

# CHANSON

By H. E. SOOTT.

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## CHAPTER I.

The death of my father occurred in 1837, at which time I was but 19 years of age. I was left with several thousand dollars, and being utterly alone in the world determined to travel for a year or two.

It was on the 27th day of August, 1838, that I arrived, after a year's wandering, in the old-fashioned Chilean town of Coquimbo on the Pacific coast, and it was the evening of that day, as I strolled from the hostelry of Don Miguel de Salazar, that I met my fate.

I was standing down on the pier, watching a Chilean man-of-war that lay anchored off the coast and a small sailing yacht that was chained to the pier, when I heard a silvery laugh, and glancing around beheld a ray of sunshine approaching in the form of a young Chilean beauty of perhaps 17 years of age. She had the form of a sylph, and her dark, lustrous eyes could belong to none but a daughter of Chili. She was tripping along by the side of an elderly don, who was continually saying:

"Not so fast, Coreta; not so fast. My old steps are getting feeble."

"Well, grandpa, we are 'most there now."

"An American, I do believe," continued the old man. "Am I correct?" And he extended his hand.

"You are," I replied. "And have I the pleasure of meeting a fellow countryman?"

"Not by birth," he answered. "I am a native of Chili, but have spent the greater part of my life in America, as



"Have I the pleasure of meeting a fellow countryman?"

has also my granddaughter, who cannot even speak the Chilean tongue. For many years I represented the government of Chili diplomatically at Washington. Allow me to introduce myself, Don Ignacio de Florencia."

"And I," said I, "am Claud Preston, at your service."

"Coreta, Mr. Preston, an American. You will be pleased."

"I am indeed," said the charming Coreta, extending her hand, which I grasped with pleasure.

"What part of America is your home?" asked the don.

"Washington, the capital of the republic," I replied. "My father, Harold Preston, died there but a year ago, and now I am without relatives."

"Harold Preston!" exclaimed the don excitedly. "Is it possible! My old friend of a quarter of a century ago!"

So it proved, and after that discovery the old don insisted that I accompany them home, and of course when Coreta seconded his invitation I could but acquiesce, and to my surprise I was conducted by the don and his granddaughter to the yacht I have mentioned as lying at the wharf.

"Senor Claud," said the don, "this yacht will convey us to our residence. Our home is an island one. True, the island is but small and but two miles from the mainland. It is the old ancestral home of my race. It is there I was born, there many of my kindred lie buried and there I shall one day lie. But here comes Pedro. Well, Pedro, we are ready."

We were soon seated in the yacht, and when Pedro had unfurled the white sails we were soon gliding rapidly through the waters.

We sailed down the coast for a mile or so, when Coreta suddenly exclaimed, "See, Senor Claud, our island home!"

And sure enough as we turned a point of the coast there, scarcely two miles away, lay the dearest little gem of an island imaginable.

Pedro handled the yacht with the skill of an old tar, and we were soon at the pier. I assisted the fair Coreta to the wharf, while Pedro gave his help to the don, and we proceeded to the residence, house, castle—what was it? A giant pile of stone and wood and yellow brick, with angles and additions and curves.

There was certainly room enough for the ancestry of any man. I thought, for many hundred years back, even should they all return from shadowland to claim it.

We passed up a gravel walk in the gathering twilight between the rows of flowers and ferns, occasionally passing a huge rocky boulder that reared its head aloft—a landmark of old Father Time. They seemed quite numerous, and I remember the don remarked:

"These rude boulders are unquestionably the security, the prop, the stay, of our home. But for them our island would be fathoms beneath the sea."

Once in and seated by the glowing fire, Pedro, who had now become the house servant instead of the sailor, brought us a bottle of wine. He uncorked the bottle and departed. Coreta turned three glasses, and the don proposed the toast, "America."

"We drank the wine—finer I have never tasted," I remarked.

"It should be fine," remarked the don—"that is, if age has improved it, for it may be older than am I."

