

# A SET OF ROGUES.

BY FRANK BARRETT AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT HESPERA," "RECOLLING VENGEANCE," "OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH," ETC., ETC.

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(Continued from last week.)

### CHAPTER X.

We turned into the first posada we came to—a poor, mean sort of an inn and general shop, to be sure, but we were in no condition to cavil about trifles, being fagged out with our journey and the adventures of the day and only too happy to find a house of entertainment still open. So, after a dish of sausages, with very good wine, we to our beds and an end to the torment of fear I had endured from the moment I changed my French habit for Spanish rags.

The next morning, when we had eaten a meal of goats' milk and bread and paid our reckoning, which amounted to a few rials and no more, Don Sanchez and I, taking what remained of Moll's two pieces, went forth into the town, and there bought two plain suits of clothes for ourselves in the mode of the country, and, according to his desire, another of the same cut for Dawson, together with a little jacket and skirt for Moll. And these expenditures left us but just enough to buy a good guitar and a tambourine. Indeed we should not have got them at all but that Don Sanchez higgled and bargained like any Jew, which he could do with a very good face now that he was dressed so beggarly. Then back to our posada, where in our room Jack and I were mighty merry in putting on our new clothes, but going below we find Moll still dressed in her finery and sulking before her skirt and jacket, which she would not put on by any persuasion until her father fell into a passion of anger. And the sight of him fuming in a short jacket barely covering his loins, and a pair of breeches so tight that the seams would scarce hold together, so tickled her sense of humor that she fell into a long fit of laughter, and this ending her sulks she went up stairs with a good grace and returned in her hated skirt, carrying her fine dress in a bundle. But I never yet knew the time when this shy baggage would not please herself for all her seeming yielding to others, and we were yet to have more pain from her than she from us in respect of that skirt. For ere we had got way through the town she, dawdling behind to look first into this shop and then into that, gave us the slip, so that we were the best part of an hour hunting the streets up and down in the utmost anxiety. Then as we were swearing with our exercise and trouble, lo! she steps out of a shop as calm as you please in a skirt and jacket of her own fancy, and ten times more handsome than our purchase, a red shawl tied about her waist, and a little round hat with a bright red bob in it set on one side of her head, and all as smart as a carrot.

"Ha," says she, "where have you been hiding all this time?"

And we, betwixt joy at finding her and anger at her impudence, could say nothing, and yet we were fain to admire her audacity too. But how, not knowing one word of the language, she had made her wants known was a mystery, and how she had obtained this finery was another, seeing that we had spent all there was of her two pieces. Certainly she had not changed her French gown and things for them, for these, in a curious bundle, had her father been carrying up and down.

"If you han't stole 'em," says Dawson, finding his tongue at last, "where did you find the money to pay for those trappings, minx?"

"In my pocket, sir," says she, with a courtesy, "where you might have found yours had you not emptied it so readily for the robbers yesterday, and I fancy," adds she shyly, "I may still find some left to offer you a dinner at midday if you will accept it."

This hint disposed us to make light of our grievance against her, and we went out to Ravellos very well satisfied to know that our next meal depended not solely upon chance, and this, together with the bright sunlight and the sweet invigorating morning air, did begot in us a spirit of happy carelessness in keeping with the smiling gay aspect of the country about us.

It was strange to see how easily Moll fell into our happy go lucky humor, she who had been as stately as any Roman queen in her long gown being now, in her short colored skirt, as frolicsome and familiar as a country wench at a fair, but indeed she was a born actress and could accommodate herself as well to one condition as another with the mere change of clothes. But I think this state was more to her real taste than the other, as putting no restraint upon her impulses and giving free play to her healthy, exuberant mirth.

