

SQUIRE JOHN

A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

Jack steps upon the platform of the car adjoining that which constitutes the rear of the train. He is bent upon finding out just how matters stand, so that should the expedition proceed, giving evidence that no suspicion of the danger ahead has entered into the calculations of the soldiers, he may be able to carry out a bright thought which has entered his head.

"I believe it can be done without a doubt," Jack mutters, after bending down and making a hasty examination of the connection between the two coaches.

"The same thing has been accomplished on numerous occasions. Railroad men in your country call it 'making a flying switch,'" says Smithers, almost in his ear—Smithers who seems to have intuitively guessed what Jack's bright thought has been, and indeed must have been figuring himself on the same thing.

"See, there is room enough for all of us to cling to the end of the other coach at the time we separate. The only danger will be the chance of discovery on the part of the soldiers."

"Well, sir, in that we are lucky. Note the fact that tents and a certain amount of luggage have been piled up at this end of the car."

"Yes, you are right."

"It not only serves to darken the platform in a degree, but will, I believe, prevent any of the men from noticing that the last coach is cut off."

"Then let us pray that luck will follow us. If it wasn't for that promise—"

"Ah, sir, if I hadn't the utmost faith in your word of honor, I never would have betrayed their secret—no, not even to save the ladies. But no more on that subject, please. We are here, and our work is cut out for us. It remains to be seen what Anglo-Saxon wit can accomplish against the minions of Spanish tyranny."

Bold words these to be uttered, even in a whisper, within sight of several hundred Spanish soldiers, who would



"Now!" he cries hoarsely.

tear the speaker limb from limb did they but overhear.

"Look, the conference is over."

Travers has kept one eye upon the group of officers all the while, and when he sees them separate he knows the subject that has been debated between them is settled.

Ah, the officers hasten to the train. Will they order the men to turn out, or make themselves comfortable for the night, since further progress has been abandoned?

Alas! this is just what they do not carry out. Instead, loud orders in Spanish of "All aboard!" are heard,

and the soldiers can be seen scrambling to enter the cars.

Thus the station platform, which but a minute before bustled with life, appears empty and almost forsaken.

The man in charge of the train glances up and down, and seeing everything in readiness, waves his arms.

An immediate response comes from the engine in the way of a shrill shriek—then is heard a puffing sound, the long train begins to move—they are off!

And the bridge at which the fearful disaster is planned to take place lies just eight miles beyond.

Jack knows they are now reduced to this dernier ressort. Should it fail, in all probability they will be in at the death, if they can find any satisfaction in that thought.

Smithers has learned one thing that may have a bearing on the question. This refers to the train guard who answered the questions of Don Roblado.

This Spaniard has leaped into a compartment of the rear coach while the train was in motion—the section nearest the platform upon which stand, or, rather, crouch, the three friends. Thus it is settled that they have someone to look after, and who must not be forgotten in the grand climax, lest he be the means of overwhelming them with disaster.

The speed increases. At this rate they will not be more than half an hour, perhaps only twenty minutes, in reaching the fatal spot.

Jack and Smithers talk it over in quick sentences, while Ah Sin stands ready to do just whatever he is bidden. No danger of their being overheard out there, with the rattle of the cars and the clang of the wheels over the rails.

One thing favors their plans—the night has swooped down upon them with black pinions, and so intense has the gloom become in this mountainous region that but for the lights streaming from the car windows it would be impossible to see the length of half the train.

Jack points to the horizon, where some low-lying clouds are tinged with a glow.

"Possibly we are near the camp fires along the trocha," he remarks, at which the other says, with grim sarcasm:

"I would be more inclined to believe that is the handwriting of Maceo on the sky."

"Oh, more canefields destroyed. This is a sad day for poor Cuba, throttled on both sides. But we must be halfway there, Smithers."

"At least that. A few more miles and the blow will fall. To work, then."

"Look ahead. We are just descending a low grade. Beyond appears a gentle ascent. It is here we must sink or swim. Everything is planned. If the execution turn out as well, we need have no cause for complaint. Let us change quarters."

This is readily done, and in a very brief space of time they find themselves clinging to the ledge at the extreme forward end of the rear coach. Jack is on his knees groping for the coupling pin that holds the two vehicles together. If they wait until the ascent begins, no single man's strength may drag it out, because at that time the strain will be wholly upon it. Smithers is on the watch.

"Now!" he cries, hoarsely, as they reach the bottom of the descent and begin to run along a very limited level stretch, with the rise close at hand.

Jack half rises from his crouching position; he has given a tremendous try, and is now seen to hold something in his hand.

"It is done," he says, tossing the

iron pin into the darkness of the night.

Almost immediately the car begins to drop behind; a gap appears that quickly widens, and the military train speeds on toward doom, leaving them behind.

CHAPTER XV.

A Little Affair Concerning Señor Roblado and the Guard.