"Now, grandpa, Senor Claud," remarked Coreta, "I will meet you at the tea table." And she was gone.

"Senor Claud," said the don, "you scarce believe that this wine can be so old as I am. You wonder that this huge structure on this little isle should be our home. It descended to me from a race who, up to 50 years ago, were buccaniers—what are nowadays termed pirates. This was their stronghold. With the death of my father, the last one to follow that life disappeared. There are in the vaults of Chanson wines and liquors, placed there when he was yet a boy, and jewels that would ransom a republic. To whom they once belonged I know not, and not knowing I have left them there. My mother was an American, captured by my father in a merchant ship, which, after being plundered of its valuables, was sent to the bottom with all on board save her. He loved her, and in time she loved him and wooed him from a pirate's life. He gave his interests to his former lieutenants and their crews and died in peace. He only stipulated that they should find another refuge, and I know nothing of them. But they are all dead long since. One only, old Martell, a Frenchman, who was father's body servant, remained with him from his former life, and he long since passed away, and his remains lie in the vault beneath. It was his last wish that he might sleep forever by the jewels, the money and the merchandise that in his younger days, under the leadership of my father, had been plundered from merchantmen of every nationality. A strange wish, was it not?"

"It was indeed," I replied, "but do you intend to make no use of all this wealth?"

"No. It was my dying mother's last wish that I should not touch it. I have seen it but twice—once when old Martell showed me the place where he wished his remains to repose after death—he was then bowed with age—again 40 years ago, when I placed his dead body on the casket of jewels in the vault."

"My father had never told me the story of his early life. It was only after his death that I learned it, and then from old Martell. Even then mother grieved greatly that he had told me of the hidden treasure and bade me never touch it. She said that in father's latter years he had considered it a curse. But come, there's the tea bell. I have told you more than any soul on earth. It must have been my early friendship for your father that impelled me. Coreta knows nothing of all this, and in her presence do not refer to it. Poor dear! Her father, mother and my own dear wife died when she was but a child."

At the tea table Coreta joined us. If I had thought her bewitching before, when I saw her now in her evening dress, a string of pearls around her snow white neck, a golden bracelet clasped round each tapering wrist, a diamond cluster sparkling mid the golden ringlets of her hair, I thought her beautiful. Her maid, Aralda, attended us at the table, and, oh, what a pleasant hour there passed to me! And after tea, when the good don and I adjourned to a neighboring room to test cigars that came from he knew not where, neither their age, with a "Good night, senor," she vanished from my sight. I felt that I had seen a lovely dream, and when I had followed Pedro to a room above, furnished with the elegance of other climes than Chili—elegant mahogany, rare lace curtains, carpets of a value rarely seen at home, each article of furniture denoting a bygone age—and laid my head upon the pillow it was not to sleep, but to think of Coreta, of the don, of the jewels beneath, of dead Martell, keeping his silent vigil on the casket, of piracies, and then wonder from what clime came each and every article, and when I slept it was the same.

Pedro awoke me in the morning, and after breakfast Coreta and I took a stroll on the island. There were surrounding the house perhaps 10 acres of ground that showed a luxuriant growth of flowers, shrubbery and vegetables of all descriptions. An old gardener was working there as we passed. To our "Good morning," he muttered some native words that I could not understand, and his face lit up with pleasure as he gazed at Coreta.

"Poor old Juan," said she. "As old as he is, he goes to every dance in Coquimbo among his class." And she gave him a coin.

"How many people have you on the island?" I asked.

"Seven," she answered, "besides grandpa and I—our servants."

I found the island for the greater part barren and rocky, with here and there, all over it, an occasional huge boulder, such as I have before mentioned.

Its greatest length could not have exceeded two miles, and its width not more than half as much. Nor was it much elevated above the ocean's level, but yet Coreta said the angriest waves never more than dashed their spray half way to the house. "But, senor," she added, "sometimes the roar of the waves and the shrieking of the wind cause me to think that our island is trembling."

