

SIQUIRE JOHN

A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"Walt; you may change your mind, Senor Jack," says the agent, deliberately.

"Suppose Roblado, bent upon such a dangerous mission, should fall into the hands of the enemy. They would perhaps feed him to the wild beasts, if you have any such in the Cuban chaparral, and possibly the dashing Colonel Spencer would share his fate; but I can see no reason why I should mourn under such conditions."

"Unfortunately it is not such clear sailing. The senor intends taking his daughters with him upon the expedition."

"Monstrous! The old wretch! It must not be allowed!" cries Jack.

"You are powerless to prevent it. He has a design behind it all, and hopes by the presence of the girls to avoid suspicion. A very shrewd old fellow, this Roblado, and as calculating and cold-blooded as you find them. But, Senor Jack, that is not all."

"The deuce, you say! Still worse coming! Well, I am prepared for it. Fire away!"

"Remember, this is in confidence. You must swear that through you not a whisper of it shall ever reach the ears of the authorities."

"Oh, I give you my solemn promise. And what I say I always do; you know that," replies Travers.

"I learned that it was the senor's intention to take a train from Havana that would bring him in the vicinity of Gomez' main camp."

"Well, I have it on pretty good authority that the rebels intend to dynamite that train, and the chances are that not a soul on board will escape to tell the story."

CHAPTER XII.

Just Five Minutes Too Late.

Smithers' intelligence causes a grating of teeth on the part of his auditor. The possibility of such a fate overtaking Jessie Cameron is quite enough to unnerve him.

"A diabolical way of striking a blow for liberty. We could not sanction it in our countries, Smithers. But that is not to the point. The question is



"The rebels intend to dynamite that train!"

how to save the girls. As to the men, I have no interest in their lives. They can take pot luck."

"Your promise, Mr. Travers?"

"I had not forgotten. That ties my hands so far as informing the authorities is concerned."

"Good."

"On my part I would say 'bad,' for now you and I must save those girls.

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I am determined on that, even though I have to start upon the doomed train myself."

"We must plan quickly, then, sir."

"How so? Is there something more you have not told me?"

"You see the day is declining."

"Yes—yes."

"And this train will leave Havana at about nightfall, I understand."

"But such a move is contrary to the usual rules governing railroad travel in these parts. All trains run by daylight, so that the danger may be less marked."

"Just so, and the rebels knowing this will not be on the lookout, it is supposed, and the extra train, or special, can go on unmolested."

"Ah, I see. Quite a clever piece of engineering, though the secret must have slipped through in some way, since as you declare a scheme is on foot to blow the train up with Yankee dynamite. Our time may be short. We must think and act quickly."

"Our only hope would be to separate the ladies from the rest of the party, perhaps at the last minute before the train started."

"I grasp your meaning. Continue."

"Roblado and his companion would be powerless to accomplish anything. They dare not keep the train waiting, and should they fail to be on it when the signal is given to start, the iron hand of the Captain-General would close upon them in a grasp that could only be cut loose before a corporal's guard at the dead-line. What do you think of the idea?"

"Well, you understand I must not appear in the matter. My promise to Jessie forbids."

"Excuse me, but if she fell overboard in mid-ocean, would you feel compelled to wait until she appealed directly to you before leaping over to her rescue? I know you better than that, Squire John. First her life, then her reproaches if she pleases to be so contrary. That life is in deadly danger now. You expect to fly to her relief. Already you are hampered by enough promises. Then away with the notion that you dare not come into her presence unless she calls for you. How is she otherwise to know you are in Havana?"

Jack throws up his hands.

"Smithers, you have won. I recognize the folly of carrying that thing out to the letter. If the occasion demands such an exposure on my part, I am ready to submit, even though she scorns me for breaking my word."

"Scorn you—my dear sir, evidently you have not studied the feminine mind as much as the methods of mining, or the necessities of a stock ranch. Besides, unless all signs fail, you may be in a position to save her from a terrible fate, and the very opportunity you desire be granted."

"I am convinced. Now tell me how you would carry out such a scheme."

Smithers has evidently thought it all out beforehand, as he unravels a plan so well arranged that Jack can hardly add anything to it.

Just previous to the time for the train to go someone employed for that purpose will draw the senor to the end of the station platform on particular business—perhaps a few last verbal directions from the Captain-General of a non-committal nature.

While he is away from the carriage in which the ladies have taken up their places, another messenger will come to them, apparently from Don Rafael, bearing the information that he has given up the trip, and that they will accompany the other in the victoria back to the hotel, where the senor will rejoin them.

How simple—how effective!

If no hitch occurs to mar the little game, Senor Rablado will make a mad

dash for his carriage as the signal to start is given, and plunging in as the train moves, discover it to be empty.

He may rave, he may bellow like a mad bull, but that will not prevent the special from leaving Havana and plunging in among the hills back of the Cuban capital. He dare not leave the train, since Spain expects him to do his duty, and any defection on his part may bring immediate ruin upon his house.