It is, as may be naturally supposed, a minute of intense suspense. Whether they will succeed in their desperate enterprise depends on the perfect alignment of numerous facts, each bearing on the others.

At the same time, our three friends do not forget to act.

As the carriage, upon the forward end of which they cling so desperately, decreases its speed, their eyes are not wholly taken up with watching the train draw ahead.

The business has been shrewdly, though hurriedly, planned, and each



"Silencio!"

one of the trio has his work laid out for him.

Thus, Ah Sin, having secured a spare coupling pin that lay upon the platform of the last car of the retreating train, only waits for the lone carriage to about come to a stand, when he intends leaping to the ground and placing this piece of iron behind one of the wheels, so as to prevent any backward movement when the momentum already acquired shall have ceased.

Smithers has in mind the guard in the nearest compartment.

That railway man, accustomed to the different motions of a carriage, will speedily know by instinct that the rear carriage is traveling along on its individual responsibility, and as this is a freak hardly within the ordinary repertoire of trailing cars in general, involving considerable danger in its way, like a faithful employe he will be likely to show some desire for an investigation.

This is what interests Smithers.

Should the guard discover that they are being deserted by the train he will naturally give tongue and endeavor by all means to attract attention to the fact, not knowing, of course, what a beneficent fate it is that has thus guarded his interests, for he can be aware of no danger ahead.

Possibly the voice of a single man, no matter how resonant, may not be heard above the rattle and roar of a train under full speed, and especially by the passengers.

Smithers does not mean that he shall have the opportunity to try. There are other times and places more propitious for testing the resounding qualities of a man's lung capacity, and since it concerns their fortunes acutely, the detective is bound to throw his influence against it.

Thus he begins to make his way in the direction of the guard's door.

Smithers has already discovered one thing of interest. There is a light in the end section of the carriage where all was dark at the last station.

Possibly the fellow has lighted a

lamp in order to read, or it may be to better accomplish his regular duties, if a guard on a train out of Havana may be supposed to have any such.

At any rate, this fact suits Smithers to a dot, as he may now discover what course to take, and can in his own way intimidate the railway man.

Once his feet have found the plank, and he no longer has any difficulty.

Half a dozen times his hands seek a new hold, and then Smithers has reached a point where he can look into the interior.

By this time the speed of the divorced car has been sensibly slackened, and even a very obtuse employe of the road can hardly help realizing that something is wrong.

Even as Smithers reaches the open window of the compartment door and crouches underneath it, the head and shoulders of the Spanish guard are hastily thrust into view, as the fellow endeavors to look up the line ahead.

It so happens that the train, having completed the gentle ascent of the hill, is just at this particular moment in full view outlined in silhouette against the heavens.

There is hence no possible excuse for the guard not immediately discovering it, and that he fully grasps the situation is evident from the startled exclamation that escapes his lips:

"Madre de Dios!"

Smithers' method of procedure is as emphatic as it is effective. As yet the man has not noticed the dark figure crouching under the window, since his attention is wholly taken up with what goes on ahead.

A hand suddenly plunges upward and fastens upon the guard's throat with a tenacious grip, and the hoarse yell which is just on the point of bursting forth is stifled in the act.

"Silencio!" says a voice in his ear.

The admonition is quite superfluous, since there is not the slightest chance of the fellow giving even a whisper while those fingers close so affectionately upon his throat.

The carriage has almost ceased to climb the gentle acclivity, its momentum having become very nearly exhausted, and already the train has vanished entirely from view, so that all danger from that source is past.

(To be continued.)

Skinned Out.

When it became known that the best shot in the regiment was going into the jungle to compass the death of a terrible tiger, the surgeon-major of the regiment, an enthusiastic curio collector, at once buttonholed him.

"Remember, Atkins," said he, "I bespeak the skin at your own price."

"All right, sir," said Atkins.

The surgeon-major was netting but terrifies on the outskirts of the jungle that evening, when he saw Atkins running toward him.

"Shot him?" shouted the surgeon-major.

"Yes, sir!" breathlessly replied the flying Nimrod.

"How much for the skin?"

"Five dollars, sir!"

The doctor gave Atkins the money. "Where's the skin?" he cried.

"Behind you, sir!" came the receding answer.

The doctor looked, and saw the skin, with the tiger in it, coming open-mouthed and bleeding from a scratch where Atkins had "shot" it. The doctor didn't get the tiger's skin, but the tiger nearly got the doctor's.

Mamma Was Shocked.

"Mr. Huggins asked me to marry him last night," said the blushing damsel.

"And what did you say?" asked her mother.

"Why," replied the fair maid, "I told him to ask you."

"Ask me!" exclaimed the astonished parent. "Why, my dear, you surely wouldn't want your poor old mother to commit bigamy, would you?"

Art in Lowly Places.

In Paris there is now open an exhibition of works of art, pictures and sculpture, executed by porters and other railway employes.