We visited the stables, where two sleek mules and Coreta's pony were quartered. "Then you ride here?" said I.

"Oh, yes!" she replied, "and I often take Jook to Coquimbo for a day or two."

"But what do the mules do," I asked.

"Oh," she replied, "plow in the garden, and old Manuel rubs them and feeds them."

"Lucky mules," I thought.

We went back to the house and found the don sitting out on the veranda.

"What think you of Chanson?" he asked.

"Chanson?" said I.

"Oh, I forgot," he said; "you do not yet know! Yes, Chanson is the name of our island. The word is a French one and signifies a song. You know we have always the song of the waves."

"A very appropriate name," I replied.

We visited the parlor, and if other parts of the old mansion were furnished in old time elegance here was splendor. Many nations must have contributed of their best, and the ships that were one day conveying all this elegance across the ocean that never reached port—where are they now? Rocking back and forth where they have been for perhaps a century—deep down in the bosom of the restless sea. Coreta played for us on a magnificent harp, but her sweet voice had more charm for me than a thousand harps.

That day passed. Another and another. Still the days went by, and I lingered at Chanson. Two weeks had passed, and in that time I had learned what it was to love. Each day I would say, "Tomorrow I will go," but when tomorrow came I would say again, "Tomorrow." At last one morning Don Ignacio said: "This is a good day for a sail. We will go to Coquimbo." I know that I grew pale and trembled.

Pedro was sent to get the yacht ready. Coreta was informed and hastened away to dress for the occasion. I took a short stroll up the beach, picked up a few shells, then a few flowers from the garden, went up to my room and got my valise, which Pedro had brought from Coquimbo 10 days before, and descended to the library.

Don Ignacio was there; so also was Coreta. "Why that valise?" said he.

"Because—because," said I, "I have staid too long. I cannot return."

"Not return!" exclaimed both the don and Coreta. And could it be possible—did she also tremble and turn pale? Certain it is that she clutched the good don's arm.

"You have nothing to go for," said he. "You must not go."

"No, no," said Coreta.

"Yes, Don Ignacio, yes, Coreta, I must go, and forever. And as dearly as I love you both, would God that I had never seen you, for, oh, Coreta, I love you! You will be the one dream of my life, but I can never return."

She had hidden her face on her grandfather's shoulder. Could it be possible—were sobs shaking her form?

Don Ignacio had placed his arm around her.

"So, Senor Claud, you love my fair flower and cannot return?"

"Not unless,—unless it be to return forever," I exclaimed.

"Oh, ho!" said the don. "Then return forever, Sir Claud."

"But—but, Coreta," said I, "she must bid me return."

She raised her tear stained face, took a step toward me, and with the word "Return!" fell fainting in my arms.

"Senor Claud," said Don Ignacio, "we will go to Coquimbo tomorrow, not today—no, not today," and from a book-

"The pirates' armory," said he.

many minutes before, with all power at my command, I could turn it, but I succeeded at last and pushed the heavy iron door back.

"Wait a few moments," said the don, "until fresh air be admitted. Remember, half a century has passed since a foot has crossed this threshold."

The air that we encountered at the door was flat and dead. I pushed again the door was flat and dead. I pushed again the door till I had it wide open. Then we sat for 10 minutes on a bench in the great hall, after which we entered the room. At the don's request I closed the door.

"The pirates' armory," said he.

Hanging from the wall on either side from end to end were weapons of all descriptions—the old fashioned broadsword of Great Britain, the rapier of France, the cutlass of Morocco and India, the saber of America.

"All nations," said the don, "contributed to this armory."

Stacked against the wall were muskets, rifles, shotguns and pikes innumerable. A long oaken table extended the length of the room, with benches at each side for seats.

"The festive board and council table," said the don.