Her very step was a kind of dance, and she must needs fall a-crooning of songs like a lark when it flies. Then she would have us rehearse our old songs to our new music. So, slinging my guitar in front of me, I put it in tune, and Jack ties his bundle to his back that he may try his hand at the tambourine. And so we march along singing and playing as if to a feast, and stopping only to laugh prodigiously when one or other fell out of tune—the most mad, light hearted fools in the world—but I speak not of Don Sanchez, who, feel what he might, never relaxed his high bearing or unbent his serious countenance.

One thing I remember of him on this journey. Having gone about five miles, we sat us down on a bridge to rest awhile, and there the don left us to go a little way up the course of the stream that flowed beneath, and he came back

with a pony of sweet jonquils set off with a delicate kind of fern very pretty, and this he presents to Moll with a gracious little speech, which act, it seemed to me, was to let her know that he respected her still as a young gentlewoman in spite of her short skirt, and Moll was not dull to the compliment either, for, after the first cry of delight in seeing these natural, dainty flowers, she loving such things beyond all else in the world, she bethought her to make him a courtesy and reply to his speech with another as good and well turned, as she set them in her waist scarf. Also I remember on this road we saw oranges and lemons growing for the first time, but full a mile after Moll had first caught their wondrous perfume in the air. And these trees, which are about the size of a crab tree, grow in close groves on either side of the road, with no manner of fence to protect them, so that any one is lief to pluck what he may without let, so plentiful are they, and curious to see how fruit and blossoms grow together on the same bush, the lemons, as I knew, giving four crops in the year, and more delicious, full and juicy than any to be bought in England at six to the groat.

We got a dinner of bread and cheese (very high) at a roadside house and glad to have that, only no meat of any kind, but excellent good wine, with dried figs and walnuts, which is the natural food of this country, where one may go a week without touching flesh and yet feel as strong and hearty at the end, and here, very merry, Jack in his pertinacious, stubborn spirit declaring he would drink his wine in the custom of the country or none at all, and so squirting it all over his face, down his new clothes and everywhere but into his mouth before he could come to do it like Don Sanchez, but, getting into the trick of it, he so mightily proued of his achievement that he must drink pot after pot until he got as drunk as any lord. So after that, finding a retired place—it being midday and prodigious hot, though only now in mid April—we lay down under the orange trees and slept a long hour, to our great refreshment. Dawson, on waking, remembered nothing of his being drunk, and being not a penny the worse for it. And soon another long stretch through sweet country, with here and there a glimpse of the Mediterranean in the distance of a surprising blueness, before we reached another town, and that on the top of a high hill. But it seems that all the towns in these parts (save those armed with fortresses) are thus built for security against the pirates, who ravage the seaboard of this continent incessantly from end to end, and for this reason the roads leading up to the town are made very narrow, tortuous and difficult, with watch towers in places, and many points where a few armed men lying in ambush could overwhelm an enemy ten times as strong. The towns themselves are fortified with gates, the streets extremely narrow and crooked, and the houses massed all together, with secret passages one to another, and a network of little alleys leading whither only the inhabitants know, so that if an enemy got into them 'tis ten to one he would never get out alive.

Here Jack and his daughter gave a show of dancing, first in their French suits, which were vastly admired, and after in their Spanish clothes, but they then were asked to dance a fandango, which they could not. However, we fared very well, getting the value of 10 shillings in little money, and the innkeeper would take nothing for our entertainment, because of the custom we had brought his house, which we considered very handsome on his part.

We set out again the next morning, but having shown how we passed the first day I need not dwell upon those which followed before we reached Barcelona, there being nothing of any great importance to tell. Only Moll was now all agog to learn the Spanish dances and I cannot easily forget how, after much coaxing and wheedling on her part, she at length persuaded Don Sanchez to show her a fandango, for surely nothing in the world was ever more comic than this stately don, without any music, and

andango, which dances we saw danced at a little theater excellently well, but in a style quite different from ours, and the women very fat and plain. And though Moll, being but a slight slip of a lass, in whom the warmer passions were unbegotten, could not give the bolero the voluptuous fervor of the Spanish dancers, yet in agility and in pretty, innocent grace she did surpass them all to naught, which was abundantly proved when she danced it in our posada before a court full of Spaniards, for there they were like mad over her, casting their silk handkerchiefs at her feet in homage, and filling Jack's tambourine three times over with cigars and a plentiful scattering of rials.

