

# SQUIRE JOHN

## A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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### CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

Perhaps he has just discovered the threatening danger from fire, or it may be the railway carriage is already ablaze. Jack is convinced that the danger springs from this source, and not on account of their demoralized enemies.

He is loth to leave his present anchorage; he believes he could remain indefinitely in such close proximity to the divinity in the form of a girl who is moulding his fate with her fair hands as a potter shapes his clay. Duty calls, and he obeys.

Upon passing through the opening which the vigorous onslaught of the agent fashioned, he finds the trio awaiting him.

Outside, the fire rages, and the crackling of a few minutes before is rapidly growing into an increasing roar as the flames leap from tree to tree.

"Rather an uncomfortable situation, I declare," is the way in which he greets them.

"Well, I should say so," emphatically declares Smithers, who has lost his coolness, and dances about like a man on a scorching gridiron.

"Have you made any discovery? Is the carriage on fire?" for he can think of nothing less, to judge from Smithers' actions.

"It's worse," groans the agent.

"How can that be?" asks Travers, mentally deciding that his trusted agent must have his usually steady mind affected in some way by the continuous run of ill luck that seems to haunt him.

"Because, unless we get out of this spot instant, we're bound for kingdom come by the shortest route on record," comes the quick, mysterious reply.

"Tell me what you have discovered," he says, in his quiet way, which even the presence of the most startling danger does not seem to disturb to any extent.

"It is easily done. The guard has just been giving it to me. You remember several of the compartments



"They contain a ton of ammunition!" of this carriage are locked. I have just learned they contain a ton of ammunition for the use of the Spanish army in the field. If the fire—if a single spark enters there, we will never know what struck us, Senor Jack."

### CHAPTER XX.

Just So Napoleon Retreated From Moscow.

In his excitement Smithers had mentioned a name upon which his lips are supposed to be sealed; but as Roblado and Spencer have not con-

cluded their argument at the door of the other compartment, it hardly seems possible that any damage can result from such a slip of the tongue.

No man fancies finding himself placed over the magazine of a burning ship, and the startling information conveyed in Smithers' crude but effective manner gives Jack some uneasiness, though it is to his credit that it is of others and not himself he thinks.

"Come," he says, cheerily; "it seems as though we've jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire, and our last state is worse than the first. The question is, how can we improve the situation?"

Smithers shakes his head helplessly. For once in his life he can see no outlet, since it appears to be a choice between two evils—the raging fire on one hand, and the mob of half frenzied guerrilleros on the other, if they desert the car and try to escape down the track between the flaming jaws.

"Come to the door, and I will show you," declares Travers, promptly.

The other flies there on eager wings. It is not a very pleasant atmosphere upon which they thrust their heads. The heat has become very intense, and Jack, as he places a hand upon the side of the carriage and comprehends what power those roaring pyramids of flame can show, whistles expressively, remembering what is contained in those two sealed chambers beyond—a free passport to the skies.

"Look," he cries, pointing down the lines of glittering rails; "notice that this wind comes from that quarter. The fire eats in the teeth of it very slowly, if at all. It is in the other direction the greatest danger lies. We are playing a peculiar part, you know. This car is like the huge pendulum of a clock. We have swung to the left and to the right—now we will go forward again."

Smithers grasps his meaning, and mentally swears at his own stupidity in failing to conceive such a simple remedy.

"You have discovered the only possible chance. Good luck to you, sir. The sooner we are on the toboggan the better; and, Ah Sin, see to it that you have your great joss guard us as we rush between those fiery hands joined across the track below, for should a spark enter one of those compartments, we're done for. If you need any assistance, sir—" But Travers is already out of the door and bending low beside one of the front wheels.

Again he matches his superb muscular ability against the grim adhesive qualities of cold iron. His former experience has taught him something, and he does not waste any precious time in useless pulling, but works the pin backward and forward with resolute jerks.

As before, he wins—pluck and brawn have again triumphed over cold metal.

No sooner does he feel the car begin to move than he makes a plunge again for the door which Smithers has held open. This time it might be very unpleasant hanging outside on the footboard, since a sea of fire awaits them below.

Hardly has he gained the interior and the door been closed than they are in it. There is a flash of flame on either side as the fire licks the framework of the moving carriage. Those in the secret of the ammunition hold their breath in very suspense, but greatly to their relief no explosion follows:

The bottom reached, a run across, and up the opposite rise they pass.

about halfway to the point from which their first dash occurred.

Jack is in readiness. Much depends on his ability to block the wheels again.

Hanging from the footboard, he leaps off at the proper moment, and applies his novel brake with the same success as before.

They seem to have escaped another great danger.

Smithers is uneasy. He makes a circuit of the carriage, sniffing the air. Jack is below, and almost immediately he hears the agent utter an exclamation. Then Smithers' head appears against the sky.

