

crypt lit by the little blue flame of an oil lamp. From above came sounds like thunder, immense, vibrating; we were immediately under the choir. Through the cracks around a large stone showed a parallelogram of light.

In the dimness I had a glimpse of the face of my conductor—a thin, wonderfully hollow-cheeked lay brother. He began, with great gentleness, to assist me out of my black robes, and then he said:

"The senorita will be here very soon with the Senor Tomas," and then added, with an infinitely sad and tender, dim smile:

"Will not the Senor Caballero, if it is not repugnant, say a prayer for the repose of—" He pointed gently upward to the great flagstone above which was the coffin of Don Balthasar and Carlos. The priest himself was one of those very holy, very touching—perhaps, very stupid—men that one finds in such places. With his dim, wistful face he is ever present in my memory. He added: "And that the good God of us all may keep it in the Senor Caballero's heart to care well for the soul of the dear senorita."

"I am a very old man," he whispered, after a pause. He was indeed an old man, quite worn out, quite without hope on earth. "I have loved the senorita since she was a child. The Senor Caballero takes her from us. I would have him pray—to be made worthy."

Whilst I was doing it, the place began to be alive with whispers of garments, of hushed footsteps, a small exclamation in a gruff voice. Then the stone above moved out of its place and a blaze of light fell down from the choir above.

I saw beside me Seraphina's face, brilliantly lit, looking upwards. Tomas Castro said:

"Come quickly . . . come quickly . . . the prayers are ending; there will be people in the street."

From the open door the priest rattled his keys, and said, "Come, come," impatiently.

I was horribly afraid that Seraphina would shriek or faint, or refuse to move. There was very little time. The pirates might stream out of the front of the cathedral as we came from the back; the bishop had promised to accentuate the length of the service. But Seraphina glided toward the open door; a breath of fresh air reached us. She looked back once. The coffin was swinging right over the hole, shutting out the light. Tomas Castro took her hand and said, "Come . . . come," with infinite tenderness.

He had been sobbing convulsively. We went up some steps and the door shut behind us with a sound like a sigh of relief.

We went very fast, in perfect blackness and solitude, on the deserted beach between the old town and the village. Every soul was near the cathedral. A boat lay half afloat. To the left in the distance the light of the schooner opposite the Casa Riego wavered on still water.

Suddenly Tomas Castro said: "The senorita never before set foot to the open ground."

At once I lifted her into the boat. "Shove off, Tomas," I said, with a beating heart.

PART FOURTH.

Blade and Guitar.

CHAPTER I.

There was a slight, almost imperceptible jar, a faint grating noise, a whispering sound of sand—and the boat, without a splash, floated.

"Hurry, senor," whispered Castro. "The mists in the middle of the bay will hide us when the moon rises."

It was time—if we were to escape. Escape where? Into the open sea? With that silent, sorrowing girl by my side! In this miserable cockleshell, and without any refuge open to us? It was not really a hesitation; she could not be left at the mercy of O'Brien.

The mists rising on the lowlands never filled the bay, and I could see them lying in moonlight across the outlet like a silvery white ghost of a wall. We penetrated it, and instantly became lost to view from the shore.

On this very night Manuel-del-Popolo was outside with a good many rowboats, waiting on an Indianman. The ship had been seen nearing the shore since noon. It was becalmed now. Perhaps they were looting it already.

I heard Seraphina's voice saying softly: "You are a true friend, Tomas Castro. To you shall come a friend's reward."

"Alas, senorita!" he sighed. "What remains for me in this world—for me who have given for two masses for the souls of that illustrious man, and of your cousin Don Carlos, my last piece of silver?"

"We shall make you very rich, Tomas Castro," she said with decision, as if there had been bags of gold in the boat.

He returned a high-flown phrase of thanks in a bitter, absent whisper. I knew well enough that the help he had given me was not for money, not for love—not even for loyalty to the Riegos. It was obedience to the last recommendation of Carlos. He ran risks for my safety, but gave me none of his allegiance.

She gave no sign of having heard Castro's

words. But suddenly I felt, without her cloaked figure having stirred, her small hand slip into mine.

"Ah, you are generous," I whispered close to the edge of the cloak overshadowing her face.