And I believe, had we staid there, we might have made more money than ever we wanted at that time, though not so much as Don Sanchez had set his mind on, wherefore he would have us jogging again as soon as Moll could be brought to it.

From Barcelona we journeyed a month to Valencia, growing more indolent with our easier circumstances, and sometimes trading no more than five or six miles in a day, and we were, I think, the happiest, idlest set of vagabonds in existence. But indeed in this country there is not that spur to exertion which is forever goading us in this. The sun fills one's heart with content, and for one's other wants a few half-pence a day will suffice, and if you have them not 'tis no such great matter, for these people are exceeding kind and hospitable. They will give you a measure of wine if you are thirsty as we would give a mug of water, and the poorest man will not sit down to table without making you an offer to share what he has. Wherever we went we were well received, and in those poor villages where they had no money to give they would pay us for our show in kind, one giving us bed, another board and filling our wallets ere we left 'em with the best they could afford.

'Twas our habit to walk a few miles before dinner, to sleep in the shade during the heat of the day and to reach a town, if possible, by the fall of the sun. There would we spend half the night in jollity and lie abed late in the morning. The inns and big houses in these parts are built in the form of squares, inclosing an open square with a sort of arcade all round, and mostly with an awning running over the sunnier side, and in this space we used to give our performance, by the light of oil lamps hung here and there conveniently, with the addition maybe of moonlight reflected from one of the white walls. Here any one was free to enter, we making no charge, but taking only what they would freely give.

And his treatment engenders a feeling of kindness on both sides (very different from our sentiment at home, where we players as often as not dread the audience as a kind of enemy, ready to tear us to pieces if we fail to please), and to us 'twas as great a pleasure to amuse as theirs to be amused. I can recall to mind nothing of any moment occurring on his journey, save that we spent some time every day in perfecting our Spanish dances, I getting to play the tunes correctly, which at first I made sad bungling of, and Dawson in learning his steps. Also he and Moll acquired the use of a kind of clappers called castanets, which they play with their hands in these fandangos and boleros, with a very pleasing effect.

At Valencia we staid a week and three days, lingering more than was necessary in order to see a bull fight. And this pastime they do not as we with dogs, but with men, and the bull quite free, and save for the needless killing of horses, I think this a very noble exercise, being a fair trial of address against brute force. And 'tis not nearly so brutal as seeing a prize fought by men, and not more cruel, I take it, than the shooting of birds and hares for sport, seeing that the agony of death is no greater for a sturdy bull than for a timid coney, and hath this advantage, that the bull, when exhausted, is dispatched quickly, whereas the bird or hare may just escape capture, to die a miserable long death with a shattered limb.

From Valencia we traveled five weeks, growing, I think, more lazy every day, over very hilly country to Alicante, a seaport town very strongly protected by a castle on a great rock, armed with guns of brass and iron, so that the pirates dare never venture near. And here I fully thought we were to dawdle away another week at the least, this being a very populous and lively city, promising much entertainment. For Moll, when not playing herself, was mad to see others play, and she did really govern, with her subtle wiles and winning smiles, more than her father, for all his masterful spirit, or Don Sanchez, with his stern authority. But seeing two or three English ships in the port the don deemed it advisable that we should push on at once for Elche, and, to our great astonishment, Moll consented to our speedy going without demur, though why we could not then discover, but did soon after, as I shall presently show.

CHAPTER XI.

