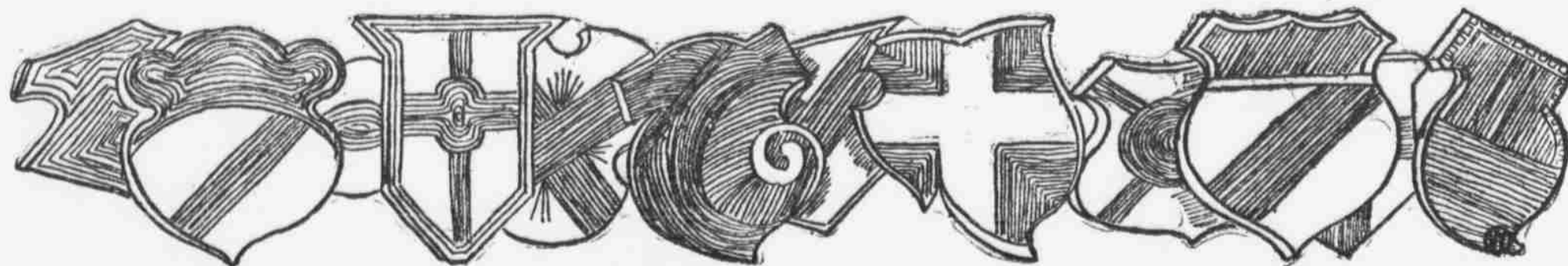


# Romance: A Chronicle of the Adventures of John



## Kemp in England and Jamaica----By Joseph Conrad

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CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

**T**O ESCAPE seemed impossible; then on the third day the thing came to pass. The way was found. Castro, who served me as if Carlos' soul had passed into my body, but looked at me with a saturnine disdain, had arranged it all with Father Antonio.

It was the day of the burial of Carlos and Don Balthasar. That same day Castro had heard that a ship had been seen becalmed a long way out to sea. It was a great opportunity; and the funeral procession would give the occasion for my escape. There was in Rio Medio, as in all Spanish towns amongst the respectable part of the population, a confraternity for burying the dead, "The Brothers of Pity," who, clothed in black robes and cowls, with only two holes for the eyes, carried the dead to their resting place, unrecognizable and unrecognized in that pious work. A "Brother of Pity" dress would be brought for me into Father Antonio's room. Castro was confident as to his ability of getting a boat. It would be a very small and dangerous one, but what would I have, if I neither killed my enemy nor let anyone else kill him for me, he commented with somber sarcasm.

Early in the day I had a short interview with Seraphina. She was resolute. Then, long before dark, I slipped into Father Antonio's room, where I was to stay until the moment to come out and mingle with the throng of other Brothers of Pity. Once with the bodies in the crypt of the cathedral, I was to await Seraphina there, and, together, we should slip through a side door onto the shore. Cesar, to throw any observer off the scent (three Lugareños were to be admitted to see the bodies put in their coffins), posted two of the Rigo negroes with loaded muskets on guard before the door of my empty room, as if to protect me.

When it had fallen very dark Castro brought me the black robes, a pair of heavy pistols to gird on under them and the heavy staff topped by a crucifix. He had an air of sarcastic protest in the dim light of my room, and he explained with exaggeratedly plain words precisely what I was to do—which, as a matter of fact, was neither more nor less than merely following in his own footsteps.

"And, oh, señor," he said sarcastically, "if you desire again to pillow your head upon the breast of your mother; if you would again see your sister, who, alas! by bewitching my Carlos, is at the heart of all our troubles; if you desire again to see that dismal land of yours, which politeness forbids me to curse, I would beg of you not to let the mad fury of your nation break loose in the midst of these thieves and scoundrels."

He peered intently into the spectacled eyeholes of my cowl, and laid his hand on his sword-hilt. His small figure, tightly clothed in black velvet from chin to knee, swayed gently backwards and forwards in the light of the dim candle, and his grotesque shadow flitted over the ghostly walls of the great room. He stood gazing silently for a minute, then turned smartly on his heels, and, with a gesture of sardonic respect, threw open the door for me.