"You must now think of yourself, Juan," she said.

"Of myself," I echoed sadly. "I have only you to think of, and you are so far away—out of my reach. There are your dead—all your loss, between you and me."

She touched my arm.

"It is I who must think of my dead," she whispered. "But you, you must think of yourself, because I have nothing of mine in this world now."

The noise of oars rowing fast, to the precipitated jingling of a guitar, swooped down upon us with a gallant ferocity.

"Caramba," Castro muttered; "it is the fool Manuel himself!"

I said, then: "We have eight shots between us two, Tomas."

He thrust his brace of pistols upon my knees.

"Dispose of them as your worship pleases," he muttered.

"You mustn't give up, yet," I whispered.

"What is it that I give up?" he numbed wearily. "Besides, there grows from my forearm a blade. If I shall find myself indisposed to quit this world alone. . . . Listen to the singing of that imbecile."

We were in the thick of it. It was Manuel's boat, as Castro had guessed, and the other boats were rallying upon it gropingly, keeping up a succession of yells:

"Oho! Oho! Where, where?"

And the people in Manuel's boat howled back at them, "Oho! Oho . . . e! This way; here!"

Suddenly he struck the guitar a mighty blow, and chanted in an inspired and grandiose strain:

"Steer—for—the—song."  
"Hombres de Rio Medio! Amigos! Valientes! . . . Manuel was beginning his peroration. He would lead them, now, against the English ship. The terrified heretics would surrender. There was always gold in English ships. He stopped his speech, and then called loudly, "Let the boats keep touch with each other, and not stray in that fog."

"The dog," grunted Castro. We heard a resolute bustle of preparation; oars were being shipped.

"Make ready, Tomas," I whispered.

"Read for what?" he grumbled. "Where shall your worship run from these swine?"

"We must follow them," I answered.

"The madness of the senor's countrymen descends upon him," he whispered with sardonic politeness. "Wherefore follow?"

"To find the English ship," I answered swiftly.

The rapid clatter of rowing, the excited hum of voices, the violent commotion of the water, passed by us with an impetuosity that took my breath away. They had started in a bunch. There must have been amongst them at least one crew of negroes, because somebody was beating a tambourine smartly, and the rowers chorused in a quick, panting undertone, "Ho, ho, tallbambo. . . . Ho, ho, tallbambo."

One of the boats silhouetted itself for an instant, a row of heads swaying back and forth, towered over astern by a full-length figure as straight as an arrow. A retreating voice thundered, "Silence!"

The sounds and the forms faded together in the fog with amazing swiftness.

Seraphina, her cloak off, her head bare, stared forward after the fleeting murmurs and shadows we were pursuing. Sometimes she warned us, "More to the left," or "Faster!" We had to put forth our best, for Manuel, as if in the very wantonness of confidence, had set a tremendous pace.

We followed in the track of the sound, and, for the most part, kept in sight of the elusive shadow of the sternmost boat. Often, in a denser belt of fog, the sounds of rowing became muffled almost to extinction; or we seemed to hear them all round and, startled, checked our speed. Dark apparitions of boats would surge up on all sides in a most inexplicable way; to the right; to the left; even coming from behind. They appeared real, unmistakable, and, before we had time to dodge them, vanished utterly. Then we had to spurt desperately after the grind of the oars, caught, just in time, in an unexpected direction.

And then we lost them. We pulled frantically. Seraphina had been urging us, "Faster! faster!" From time to time I would ask her, "Can you see them?" "Not yet," she answered curtly. The perspiration poured down my face. Castro's panting was like the wheezing of bellows at my back. Suddenly, in a despairing tone, she said:

"Stop! I can neither see nor hear anything now."

We feathered our oars at once, and fell to listening with lowered heads. The ripple of the boat's way expired slowly. A great white stillness hung slumberously over the sea.

It was inconceivable. We pulled once or twice with extreme energy for a few minutes after imaginary whistles or shouts. Once I heard them passing our bow. But it was useless; we stopped, and the moon, from within the mistiness of an immense halo, looked dreamily upon our heads.

Castro grunted "Here is an end of your plan, Senor Don Juan."

CHAPTER II.

A distant tumult arose suddenly, and as suddenly ceased for a space of a breath or two.

