

SQUIRE JOHN

A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBONE

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CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

Smithers believes there is no further necessity for torturing the poor devil whom the fortunes of war have thrown into his power, and is willing to compromise the matter. So he suddenly pushes the half-strangled guard back into the compartment, and finding a means of opening the door, passes inside just as the carriage ceases to move.

Ah Sin has not been backward about managing his share of the business, and he utilizes the piece of iron in his hand to such good purpose that the car makes no effort to return toward the bottom of the incline.

As for Jack, he has his work cut out also.

When the vehicle of transportation ceases to move, he reaches the ground alongside, and hastens toward the compartment in which the party may be found in whom he is so deeply interested.

Now he reaches the door.

He is on the other side from that selected by Smithers, so that he sees nothing of that worthy gentleman's little engagement with the train guard.

"Why do we stop, guard?" asks a voice, and Jack readily recognizes it as belonging to the very being who fills his thoughts.

She is there within arm's length of him at the moment—what ecstasy the fact brings to him—his Highland bride, the girl who really bears his name; and yet a cruel fate compels him to dissemble.

"There has been an accident—a coupling proved false, and the train has gone on, leaving our carriage behind," is what he says.

He hears feminine exclamations of alarm, and the gruffer tones of a man's voice. Then out comes the white head of the painter.

"What is all this, guard? You say we are left behind in the wilds. Cospita! this is, indeed, a nice kettle of fish."

Senor Roblado is evidently in a towering rage at being subjected to such



"Caramba, you are not the guard we had at the last station!"

delay. He opens the door and springs out into the night.

Immediately he makes a discovery.

He looks at the disguised "Squire John" as though something very singular has flashed into his mind.

"Caramba, you are not the guard we had at the last station!" ejaculates Roblado.

"I know it," replies Jack, simply.

"Then who are you?" demands this

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fiery don, as if suspecting treachery.

"A passenger by the train, like yourself, senior, and one who is as much interested in looking after our safety as you may be."

Roblado cools down a little.

"What would you advise, senior?" asks the don, eagerly.

"A danger signal both up and down the line, that we may warn them, no matter from what direction they come."

"You mean lanterns?"

"If they can be had; but otherwise fires will do just as well."

"A splendid thought. I congratulate you on your idea, senior. Let us waste no time in accomplishing it. Ah, who is this?" as Ah Sin comes creeping from under the car and falls in behind his master.

"A servant of mine, senior, who is worth his weight in gold in a crisis like this."

"He can help with the fires. But I would like to know what has become of that guard. He shall be punished for deserting us."

"Hark! I hear voices. Possibly it is the guard and the gentleman who traveled with me. Look, yonder they come round the end of the car. We shall have company—plenty of hands to build the fires, senior."

Sure enough Smithers comes hurrying to the spot, accompanied by the guard, whom he seems to have utterly hypnotized, since the fellow shows an eagerness to obey his slightest wish that is really ridiculous to Jack.

CHAPTER XVI.

Under One Flag.

A hasty council of war is convened, and the remarkable situation discussed. All seem to be of one mind, that their only course under the circumstances is to keep on the watch and guard against the approach of a train.

So, while the senior and Smithers walk down the line a dozen or so yards, with the avowed intention of building a bonfire there, Jack, Ah Sin and the guard start upward to do the same above the stalled carriage.

As the light from this is thrown around, dispelling the gloom, it will be easier work collecting the wood.

Ah Sin proves a master hand at this, and his employer is quite content he should have charge of the fires, once they get going, since it will keep the Chinaman away from the carriage, and hence lessen the danger of his appearance arousing sudden suspicion in the mind of the senior.

Besides, Jack's curiosity has been aroused, and he longs to know what magic the wonderful Smithers has exercised in order to make such a devoted ally out of the guard.

The opportunity comes when he can address the chap, and he does not hesitate; for he has already learned that the guard has a fair comprehension of "English as she is spoke."

"You have seen my friend; you understand the truth. Is it so?" he asks, and the guard with a smile and a shrug makes answer, as he involuntarily raises a hand to his throat, which doubtless still feels the effect of the detective's hard fingers.

"Hola, senior, I understand. Anything he says, that will I do. We are as one. When a man saves the life of Pedro Agrilla, there is nothing I would not for him do. And you are his friend, senior; have no fear that I the truth will ever tell."

Ah, Smithers has therefore told him about the dreadful doom from which he has been snatched, as it were, by a miracle, and for the present, at least, the fellow in his gratitude is ready and willing to serve them faithfully. What

he might do when the idea grows a little more familiar to him remains to be seen.

Jack moves down toward the others, as Ah Sin may be trusted to keep things going. As he passes the carriage he sees two heads at the open door, and needs no spirit of divination to tell him who the interested spectators may be.

While he is just in front of them, one of the girls asks him if there is any danger. Evidently they are disturbed, as the bravest feminine mind might well be.