I gazed in wonder at the contents of this room. Midway of the room on one side was an immense sideboard, on which stood decanters without number, also goblets and glasses. At the lower end a table and a rack were filled with short arms, pistols, dirks and knives. All were moldy and showed evidence of great age, and in places the straps that had held muskets and sabers in their positions had given way, and they had fallen to the floor. Even as we walked along a heavy cutlass and an enormous broadsword fell from their position of perhaps a century and struck the stone floor with a clang that startled me. I glanced at them. The reverberation of our footfall had caused the moldy straps to part. At the end of this large room a door stood open. We stepped to it and glanced in.

"The culinary department," said the don.

Huge fireplaces were on either side, and large kettles still hung on the old fashioned cranes. Bake ovens and pots all ranged on either side, while pipes on shelves and tables were tin plated and china plates, immense platters and knives and forks, but when I picked up a huge carver the wooden handle crumbled into dust.

"Why," said I, "your ancestors must have had many followers."

Ignace, my father, I believe," replied the don, "had 20 pirate crafts afloat and manned by many hundred men, though rarely more than two or three crews would be here at one time. But come." And we retraced our steps to the council room.

Arrived near the center of the room, I noticed two large black flags hanging from either side of the door we had entered, while above them one large flag was suspended by two corners and hung straight down. The flag was black. I could just discern in its center the letters I. D. F. "The pirate's flag—I. D. Florencia," said Don Ignacio.

I placed my hand on the folds of one of them. It fell to dust.

"Now for the vaults," said the don, and at the sideboard he halted, reached one hand behind it, seized a lever and pulled, but without any result.

"Pull with your younger arms, Claud. Here; stand here."

I seized the lever and pulled and pulled again, and right in front of the sideboard an iron plate of some 6 by 8 feet sank gradually down until it hung suspended by straps, which were secured to the plate from the under side.

Holding my lantern, I could see an iron ladder, which leaned against the stone on which we stood.

"Let us descend," said the don.

"But the air!" I exclaimed; "the atmosphere!"

"Plenty of ventilation there," he replied, "from the outside."

We were soon at the foot of the ladder, some 12 feet below. The vault was a large one, solidly walled up with stone. The floor was solid stone, and ranged along the walls were barrels, casks, boxes and moldy packages without number. Most of them, at a kick, would drop to pieces. In a number of the boxes were bottled goods, old wines and brandies.

"Here," said I, "is where our wine comes from."

ure and leave the island. Sometimes, you know, you can return to Chanson. Leave Pedro and the other servant here. Provide for them, and when in time they die do not leave the old home tenantless."

"Oh, Don Ignacio, you will not die!"

"Hush, Claud, it is very near."

It was midnight, and all were at rest, even faithful Pedro, when, with two large lanterns, we passed through a great, unused room some 40 feet in length and half as wide in the very center of the castle. I had never entered it before, and when from a big bunch of keys the don selected a large one I inserted it in the lock. It was

"Here is where it originally came from," said the don. "Old Martell moved it up above before he died, but he must have left a great quantity here. These boxes and bales contain all manner of goods, now surely worthless."

We had reached one end of the vault. "Do you care to see the resting place of my ancestors? You must, as I desire to be laid beside them."

He grasped a lever sunk in the wall and pulled, and a sheet iron plate some 12 feet in length sank slowly into the ground and revealed three stone steps, which we mounted and stood in a room of, I judge, 15 feet square. I nearly fainted. The don drew from his pocket a flask of brandy. We took a swallow each, and it revived us.

There, extended on two sides of this room were marble slabs, some 6 feet wide and elevated on a stone foundation about four feet from the floor. On these slabs and side by side lay long objects. I held my lantern close. They were evidently bundles of some kind. Cloth or canvas was wrapped around them, and they had been wrapped with care. Of some of them there was evidently little substance left, as the packages were almost flat.

"My ancestors," said the don. "No coffin even confined their limbs. Each, wrapped in oiled silk and canvas, has there been laid at rest, father and son, for generations back, except such as lie beneath the ocean waves. This one, the last in this row, was my father. Each of these frames was once master of Chanson and a pirate chief. The women of the race all lie in the cemetery at Coquimbo, as does my own son. I desire to be the last of my race to be laid here. When I die, place me here, next my father. Pedro will assist you. He knows where the oiled silk and canvas can be found. Now for the treasures."