Being resolved to our purpose overnight, we set out fairly early in the morning for Elche, which lies a dozen leagues or thereabouts to the west of Alicante. Our way lay through gardens of oranges and spreading vineyards, which flourish exceedingly in this part, being protected from unkind winds by high mountains against the north and east, and here you shall picture us on the white, dusty road, Moll leading the way a dozen yards in advance, a tambourine slung on her back with streaming ribbons of many colors, taking two or three steps on one foot and then two or three steps on 't'other, with a Spanish swing of her hips at each turn, swinging her arms as she clasps her castanets to the air of a song she had picked up at Barcelona, and we three men plodding behind, the don with a guitar across his back, Dawson with our bundle of alms, and I with a wallet of merr-

itions hanging o' one side and a skin of wine on the other, and all as white as any miller with the dust of Moll's dancing.

"It might be as well," says Don Sanchez in his solemn, deliberate manner, "if Mistress Moll were advised to practice her steps in our rear."

"Aye, señor," replied Dawson, "I've been of the same mind these last ten minutes. But with your consent, Don Sanchez, I'll put her to a more serious exercise."

The don consenting with a bow, Jack continues:

"You may have observed that I haven't opened my lips since we left the town, and the reason thereof is that I've been turning over in my mind whether, having come this far, it would not be advisable to let my Moll know of our project. Because if she should refuse the sooner we consider some other plan the better, seeing that now she is in good case and as careless as the bird on the bough, and she is less tractable to our purposes than when she felt the pinch of hunger and cold and would have jumped at anything for a bit of comfort."

"Does she not know of our design?" asks the don, lifting his eyebrows.

"No more than the man in the moon, señor," answers Jack. "For, though Kit and I may have discoursed of it at odd times, we have been mighty careful to shut our mouths or talk of a fine day at her approach."

"Very good," says Don Sanchez. "You are her father."

"And she shall know it," says Jack, with resolution, and taking a stride or two in advance he calls to her to give over dancing and come to him.

"Have you forgot your breeding," he asks as she turns and waits for him, "that you have no more respect for your elders than to choke 'em with dust along of your shuffling?"

"What a thoughtless thing am I!" cries she in a voice of contrition. "Why, you're floured as white as a shade."

Then, taking up a corner of her waist shawl, she gently rubs away the dust from the tip of his nose, so that it stands out glowing red from his face like a cherry through a hole in a pie crust, at which she clasps her hands and rings out a peal of laughter.

"I counted to make a lady of you, Moll," says Jack in sorrow, "but I see plainly you will ever be a fool, and so 'tis to no purpose to speak seriously."

"Surely, father, I have ever been what you wish me to be," answers she demurely, curious now to know what he would be telling her.

"Then do you put them plaguy clappers away and listen to me patiently," says he.

Moll puts her hands behind her, and drawing a long lip and casting round eyes at us over her shoulder walks along very slowly by her father's side, while he broaches the matter to her. And this he did with some difficulty, for 'tis no easy thing to make a roguish plot look innocent, as we could see by his shifting his bundle from one shoulder to the other now and again, scratching his ear and the like, but what he said we, walking a pace or two behind, could not catch, he dropping to a very low tone, as if ashamed to hear his own voice. To all he has to tell she listens very attentively, but in the end she says something which causes him to stop dead short and turn upon her, gaping like a pig.

"What!" he cries as we came up. "You knew all this two months ago?"

"Yes, father," answers she primly, "quite two months."

"And pray who told you?" he asks.

"No one, father, since you forbade me to ask questions. But though I may be dumb to oblige you I can't be deaf. Kit and you are forever a-talking of it."

"Maybe, child," says Dawson, mightily nettled, "maybe you know why we left Alicante this morning."

"I should be dull indeed if I didn't," answers she. "And if you hadn't said when we saw the ships that we might meet more Englishmen in the town than we might care to know hereafter why—well, maybe we should have been in Alicante now."

"By denying yourself that satisfaction," says Don Sanchez, "we may conclude that the future we are making for you is not unacceptable."

