more to her of the danger she ran—in the service of love what matters it where peril lies; the sacred nature of the duty renders every obligation a privilege.

"Follow me, please, and keep close to the wall. When I stop do likewise and crouch down. Should one of the fellows on the walls call out, make no move, utter no sound, but wait until I direct you."

Such were his brief instructions.

She gave him to understand that she comprehended all he wished.

Then they moved away, keeping close to the rough walls, where the shadows lay thickest.

It was a slow and laborious task.

Here and there lay heaps of broken bricks, just where they had fallen Heaven alone knew how many years back, since it is a settled Spanish rule never to spoil the picturesque and *bizarre* by miserable modern attempts at thrift and cleanliness—vines had grown over the *debris* and moon flowers whitened the face of the rough wall.

It may have been very pretty, but it made the task Roderic had marked out more tiresome than it would otherwise have been.

He did not grumble however, and Inez would never have complained even though compelled to creep through an acre of prickly pear or cactus—her holy fervor of love sanctified the means, and she blessed the Virgin for allowing her such a privilege to prove her devotion.

She was a woman in ten thousand—happy Leon, to possess such a loyal heart. [246]

Besides, while temporarily suffering from these accumulation of years, Roderic knew they were soon to profit through something in the same line.

Leon had escaped from his former prison by means of a gaping aperture made by an inquisitive Yankee shell—the story of his thrilling adventure had made a deep impression on the mind of Owen, and discovering just such a grand opening in the wall of the old medieval structure against which he had now pitted his forces he resolved to improve upon the experience of Georgia's brother.

They could, if given half a show, both enter and make their final exit by this means.

He had the location of the opening pretty well in mind, and was heading for it now.

They had fully embarked upon their perilous mission, and please Heaven, would sooner or later meet with the anticipated reward.

The sentinels paced their beats above on the broad walls, and their "*quien vive*" as they approached each other, together with the answer, came plainly to the ears of those crowded below.

Roderic breathed easier when he discovered that they had reached the vicinity of this ragged aperture, for at least one portion of their dangerous journey was over.

He exercised double care at this point, for while the coast had appeared clear during the day, that was no sign that it might not be policed after nightfall.

These Spanish sentries have little scruples about opening fire upon any suspicious person seen in the act of endeavoring to enter one of their fortifications under the protecting shades of night—scores of wretched reconcentrados in Cuba thus paid the penalty of rashness or curiosity with their lives. [247]

A little close observation told him that in all likelihood the opening had not been made an especial object of surveillance—two slow moving automatons, *yclept* sentries, in the process of following their beats to a conclusion approached this scene of wreck about once in five minutes, exchanged salutation according to the discipline of the army, indulged in a little good natured chaff, perhaps spoke of the chance of soon beholding the beloved hills of their native land again when the inevitable end came to the dramatic farce old Spain was playing for the benefit of those Frenchmen and others holding five hundred million dollars worth of Cuban bonds—and then wheeling left the spot to darkness and the bats for another spell.

It was easy enough to pick out the proper time to begin the climb, but after once starting they found it a trifle more difficult to make progress, for the material under their feet threatened to trip them up, and several times one of them started some of the broken bricks moving in a way that opened the possibility of an avalanche.

Thus they had gone but little more than half way when Roderic, believing the time between the meeting of the sentries must have elapsed, whispered to his companion to crouch down and move no more.

At this instant a dislodged brick fell with some little clatter down the declivity, and the sound appeared magnified in his ears because of its possible serious results.

A Spanish voice called out above, being answered from the opposite side, and Roderic looking up could see the two sentinels plainly outlined, as they stood peering into the gloom below, and

indulging in various speculations as to the cause of the sound that had reached their ears.

It was a minute of intense suspense, for he had grave fears lest they bombard the spot with broken bricks, in order to satisfy their minds that no secret enemy lurked there. [248]

Fortunately just at this moment a zigzag flying bat, creature of the tropics, came whirring out of the gloom below, and actually knocked off one of the sentries' hat, which unexpected incident caused considerable hard words from the man who received the scare, and was greeted with an equal amount of half suppressed laughter from the other quarter.

At least, since the hat was saved the incident might be set down as closed—no bricks were fired into the chasm, for which Roderic was devoutly thankful, not merely on his own account, but because he had one under his charge for whose safety he held himself responsible.

When the two Dromios above had withdrawn and with shouldered Mausers again sauntered down their several beats he whispered words of encouragement to the shrinking form so close at hand, and bade her once more follow his lead.

The venture proved a success, so far as their *entree* was concerned, for by the time Spanish eyes and ears again approached the broken spot in the ramparts the two intruders had gained the corridor and were safe within the walls.

This was only a beginning—the first step.

Around them stretched the massive walls of the ancient landmark, and somewhere within their confines Leon was to be found.

Roderic never groped in the dark when there was a chance for light, and he had used his utmost endeavors during the day in trying to locate the prisoner.

One portion of the old fortification was literally a picturesque ruin. [249]

It did not seem possible that even the easy going Spaniards would confine a prisoner, condemned to be shot, to this antiquated wreck, for there would be too much chance of his escaping, especially one who had already proven so hard to hold as Leon.

This was of course mere speculation on the part of the Yankee, but he had taken note of several facts that seemed to corroborate his suspicion.

At any rate so strongly impressed was he with this idea that once within the fortress he had no hesitation in turning to the left.

Possibly Roderic never had a more difficult task than the one now confronting him.

The interior of the great pile of masonry was almost a sealed book to him, the best he could do during the afternoon having given him but a shadowy idea as to how it was constructed.

Of course most of it was inhabited only by bats and owls, a sombre relic of past glories, which fact added to the confusion.

Sentries patrolled sections of the place, just as had been marked out for them—indeed, it was almost impossible to know when one of these jack-in-the-box guardians might bob up serenely directly in the intruder's path.

This fact kept Roderic's nerves on a tension; but the sensation was no new one to him—he felt pretty much as does the hound held in leash, and scenting the game near by.

Inez followed him closely.

She was "dead game" as Roderic more than once muttered to himself when he noticed how she copied his movements.

Never did man have a more faithful and devoted spouse, ready to undertake all risks for his sake —never did woman have a motive more sacred to urge her forward to the rescue of one beloved. [250]

Roderic knew he was enlisted in a good cause, and in his mind this counted for much.

Their progress while laborious, seemed to be in the right direction.

Evidences multiplied to the effect that this wing of the fortress was under surveillance, as though it contained that over which it was necessary a guard should be placed.

Roderic had been in Russia—he had visited the historic pile of masonry at St. Petersburg on the Volga known as the Fortress of Peter and Paul, and had seen its numerous dungeons, its impregnable gates and the wonderful methods in vogue among the troops guarding its walls.

Something about this structure in San Juan recalled the prison and fort of Holy Russia—perhaps it was the gloom, the dark dungeons and general funereal aspect of the place, for surely there could be little comparison otherwise.

