

# SQUIRE JOHN

## A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBONE

### CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

They are whirled through Washington and down the coast line, through the Carolinas, with a rapidity that never ceases until finally they reach Jacksonville.

Even here the delay is short, and on the mail for Cuba goes, flying along the bank of the romantic St. John's river, under the weird palmettos and past swamps where the cypress trees stretch out their arms, shrouded in wonderful streamers of grey Spanish moss that float in the breeze like trailing banners.

And thus they sped into Tampa, on the Gulf Coast. Jack has no desire to linger now. Some other day he may come back to see the charms of Florida, for the glimpses he has had of the orange and pineapple region have aroused a desire to see more; but just at present his one aim is to be in Havana when the steamer arrives, so that he may not lose sight of the girl who daily grows more precious in his regard, since the more difficult the game the higher we appreciate the victory.

They board the Mascot and under a darkened sky leave Tampa behind.

The sea is boisterous, as is usual with the Atlantic, and few passengers remain on deck. Even Smithers swears he is sleepy and seeks his bunk.

Jack, who is as staunch as an old sea dog, really enjoys the commotion, and, finding a sheltered spot on deck, he smokes his pipe, watches the plunging of the gallant little steamer through the foamy billows and ponders on the strange fortune having him in tow.

Morning comes. Ahead, the fair island of Cuba rises out of the sea, as it were. There is a stretch of low ground, and then suddenly looms up the frowning fortress of Morro Castle, guarding the beautiful harbor of Havana, into which no steamer may enter during the night.

Several Spanish men-of-war are at anchor in the harbor; for the island of Cuba is in the throes of another revolution or rebellion, which Spain has sworn to crush at any cost. Other vessels are discovered, and scores of



She has advanced quickly to his side. smaller craft. The effect as the sunlight falls upon the scene is indeed amazing.

Taking a vehicle, our friends are soon threading Obispo, or Bishop street, on the way to the chief hotel of the city, which faces the Prado, or public square, said to be several miles in length.

Jack is interested in all he sees, but Smithers rather draws back in the carriage, as though not desirous of being recognized by some one whom

he has reason to believe may be in Havana.

There is that in the air that declares this land, in spite of its many drawbacks, to be the theater of romance—an utterly indescribable charm that steals over the senses. The gaily dressed people, the lounging Spanish soldiers encountered everywhere, the strings of mules bearing burdens, often bedight with colors and bearing tinkling bells, but belabored with the same brutality as in Spain, Morocco, or Egypt—these and the general holiday aspect of the place, with decorations to catch the eye and draw attention to window display, combine to make a scene that drives away dull care; while at night the sound of music on every hand, the flash of fireflies, and the scent of orange blossoms in the air make one begin to believe there is, after all, a land of enchantment, and that if the eyes be shut to the coarser side of the picture, Havana is its abiding place.

And it is this strange country Jack has come with the desperate resolve to win the love of his wife—to stand between that sweet Highland lassie and the dangers which some intuition tells him must beset her path in this land, where the twang of the serenader's guitar is interrupted by the crack of the insurgent's rifle.

### CHAPTER X.

#### A Little Cuban Beauty.

On the way up Obispo street Jack changes his mind, and asks his companion with regard to other hotels than the one on the Prado, since in all probability Senor Roblado will conduct his little company thither upon landing; and however happy Jack might be to sleep under the same roof as the fair maid of Scotia, he realizes that such a thing may involve discovery, and set back their plans.

Smithers appears to hesitate, as though revolving something in his mind.

"I might risk it," he says, softly. "Come, sing out what you think," urges Jack.

"Let me give the driver an address," continues Job, as though he has decided.

So their route is changed, and presently they plunge into another street, where new scenes attract attention. Ah Sin smiles to see the familiar signs of Chinese laundries, while Jack pokes his head out to watch the most astonishing delivery of fresh milk on record, the cow being driven to the door of each customer, and the quantity desired extracted on the spot, with no question as to its purity.

Noticing their tortuous course, Jack is beginning to show some curiosity with regard to their destination, whereupon Smithers proceeds to enlighten him in a manner that only serves to whet the appetite of Travers for mystery.

"I am going to the house of a friend who will welcome you, because he is under obligations to me. More than this I cannot say just now, but in time may tell you a strange story concerning my former adventures in this mad town. All I ask is, that should you at any time, while under this friend's roof, notice anything that strikes you as singular, you will make no remark."

Of course Jack at once promises, though the fact remains that his curiosity has been more than ever aroused by Job's words.

Suddenly the vehicle brings up; they have arrived at their destination.

"Remain seated a little until I see my friend and tell him of your coming."

So saying the agent springs out and passes some words in Spanish with the driver.

Jack sees him open a door in a

high wall, and is struck with the fact that Smithers appears to be quite at home.

Presently he appears again. No one could tell from his solemn face whether he carries good news or bad; at a funeral or a wedding the sphinx would appear the same.

"It's all right, sir. Driver drop the luggage; and here's an extra bit of silver for the delay."

