

SQUIRE JOHN

A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

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CHAPTER XXVI—Continued.

Smithers has already gone, desirous of safely delivering the missive before the consul is wholly hedged in by the crowd that usually surrounds him.

Whatever Jack has written appears to deeply impress the quiet gentleman who for years has represented the United States in Cuba. He reads it through, and placing it in his pocket, says to Smithers:

"Tell Mr. Travers I will be on my guard, and ready to respond to his message at any time of the day or night."

When Jack hears this he feels considerably relieved. With the power of the United States government behind him he cannot see much to fear in the situation.

While Smithers was absent on his mission, Jack has by rare good luck discovered the party for whom he has been searching.

Senor Robado is looking quite his best, and his distinguished appearance arouses considerable curiosity, though the glances leveled at him are quickly transferred to the wondrous fair face at his elbow. Among the sable-haired señoritas of Spain or Cuba one so purely a blonde as Jessie Cameron must always attract an unusual share of notice.

Jack literally feasts his eyes upon her.

He wonders when this miserable farce will have been played to its limit—when he may dare claim this dear one for his own. The game is galling him and he frets under it. Have patience, Senor Jack; that jade Fortune intends to give her wheel a merry whirl on this night of the Captain General's reception, and if you remain on the qui vive, it is possible the profit may fall to your share. Eternal vigilance is the price of success in love as well as in war.

Smithers now leaves his patron for a time. He has a game of his own to look after. Since Gomez has determined to visit the grand reception, and see his enemy face to face, those



Jack literally feasts his eyes upon her, who are concerned for the safety of the great insurgent leader have plenty to worry them.

Perhaps the keen wit of the detective has been levied upon to produce additional features that will ensure the safety of the man upon whom the Cubans in rebellion rely more than any other for leadership. The passage of events will prove this.

Ever and anon Jack casts his eyes after the little party. The crush becomes great, and many seek the ring

in order to secure relief. Fearful lest he may lose sight of her in the great crowd, Jack pushes after, and as luck will have it, discovers the object of his search with a look of distress upon her face, the pressure of the surging populace having separated her from the others.

And Jack, stilling the mad throbbing of his heart, pushes close to where she stands, sheltered by a pillar.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Jack Cuts the Gordian Knot.

And yet she has not seen him, although he is so near he might put out his hand and touch her rounded arm. Ah! As her anxious gaze wanders this way and that, her eyes rest upon his face. Jack no longer endeavors to disguise himself, since his enemies know of his presence, and he might get into trouble with the authorities while sailing around under a name and conditions that do not agree with his passport.

She starts plainly—the blood rushes, surges to her face, bathing cheeks and brow and neck with its rosy hue. Ye gods, how beautiful she looks while thus bathed in blushes! Poor Jack is unable to drag his eyes away, even though he risk his queen's displeasure by continuing to stare so boldly. Hard lines, indeed, when a poor fellow takes desperate chances in simply looking at his own wife.

Does she frown? Will my lady turn her head haughtily aside and ignore him, overcome by recollections of the past?

Perhaps—who can say?—she has not forgotten the black-eyed beauty on the milk-white horse whose life Jack saved on that terrible night of the battle, and whom he had called "Lola Montez"—a thousand chances to one the name has burned in her mind ever since that night of adventure.

Last of all, he belongs to her—at least, by Scottish law; and if the secret of a heart ever shone in mortal eyes, Jack reveals his passion at that moment.

So, instead of the cold treatment he expects and fears, the young squire is amazed and delighted beyond measure when she reaches out a hand and catches hold of his sleeve. Well, he makes no effort to break away, but meekly submits to his fate—indeed, nothing would suit him better and cure the aching void in his heart sooner than that she continue to hold him thus indefinitely.

"I am pleased to see you, Squire John. You find me a distressed female—separated from the rest of my party. I must appeal to you to stand by me until I can rejoin them; and I had intended when next we met to ask your pardon for my rudeness on the occasion of our singular introduction. I forbade you to ever address me. I was not myself. You can imagine the conditions of my mind. You have nobly kept your word, and yet what do I not owe to your bravery? I want you to say you can pardon my treatment of you, and promise to be one of my friends."

She says this hurriedly, as though not quite sure that she may get through without being overcome by confusion.

Jack hears and exults.

His hour of triumph is at hand. She no longer bids him keep his distance and freezes him with haughty looks. Instead, she opens the way to her friendship—perhaps more.

His first impulse is to eagerly seize upon the golden opportunity.

Then, upon second thought he hesitates. Perhaps she is grateful because of his risking a life in her behalf. Bah! Gratitude is far from what he seeks—it is the affection

shown by the dog as it licks a master's hand. He wants not that from her.

"That were a position I should be proud to occupy, but I am afraid it is too late," he says, slowly.

"Too late! I—really, I am not quite sure I understand your meaning;" and she gives him a startled, perplexed look.

