

SQUIRE JOHN

A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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CHAPTER III.—Continued.

His identity! Good heavens! they seem to know him already, since the old sinner had called him by name, and still addresses him as Senor Jack.

Can it be possible this is some shrewd, canny Scotch game to inveigle him into a marriage that will put him in the power of a gang of blackmailers?

He might even suspect such a thing only for Howard's connection with it, and his declaration that he had a mortgage upon the name of Jack Travers.

At any rate there is still a lapse of time before the final round, and that same powerless curiosity urges him on—he may yet be able to fathom the amazing depths of this mystery.

He has aroused himself. He asks questions so fashioned that they may not betray his ignorance of the subject, receiving in reply non-committal explanations that only partially satisfy him.

In the midst of it all an explosion threatens.

"Senor Jack," says the remarkable host, who stands eyeing him from head to foot in a critical manner, "I believe you will make a wonderful hit with the charming young lady, and she will not think the union so disagreeable as she feared. Pardon me, but I had not dreamed from your description that you were so dashing, so very handsome."

It is not often a man receives a compliment from his own sex, and Jack laughs in some confusion, meanwhile muttering under his breath:

"Well, I don't wonder the old chap's surprised if Howard gave a truthful description of himself, since I've known him to scare a coyote by smiling at it."

His strange host continues:

"There is one thing we have forgotten—not that I suppose it matters at all, but you will of course remember, Senor Jack, that it was agreed between us you should prove your identity when you came."

"Just so," remarks Jack, serenely, wondering which identity he is called upon to produce the evidence for, and hardly ready to stand up and swear he is the genuine party whose arrival has been so anxiously anticipated.

"Ahem! have you those letters with



Bursts into a laugh.

you?" asks the other, suavely.

Letters! That reminds him Ah Sin picked up a packet in the street after the wreck of the Caledonian hansom. Jack draws them out with a confident air; he is now ready to believe Fortune plays the cards for him, since everything seems to fit as neatly as though the ends were dovetailed by an experienced joiner.

"Ah! the last doubt is thrown to the wind. Buenos! We shall be merry. Last of all, Senor Jack, you remember the compact."

"Suppose you repeat it, to refresh my memory," suggests the artful Jack, using the brush on his curly locks.

"Briefly, then, you have agreed to carry out your share of this business



"Will you shake hands with me?"

for a third of the spoils, which shall be placed in your hands as soon as we secure possession, and all is arranged so that you need not fear being cheated. On my part, because of my influence in the matter, I receive another third, or as much as I can coax from my lovely ward. The one point insisted on by her is hard with you, senor."

"How so?" asks Jack, deeply interested.

"You remember, I explained, and you agreed to abide by it. Otherwise there could have been no wedding here to-night. It is this—that once the ceremony is over, you part from your wife, and never seek to come into her presence again except by her own order."

Jack gives a little whistle. Really this affair gets more and more mysterious, and yet, strange to say, the deeper the complications become, the firmer grows his grasp upon it.

"Well, as you say, senor, when one has promised it is settled, and I would not go back on my word," he remarks, coolly.

"You are all ready now, I believe." "Ready?"

"To descend with me—to add the finishing stroke to this great plan which has been arranged between us by letter—to end your bachelor days and for the space of five minutes call yourself the husband of a most charming young lady. Follow me, Senor Jack. Come, both of you; the bride may be growing anxious," cries the other, waiting at the top of the stairs.

Jack's hesitation is brief.

"Hang the luck! I'm in for it, I fear; but at the last I shall make a dash for the door. That refuge is left. All I wait for is one peep at the bride, and then you'll see Jack Travers make a record. Married! Good heavens! the very thought paralyzes me. Jack Travers married to-night! Not unless—"

He finishes the muttered sentence with a knowing smile of anticipation, and hurries after the beckoning old gentleman; while Ah Sin, winking wickedly at himself as he passes the mirror, patters after the master.

"One moment, senor," Jack says, huskily, for the dramatic situation begins to tell upon him.

"What now," demands the other, a little testily.

"A simple request. Before we enter allow me one glimpse of the young woman to whom I am about—ahem—to sacrifice my bachelor days."

"That is reasonable. Turn your eyes yonder—she who is dressed in white. Tell me, Senor Jack, saw you ever a lovelier vision than that?"

And Jack Travers, looking, feels his heart beat with tumultuous force against its prison walls—feels his whole frame thrill with an ecstasy he cannot explain. He draws a long breath of resignation and to his guide says:

"Lead on; do with me what you wish," while to himself he whispers, "The hand of fate is behind all. Why should I hesitate, when in this girl who they intend shall be my wife I see the original of the photograph I adore—sweet Jessie Cameron?"

CHAPTER IV.

Merely a Business Arrangement.