Moll stops and says, with some passion:

"I would turn back now and go over those mountains the way we came to ride through France in my fine gown like a lady."

"Bravo! Bravo!" says the don in a low voice as she steps on in front of us, holding her head high with the recollection of her former state.

"She was ever like that," whispers Dawson, with pride. "We could never get her to play a mean part willingly—could we, Kit? She was forever wanting the part of a queen writ for her."

The next day about sundown, coming to a little eminence, Don Sanchez points out a dark patch of forest lying betwixt us and the mountains and says:

"That is Elche, the place where we are to stay some months."

We could make out no houses at all, but he told us the town lay in the middle of the forest and added some curious particulars as how, lying on flat ground and within easy access of the sea, it could not exist at all but for the sufferance of the Spaniards on one side and of the Barbary pirates on the other; how both for their own convenience respected it as neutral ground on which each could exchange his merchandise without let or hindrance from the other; how the sort of sanctuary thus provided was never violated either by Algerine or Spaniard, but each was free to come and go as he pleased, etc., and this did somewhat reassure us, though we had all been more content to see our destination on the crest of a high hill.

From this point we came in less than half an hour to Abade, a small village, but very bustling, for here the cart road from Alicante ends, all transport of commodities betwixt this and Elche being done on mules. So here there was

exceedingly what is to happen next. And following a wall overhung by great palms we turn a corner and find there our old Moor standing beside an open door with a key in his hand. The old Moor gives the key into Don Sanchez's hand, and with a very formal salutation leaves us.

Then, following the don through the doorway, we find ourselves in a spacious garden, but quite wild for neglect, flower and weed and fruit all mingling madly together, but very beautiful to my eye nevertheless for the abundance of color, the richness of the vegetable and the graceful forms of the adjacent palms.

A house stood in the midst of this wilderness, and thither Don Sanchez picked his way, we at his heels still too amazed to speak. Beside the house was a well, with a little wall about it, and seating himself on this Don Sanchez opens his lips for the first time.

"My friend, Sidi ben Ahmed, has offered me the use of this place as long as we choose to stay here," says he. "Go look in the house and tell me if you care to live in it for a year."

(To be Continued.)

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great common of carriers setting down and taking up merchandise and the way choked with carts and mules and a very babel of tongues, there being Moors here as well as Spaniards, and all shouting their loudest to be the better understood of each other. These were the first Moors we had seen, but they did not encourage us with great hopes of more intimate acquaintance, wearing nothing but a kind of long, ragged shirt to their heels, with a hood for their heads in place of a hat and all mighty foul with grease and dirt.

Being astir betimes the next morning, we reached Elche before midday, and here we seemed to be in another world, for this region is no more like Spain than Spain is like our own country. Entering the forest, we found ourselves encompassed on all sides by prodigious high palm trees, which hitherto we had seen only singly here and there cultivated as curiosities. And noble trees they are, standing 80 to 100 feet high, with never a branch, but only a great spreading crown of leaves, with strings of dates hanging down from their midst. Beneath in marshy places grew sugar canes as high as any bagstock, and elsewhere were patches of rice, which grows like corn with us, but thrives well in the shade, curiously watered by artificial streams of water. And for hedges to their property these Moors have agaves, with great spiky leaves which no man can penetrate, and other strange plants, whereof I will mention only one they call the fig of Barbary, which is no fig at all, but a plant having large, fleshy leaves growing one out of the other, with fruit and flower sprouting out of the edges, and all monstrous prickly. To garnish and beautify this formidable defense nature had cast over all a network of creeping herbs with most extraordinary flowers, delightful both to see and smell, but why so prickly no man can say.

"Surely this must be paradise," cries Moll, staying to look around her.

