

SQUIRE JOHN

A TALE OF THE CUBAN WAR

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CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.

As he looks he sees a sight that he can never forget. Jessie no longer stands there alone, for the crippled daughter of Don Roblado is at her side, one arm around her waist. The attitude is striking—it declares that since Juanita is powerless to save the sister she loves, then welcome death in her company.

Then another wave of the fairy wand, and a new grouping has occurred. Jack is unable to see the object of his solicitude because someone has come between—someone who springs out from the crowd of huddled, shrieking women, and, snatching up a red shawl that has fallen from the shoulders of a senorita, actually starts to meet the charge of the bull.

He sees with simple amazement that it is not a man who thus defies death—the sable-hued figure is no stranger to him.

Ye gods! it is Lola Montez!

Every eye is upon her—even the terrified women forget to shriek now; hushed is the vast audience, as though mighty pressure had been brought to bear upon the thousands.

Her motive was plain enough. This heroic maid of Havana, in order to save her fellows, seeks to attract the attention of the black cyclone toward herself. No nobler act of self-denial could enter the human mind. Nor can she be ignorant of the fact that the fair-haired maiden foremost among those she seeks to save is her successful rival for the love of Jack Travers, which makes her action all the more amazing in the eyes of that individual.

Lola Montez has seen many a fierce engagement in the bullring. Born under Cuban skies, and with years of her life spent in Mexico, she has, like her sisters, gazed upon and possibly enjoyed the national sport, which seems so cruel and shocking to foreign eyes.

Hence, she knows full well the danger she chances in thus facing an infuriated toro bent upon increasing the number of victims.

Under such conditions people can



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only act through impulse, since time will not allow a calm consideration of the question.

It is the heart that urges one on, rather than the reasoning of the brain.

Generous impulses spring to the front, and when danger threatens, many a man whom no one ever dreamed of calling a hero stands at the engine until death overtakes him, but saves those lives entrusted to his care.

It is a forlorn hope the Cuban girl entertains.

Even an experienced matador might shudder if given the task with only a slender dagger in place of the trusty sword.

She seeks to have the beast dart at the red shawl, perhaps to lead him a chase round the arena while the women are being drawn up by stout arms above.

Alas! at the critical moment she slips and fails to dart aside. They see her make a fruitless stroke at the beast; then comes the sound of impact. It causes Jack's blood to run cold, as though chilled with ice, but he does not stop. With mad bounds, he presses on, clearing the intervening ground.

Taurus has only halted long enough to toss the brave girl aside. A horrid front he presents as he once more lowers his head, and, giving a muffled roar, starts toward the defenseless women. Ah! defenseless no longer, for Jack Travers has, by a herculean effort, reached them and planted himself squarely in front.

He pants for breath, but the hand that raises the revolver is as steady as a rock, for well he knows, this man of the plains, how much depends upon his nerve at this juncture.

As a cattleman, Jack is very familiar with animals, and this is hardly the first adventure in which he has figured with a raging bull as his opponent.

This knowledge of anatomy, as applied to the long horns of Texas, is very apt to prove of advantage to him under the conditions with which he is now confronted; for it means something to know just where to place a leaden bullet in order to instantly paralyze an onrushing monster.

Another hush succeeding the universal cry of horror attending the catastrophe that marked the last rush of the bull.

This is broken by the sharp report of the revolver.

The beast instantly ceases his gallop; as though stricken by an electric bolt, he plunges forward, as his forelegs fail in their duty.

Hurrah! the mighty monster is down.

A shout arises that rends the air. Every living being in all that vast amphitheater joins in the whirlwind of applause, such is the overwhelming sense of relief that sweeps over the multitude upon finding that no more women are to be offered up as victims. They can see men overthrown any day, and applaud with "Bravo, toro!" the plucky beast that battles for his life, but with the gentler sex in the arena it is a different thing.

The bull is not yet done for; he attempts to arise, but Jack has the game all in his own hands now, and, without delay, plants a couple of bullets in the body of the beast that effectually end his troubles.

No sooner is he assured that the black terror is no longer able to do damage than Jack turns upon the girl he has saved. She is still very white, but she holds out her hand to him. He reads something in her face, something that thrills him with an ecstasy he cannot define. It is useless for her to longer deceive herself—destiny has intended them for each other, and Love's powerful touch has sealed the bargain. He is at her side; he believes the moment is auspicious—that his fate trembles in the balance.

"What would you say? I can see something in your eyes. Tell me, have you decided? Am I to go, or come?" he asks, hoarsely, forgetting all else in that supreme moment.

"Come," she replies, giving him her other hand, "since it seems you are the only one who can defend me, Squire John. But, oh, do not let us forget her."

"Good heavens! Yes, poor Lola Montez," he exclaims; and together they hasten to where Smithers is gathering the form of the wounded girl in his arms, fiercely demanding that the crowd make way, so that he can carry her to a room where a doctor can attend to her wounds.