Meanwhile, it will not be so difficult a feat for the driver of the vehicle to explain matters to the two girls, and endeavor to gain their consent to his driving them—not to the hotel, but to the house under whose roof Senor Jack has found such an hospitable welcome.

"The rest I must leave to you, sir, for I expect you to be with me on the



Something of a piratical look.

box of the vehicle. If you have never kissed the Blarney stone, I imagine you may at least be able to offer some specious plea as to why they should accept this hospitality."

"And Lola will be there to greet them," adds Travers, mentally picturing the scene when these two come together—the one so fair and winsome a lassie, bred in the bonnie air of the Scottish highlands, the other dark and beautiful, like a tropical flower.

"Well—er—no, I hardly think Lola will be at home. I gave her a note from head—from some parties who desire her presence, and unless I am mistaken she has gone from here before now. But that will not matter. The whole house is at their disposal."

"I hope they will accept. What comes after, we must leave to chance," and Jack smiles at the pleasing prospect.

"At any rate, with the don out of the game, there's no reason why you shouldn't advance your cause, my friend."

"H'm! Poor don. It is a terrible fate, and I hate to think of it; but I presume these people have been rendered quite desperate by what they believe to be their wrongs. At any rate, I don't pretend to judge just how far they are justified in such severe actions. My whole concern is to save my wife from such a fate into which as an entirely innocent party she seems in danger of being dragged."

"The wrongs of Cuba cry aloud to Heaven for redress from every hillside—they have burned like smouldering fires for half a century, breaking out now and again in such heroic struggles as the Ten Years' War. The end is inevitable, and none but the wilfully blind can fail to see the handwriting on the wall. Cuba must, and shall be free."

Smithers has unconsciously betrayed himself. He realizes that his enthusiasm has carried him beyond the line of prudence. His face pales, and he immediately places his hand on Jack's arm.

"Forget what I have said, I beg of you, sir."

"No, I could not if I would, and I would not if I could. My heart is in sympathy with the movement to free this island from her yoke. It does not

surprise me that you are interested in the desperate struggle—many brave Englishmen are. Nothing surprises me in connection with this country. I honor you for the stand you have taken. Your secret is safe with me, Smithers. Now I can give a guess why you hesitated to come back to Havana. But, since we understand each other, let us talk of our plans for saving the girls."

Jack readily admits that he can think of no positive improvement in connection with the idea so clearly suggested by the keen-sighted agent, and which appears to quite cover the ground.

"How much time have we to make ready?" he asks.

Smithers consults his chronometer. "It is now a quarter to five—the train is appointed to leave at six-thirty," he says.

"An hour and three-quarters. Ample time to accomplish wonders, my dear fellow. I've seen occasions when the world was apparently turned topsyturvy in far less."

"I don't doubt it. You fellows in the Wild West live fast. I know something about it myself, sir."

"You've seen our country, then?"

"That is a fact, sir."

"Been in the Colorado mines—looked on a Texas ranch, perhaps?"

"Never shall forget it."

"And possibly visited some of our Spanish-American cities down near the border of Mexico—Santa Fe, for instance?"

"Again I admit the soft impeachment," returns Smithers, a little uneasily, as if he realizes what Jack is driving at.

"Ah!"

That is all Travers says, but there is a world of significance in his manner of uttering the one word. He understands now that it must have been while in the New Mexican capital this English agent met Lola. The relations between them are beyond his present ken, but by degrees it appears as though the curtain will rise.

Smithers prepares to bolt.

"I shall be back here with a vehicle by six o'clock. Meanwhile, alter your looks a little so as to seem more of a native. You will find certain things in your apartment that will aid you. As to Ah Sin, shall we take him with us?"

"He may prove valuable. I have found him so on many occasions."

"Very well. He goes along. I'm off, sir."

Jack watches the other's vanishing form until it is swallowed up amid the luxuriant flower bushes. Then he seeks solace in a cigar, and passes through the court to the suite of rooms assigned him.

Remembering Smithers' injunction he tries his hand at darkening his skin a little and in various ways altering his appearance, so that when success follows his efforts he is constrained to believe he presents something of a piratical look, and experiences a feeling of dismal dismay at the prospect of her eyes being turned upon him.

(To be continued.)

Horrible to Think Of.

Church—"In some of the Hindoo temples an elephant takes up the collection. It goes round with a basket extended from its trunk."

Gotham—"What do you suppose would happen if some thoughtless man dropped a peanut in the basket some Sunday morning?"

She Was Cornered.

Mother—Why have you taken all of the chairs out of the parlor, dear?

Daughter—Because George is so fearfully bashful, I'm not progressing at all. Now there is nothing left in the room but a tete-a-tete and he's got to sit near me!—Detroit Free Press.

Their Smile Came Off.

Maud—I always like to stand between a couple of brawny football players.

Both (pleased)—Aw! why, now? Maud—Their hideous appearance sets off a girl's locks so.