"Pray, señor," he said, "that the moon may not rise too soon."

We went swiftly down the colonades for the last time, in the pitch darkness and into the blackness of the vast archway. The clumping staff of my heavy crucifix drew hollow echoes from the flagstones. In the deep sort of cave behind us, lit by a dim lantern, the negroes waited to unbar the doors. Castro himself began to mutter over his beads. Suddenly he said:

"It is the last time I shall stand here. Now, there is not any more a place for me on the earth."

Great flashes of light began to make suddenly visible the tall pillars of the immense mournful place, and after a long time, absolutely without a sound, save the sputter of enormous torches, an incredibly ghostly body of figures, black-robed from head to foot, with large eyeholes peering fantastically, swayed into the great arch of the hall. Above them was the enormous black coffin. It was a sight so appalling and unexpected that I stood gazing at them without any power to move, until I remembered that I, too, was such a figure. And then, with an ejaculation of impatience, Tomas Castro caught at my hand and whirled me around.

The great doors had swung noiselessly open, and the black night, bespangled with little flames, was framed in front of me. He suddenly unsheathed his portentous sword, and, hanging his great hat upon his maimed arm, stalked, a pathetic and sinister figure of grief, down the great steps. I followed him in the vivid and extraordinary compulsion of the sinister body that, like one fabulous and enormous monster, swayed impenetrably after me.

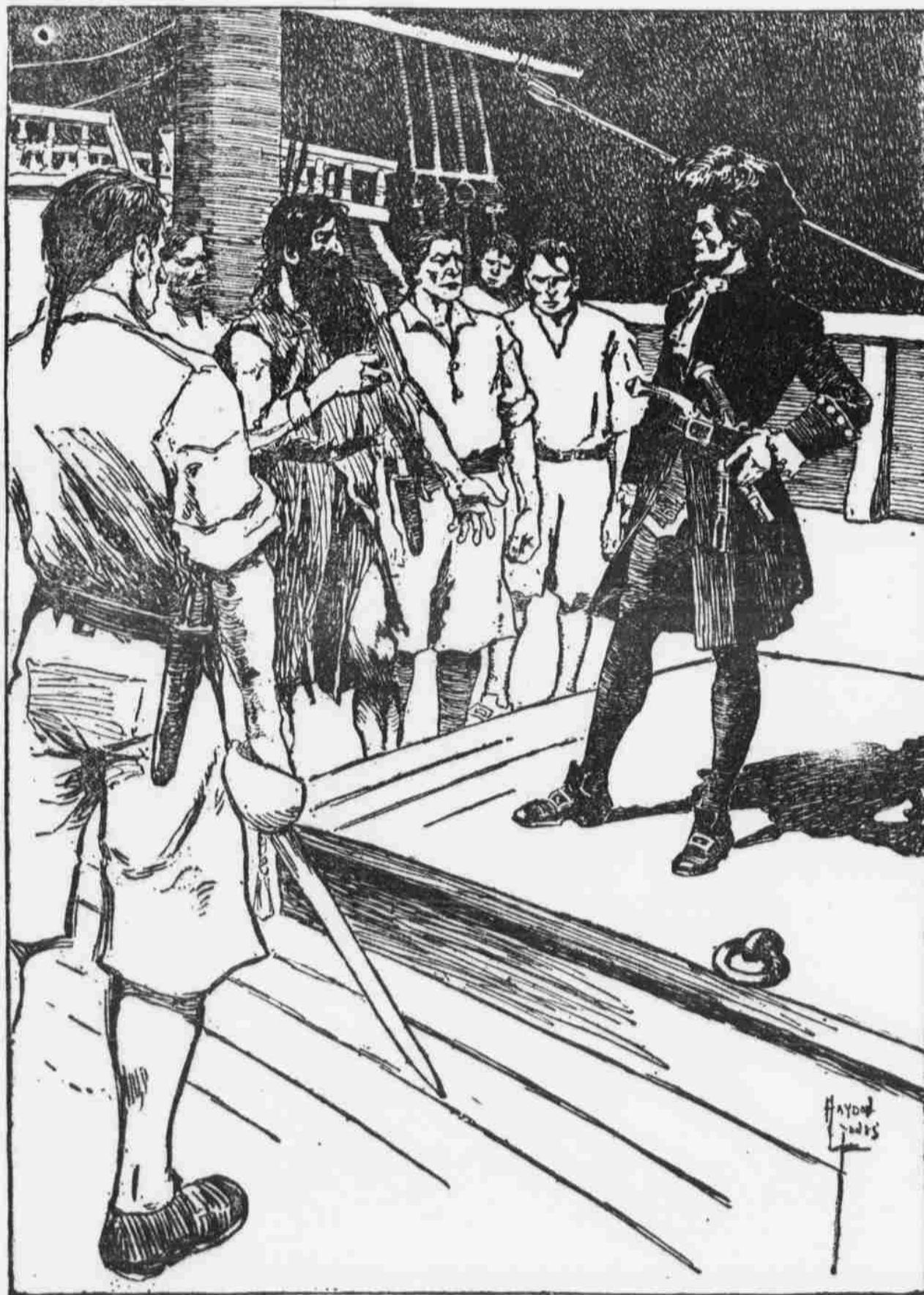
My heart beat till my head was in a tumultuous whirl, when thus, at last, I