"Now, Castro," I shouted.

"Ha! Bueno!"

We gave way with a vigor that seemed to lift the dingey out of the water. The uproar gathered volume and fierceness.

From the first it was a hand to hand contest, engaged in suddenly, as if the assailants had at once managed to board in a body, and, as it were, in one unanimous spring. No shots had been fired. Too far to hear the blows, and seeing nothing as yet of the ship, we seemed to be hastening towards a deadly struggle of voices, of shadows with leathern throats; every cry heard in battle was there—rage, encouragement, fury, hate and pain. And those of pain were amazingly distinct. They were yells; they were howls. And suddenly, as we approached the ship, but before we could make out any sign of it, we came upon a boat. We had to swerve to clear it. It seemed to have dropped out of the fight in utter disarray; it lay with no oars out, and full of men who writhed and tumbled over each other, shrieking as if they had been flayed. Above the writhing figures in the middle of the boat, a tall man, upright in the sternsheets, raved awful imprecations and shook his fists above his head.

The blunt dingey foamed past that vision within an oar's length, no more, making straight for the clamor of the fight. The last puff of wind must have thinned the fog in the ship's track; for, standing up, face forward to pull stroke, I saw it come out, stern on to us, from truck to water line, mistily tall and motionless, but resounding with the most fierce and desperate noises. A cluster of empty boats clung low to its port side, raft-like and vague on the water.

We heard now, mingled with the fury and hate of shouts reverberating from the placid sails, mighty thuds and crashes, as if it had been a combat with clubs and battle axes.

As I headed for 't, a big boat, full of men with many oars, shot across our bow and vanished around the ship's counter in the twinkling of an eye. The defenders, engaged on the port side, were going to be taken in the rear. We were then so close to the counter that the cries of "Death, death," rang over our heads. A voice on the poop said furiously in English, "Stand fast, men." Next moment we, too, rounded the quarter only twenty feet behind the big boat, but with a slightly wider sweep.

I said, "Have the pistols ready, Seraphina." And she answered quite steadily:

"They are ready, Juan."

No sooner around than we were upon them. We were upon them so fast that I had barely the time to fling away my oar and close my grip on the butt of the pistols Seraphina pressed into my hand from behind. Castro, too, had dropped his oar, and turning as swift as a cat, crouched in the bows. I saw his good arm darting out towards their boat.

They had cast a grapnel cleverly and swung abreast of the main chains were grimly busied in boarding the undefended side in silence. One had already his leg over the ship's rail and below him three more were clambering resolutely, one above the other. The rest of them, standing up in a body with their faces to the ship, were so oblivious of everything in their purpose that they staggered all together to the shock of the dingey, heavily, as if the earth had reeled under them.

Castro knew what he was doing. I saw his only hand hop along the gunwale, dragging our cockleshell forward very swiftly. The tottering Spaniards turned their heads, and for a moment we looked at each other in silence.

I was too excited to shout; the surprise seemed to have deprived them of their senses, and they all had the same grin of teeth closed upon the naked blades of their knives, the same stupid stare fastened upon my eyes. I pulled the trigger in the nearest face, and the terrific din of the fight going on above us was overpowered by the report of the pistol, as if by a clap of thunder. The man's gaping mouth dropped the knife, and he stood stiffly long enough for the thought, "I've missed him," to flash through my mind before he tumbled clean out of the boat without touching anything, like a wooden dummy tipped by the heels. His headlong fall sent the water flying high over the stern of the dingey. With the second barrel I took a long shot at the man sitting, amazed, astride of the rail above. I saw him double up suddenly and fall inboard sideways, but the fellow following him made a convulsive effort, and leaped out of sight onto the deck of the ship. I dropped the discharged weapon and fired the first barrel of the other at the upper of the two men clinging halfway up the ship's side. To that one shot they both vanished as if by enchantment, the fellow I had hit knocking off his friend below. The crash of their fall was followed by a great yell.

Leaving Seraphina with Castro, and sticking the remaining pair of pistols in my

belt, I swarmed up the rope. The moon, the lights of several lanterns, the glare from the open doors, mingled violently in the steamy fog between the high bulwarks of the ship. But the character of the contest was changing, even as I paused on the rail to get my bearings. The fellow who had leaped on board to escape my shot had bolted across the deck to his friends on the other side, yelling:

"Fly, fly! The heretics are coming, shooting from the sea. All is lost. Fly, oh, fly!"