Occasionally the moon appeared and gave them some means of seeing what lay ahead; but on these occasions they were compelled to lie quiet so that their presence might not be discovered.

All the while they were progressing.

A labyrinth of masonry surrounded them, and Roderic had to bring to bear many shrewd tactics in order to keep from getting lost.

His usual manner of doing this was simple and yet wonderfully effective.

When they came to a place where the passage forked, and it appeared puzzling to judge which way they should turn, he did not decide hastily but spent a little time in ascertaining whether one [251]

of the routes did not show more signs of usage than the other, and in every case he found a very distinct difference.

By following the passage in general use it stood to reason that he would sooner or later reach the closed dungeon.

Through such tactics, employed with success by those Nimrods of the forests in their search after game, Roderic had always been able to accomplish tasks that were deemed next to impossible by others of his craft, who governed their actions by antiquated rules lacking in common sense.

It was evident that they had crossed the Rubicon—that their bridges had been burned behind them.

Once discovered in the depths of this place and the chances seemed twenty to one that they would never leave it alive.

Roderic scouted such a thought—he never allowed it to interfere with his work—chances of failure were not to be taken as a factor in the matter whatever—success must be the beacon held up to lure them on, glorious success.

Such confidence brings wonderful results in all things, and would account for some of the success attending his past.

A brilliant diplomat is compelled to be bold as well as sagacious.

To find Leon and bring about his release—to cheat the Spanish army of a victim whom they expected to execute at sunrise—this was the mission he had undertaken, and with the kind assistance of good fortune, added to his tact, he meant that the harvest should be bountiful.



## CHAPTER XXIV. THE STRANGE MEETING IN THE DUNGEON.

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A gentle tug at his coat made Roderic turn.

It was Inez, who desired to speak, and yet who knew she should not utter a word above the lowest whisper.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Tell me—are we not nearing there—I am so anxious—my heart almost suffocates me, for it beats like wildfire," she gasped.

He pitied her, for he could easily understand why she should thus feel distressed.

"Courage—we cannot be far away from his cell now. Bear up, and all will be well. To fail at this time would mean his death."

Roderic did not add that their own fate would probably be also sealed—he knew that fact only too well, but it was useless to mention it.

At any rate all Inez thought of was Leon's welfare.

She seemed to call upon some reserve force, and her companion knew the crisis had been safely passed, for which he was deeply thankful.

When he said he believed they were near the spot where they would find Leon, he spoke truly.

There were strong evidences of dungeons all around them, some with the doors entirely gone, while others had a stout barrier hanging from one great rusty hinge.

It might be supposed that ere long they would run across those still remaining in a good state of preservation, and in which prisoners were confined.

Perhaps an especial guard had been stationed in the passage.

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If so it would be Roderic's duty to take care of him, and to this end he had previously made ample preparation.

Desperate measures are only carried to a successful issue by heroic treatment, and no man was better equipped for this purpose than the American who dared enter San Juan while the Spanish flag still waved over the walls.

The darkness was now against them, and it would have been almost impossible to advance but for a streak of luck that separated clouds and moon, and allowed the latter to sift her silvery radiance down through various breaches in the overhanging walls, thus dissipating to some extent the appalling gloom.

Thanks then to this feeble illumination Roderic with his keen vision was enabled to discover a figure ahead.

Spanish soldiers doing duty in the tropics are generally in the habit of wearing white uniforms made of some coarse drilling or canvas.

It was this fact that betrayed the presence of the guard, and Roderic mentally thanked his lucky stars for the favor.

He watched the man.

The Spaniard seemed nervous, and would walk up and down with jerky steps, stopping now and then to try the doors of several cells.

Roderic was unable to decide what the man was up to, since Spanish soldiers as a rule are not given to exert themselves overly much.

Now and then the fellow would stop, and at such times his attitude strongly reminded the watcher of one who was straining his hearing in the hope of catching some eagerly anticipated signal.

After a little reflection Roderic felt compelled to decide that the fellow was anxiously waiting for a relief guard to appear, although this hardly satisfied him.

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His duty in the premises was clear enough.

That guard was in the way.

He threatened to block their game just when, after surmounting so many difficulties, it promised to bring them success.

Such a thing could not be allowed.

The guard would have to succumb, like all Spaniards, to superior Yankee dominion.

First he must give Inez warning as to his intentions, so that she might not be alarmed when he quitted her side.

He found her very sensible, for she realized that some such move must be adopted to get rid of the miserable sentry.

"Spare him not, senor—he has doubtless taken delight in torturing my Leon—have no pity on the wretch," she whispered in his ear, with considerable warmth.

Roderic had his own notion about the eternal fitness of things, and being a cool, sensible American instead of a hot blooded Spaniard, he was decidedly averse to shedding blood when such a thing might possibly be avoided.

There were other ways of accomplishing the same end, this Yankee brain decided.

With a few last words of caution to Inez, who was trembling all over with excitement, he left her and started upon his advance.

An old Indian fighter might have been proud of the progress Roderic made.

He imitated a cat creeping upon a bird, his eyes being glued upon the white garbed figure of the guard, and every movement governed by that of the man who carried the Mauser.

Foot by foot he went forward.

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The guard was muttering to himself as he still moved restlessly from one heavy door to another.

Something undoubtedly disturbed him, but it was a mystery to Roderic, who could not quite catch the words he let fall, and which might have simplified matters had he heard them.

The closer he drew the more cautious he became.

Everything depended on the successful issue of his plans; even his own future happiness was at stake in the matter.

It may be taken for granted, therefore, that he exercised his utmost care, for after all there is no motive so positive of good results in a general way, as self interest—it makes a success of co-operative factories wherever tried.

Roderic was finally in a position to lay his plans for a finish.

He waited until the man's back was turned and then slipped forward to a certain dark doorway previously selected.

Then he awaited the return of the sentry—awaited him as the tiger lies in cover for his advancing prey, with muscles tense and drawn, and every small nerve on the alert for the desperate charge.

Ah! the fellow in pursuing his eccentric tactics had reached what appeared to be the terminus of his beat, and wheeling had started back, utterly unconscious of what lay in store for him and that each nervous step took him closer to his fate.

Roderic was perfectly cool and collected—he was not in the habit of giving way to excitement and losing his advantage.

As he thus lay in wait and watched the advance of the dusky figure which he had set out to overcome, he even selected the very portion of the sentry's person upon which he should throw his full force.

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Closer still.

The man's fate hung like the sword of Damocles, as by a single hair.

Roderic timed his leap with such precision that he struck the sentry totally unawares.

A dark figure launched forward like a gigantic bat—the man only had time to give a gurgle of surprise when a firm hand closed on his throat, and the sound died there.

Such was the impetus of Roderic's advance that the two of them went to the stone floor.

Immediately the American felt his antagonist cease to struggle, and he knew the other must have been knocked senseless through the blow on the head received when he came in contact with the flagging.

The percussion had sounded loud enough at least, to account for his having lost all interest in affairs mundane.