even as her great griefs were to me invisible and unassuageable. Outside the lines were the crowd of rascallions in red jackets, their women and children—all the population of the Aldea Bajo, groaning. The whole crowd got into motion round us, the white mules, plunging frantically, the coach swaying. Ahead of me marched the sardonic, gallantly grotesque figure of true Tomas, his sword point up, his motions always jaunty. Ahead of him, again, were the white robes of many priests, a cluster of tall candles, a great jeweled cross, and

turned me suddenly faint; my ears buzzed and I heard strange sounds.

The cathedral was a mass of heads. Everyone in Rio Medio was present, or came trooping behind us. The better class was clustered near the blaze of gilding, mottled marble, wax flowers and black and purple drapery that vaulted over the two black coffins in the choir. Down in the unlit body of the church the ruffraff of O'Brien kept the doors.

Monks began to sing; a great brass instrument grunted lamentably; in the body



"I OFFERED YOU MY FIDELITY, SENOR. AS YOU ARE A CABALLERO I CHARGE YOU TO REMEMBER. SAVE ME, SENOR. SPEAK TO THOSE MEN. FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR HONOR, SENOR!"

stepped out of that house—but I suppose my grim robes cloaked my emotions—though, seeing very clearly through the eyeholes, it was almost incredible to me that I was not myself seen. But these Brothers of Pity were a secret society, known to no man except their spiritual head, who chose them in turn, and not knowing even each other. Their good deeds of charity were, in that way, done by pure stealth. And it happened that their spiritual director was the Father Antonio himself. At the foot of the palace steps, drawn back out of our way, stood the great glass coach of state, containing, even then, the woman who was all the world to me, invisible to me, unattainable to me, not to be comforted by me,

a tall saint's figure swaying, more than shoulder high, and disappearing up above into the darkness. For me, under my cowl, it was suffocatingly hot, but I seemed to move forward, following, swept along without any volition of my own. It appeared an immensely long journey; and then, as we went at last up the cathedral steps, a voice cried harshly, "Death to the heretic!" My heart stood still. I clutched frantically at the handle of a pistol that I could not disengage from folds of black cloth. But, as a matter of fact, the cry was purely a general one; I was supposed to be shut up in the palace still.

The sudden glow, the hush, the warm breath of incense, and the blaze of light

of the building there was silence. The bishop and his supporters moved about as if aimlessly in front of the altar; the chains of gold censers clicked ceaselessly. Seraphina's head had sunk forward out of my sight. All the heads of the cathedral bowed down, and suddenly from around the side of a stall a hand touched mine, and a voice said, "It is time." Very softly, as if it were part of the rite, I was drawn around the stall through a door in the side of the screen. As we went out, in his turnings, the old bishop gave us the benediction. Then the door closed on the glory of his robes and in a minute, in the darkness, we were rustling down a circular narrow staircase into the dimness of a