As they pass Jack and his wife, the eyes of the little Cuban beauty rest upon them. She smiles in a pitiful way, poor child; and how his heart bleeds for her!

"I helped to save her, Senor Jack. I know she belongs to you. My blessing. Do not forget poor—" But they can hear no more, for Smithers has rushed through a door that has been tardily opened, bearing his apparently dying niece to a place of quiet.

It is a severe shock to Travers, and



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he has not the heart to feel exultant over the happy outcome to his own fortunes. They wander off together, for Juanita, beaming with joy, will not intrude upon them, but remains near by to watch and warn if danger threatens.

Jack learns many things in the course of that interview. Of late the Spanish artist has endeavored to bring his stepdaughter and ward round to his way of thinking, and in so doing destroyed much of the confidence she once had in him. At the same time her high regard for the husband which the provisions of an old will gave her has gradually ripened into a deeper feeling, and she is not ashamed to confess it to the man she honors.

"Yes, dear Jack, I do return your affection. I love you with all my heart. Take me, if you believe that would make you happy. Surely you deserve all I can do for you," is what she says; and poor Travers feels quite lost because the publicity of their position forbids him from literally obeying.

And as they wander around in as quiet a spot as may be found, endeavoring to forget the awful scenes of the last hour, Juanita suddenly appears before them with a warning.

Contrary to her expectation, Jack does not fly in haste; he simply draws Jessie's hand farther through his arm, and, with a smile of conscious triumph, awaits the coming of the wonderful senor.

Don Roblado comes bustling up, with the everlasting Spencer at his heels. The latter exhibited remarkable agility in the arena in deserting the ladies and climbing the fence in search of a machete or a cannon or some other equally destructive weapon with which to annihilate the charging bull. He sees the fine scorn upon that fair face, and reads his doom there.

The senor doubtless can give a pretty shrewd guess as to how the land lies when he sees these two holding

sweet converse together, and especially after witnessing the brave action of Jack Travers in saving the women; but he is by nature not accustomed to laying down his hand easily, and proves himself capable of one last big bluff ere posing as the forgiving father.

So he forces himself to thank the American for his brave action, and finally tells the girl to accept his escort, as he intends leaving for the hotel.

It is the supreme test.

Jessie's face flushes crimson; she feels that her position is a strange one, but Jack presses her hand confidently with his arm, and the contact gives her courage.

So she deliberately informs the senor that she has decided to place her future in the hands of her husband, whom she has learned not only to respect, but love.

"And," adds Jack, significantly, "who is both able and willing to defend her."

The senor makes a signal, and in a trice they are surrounded by Spanish guards. Jack is hurried away. His manner puzzles the Spaniard, it seems so confident.

One night, or, rather, a part of it, Jack spends in a dungeon under Morro Castle, and it is quite enough for him.

By noon on the following day the American Consul had been to see the Captain-General, before whom he places the facts, and demands the immediate release of an American citizen on penalty of complaints to the Government at Washington.

So Smithers and Mr. Williams personally go to the gloomy fortress and bring Jack out of his hole.

As soon as he is released, Jack's first thought is of his wife, for he has grave fears lest Senor Roblado spirit her away in order to carry out his schemes. Ah Sin has had his duty cut out for him, and knows how to do it. A message from the heathen Chinese brings Jack and Smithers to the landing, and they are carried out to a steamer just about ready to sail for New York.

On board they find those they seek. The two men are stunned by Jack's appearance, and make no move when Jessie runs to the shelter of his arms, for she has passed a wretched night in suspense as to his fate.

Jack has won. Roblado flings up the game and asks for terms, but they will not treat with him save upon unconditional surrender. In the end he gets off better than he deserves. Even Juanita deserts him, resolving to cling to the stepsister she loves; and the two plotters sail with the steamer, for Roblado has learned he is a marked man among the revolutionists.

And Lola Montez? Jack and his wife seek her when permitted to do so. She will live, though never again to actively participate in the work of freeing Cuba, but her wealth and influence must all be spent in that way.

Ah Sin, still Squire John's most faithful henchman, and quite invaluable in carrying out the many philanthropic designs in which the young mine owner and his sweet wife engage, with the idea of bettering the condition of the tenants upon their vast English estate.

THE END.

What Payson Tucker Would Do.

The late Payson Tucker, for so many years connected with the Maine Central railroad, was a man of humor as well as of great business ability. Once a man who had had the misfortune to lose all the fingers on his right hand met Mr. Tucker, and, holding up his thumb, which was all that remained of the hand, said: "Mr. Tucker, what would you do if that thumb was all you had to earn your living with?"

Without an instant's hesitation, Mr. Tucker replied: "I should wash it."

Easy.

Willie—If a poker, shovel and tongs cost \$5, what will a ton of red ash coal come to?

George—What?

Willie—Ashes.