I needn't relate how I had my arms shaken off in the character of a savior. But I got any amount of praise at last, though I was terribly out of breath—at the very last gasp, as you might say. A man, smooth-faced, well knit, very elated and buoyant, began talking to me endlessly. He was mighty happy, and anyhow he could talk to me, because I was past doing anything but taking a moment's rest. He said I had come in the nick of time and was quite the best of fellows.

"If you had a fancy to be called the archbishop of Canterbury, we'd 'your grace' you. I am the mate, Sebright. You don't think they'd come back for another taste? The blessed old deck's afloat. That's my little dodge, boiling water for those Dagoes, if they come. So I got the cook to fire up and we put the suction hose of the fire pump into the boiler, and we filled the coppers and kettles. Not a bad notion, eh? But ten times as much wouldn't have been enough, and the hose burst at the third stroke, so that only one boat got anything to speak of. But Lord, it dropped out of the ruck as if it had been swept with langridge. Squaled like a litter of pigs, didn't they?"

And then I managed to tell him something of Seraphina that he would listen to.

"What, what?" he said. "Oh, heavens and earth! There's your girl. Of course. Hey, bo'sun, rig a whip and chair on the yardarm to take a woman on board. Bear a hand. A woman! yes, a woman. Confound it, don't lose your wits, man. Look over the starboard rail and you will see a woman alongside with a Dago in a small boat. Let the Dago come on board, the gentleman here says he's a good sort. Now, do you understand?"

He talked to me a good deal more; told me that they had made a prisoner—a tall comical chap, wears his hair like an old aunt of mine, a bunch of curls flapping on each side of his face—and then said that he must go and report to Captain Williams. The name struck me. I said:

"Is this ship the Lion?"

"Aye, aye. That's it. It is," several seamen answered together, casting curious glances from their work.

"Tell your captain my name is Kemp," I shouted after Sebright with what strength of lung I had.

What luck! Williams was the jolly little ship's captain I was to have dined with on the day of execution on Kingston Point—the day I had been kidnaped. It seemed ages ago. I wanted to get to the side to look after Seraphina, but I simply couldn't remember how to stand. I sat on the hatch, looking at the seamen.

They were clearing the ropes, collecting the lamps, picking up knives, handspikes, crowbars, swabbing the decks with squishy faps. A bare-footed, bare-armed fellow, holding a bundle of brass-bitted cutlasses under his arm, had lost himself in the contemplation of my person.

"Where are you bound to?" I inquired at large, and everybody showed a friendly alacrity in answer.

"Havana," "Havana, sir," "Havana's our next port. Aye, Havana."

I heard a loud "Alas!" sighed out behind me. A distracted, stricken voice repeated twice in Spanish: "Oh, my greatness; oh, my greatness." Then, shivering, in a tone of profound self-communion, "I have a greatly parched throat," it said. Harshly jovial voices answered:

"Stow your lingo and come before the captain. Step along."

A prisoner, conducted aft, stalked reluctantly into the light between two short, bustling sailors. Disheveled black hair like a damaged peruke, mournful, yellow face, enormous stag's eyes straining down on me, I recognized Manuel-del-Popolo. At the same moment he sprang back, striking, "This is a miracle of the devil—of the devil."

The sailors fell to tugging at his arms savagely, asking "What's come to you?" and after a short struggle that shook his fatters and his raven locks tempestuously like a gust of wind, he submitted to be walked up, repeating:

"Is it you, senor? Is it you? Is it you?"

One of his shoulders was bare from neck to elbow; at every step one of his knees and part of a lean thigh protruded their nakedness through a large rent; a strip of grimy, blood-stained linen, torn right down to the waist, dangled solemnly in front of his legs. There was a horrible raw patch amongst the roots of his hair just above his temple; there was blood in his nostrils, the stamp of excessive anguish on his features, a sort of guarded despair in his eye. His voice sank while he said again, twice:

"Is it you? Is it you?" And then, for the last time, "Is it you?" he repeated in a whisper.

(To be Continued.)