Roderic hoped he was not killed, nor did he have any reason to believe such a fate had overtaken the wretched guard.

At least everything seemed to be working beautifully in his favor, and he certainly could find no cause for complaint.

What was to be done with this pretty thing, now that he had secured the prize?

The man might prove to be something of a white elephant on his hands.

However, his first move was to drag out some stout cord, with which he made the fellow's hands and feet secure.

In doing so he could not but notice,—through touch more than sight, since the darkness was only partially dissipated by the moon's inquisitive beams that forced an entrance—that the luckless guard had delicate hands such as he had seldom noticed among the common Spanish soldiers.

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At another time he might have endeavored to assign some logical reason for this thing, but just at the present crisis it mattered little.

The end and not the means engrossed his fullest attention.

When he took hold of the senseless guard and began dragging him across the corridor to the

shade that lay more densely in that quarter, it was only with the intention of getting him out of the way, so that in case any one came along he would not stumble over the fellow and thus have the peculiar status of affairs rudely thrust upon his attention.

Perhaps Roderic was not as careful as he might and should have been—at any rate he tripped and fell over some object lying in his way.

Even as he went down he was strongly impressed with the suspicion that what he had taken his cropper over was a human being, and possibly a second guard enjoying a quiet nap.

Hence, Roderic scrambled up in all haste with the intention of throwing himself upon the fellow, and if possible preventing him from giving the alarm, for that was what his wretched mistake might end in.

To his surprise as well as gratification there was not the least sign of an aroused sentry endeavoring to gather his scattered senses and shout for help.

All was silent.

He put out his hand, groping for the object which had been the cause of his tumble.

When finally he touched it a peculiar sensation flashed over him from head to foot, for in truth it was a human being. [258]

Could the man be dead?

Had there been some drunken dispute between the guards resulting in a tragedy?

He remembered the peculiar actions of the man who now lay bound near by.

Bending over the second fellow he speedily made a discovery of some moment.

A strong scent of liquor greeted him and his hand came upon the flask still clutched in the miserable guard's hand.

Where he got it, and why the second man did not take his share were puzzling questions which Roderic only shook his head over.

For him it was quite sufficient that the two sentries had in different ways been rendered *hors de combat*, and would so far as he could see, give him no further trouble.

So he left them there, the second chap with his head resting lovingly upon the body of the toper, two of a kind and well matched, he considered.

Perhaps there would be a reckoning when the officer of the guard came around later, though if the flask still contained a portion of its original contents he might forgive the erring one.

Roderic sincerely hoped he had seen the last of the two guards—he expressed a low but earnest desire that their slumbers might be sweet, and indefinitely prolonged—at least until his desperate work had been accomplished.

He uttered a low signal, the same bird call that, trilling forth at the tower corner of the fortress had brought Inez to his side.

She heard and gladly tripped forward.

It was a supreme moment for her—the girl was tremendously excited, and cast several quick glances toward the spot where the demoralized section of the invincible Spanish army lay. [259]

Roderic noticed how her eager hand crept toward her bosom as she looked toward the dimly seen figures, and he quickly said:

"Come, we must find the door of his cell."

"You leave foes upon the trail you must tread on your return," was the significant way in which she put it.

"They are helpless—God forbid I should do murder," he returned, knowing at the same time that the Spanish way was the safer way.

The first cell door was beside them.

Roderic, bending over discovered that it was secured by a heavy iron bar—so far as he could see there was no other obstacle to an entrance.

He seized upon this and exerting his strength threw it over.

It made something of a clanking sound, possibly subdued, but to Roderic's mind very like the gong of a railway station dining room.

Inez uttered a low cry of alarm and he could hear her whisper the name of her patron saint, as if invoking heavenly aid.

"It's all right—don't be alarmed," he said, encouragingly.

Roderic waited to draw out a little pocket lantern which when lighted would throw some illumination upon their path.

This done he tried the door, and finding it fast put his shoulder to it.

Under such pressure further resistance was utterly out of the question, and the heavy barrier quickly gave way. [260]

Inez would have rushed headlong in but Roderic's sturdy arm prevented—he believed it was his

duty to still lead the van so long as the future was unknown—it would be time enough to yield that place of vantage to his frail companion in the venture when success had been assured.

So they passed into the gloomy dungeon, the history of which would doubtless prove interesting reading as shedding a strong light upon Spain's methods of colonizing, for in the years gone no doubt many a political prisoner had been tortured here with all the despotic barbarism that marked the infernal Inquisition of old.

Looking eagerly around the cell Roderic almost immediately discovered the object of his search.

Some one was standing beside a chair at the further end—some one who had evidently risen hastily at the sound of the clanking iron bar—some one who uttered a cry at their rough entrance.

Roderic saw and was at once struck with the astonishing likeness to Georgia in the smooth faced young man standing there; but he had been prepared for that fact since she herself had impressed it on his mind when he demanded how he might know Leon should he meet him.

Yes, brother and sister were very much alike and the sight of him just then gave Roderic something of a shock, since it seemed as though he were gazing upon Georgia.

There was no longer any need of restraining Inez—at sight of the prisoner she had uttered a cry bubbling over with limitless delight and unable to longer keep back the eager desire to reach him, to convince her ravished eyes that they did not deceive her soul, she sped forward.

Not straighter does the arrow fly from the warrior's bow than this devoted Spanish girl went to the object of her devotion. [261]

Surely eyes of love could easily recognize in the seeming youth the beautiful daughter of Morro's governor.

Her hat had fallen off in the struggle with Roderic, and her luxuriant hair dropped almost to her waist, rendering further deception utterly out of the question.

Roderic fully expected to see the amazed prisoner open his arms and eagerly take her close to his heart in a transport of joy.

It was only natural that he should look for just such an ending to the devoted wife's adventurous search.

To the astonishment of the American nothing of the kind occurred—indeed, a result about as contrary as one could well conceive, came to pass.

As Inez was about to throw her arms about the figure of the handsome young fellow, he put out his hand and gave her a vigorous push aside, a push that caused the poor girl to stagger back against the wall.

And with his great black eyes flashing with indignation the prisoner cried out:

"Do not dare to touch me—go back to yonder double faced traitor, and leave me to my fate. I would sooner be left here to moulder than be rescued by you, *creature!*"

Roderic was panic stricken—he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses—the prisoner of the dungeon was to all appearances Leon, yet the voice was that of Georgia—the words evidently spoken by one racked with jealousy, who saw in Inez a hated rival!

**CHAPTER XXV.**  
**WHEN THE OFFICER OF THE GUARD CAME.**

[262]

It was a remarkable tableau.

The dark dungeon with its mouldy stone walls was a fitting background.

Roderic's little lantern did not cast a superabundance of light, but there was enough to show the three figures in the scene.

Inez, poor girl, had staggered back and seemed almost paralyzed—half crouching she leaned one hand against the wall for support, and with eyes distended by amazement and horror, stared at the prisoner as though appalled by the thought that her Leon had gone mad—that the cruel Spaniards had driven him out of his mind, else why should he treat her so roughly, she who would give her life for him if need be?