Manita does most of the questioning, but her Scotch stepsister occasionally introduces a few words, and evidently grasps the situation far better than Jack had believed possible.

He is more than charmed with her apparently brave demeanor in the face of danger, and not forgetting his design of keeping his identity a secret, answers as gruffly as possible. Seizing



Spencer eyes him curiously.

the first opportunity, he hurries down to where the others are engaged.

Another form can be seen fitting about in the light of the fires—evidently Col. Spencer has been aroused from his nap in the cozy corner of the carriage, and brought to a realization of the deadly danger menacing them in case a train comes along.

Long ere now Howard Spencer has learned of his fallacy with regard to the death of Jack Travers. Senor Roblado has regaled him with a full and exceedingly vivid account of the singular events that followed so fast upon his accident in the Canongate. Hence he knows Jack is alive, and that through the most peculiar freak of fortune in the world he was permitted to wed sweet Jessie Cameron, just as the outrageous will and testament of his Quixotic relative required. This being the case, it may be safely assumed that Spencer nurses an additional grievance against the man he has wronged, and that when the very first opportunity springs up he will avail himself of it in the hope of winning "Squire John's" widow.

As to that, Jack hopes to have a voice in the matter himself.

The three are apparently discussing some knotty question connected with the peculiar situation when Jack comes up.

They turn to him as though resolved to have his idea on the subject, and Jack experiences an itching of the fingers when he finds himself near the man who envies him the possession of Jessie Cameron, for something tells him that sooner or later they will have to fight it out between them.

Spencer eyes him curiously, but gives no evidence of suspicion.

"Senior, we were just debating here whether this thing that has happened to us can be an accident or some deep design on the part of those who secretly plan to destroy the government of Spain on this island. I had not thought of that until your friend mentioned it."

It is, of course, Senor Roblado who says this.

"I myself have wondered whether the rebels can have any special desire

to make way with some of us. It looks suspicious, I am bound to confess," remarks Jack, coolly.

Roblado has a guilty conscience—he knows full well there are good reasons why the patriot followers of Gomez and Maceo should hate him like poison—and Jack, who has purposely sent the shaft, sees the start and sudden pallor that mark its reception.

Undoubtedly the worthy senior has a pretty good notion that if this thing has happened by design instead of accident, he is the party at whom the blow is aimed.

"Gentlemen, I trust you are all armed, so that should we be attacked the ladies may be defended," he says, hastily, at which there is a general showing of firearms that might appear ridiculous in many countries, but which is certainly not out of place in poor, distracted Cuba.

Senor Roblado shows some relief when assured that the revolver which he so quickly brings to light is at once matched by every one of the others present.

"Cospita! a brave collection indeed, seniors. With valiant men behind them, I am sure we need have little fear of the result, unless—"

The white haired artist and Spanish diplomat never finishes that sentence. While he is in the midst of it, there suddenly salutes their startled ears a heavy, rumbling sound. The very earth seems to quiver under their feet.

"Thunder!" exclaims Senor Roblado on the spur of the moment.

"Bah! look at the sky," echoes Jack.

Not a cloud is to be seen; the silvery stars peep down upon them with a brightness that has to be witnessed in a tropical climate in order to be appreciated.

"You are right—it cannot be thunder, since there are no signs of a storm. What, then?" says the senior, in no little excitement.

"Hark!"

As Smithers utters the one word, they all strain their hearing. A gentle southern zephyr chances to be blowing, and this brings to their ears faint, far-away sounds that, while confused at first, resolve themselves into shouts and rifle shots, together with all the other various noises that signalize a battle royal.

Senor Roblado no longer gropes in uncertainty after the truth. It has flashed upon his mind as the meteor leaps through space.

"Por Dios! listen to that seniors. Yonder men meet in deadly strife. And that fearful explosion—I tell you it was dynamite. They have blown up the train, those fiends incarnate who fight against Spain!" he cries in a husky voice, that trembles in spite of the man's positive nerve.

"Under those conditions it seems to me our accident, then, has turned out a most remarkable piece of good luck for us," remarks Jack, with a coolness that is refreshing.

"Quien sabe? At least we are alive, and that is something to be thankful for. But, gentlemen, I have reason to believe they seek me over yonder, and upon learning the truth will come this way in force."

"That will be bad," declares Smithers, who has hard work to hide the grin that causes his facial muscles to twitch.

"Very bad indeed. But, seniors, if they should come, that is no reason we must give in like weaklings. I myself will set you an example. They shall only enter yonder carriage, where the ladies are, over my body."

(To be continued.)

Looking Ahead.

Mabel—"You don't know George, papa. He's generous to a fault."

Mr. Nurox—"I'm glad to hear it. Perhaps he'll be generous to some of yours."—Judge.

The fool who knows his foolishness, is wise at least so far; but a fool who thinks himself wise, he is a fool indeed.—Buddha.

We must climb before we can have our visions.—Dr. L. S. McCollister.