Once beyond the door in the wall, Jack finds himself in a garden. Flowers gleam amid the green foliage, and their rich fragrance scents the air. Come, this is something like Paradise, only for the everlasting fleas that inhabit the sandy soil and persist in



Has changed his garb.

making life miserable for the stranger within the gates.

Smithers takes him into the house with a familiarity that proclaims his acquaintance with the place. A few black servants flit about, but no master appears. Jack is a poor hand at asking questions, and prefers to wait until it is his comrade's pleasure to lift the curtain. At meal time they will doubtless be made acquainted with the kind owner.

Ah Sin has given over the luggage to a couple of stout blacks, who appear to be dressed in something like livery. Really they must have happened into the palace of a nabob. Smithers must have had swell acquaintances when in Havana. Perhaps his name is not Smithers at all—that might be a name assumed for the purpose of hiding his identity. Can the strange story he has half promised to tell have some connection with this land of paradise? One can easily imagine any romantic tale when surrounded by such an atmosphere.

Jack has changed his garb and made himself look quite attractive; like some men, he has the knack of doing it, with a figure Apollo might envy, thick curly hair, and a careless way of knotting the flowing tie that somehow or other attracts admiring glances, especially from female eyes. Just now Jack is not caring a penny about any damsel on earth other than Jessie Cameron.

Perhaps that is just why Fate pleases to bring him in contact with a counter irritant.

Tiring of waiting for Smithers, and being a little curious, Jack steps out into the court. No one is there. Birds sing in cages, but the gleam of bright-hued flowers in the garden somehow seems to beckon him under the arch, and almost before he knows it he has drawn near the fountain.

He has seen no one, but as he stoops to lave his hand in the sparkling water a low sigh catches his ear. Glancing up, he discovers that not more than six feet away half concealed in the tropical growth just beside the fountain, is a female figure.

As yet he has only a glimpse of an apparently faultless form, below the average in size, dressed richly after a style that might bespeak the Cuban or Spanish lady.

Jack is a little embarrassed.

The little lady—possibly the daughter, or maybe the wife of this host—has not noticed his presence as yet.

If he could only withdraw as silent-

ly as he has apparently come! But at the first move on his part he sees her turn as though she too would quit the spot.

A meeting is therefore inevitable. Another instant and Jack finds himself looking into the remarkably fine face of a little Cuban beauty.

He opens his mouth to apologize for his lack of courtesy in thus disturbing her privacy, but his tongue refuses to act, clinging to the roof of his mouth with surprise.

As for the girl, she seems to share his astonishment.

Evidently this is not the first time Senor Jack and the black-eyed damsel have looked into each other's face.

"Lola!"

His lips form the musical name, and at the sound of his voice her face brightens with sudden pleasure.

"Then my eyes do not deceive me. It is really you, Senor Jack. I did not dream such a thing. But indeed you are welcome. I need hardly tell you that."

She has advanced quickly to his side, holding out both hands, which he is bound to take. The eager light in her eyes, the flush upon her face, combine to form a lovely picture, and Jack would hardly be human if he failed to be affected in some degree by it.

"This is a great surprise to me. I had no idea of ever meeting you again. Believe me, I am glad to see you looking so well and so happy," he says, warmly.

"Ah, senor, hardly that. I shall never know the same happiness as of old again. That terrible shock changed me from a girl to a woman. And, senor, there has not a day gone by that I have not thought of you, and prayed the Virgin to watch over you. I had not hoped to ever see you again. It is a great pleasure. You opened my eyes to the baseness of that man who had won my girlish heart, and when he insulted me—the coward—it was your arm that struck him down, friend of yours though he had been. Ah, yes, Senor Jack, two years have since flown, but I shall never forget."

There is a witchery in her presence which he feels but cannot explain. Around her hovers a sweet perfume, such as the daughters of the East delight to weave into their hair or about their flowing garments. Jack feels the power of her flashing eyes, now so dreamy or full of unshed tears; but he is in a position to resist, for close against his heart as a shield he keeps the picture of sweet Jessie Cameron, and with this sentinel on guard none dare enter that citadel.

He has marked it "taken."

"I am surprised to find you in Havana. When last I saw you it was in the old city of Santa Fe, in New Mexico," he remarks, as he releases the fluttering hands.

"And perhaps you thought Mexico my home; but I am a Cuban, Senor Jack, and there is no place in the world like this dearly-beloved Isle."

"There are many charming features about it, I confess; and I am pleased to discover that your life has not been ruined by that wretched fiasco in the past. I shall forget it if you wish, and remember it no more."

"You are kind. How can I thank you, Senor Jack. Since that day have you ever seen him?"

How strongly she emphasizes the pronoun, and what a look flashes over her face!

(To be continued.)

#### Argument Unanswerable.

Commissioner Woodbury of the department of street cleaning tells this anecdote of a friend of his who was walking through Central park the other day. Being in somewhat of a hurry, he started to cut across the grass at one place, but was stopped by a park policeman, who remonstrated with him.

What difference does it make?" asked the New Yorker. "The grass is half dead, anyway."

"Sure, an' what if it is?" responded the indignant guardian of the peace. "Sure an' if yez had a sick friend would yez be takin' a walk on his stomach?"—New York Times.