Roderic grasped the truth, and yet it was so astounding that he could not believe the positive evidence of his senses.

It seemed as though the hand of a magician had been extended to bring about such an amazing transformation.

He came to rescue Leon, and found in the young man's dungeon—Georgia!

Was ever surprise more complete?

Who could the wizard be—had brother and sister the power of changing their personality at will?

Strange fancies rioted through his excited mind as he stood there and stared—the situation was remarkable enough to arouse the most extravagant and marvelous thoughts. [263]

At the same time Roderic was conscious of a powerful desire to take this bold maid of San Juan to his heart, for his love was still strong within him.

And as he thus stood and looked at her, perhaps with reproach upon his face, the anger seemed to gradually die away from her eyes, the color returned to her cheeks, her upraised hand that had flung Inez so violently back fell to her side and she trembled with a mixture of emotions.

Strange place indeed for an explanation and yet Roderic knew it was bound to come.

He wished to know many things, and on her part a revolution of feeling must take part in her heart toward the devoted being whom she had so scornfully thrust aside.

Of the three then, Inez was the first to find her tongue, to give utterance to the anguish that racked her soul.

"Holy Mother," she wailed, "he knows me not—they have robbed him of reason—they have broken my heart. Oh! Leon, unsay those cruel words—tell me that you still love me, or I too must go mad!"

The prisoner of the fortress doubtless heard, but never once were those luminous midnight orbs removed from Roderic's face.

His disguise might have baffled some but it was of no avail where those eyes were concerned.

One look and the mask had been torn away—she had known him from the instant he rushed through the arched doorway.

By this time Roderic had succeeded in mastering his emotions—at least he was in a fair way to gradually assume control. [264]

The situation, too, was becoming unbearable, for Georgia, if the prisoner could be the girl he loved, seemed gradually being overwhelmed by confusion, perhaps because thus seen in male attire by the man whose respect she desired above all others, or it might be from some other equally potent reason.

"Georgia!"

Just one word, but what an effect it had upon the other—the prisoner of the dungeon burst into tears, all the while protesting and accusing Roderic of duplicity, declaring that her love had turned to hate, and yet giving this assertion the lie by the very emphasis with which she spoke.

It was a tirade of almost meaningless phrases, just such as one might expect from an impulsive whole hearted daughter of the tropics, who loved and suffered, and whose brave front, artificially sustained, had given way under this sudden shock.

Roderic did not wince—Roderic knew he held the magic power in his grasp whereby he could change this mourning into rejoicing—he knew she loved him in spite of what she might say, yes loved him with an undying affection such as only a woman of her stamp could experience.

He waited a minute or so until she had exhausted the violence of her emotions.

When finally she had hidden her face in her hands, as if she dared no longer let him gaze upon her weakness, Roderic took a step toward her and spoke gently.

At the sound of his beloved voice she trembled like an aspen leaf, and as she heard the astounding intelligence imparted by his calm words, first she looked from between her fingers, [265]

then both hands fell from her face, and finally with bated breath she hung upon his closing sentences, utterly transformed, radiant with a sudden return of happiness such as she had believed could never again be her portion on earth.

What he said was but a hurried review of this meeting with Inez under such strange conditions, the appointment he had made for a rendezvous in the plaza, and last of all their desperate undertaking in company on this night, resolved to save Leon if it be in mortal power to do so.

She looked toward Inez, into whose brain something of the wonderful truth was beginning to enter.

That look no longer spoke of contempt and hatred—there was a new light in her eye as though her soul had awakened to a glorious realization of the possibilities opening before.

In Inez the devoted daughter of Morro's stern governor, the girl who had saved Leon from a prison cell in Cuba, the woman whose love had made her that same Leon's wife and who was therefore her own sister, she saw a different being from the dark-eyed houri whom she once believed had stolen Roderic's heart—circumstances alter cases, and the same scene we have looked upon in the deceptive moonlight becomes transformed in the garish light of day.

"His wife—my brother's wife—oh! what is this strange thing you tell me—that would be too much happiness—I must be dreaming."

The girl had met with such a revulsion of feeling that she threatened to become incoherent again; but Roderic, advancing another step laid a hand upon her arm, his touch acting like magic, for he seemed to infuse some of his own calmness into her. [266]

"Go closer to Inez—see, the poor girl is bewildered, overwhelmed at finding you here when she expected Leon, just as I too am deeply puzzled. Speak to her—ask her who she is, and what she seeks at the risk of her life. Ah! you cannot hate her, sweetheart, she who loves your brother so dearly—your sister. Take her to your heart, you two whom Heaven has brought together so strangely."

His words stirred both of those who heard—the girls looked at each other yearningly, for a new emotion had leaped into their souls.

Unable to longer restrain their feminine feelings they were speedily clasped in each other's arms, while Roderic stood by, holding his little lantern, complacently watching the demonstration, meanwhile congratulating himself that his skies had cleared and that the future promised glorious possibilities.

He was still greatly puzzled and for the life of him unable to comprehend how Georgia could take the place of Leon in this dungeon of the old fortress, difficult of access and vigilantly guarded by not only one but two sentries.

At the same time he knew an explanation would speedily be forthcoming, and hence exercised what patience he possessed.

It is not so difficult to do this when all things seem to be coming one's way.

Presently Georgia remembered.

As she turned from Inez and faced her lover, face and neck were suffused with scarlet.

In his eyes it was a beautiful sight, and he could not remember ever having seen her look so charming.

"Oh! Roderic, can you, will you forgive my cruel, unjust suspicions, my insane jealousy that caused me to treat you so bitterly, that refused to hear your explanations? I do not deserve your love, but God knows I could not live without it. Tell me you forgive such a wretch, and make me happy again." [267]

He opened wide his arms, and forgetting her confusion, forgetting everything but that she loved him and had again found Paradise, her head was quickly pillowed on his shoulder, and she looked up into his face, smiling through her tears.

"You do forgive?"

"As I hope to be forgiven. Let it be forgotten, even as you said of my transgression. We love—we have been true to each other—the future lies before us, why should we burden ourselves with foolish doubts and fears? From this hour then we begin anew, nor may all Satan's power prevail against us, nor shall I have reason to fear a Jerome or a Julio, the latter of whom turns out to be the erring black sheep in the family of Inez—her step-brother. As to Leon——"

"*Carramba!* yes, what of Leon?" cried Inez, with suddenly renewed interest.

What indeed.

Roderic himself was conscious of a keen interest in the young man—where had he gone and what brought Georgia to his dungeon?

Plainly the time had arrived for explanations, nor did Georgia show a disposition to withhold them.

"You wonder to find me here?" she said, releasing herself from his arms.

"Naturally so."

"And disguised as—as, a man," with confusion.

"Under the conditions if you came here at all it would have to be under false colors."