Many people are around them, though the pillar prevents a crush, and yet there is sometimes a more marked sense of isolation in a crowd than upon a lonely road. Besides, these people speak Spanish, and are interested in other things than the two who stand there close together.

Jack has seen this at a glance, and has determined that the die shall be cast then and there.

He will never be satisfied until he has let her know the true state of his mind. She may scorn him. Well and



"I am pleased to see you, Squire John."

good, the world is wide, and he can go far away; but at least Jack has never yet in all his life allowed a game to go against him by default. That is not the nature of his Anglo-Saxon blood.

"Forgive me if I am brutally frank. I may never have another chance to speak to you. You asked that we may be friends, and I have said it could not be. Let me explain in my clumsy way what I mean. You remember, our lives were drawn together in a very singular manner. You forbade me to approach you after that strange ceremony—to even address you unless I had permission. Please do not interrupt me now. I believe I kept my pledge to the letter. You will give me that credit."

"Yes—yes. Oh, I was not responsible for my rude actions, believe me."

"Although you bound me to a promise not to come to you without an invitation, there was one thing you did not demand—one thing I could not have promised had you asked it, because it was not in my power to grant—you did not forbid me to love the girl whom a kind Fate had brought across my path. There, I have said it. Now do with me what you will," and he endeavors to nerve himself to hear his fate.

And Jessie—was ever a girl placed in a more remarkable position?

No wonder she lets her eyes drop, and toys desperately with her fan.

"You—love—me?" she almost whispers; but whose hearing is so keen as that of a lover?

"I do—I swear it! I love you with every atom of my being. If I could win a response from your heart I should be the happiest man on earth. Have I made you angry in telling you this?"

"N-no," she replies, still looking down.

"You do not dislike me?"

"Certainly not"—promptly, for the way in which he carried himself in those trying scenes has made him a hero in her eyes.

"Tell me," he asks, suddenly—eagerly—"would you give me a blessed hope—"

"No, no, I did not say that. You have taken me by surprise; this place is so public. Do have pity on me,

Senor Jack, and another time, under more appropriate conditions, perhaps we may come to an understanding."

"Another time may never come to me. You are surrounded by danger. They even plot to put me out of the way so there may be no legal obstacle to your becoming the wife of the man who would have personated me in Edinburgh."

"You mean Mr. Spencer. I abhor him."

"I am delighted to hear it, but all the same your guardian hopes to manage things that way. One word from you to me at any time will end your persecution, end their plotting."

"A single word?"

"Yes. It is 'come.' I shall understand what it means. But I beg of you do not let gratitude have any influence with you. I demand a return of what I give—the deep and lasting affection of the heart. With me it must be all or none. But I see the senor making his way toward us. Forgive me if I have been bold. I could not help it. Perhaps it would be better if I should not be seen by your guardian. I will pass on, but remain close by. Good-bye."

He squeezes her hand in his hearty way, so full of warmth. She cannot but contrast it with the cold manner in which Spencer does the same thing, his hand is clammy and apparently as bloodless as a snake.

Jack has made amazing progress—far better than his wildest hopes.

If this were the sum total of his gains he would feel repaid a thousandfold for coming to the great reception. She does not dislike him; he has even a fair reason to believe she may be learning to love him. What rapture in the thought! How he figuratively hugs himself as he contemplates a possible happy day when he may receive from her the "open sesame" to her heart in the simple word "come"! Heaven speed the hour, for he has grave fears lest these unscrupulous plotters may overwhelm him. Once she came to him as his own wife the whole fabric of their machinations must fall in ruins. That is why he mentally prays the happy day may not be far distant.

He watches from a little distance, and sees the others join Jessie. It is hard for Jack to take his eyes from her, but the coming of Smithers tells him other events of an exciting order are about to transpire.

"Come, Senor Jack; make your way with me to the barrier. From that point we have an uninterrupted view of the amphitheater. You see, the den of the bull is on our left, and should he take a sudden notion to issue forth in order to pay his respects to the Captain-General, we will be in line to see him tumble those brave musicians head over heels, and watch the fight of the innocents who so proudly strut about the arena now."

"Don't mention it, I beg," says Jack, with a shiver; for he notices that many of those who promenade are ladies.

"Well, look across. You see we are just about on a level with the Captain-General's box, where he sits in all his pomp and panoply receiving citizens and soldiers"—lowering his voice to a whisper—"little dreaming that within ten feet of him stands the noble hero who is the head and front of this upheaval in the once ever-faithful isle—General Gomez."

(To be continued.)

Travel to California.

This year promises to be the record year for travel into California from the East. It is estimated by the officials of the railroads interested in this movement that 50,000 tourists have visited the state this winter. The total revenue of the railroads transporting the visitors is estimated at not less than \$5,000,000. The conclusion is drawn that California will derive the snug sum of \$15,000,000 from the season's tourist business.

Czarina's Coronation Robe.

The coronation robe presented to the Empress of Russia was of fur. It weighed only sixteen ounces, yet was worth \$8,000, or \$375 an ounce.