"The roof is afire—right over one of the other sections, and I can't get at it with my hand or foot! If you could secure a small quantity of water—"

But Jack has already leaped into the guard's den and seized upon a gallon can he remembers discovering there.

"Here—here! Take it and be quick, my dear fellow!" he says, handing it up.

Smithers promptly seizes hold of the can, and turns to accomplish his pur-



The strong wind brings to his ears a crash of shots and loud outcries.

pose, reappearing a minute later with a relieved air and an empty water vessel.

"The country is saved, sir," is his cheering report, and from this Travers understands that the deluge of water fell upon the right spot.

There is much to think of still. While danger from the blazing woods need not alarm them—for the time being, at least—they dread to think of what might happen should there be a change of wind, and this is apt to occur at any hour.

Jack and Smithers talk it over in the forward compartment, and Senor Roblado joins them.

The Spanish artist does not seem as enthusiastic as before. He asks questions and makes suggestions, but evidently his spirit is tamed. Perhaps the multitude of dangers descending upon them in succession have something to do with this change in his manner.

There is one who thinks differently, and this is the astute Mr. Smithers.

When Roblado retires again to the other compartment, to ascertain how the ladies are faring, the agent takes advantage of his flitting to hastily remark in an undertone:

"Well, he's guessed it, Senor Jack. He knows you are the Squire John again against whom they played their cards in Edinburgh."

"What do you suppose he will do?"

"Nothing just at present."

"But he hates me."

"Quite true; and yet just at present he depends upon you for his very life. When we get back to Havana, if Fortune is so kind as to allow us, then look out for storms, but not here."

"It's little I care, you know, so long as I am able to serve her. That is the full extent of my mission to Cuba. And from the way matters are going, I have strong hopes that sooner or later success will come to me. But let us forget the future, and take care of the present. We have seen no signs

of our enemies around, and yet I hardly believe they have left the neighborhood. Look out here at the sky—you have spent some years in Cuba. Tell me what you think of the chances for a down-pour of rain."

"It has certainly clouded over; but you know at this season of the year we usually have a daily rain after the noon hour."

"That's what I look for, my dear fellow; it would be in a direct line with our luck. But you seem to be listening. What is it you hear?"

"Put your head out again, sir, and you will be fully informed."

Jack does as requested.

The strong wind bears to his ears a crash of shots and loud outcries; nor is Travers more backward about guessing their meaning than his companion expected.

"They are advancing this way, and fighting as they come," he declares.

"That is true as gospel, sir. The men of Gomez have them on the run. May the god of battles prosper their cause until Spanish rule in Cuba is known no more."

Jack's curiosity is again aroused, and he wonders what strange fortune has welded the career of this Briton with the cause of liberty in the Gem of the Antilles; but certainly there is no time to hear the story now.

Doubtless the explosion of the dynamite destroyed the bridge, and caused the wreck of the military train, but the majority of the troops aboard have escaped, and meet the attack of their foes with a bravery that proves their right to a part in the traditions of olden Spanish chivalry.

While our friends keep watch and ward, wondering what new and strange experience is about to be their portion, a crash of musketry sounds just beyond the crest of the hill.

"They are coming," exclaims Smithers, laboring under unusual excitement.

Moving figures are seen, and the light of the still-burning trees glints from polished gunbarrels and shining swords.

They are Spanish soldiers who gather there and gaze in wonder at the fiery scene spread before them.

Our friends can even hear their loud exclamations at sight of the carriage.

Senor Roblado is of course wildly delighted at the coming of the military; he springs to the ground and makes all manner of frantic gestures, inviting them to come on, meanwhile bawling at the top of his voice.

Whether they understand what he means or not, the soldiers spend but a brief time in irresolution.

Shots and shouts tell that the enemy presses hot upon their trail, so that every little while it is necessary to turn at bay and beat off the eager rebels.

So Napoleon retreated from Moscow, leaving a trail of blood through all southwestern Russia. Down the slope they come, helter-skelter. Jack wonders whether his friend Gen. Toledo is one of the officers in the front.

The cries they now utter are indicative of great joy. At first he is puzzled to account for them, but when the leading soldiers draw nearer he is able to catch the tenor of these exultant shouts. They have fought under heavy disadvantages, since their weapons are nearly all empty, and the sight of the carriage laden with ammunition causes hilarious satisfaction.

(To be continued.)

### A Reasonable Claim.

"We'll dispense with your services, sir," said Mr. Merchant sternly. "I saw you coming out of a saloon today. I told you I'd discharge you for that, didn't I?"

"Why, no, sir," replied Galley, "you said you'd discharge me if you saw me going into one. I think I deserve some credit for coming out."—Philadelphia Press.

### Snow on Vesuvius.

Vesuvius under a mantle of snow was one of the curiosities to be witnessed at Naples in the first week of January.