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"The case was desperate—it admitted of no false modesty. Leon was to be shot in the morning. I laid my plans and sought help of the only one I believed I could trust in all San Juan. Heaven bless her kind spirit, and forgive me for ever having believed she could have stooped so low as to take the heart that belonged to me."

"What! you went to Cleo?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing more nor less, since I dared not ask the active assistance of my guardian Don Porfidio, who endeavored in vain to have Leon's sentence dismissed or changed. Yes, the Senorita Cleo not only received me warmly but gave me aid and promised that if we succeeded Leon should sail away on her yacht to safety."

"God bless her!" muttered Roderic.

"And he will, beloved, depend on it. But time will not permit me to tell all. Her Captain Beven came ashore with me, and waits near by for us to join him. Unfortunately we met Jerome on the street, showing Captain Shackelford the sights of San Juan. I know he recognized me in spite of my disguise for they hung upon our track until we drew near the fortress. I fear he may discover the truth and in some way overwhelm us with trouble. He is my evil genius—something within tells me that through Senor Wellington the most bitter trial of my life must come. But at last we seemed to shake them off, and I found an opportunity to enter this awful place."

Roderic shuddered to think of this valiant girl undertaking such a gigantic task alone—it seemed almost incredible, and he would not have believed it had not the fact come under his own observation.

"But—how did you gain entrance to this cell, and—where has Leon gone?"

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"Yes, tell us of him, I implore," echoed Inez, who had hung upon every word.

"You shall hear. I already knew where my poor brother was confined,—how I learned the facts I shall not say just now; and after infinite trouble I came to where a guard walked up and down before a barred door behind which I was positive Leon might be found.

"All had been prepared, Captain Beven having so doctored a flask of liquor that the wretch drinking half of it would be overwhelmed by sleep.

"While the guard walked away from me I placed this bait where he would be apt to kick it with his foot on his return.

"Everything worked smoothly, Senor Owen—the fellow gulped down some of the stuff and presently slept as sweetly as a cherub."

"Is sleeping still, and good for ten hours," declared Roderic, and then resumed his attitude of listener, believing that something of deep importance was coming next.

"When this result had been secured I opened the door and found Leon alive and well."

Inez uttered a fervent prayer of thanks.

"I had brought him some garments to put on, such as the Spanish soldiers wear, but knowing the hour was near when the officer of the guard would come along to see that each sentry was in his place it was decided that until that critical time passed I was to remain in the cell, while with the door barred Leon would take the sentry's gun and mount guard—"

Inez uttered a startled cry that seemed to come from her very soul, and turning from them darted toward the door of the dungeon.

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Roderic knew what it meant.

He suddenly remembered how he had placed the nervous guard *hors de combat*—at the time he considered this a remarkably clever piece of business—now he was ready to call himself a fool for his action.

Good Heavens! what if he had gone a little further than he intended—what if the breath had refused to return to the seeming guard after his fall—it was Leon whom he had assailed, Leon, the very man for whose sake, considering the fact that he was *her* brother, he had taken all this deadly risk.

No wonder then he hurried after the impulsive wife, whom love sent flying through the cell door.

And Georgia, as yet failing to grasp the true sense of the situation, and unwilling to remain behind, also followed.

As Roderic issued from the dungeon he discovered Inez bending over the form of the bound guard, and the American held his breath with suspense as he hurried toward them.

Ere he arrived however he was reassured.

"He lives, senor, thanks be to the Virgin—it is I, my Leon, your Inez who has sworn to save you nor share your fate. A knife Senor Owen, so that we may cut loose his arms. Oh! blessed moment that I behold you alive!"

Thus alternately addressing Roderic and anon her husband, Inez pillowed the head of the bound man, who seemed too amazed to speak.

When however Roderic had opened his pocket knife and severed the bonds with which he had so carefully bound his victim, he was rejoiced to see him immediately sit up.

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All seemed to be going well.

Perhaps fortune had other favors in store for them—at least the clouds were rolling away, leaving a clear sky above.

Inez had by this time managed to get her arms around the neck of her husband, and was uttering happy expressions of endearment.

Roderic himself would not have minded copying this example, with the being he loved so close by, but just at this juncture the happy scene was rudely and suddenly disturbed by a gruff voice uttering in vigorous Spanish some astonishment at what was occurring in the grim passage of the old fortress.

Of course it was the miserable officer making his rounds, and who had arrived just at this interesting moment.



## CHAPTER XXVI. A RACE TO THE BOAT.

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It was dreadfully unfortunate that such a miserable *contretemps* seemed bound to occur as that the officer of the guard must arrive upon the scene just at this moment.

Roderic, upon hearing the first Spanish word in that thick voice knew discovery was at hand, and the little cherub of good fortune had suddenly taken a back seat.

If anything were done to prevent a general alarm from going forth, it would have to come from him, since Leon was hardly in a position to attempt any aggressive act, having a woman's arms about his neck.

Roderic unfortunately had his back turned in the quarter from whence the men advanced, else he might have detected the glow of light even before they turned the corner of the passage.

There was little use in crying over spilt milk.

What was done could not be undone.

The best he could do was to make some show of holding the enemy, perhaps incarcerating him in the dungeon so lately Leon's abode.

Unfortunately it happened that the rules and regulations of the Spanish army do not allow a captain of the guard to make his rounds alone and unattended.

A non commissioned officer, perhaps a sergeant, stood at his side holding the lantern and presenting a most astonished appearance at witnessing so remarkable a scene.

Roderic, without losing time, made a dive at the two soldiers, having whipped out his revolver.

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"Surrender!" he exclaimed, not forgetting to put the emphatic word in Spanish as became the character he represented.

To his disgust the fellow who held the lantern was so overwhelmed by his alarm that his fingers lost their grip, consequently the article of illumination fell from his grasp and as Roderic's little affair had taken a notion to go out, owing to the abrupt movement he made, they found themselves enveloped in darkness that was not excelled by that of Egypt when the plague came.

It was very very unfortunate.

Just when the Yankee had begun to feel confident he could grasp the game, and manipulate it to his liking, it was snatched out of his hands.

He knew the two men were beating a hasty retreat, for they made plenty of noise as they stumbled along the dark passage.

"We must lose no time—Leon, look to your wife—this way Georgia—please Heaven we will yet find safety on Cleo's yacht."

He had thrown a stout arm around her, and together they pushed forward, while the others came close behind.

At last the moon had pity for their misfortunes, for presently the fair mistress of the night shone forth and dissipated some of the shadows that had hung so heavily around them.

If it had been of moment that Roderic should use caution in making his advance toward the dungeon, surely there was now double reason for such exactness, since their case was desperate enough without any further accidents, such as wandering from the beaten track.

Fortunately they were two, and where his knowledge of the right passage was in doubt Georgia came to the rescue with her woman's wit.

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Thus they went on without a mistake.

It was useless to hope they could escape from the whole result of this unfortunate discovery, for the captain of the guard and his attendant had kept up a constant bawling as they stumbled and threshed along, so if under the impression that an enemy chased hard upon their heels with naked swords, ready to impale them thereon.