And we were of the same thinking until we came to the town, which, as I have said, lies in the midst of this forest, and then all our hopes and expectations were dashed to the ground, for we had looked to find a city in keeping with these surroundings—of fairy palaces and stately mansions. In place whereof was naught but a wilderness of mean, low, squalid houses, with meandering, ill paved alleys, and all past everything for unsavory smells—heaps of refuse lying before every door, stark naked brats of children screaming everywhere and a pack of famished dogs snapping at our heels.

Don Sanchez leads the way, we following, with rueful looks one at the other, till we reach the market place, and there he takes us into a house of entertainment, where a dozen Moors are squatting on their haunches in groups about sundry bowls of a smoking mess called cuscussou, which is a kind of paste with a little butter in it and a store of spices. Their manner of eating it is simple enough. Each man dips his hand in the pot, takes out a handful and dances it about till it is fashioned into a ball, and then he eats it with all the gusto in the world.

For our repast we were served with a joint of roast mutton, and this being cut up we had to take up in our hands and eat like any savages, their religion denying these Moors anything but the bare necessities of life. Also their law forbids the drinking of wine, which did most upset Jack Dawson, he having for drink with his meat nothing but the choice of water and sour milk, but which he liked least I know not, for he would touch neither, saying he would rather go dry any day than be poisoned with such liquor.

While we were at our meal a good many Moors came in to stare at us, as at a rare show, and especially at Moll, whose bright clothes and loose hair excited their curiosity, for their women do rarely go abroad, except they be old, and wear only long, dirty white robes, muffling the lower part of their faces. None of them smiled, and it is noticeable that these people, like our own don, do never laugh, taking such demonstration as a sign of weak understanding and foolishness, but watching all our actions very intently. And presently an old Moor, with a white beard and more cleanly dressed than the rest, pushing the crowd aside to see what was forward, recognized Don Sanchez, who at once rose to his feet, we not to be behind him in good manners, rising also.

"May Babar?" says the old Moor, and repeating this phrase thrice, which is a sure sign of hearty welcome, he clasps the don's hand without shaking it and lays his own upon his breast, the don doing likewise. Then Don Sanchez, introducing us as we understood by his gestures, the old Moor bends his head gravely, putting his right hand first to his heart, next to his forehead and then kissing the two foremost fingers laid across his lips, we replying as best we could with a bowing and scraping. These formalities concluded, the don and the old Moor walk apart, and we squat down again to our mutton bones.

After a lengthy discussion the old Moor goes, and Don Sanchez, having paid the reckoning, leads us out of the town by many crooked alleys and cross passages, he speaking never a word and we asking no questions, but marveling

at the manner of his conduct, and wondering what he had in mind. We were led to a small, low, white-washed building, the door of which was open, and we entered, and found ourselves in a room of moderate size, with a table and a few chairs, and a small fire burning on a hearth. The old Moor, who had accompanied us, stood by the door, and we sat down at the table. Don Sanchez, who had been silent throughout the journey, now spoke, and we learned that he had been to the market place, and had seen the old Moor, who had recognized him, and had led us to this house. We were to stay here for a year, and the old Moor was to be our servant. We were to pay for our board and lodging, and the old Moor was to be paid by the month. We were to be free to go out as we pleased, but we were not to leave the house without the old Moor's consent. We were to be free to buy and sell as we pleased, but we were not to buy or sell anything without the old Moor's consent. We were to be free to marry as we pleased, but we were not to marry without the old Moor's consent. We were to be free to die as we pleased, but we were not to die without the old Moor's consent. We were to be free to do anything as we pleased, but we were not to do anything without the old Moor's consent.



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She at length persuaded the don to show her a fandango.

in the middle of the highroad, cutting capers, with a countenance as solemn as any person at a burying. No one could be more quick to observe the ludicrous than he, nor more careful to avoid ridicule. Therefore it said much for Moll's cajolery, or for the love he bore her even at this time, to thus expose himself to Dawson's rnde mirth and mine.

We reached Barcelona the 25th of April, and there we staid till the 1st of May, for Moll would go no farther before she had learned a bolero and a

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