He stepped to the end of the room, and from underneath the marble slab pulled out another lever. A slab sank from the side of the wall and disclosed a small space of 6 feet in length and perhaps 3 deep. There on the floor stood a brass or iron bound box, and on it lay a form similar to those on the marble slabs.

"Old Martell," said the don. "Let us remove him."

We each seized one end of the bundle. A handful of rotten canvas; nothing more. I set down my lantern and took hold with both hands. The canvas and silk came away, and the dry bones of old Martell rolled from the casket, rattling as they struck the stone floor. The vertebra snapped asunder, and the grinning head of the silent sentinel rolled down the three stone steps.

"Poor old Martell!" said the don. "I will soon keep you company."

He fitted a key to the casket, and we soon had it open. The don removed what, I judge, was once a pirate flag from the top, and I saw before me untold wealth—diamonds, rubies, pearls, gold coin of every nation. I raised a handful of the jewels. How they sparkled!

"When I am dead," said the don, "remove them. They are yours. No crowned head of Europe possesses their value. Stay! Put these in your pocket, that after you have slept this may not seem a dream. And now bring back the head of old Martell. It was ever a true one, and, old friend, we will leave it with you."

I did so, and he closed the casket. We placed the skeleton again on its lid.

"Now mark my movements well," said the don, as he shoved back the lever. The slab arose to its place. We passed out of the tomb, he pushed back the lever, and naught but a wall confronted us. Back through the vault, another pushing back of a lever, and the entrance was closed. We were soon out of the council room, the door locked, and back in the library.

The clock struck 2. The don was very pale.

"Here, Claud, are the keys. I never desire to see them again. You have observed all."

"I have observed all and can scarcely believe what I have seen, but God grant that it may be yet many years before you are laid with your ancestors below."

"Promise me, Claud, to fulfill my wishes."

"I promise," I replied.

"Well, a glass of brandy and good night, or rather good morning, and don't forget your promise."

I went to the floor above to my sleeping wife and boy.

**CHAPTER III.**

I awoke in the morning with a start. Some one was knocking wildly. I leaped out of bed and rushed to the door. It was Pedro. The old man was trembling violently, and his features were pallid.

"Don Ignacio! Don Ignacio!" he exclaimed.

I rushed past him, down the stairs and to the don's room. It was tenantless, nor had his couch been occupied. I hastened to the library. Sitting in his armchair near his desk was Don Ignacio. His head lay back against the cushion of the chair. His eyes were wide open.

"Don Ignacio! Don Ignacio!"

He moved not. I raised his hand. It was warm, but fell helpless when I let it go. He was breathing heavily, but could not speak. I poured a glass of brandy and with great difficulty got a portion down his throat. I was chafing his hands and trying to arouse him when—"Grandpa! grandpa!" and my dear wife was on her knees beside him. Those hands that ever had for her a caress did not move, though the eyes rested lovingly upon her. She kissed his pale lips, but he for a time uttered no sound, but glanced from Coreta to me, then back to her. Finally his breast heaved, great drops of sweat stood out on his brow and from between his lips came the words, "Boy, my boy!" I flew up the stairs and snatched little Ignacio from his slumbers, back again and laid him across the old man's knees. His eyes seemed to devour him.

"Here," said I, "is where our wine comes from."

"The pirates' armory," said he.

many minutes before, with all power at my command, I could turn it, but I succeeded at last and pushed the heavy iron door back.

"Wait a few moments," said the don, "until fresh air be admitted. Remember, half a century has passed since a foot has crossed this threshold."

The air that we encountered at the door was flat and dead. I pushed again the door was flat and dead. I pushed again the door till I had it wide open. Then we sat for 10 minutes on a bench in the great hall, after which we entered the room. At the don's request I closed the door.

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