Of course this must ere now have placed every guard along the ramparts on the alert, and the chances of the fugitives getting out of the fortress in safety were scant indeed.

"Faint heart ne'er won fair lady," as Roderic well knew, and he was one of those men who, having sallied forth to accomplish a given object, allow no obstacle to prevent them from attaining that end, so long as a sturdy arm can prevail.

He never magnified evils that cast their ugly shadows before, while at the same time it was not his principle to under estimate a foe.

At length they drew near the breach in the wall, which had offered Roderic such friendly assistance when entering the fortress of San Juan.

He had not forgotten the two sentries to whose interesting remarks he had listened as he crouched there in the dark aperture under their feet.

He could see them plainly standing there in an expectant attitude, as though under the belief that

an attack of some sort was coming, for in no other way could they account for the loud shouts borne to their ears.

It was a case necessitating heroic treatment.

Roderic knew that nothing could be gained by delay and that the demoralization of the guards was what would be to their best advantage. [275]

He crawled in advance of the others and deliberately opened fire upon the two men.

It was his intention to wound rather than slay, but he had life and liberty at stake, and could not be blamed if he sent in the shots thick and fast. The way must be cleared and those fellows above held it in their power to prevent an escape, since they controlled the only exit with which he was acquainted.

Nor was the bombardment all one sided.

The first sentry was struck in the leg, and dropping his Mauser rifle he went hobbling away, bellowing as lustily as a calf; but his comrade was made of better stuff, and at once opened fire in the quarter from whence the shots came.

This was serious enough, for one of the steel clad bullets, even while missing Roderic might glance from some stone and do damage beyond.

So the American forgot that he had intended to simply wound, and began firing point blank, in the hope of downing the Spaniard before he could do any damage.

He was rejoiced then to see the man suddenly stagger back, raise his weapon half way to his shoulder, fire a last shot; and then gun and sentry fell on the rampart together.

The way was open!

It had been cleared at heavy cost—just how heavy Roderic did not even suspect at the time.

"Come," he said, huskily, "over the wall and down to safety—it is our only hope!"

And while the roll of the drum called the Spanish garrison to quarters and soldiers hurried to doubly guard the walls, the fugitives scrambled over the debris that half blocked the breach in the old fortress made by the guns of Sampson's war ships. [276]

Over these impediments Roderic assisted Georgia, nor could he fail to notice how strangely she seemed to hesitate, trusting almost entirely in his strong arm, which was so unlike the Georgia he had known of old.

Perhaps the realization of her dream, and the rescue of Leon from his dungeon had brought about this singular result.

At any rate there was no time given in which to consider it.

Prompt action alone could take them through with flying colors.

The martial sounds increased—one could almost imagine the garrison prepared to receive an attack from the whole of General Miles' invading army.

If noise could accomplish it such an assault would be beaten back readily enough, for the tumult already extended beyond the fortress and was penetrating the town.

Roderic would have felt inclined to laugh but for the seriousness of the occasion—it was like a child and a stack of cards pitched on end—a touch of the first sends the whole pack falling; or a spark of fire coming in contact with a train of gunpowder—so the shouting passed from street to street and San Juan was racked with the commotion.

It was a big send off, at any rate, and those responsible for it could possibly find some future satisfaction in knowing that San Juan had not received such a shock since that early May morning when Sampson stirred things up with his war terrors of the sea.

By rare good luck the fugitives managed to get down from the break in the massive wall without any serious accident. [277]

Several times one would stumble as a portion of the *debris* slipped under foot, or the tangle of the moon-flower vines tripped them up; but these little accidents bore no result.

Once upon *terra firma* Roderic knew what he had arranged was all very well, but if Cleo had sent Captain Beven to the rescue, his boat might after all be more advantageously located than the one Owen had in mind.

"To the left!" said Georgia, breathing heavily, for the task just finished had been a severe one.

Of course that meant that Beven was waiting near by, and Roderic was fully content to let events drift him from now on.

Hardly had they gone a dozen paces than the bluff English sailor showed up.

Perhaps he was surprised at discovering the presence of Roderic, who made his identity known immediately, but if so no one knew it, for Beven was a matter of fact old fellow, who took things as they came.

The flight was hastily resumed—indeed, it would have been madness to have halted any length of time with such signs of an aroused military power all around them.

Beven had assumed the lead, and as he was supposed to have his bearings, so that the shortest route to the boat could be taken Roderic was only too glad to resign the whole affair into his

hands.

It was at this critical juncture, when hope began to rise strongly in their hearts, that a new element was injected into the game.

Jerome and Captain Shackelford had indeed made a strong guess as to the mission of Beven and the disguised Georgia. [278]

When they finally lost them in the neighborhood of the old fortress, Shackelford had suggested that they visit the Spanish barracks not far away, and talk the matter over with the colonel in charge, who was an old friend of the sea captain.

Thus, when the alarm broke out, they surmised that Beven had something to do with it, and accompanied by a file of soldiers, posted in hot haste toward the spot.

It was our friends' misfortune to meet them on the way.

There were no means of hiding—indeed, the hostile squads discovered each other at about the same moment.

What made it the more aggravating was the fact that the soldiers were directly between them and the bay—just a little beyond could be seen the dimpled water, flashing in the glorious light of the moon.

What was to be done?

Retreat had been rendered impossible, for Roderic was so confused by the several turns taken that he would not have known how to reach his boat.

To surrender meant ignominious death.

An Anglo-Saxon could not dream of submitting to such disgrace while one door yet remained open.

That door was a gallant charge.

Beven knew his nation was not at war with Spain, but his sympathies were wholly with those who spoke the same tongue—blood is thicker than water, and with prophetic wisdom he like many of his race, saw signs in the air to indicate that the time was coming when Great Britain and her colonies would stand fast with the great Republic against the rest of the world—*for peace!*

Therefore he was ready to step in, this gallant son of Neptune who had seen many a hot engagement under the flag of St. George. [279]

"We must cut through or all is lost!" cried Roderic, clinching his teeth in anticipation of the hot time that was coming.

"Good. I'm with you!" snapped the sailor, grimly.

Leon had been armed and was eager for the fray—eager to strike a blow because of the suffering and indignities put upon him by these Spanish Tories who loved not Porto Rico.

"Forward, then, and God defend the right!"

Roderic had hardly spoken before they were once again in motion, having involuntarily halted at first sight of the foe.

As the Spaniards had also started forward, the two hostile bodies were advancing toward each other with a rapidity that promised to speedily bring them into contact.

Roderic's martial spirit was fully awakened.

He only feared for the devoted girl who clung so closely to him—on her account he was like a lion aroused, and all thought of pity for those against whom they must come in battle array vanished from his heart.

Beven knew the advantage that must accrue from a hot fire delivered before the others thought of opening the engagement.

"Altogether—make it warm for the dagoes!" he said, swinging his right arm on a level.