In order that Jack's motives may appear to have at least some degree of sanity in the eyes of the reader, it may be well to lift the curtain a little at the point of his appearance in the room, and explain briefly what mission brings him to Edinburgh, and how strangely the Fates have undertaken to manage his case for him.

While Jack was wrestling with a fickle fortune in the silver mines of Colorado, he received word through a firm of solicitors in London that a most extraordinary event had occurred in the other branch of the family, which resulted in his being made heir to a tremendous English property over in the tight little island, besides the honored address of Squire John Travers.

It chanced that Jack had made a rich strike in the mines at about the same time, so that he was not very eager to hurry across the big pond and claim his new inheritance.

Finally, however, having put his affairs in order, he accompanied the lawyers to London.

There, for the first time he learned of a peculiar codicil to the will through which he was to come into possession of the vast estate of the Travers family.

The squire's part of it was incontestable, and that small portion of the estate, about one-fifth, which had been entailed, must come to him through the natural law of next-of-kin, but the great balance, an enormous property, too, could only become his own in case he married a certain young woman—a distant relative of the testator, who cherished an affection for her—which affair must come off within a year.

Jack laughed aloud in scorn at the idea.

He give up his freedom and take for his wife a girl whom he had never seen before, in order to acquire certain property! He would see the lawyers in a very warm place, indeed, before he dreamed of such a thing.

Finding expostulation vain from the monetary point, since this young chap already possessed a fair fortune, the shrewd lawyers of Chancery lane changed their tactics.

They read him, and saw that, like most Americans, he was chivalrous wherever womankind was concerned.

So they drew his attention to the will again, and showed him that should this marriage on which the testator had set his heart as a means of bringing the two transatlantic branches of the family together again fail to be consummated, the vast property was to pass into the hands of the Society for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Hottentots.

Having fastened his attention here, they showed him over the noble estate, and Jack really was quite smitten with its charms.

Then the lawyers explained to him that in case of his refusal to carry out the conditions of the will, the young woman would be left penniless, even though it were not her fault the arrangement fell through.

Thus Jack was made to see what depended on him, and how ungallant

it would be on his part to force this state of poverty upon her.

Last of all, these shrewd legal gentlemen gave him a photograph of the girl.

That completed the matter. The more he scanned the picture of his kinswoman, Jessie Cameron, the deeper grew his conviction that it was a shame for him to keep her out of that beautiful property.

It ended in Jack making up his mind that he would secretly seek the presence of Jessie Cameron, and if he found her all that her photograph seemed to promise, he would attempt to win her love under another name.

His first step was to discover where the young lady might be found, and without difficulty he learned she was in Edinburgh.

It was just when he was starting for that northern capital that the young American received a mysterious letter with the postmark of Edinburgh upon the envelope.

The writer, who was undoubtedly a woman, appealed to his love of fair play—declared that there was a plot on foot to out-general him, and that those engaged in it were unscrupulous in their designs, and finally begged him, if the letter should chance to reach him through his solicitors, to meet the writer before midnight on the night of May 28, or, if not then, the following night, at the Old Tolbooth in the Canongate of Edinburgh, when strange things would be revealed.

Jack puzzled over this missive many times.

He was strongly tempted to ask the advice of his lawyers, but compromised by seeking a friend and laying the case before him, with the result that he left London for the North on the morning of the appointed day, with only the faithful Ah Sin for company, and as a consequence we see the twain seeking the historic shades of the Canongate when the fateful hour draws near.

So much for Buckingham.

His motives are beyond reproach.

What share has Howard Spencer in the affair? That is the puzzle with which Jack has been wrestling, and of which he now believes he sees the solution clearly.

(To be continued.)

SCHEME A SURE WINNER.

Youth's Plan Proved That He Knew the Feminine Character.

"I've got a scheme," said a sharp-featured young man, "that I think will work like a clock. I'm going to put an ad. in the papers asking women to send their photographs and \$2 and I'll tell them how to become beautiful."

And how are you going to make them beautiful?" asked a listener.

Don't have to. I'll just send back each photograph with a letter something like this: Dear Madam—After seeing your photograph we are surprised that you desire to become more beautiful than you already are. It sometimes seems that the very ones upon whom Nature bestows her greatest favors are the least thankful. One so divinely endowed with such loveliness as you possess should be content. Although we have added to the beauty of such women as Lily Langtry, Maxine Elliott and Lillian Russell, our honor as gentlemen and our reputation as an old established firm compel us to inform you that you already possess beauty far beyond the possibilities of our system."

But the \$2?" asked the listener.

Oh, I guess any homely woman will pay \$2 for such a letter."

Progress in Travel.

It is recalled by the London Times that Berkeley, who wrote "Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way," landed at Newport on Jan. 23, 1729, and that he left Greenwich, England, in a "pretty large ship," as the New England Weekly Courier called it, early in September, 1728. So that he took nearly five months to make the trip.