Then flashes of fire leaped out, and the rattle of revolvers sounded like giant hail stones beating on an enormous kettle.

It was a perfect cyclone of lead that whipped along that narrow street leading to the bay.

Hardly a shot was wasted. [280]

Confusion and consternation seemed to overwhelm the Spaniards.

Brave men they may have been, but there is a limit to endurance, a time when panic sweeps irresistibly through the mind, and each individual feels that he is the only one remaining alive of many.

So it was no doubt here.

The hurricane of missiles had done considerable damage, but the abruptness and violence with which the storm burst upon them was of even more value in completing the utter demoralization of the Spaniards.

Jerome and Shackelford were the only ones left standing in the street when the fusillade ceased, and the captain had but one leg left upon which he could rely.

Wellington had thrown both arms into the air as a token that his teeth were drawn and that he surrendered.

"To the boat!" said Captain Beven, knowing that a thousand Spanish soldiers would be on the spot ere ten minutes had passed.

Although this round had been so gloriously won he knew they still had a hard row to hoe ere success could be assured.

Still, when were brave hearts of the Saxon race dismayed by even overwhelming odds—the record of many a fierce battle fought on European, Asian, African and American fields bears testimony of their dauntless grit.

Jerome's attitude would have been ludicrous at any other time—he seemed desirous of raising his arms to their highest possible level.

"You have won—you deserve success—I have had enough—count me out, and good luck go with the whole of you!" was what he bawled as they passed him by.

The tiger's claws had been trimmed.

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Shackelford was not so magnanimous—he had a game leg that would trouble him no doubt for the rest of his life, and his benediction was in the shape of some hot blasphemy that doubtless eased his soul more or less.

It was a strange parting from the villain of the play—but then Jerome was after all only an adventurer whose maxim it was to sip honey from the beautiful flowers, and leave dangerous briars alone.

## WHEN THE SPANISH FLAG LEFT PORTO RICO FOREVER.

Another short run would take them to the water's edge where a boat awaited, and sturdy English muscles were eager to row them to safety.

Captain Beven had taken the precaution to make Spaniards out of his men and himself, in the expectation that such a conceit might avail to save Cleo future trouble; for such an event as this could easily be made the foundation of an international dispute, and the Spanish government find just cause to demand damages from John Bull.

Down the *calle* they went, in the midst of shouts and execrations from a myriad of heads that protruded from the windows on either side.

That the owners neither knew what was in the wind nor cared a *peseta* was a foregone conclusion; but they could not resist giving tongue after the manner of their kind and according to the stripe of their belief.

It was a hot finish.

Roderic did not breathe easily until they reached the boat.

Then he began to believe there was a strong chance for boarding the yacht.

It would not be a walk over, for pursuit had been inaugurated, and the shouts of the angry soldiery rang down the narrow street.

The embarkation was speedily accomplished—indeed, almost like magic they found themselves in the boat, the sailors sprang after, oars were unshipped and the shore left behind. [283]

What a pæan of thanksgiving seemed to arise in Owen's heart when he saw the long prayed for consummation of their hopes accomplished—as the shore receded, each stroke of the oars appeared like a measure in the glad anthem that swelled upward from his very soul.

For success meant to him more than life—he had fought *for love*, and Paradise opened wide her doors.

Then he cast an anxious look above—oh, pale moon, sailing so serenely athwart the heavens, show yet again your sympathy and gentle mercy by veiling that bright face behind some friendly cloud—it were worth a king's ransom to have this occur, but it was vouchsafed them without money and without price.

The moon dipped out of sight behind a black, ragged mass of clouds, and the bay of San Juan was for the time being wrapped in semi-gloom. Even Providence seemed on their side.

When the Spanish soldiers reached the water's edge they fired at random, but none of the missiles came anywhere near them in the boat.

Faster rowed the British tars, knowing full well that boats must already have put out in pursuit, and delay meant trouble.

Roderic cast many an anxious glance up toward that section of the heavens where moon and cloud were having a royal warfare, and he was delighted to discover that the former would evidently be discounted in the battle—at least the reign of the cloud would last until they had reached the Dreadnaught and were sheltered by her bulk from searching eyes.

So it happened. [284]

One and all had gained her deck and the boat was hauled up to the davits ere the face of fair Luna peeped inquisitively forth.

Looking toward the shore they saw a dozen boats, all occupied by Spanish soldiers in pursuit of a little sailboat or sloop that, taking advantage of the night wind was endeavoring to slip out of the harbor, being possibly a smuggler engaged in defying the severe duties placed upon all imports by Spanish laws.

Fortune seemed never to tire of aiding their cause—it was one chance in a thousand that this smuggler should start just at such a moment, and divert the attention of the enraged Spaniards.

Perhaps, however, a guilty conscience had something to do with the matter, for those on board the *contrabandista* boat must have believed the tremendous row ashore had to do with their presence in the bay, and spreading their white wings they had flown seaward.

Several volleys were fired after them by the soldiers, and there came a deep boom or two later announcing that the fort commanding the entrance to the bay had taken a few chances at the escaping boat; but the moon had again plunged behind the clouds, and besides, those on board the sloop knew every foot of the offing so that the way to escape was open.

But Roderic, even though the yacht was in motion, and there was more or less danger of a bombardment from the forts, had lost all interest in the result.

He was hovering over the berth where they had laid Georgia, for upon reaching the deck the girl had fainted in his arms—she had been wounded, perhaps by the glancing bullet that came from the guard's Mauser when he took his last shot.

All were dismayed to discover it, and Roderic felt a dumb anguish creeping over his heart as he awaited the doctor's report. [285]

It was a serious wound, with the chances against her surviving in such a warm climate.

The truth almost paralyzed poor Roderic—for this had he labored, that Leon should be saved and his sister yield up her bright young life?

Heaven alone knows what he suffered during the weary hours of suspense.

When the dread summons came and he knew he had lost her, the awful nature of the blow almost crushed him.

For once in his life he felt like cursing the Providence that rules over all.

Georgia passed away with her arm about his neck, her head pillowed on his breast, and her last whispered words were:

"How I love you, my Roderic—do not quite forget the poor daughter of Porto Rico!"

As if he could forget—so long as life remained her image must always be enshrined in his heart.

Perhaps it was just as well for his future happiness—love like Georgia's, so hot and inflammable, does not always bring that peace and content of mind which most men who speak the English tongue desire as their portion—it would mean an iceberg, a volcano—cold one hour and scorching the next.

Yes, perhaps Providence ordered it for the best.

And Georgia who seemed gifted with unusually clear vision, Georgia must have realized this, for had she not placed Cleo's hand in his, and solemnly declared that it was her dying wish he should in due time take this fair blue-eyed cousin for his own.

At first in the keen anguish of his grief Roderic scarcely gave this a second thought, but later on it loomed up before his vision as he saw how Cleo avoided him and how she blushed furiously whenever he glanced at her. [286]

Thus he knew an explanation was absolutely necessary, and not being the man to avoid duty he had a long interview with his cousin.

It was arranged that Roderic should go away, after poor Georgia had been buried near Ponce, (where Leon decided should be the final resting place of his devoted sister,) and not see Cleo again for six months—if at the end of that time he could come to her and honestly confess a positive growth of the love he had always entertained for her, she would consent to become his wife.

That was all.

They had not been interfered with in leaving San Juan harbor, and a safe landing was made on the southern shore of Porto Rico where the stars and stripes already floated over the land that fate intended should be one of the fairest gems upon Columbia's diadem.

After the simple ceremony that marked the funeral of the beautiful girl, Roderic thought life was a blank to him.

He joined one of the armies of occupation and saw some hot service as the boys in blue advanced across the island toward San Juan, always driving the Spaniards before, yet each day finding the task more difficult.

Utterly reckless in his present state of mind, Roderic rushed into the jaws of death once too often—if his mad desire was to follow his poor Georgia across the borders of eternity he came very near accomplishing it one day when, with a few chosen spirits he cleared a rocky eminence of Spanish bushwhackers lying in wait for the Yankee advance guard.

The field doctor actually gave him up for lost, but he was carried back to the town of Ponce in an old *volante* found at a farmer's, relic of days long gone by, and not the most comfortable vehicle of transportation in the world for a pain-racked hero, but infinitely better than nothing. [287]

Here, in the hospital they found that he had one chance in a dozen if carefully nursed, and behold, who should appear at the side of his cot but Cleo, the girl he had believed a thousand miles away on pleasure bent; yes Cleo, who, finding there was need of nurses to look after the sick and wounded heroes among the Regulars and Volunteers, "her own boys" as she called them, had quickly chosen to let the voyage wait and devote herself to the ministrations of angelic duties.

How they worshiped her, those wounded and fever stricken fellows to whom her presence brought such comfort as she wrote letters, read cheering words and waited upon them.

Many a heart asked Heaven's choicest blessings to follow her.

And Cleo had her reward when she found Roderic on a cot of pain.

Hers was the blessed hand that sustained him, hers the cheery face that bending above gave him new desire to live.

Of course he survived, else had this over true tale never been written; but it was a hard struggle, and the good army surgeon solemnly assured Roderic he had positively been a dead man only for the unremitting and gentle care of his sweet nurse.

It was so ordered by Divine Providence.

Roderic found out the truth—found that he did really and sincerely love this brave girl from [288]

Virginia, not with the tempestuous affection such as he had felt for Georgia,—no woman on earth could ever again arouse such a passion within his heart, but with a steadfast zeal that must grow with the passage of time until it became the sum and total of his existence.

By the time Roderic was well enough to be moved San Juan had come into the hands of the Americans, a protocol having been signed anticipating peace between the two nations, now at war for the first time in their history.

Porto Rico was a part of the United States—the days of Spain's dominion had passed and would return no more.

It was necessary that Roderic be moved north, for recovery would be more rapid in a cooler, bracing atmosphere.

Cleo's beautiful steam yacht still lay in the harbor awaiting her pleasure.

No one may ever know who suggested the thing, but that mattered little, since such a union was a foregone conclusion; but one day a little ceremony was performed in Roderic's room at the hotel, and Cleo changed her name—Miss Fairfax of Virginia was no more—enter Mrs. Roderic Owen.

Thus Roderic brushed all scruples aside—as the husband of the owner of the yacht he could sail in her forever without arousing comment.

Weak as he was he and Cleo drove to the grave of his lost love and mingled their tears with the beautiful flowers they spread upon it.

No, Roderic could never forget her—he would be less than a man to dream of trying, and no doubt once in a while a yearning would arise in his heart that could not be kept down, for in imagination he could feel her arms about his neck, her passionate kisses upon his lips. [289]

But that will come and go as a vague dream.

His wife is the sweetest and noblest woman in all the wide world, her devotion to him is the envy of all his bachelor friends and Roderic declares himself the happiest benedict in existence.

To Cleo the memory of Georgia is sacred, and she often brings up the subject herself, being singularly free from jealousy.

Roderic met Julio in Ponce at the time he was saying good-bye to Leon and his wife; the *extoreador* and beau of San Juan was thinking of migrating to Spain, since he could not hope to win many fresh laurels in a land where the stars and stripes waved, and where men had a stern code of morals for such sad flirts as he.

Of General Porfidio, Roderic had seen quite considerable while in the hospital, and the old warrior will always have a warm place in Roderic's heart; nor can he ever forget that awful duel with swords in the East India bungalow of Rathmines road, Dublin.

As for Jerome, doubtless he is working the European capitals—perhaps should he meet one Joel Darby on his rounds, the latter might kindly give him points concerning the combination with which he broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

THE END.

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## Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation has been standardized.

Some alternate spellings have been retained.

A Table of Contents has been added.

Character "Roderic" name had variant spelling "Roderick" on 10 pages. Corrected to "Roderic" for consistency with other 450 occurrences.

Character "Beven" name had variant spelling "Bevens" on 8 pages. Corrected to "Beven" for consistency with other 53 occurrences.

Corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

p. 15: "debonnair" changed to "debonair" (his debonair manner)

p. 33: "wont" changed to "won't" (You won't join me then?)

p. 68: "chapparal" changed to "chaparral" (than from a chaparral)

p. 92: "openations" changed to "operations" (start operations upon)

p. 93: "glimse" changed to "glimpse" (a glimpse of a flaring candle)

p. 122: "predeliction" changed to "predilection" (predilection for having)

p. 145: "bete noir" changed to "bete noire" (greatest bete noire was)

p. 155: "temptation" changed to "temptation" (resist the temptation)

p. 171: "lesat" changed to "least" (to say the least)

p. 175: "byegone" changed to "bygone" (relics of bygone days)

p. 184: "byeways" changed to "byways" (the streets and byways)

p. 185: "in" changed to "to" (induced to enter the trap)

p. 189: "diableric" changed to "diablerie" (diablerie of his appearance)

p. 195: "succumed" changed to "succumbed" (succumbed to the charm)

p. 217: "semed" changed to "seemed" (at the moment seemed deeply engrossed)

p. 235: "posibility" changed to "possibility" (bounds of human possibility)

p. 245: "ecstacy" changed to "ecstasy" (ecstasy and keen pain)

p. 246: "apperture" changed to "aperture" (a gaping aperture)

p. 251: Finished incomplete word "dungeon" (reach the closed dungeon)

p. 261: "resuced" changed to "rescued" (than be rescued by you)

p. 280: "irrisistibly" changed to "irresistibly" (sweeps irresistibly)

p. 280: "fusilade" changed to "fusillade" (when the fusillade ceased)

p. 287: "Her's" changed to "Hers" (Hers was the blessed hand)

p. 287: "her's" changed to "hers" (hers the cheery face)

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS FAIRFAX OF VIRGINIA: A ROMANCE OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE UNDER THE PALMETTOS \*\*\*

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