

side the sill, with his back to the precipice and his face turned up.

"There is nobody in there," he shouted. "I come at once," he cried to them, without lifting his head.

I had crept up almost near enough to grab the flask. It never occurred to me that by flinging myself on him I could have pushed him off the sill. My only idea was to get hold. He did not resist for me. The leather-covered bottle was the only real thing in the world. I was completely insane. I heard a faint detonation, and Manuel got up quickly from the sill. The flask was out of my reach.

There were more popping sounds of shots fired, away on the plain. The peons were attacking an outpost of the Lugeranos. A deep voice cried, "They are driving them in." Then several together yelled:

"Come away, Manuel. Come away. Por Dios . . ."

Stretched at full length in the passage, and sustaining myself on my trembling arms, I gazed up at him. He stood very rigid, holding the flask in both hands. Several muskets were discharged together first above, and in the noise of the reports I remember a voice crying urgently over the edge, "Manuel! Manuel!" The shadow of irresolution passed over his features. He hesitated whether to run up the ledge or bolt into the cave. He shouted something. He was not answered, but the yelling and the firing ceased suddenly, as if the Lugeranos had given up and taken to their heels. I became aware of a sort of increasing throbbing sound that seemed to come from behind me, out of the cave; then, as Manuel lifted his foot hastily to step over the sill, I jumped up deliriously, and with outstretched hands lurched forward at the flask in his fingers.

I believe I laughed at him in an imbecile manner. Somebody laughed; and I remember the superior smile on his face passing into a ghastly grin that disappeared slowly while his astonished eyes, glaring at that gaunt and disheveled apparition rising before him in the dusk of the passage, seemed to grow to an enormous size. He drew back his foot as though it had been burnt, and in a single stricken impulse he flung the flask straight into my face and staggered away from the sill.

I made a catch of it with a scream of triumph, whose unearthly sound brought me back to my senses.

"In the name of God, retire," I cried, as though I had been an apparition from another world.

What took place afterwards happened with an inconceivable rapidity, in less time than it takes to draw breath. He never recognized me. I saw his glare of incredulous awe change suddenly to horror and despair. He had felt himself losing his balance.

He had stepped too far back. He tried to recover himself, but it was too late. He hung for a moment in his backward fall; his arms beat the air, his body curled upon itself with an awful striving. All at once he went limp all over and, with the sunlight full upon his upturned face, vanished downwards from my sight.

Tears, tears of gratitude were running down my face. My limbs trembled. But I was sane enough not to think of myself any more.

"Drink! Drink!" I stammered, raising Seraphina's head on my shoulder, while the galloping horses of the peons in hot pursuit passed with a thundering rumble above us. Then all was still.

Our getting out of the cave was a matter of unremitting toil, through what might have been a year of time.

We walked away from the spot as if our feet had been shod in lead, and we hugged the edge of the cruel ravine as one keeps by the side of a friend.

From our first step downwards the hard, rattling noise of the stones accompanied our descent, growing in volume, bewildering our minds. We had missed the indistinct beginning of the trail on the side of the ravine and had to follow the course of the stream.

We pushed on through the bunches of tough twigs; the massive boulders closed the view on every side, and Seraphina followed me with her hands on my shoulders. This was the best way in which I could help her descent till the declivity became less steep, and then I went ahead forcing a path for her. Often we had to walk into the bed of the stream. It was icy cold. Some strange beast, perhaps a bird, invisible somewhere, emitted from time to time a faint and lamentable shriek.

Then, as I stepped around a large fragment of rock, my eyes fell on a young vaquero. He had taken off his hat before something and made a perfunctory sign of the cross. He looked up and down the lofty wall, as if it could give him the word of that riddle. Twice his spurs clashed softly, and with one hand grasping the rope he stooped low in the twilight over a body.

"We looked for this Lugerano," he said, replacing his hat on his head carelessly. "He was a mad singer, and I saw him once kill one of us very swiftly. They used to call him in jest El Demonio. Ah! But you . . . But you . . ."

His wonder overcame him. His bewildered eyes glistened, staring at us in the deepening dusk.

"Speak, hombre," he cried. "Who are

you and who is she? Whence came you? Where are you going with this woman? . . ."

CHAPTER XI.

Not a soul stirred in the one long street of the negro village. We entered Seraphina's hacienda. The high walls inclosed a square court deep as the yard of a prison, with flat-roofed buildings all around. It rang with many voices suddenly. Every moment the daylight increased; young negresses in loose gowns ran here and there, cackling like chased hens, and a fat woman waddled out from under the shadow of a veranda.

She was Seraphina's old nurse. She was scolding volubly, and suddenly she shrieked, as though she had been stabbed. Then all was still for a long time. Sitting high on the back of my patient mount, with my fingers twisted in the mane, I saw in a throng of woolly heads and bright garments Seraphina's pale face. An increasing murmur of sobs and endearing names mounted up to me. Her hair hung down, her eyes seemed immense; those people were carrying her off—and a man with a careworn, bilious face and a straight, gray beard, neatly clipped on the edges, stood at the head of my horse, blinking with astonishment.

The fat woman reappeared, rolling painfully along the veranda.

"Enrico! It is her lover! Oh! my treasure, my lamb, my precious child. Do you hear, Enrico? Her lover! Oh! the poor darling of my heart."

She appeared to be giggling and weeping at the same time. The sky above the yard brightened all at once, as if the sun had emerged with a leap from the distant waters of the Atlantic. She waved her short arms at me over the railing, then plunged her dark fingers in the shock of iron-gray hair gathered on the top of her head.

I swayed to and fro in the saddle, but faithful to the plan of our escape, I tried to make clear my desire that these peons should be sworn to secrecy immediately. Meantime, somebody was trying to disengage my feet from the stirrups.

"Certainly. It is as your worship wishes."

The careworn man at the head of my horse was utterly in the dark.

"Attention!" he shouted. "Catch hold, hombre. Carry the caballero." I knew no more till I beheld Enrico, with his white beard and zealous eyes, bending over my couch.

"Senor, the night is far advanced," he said soothingly, "and Dolores, my wife, watches over Dona Seraphina's slumbers on the other side of this wall."

I had been dead to the world for nearly twenty hours, and the awakening resembled a new birth, for I felt as weak and helpless as an infant.

Not a whisper of any sort of news reached us in our hiding place till the fourth evening, when one of the vaqueros reported to Enrico that, riding on the inland boundary, he had fallen in with a company of infantry encamped on the edge of a little wood. Troops were being moved upon Rio Medio. He brought a note from the officer in command of that party. It contained nothing but a requisition for twenty head of cattle. The same night we left the hacienda.

It was a starry darkness. Behind us the soft walling of the old woman at the gate died out:

"So far! So very far!"

We left the long street of the slave village on the left, and walked down the gentle slope of the open glade toward the little river. Seraphina's hair was concealed in the crown of a wide sombrero and, wrapped up in a serape, she looked so much like a cloaked vaquero that one missed the jingle of spurs out of her walk. Enrico had fitted me out in his own clothes from top to toe. He carried a lantern, and we followed the circle of light that swayed and trembled upon the short grass. There was no one else with us, the crew of the drogher being already on board to await our coming.

Two days after we saw a castle on a sandy hill, and a few small boats with ragged sails making for the land. A brigantine, that seemed to have carried the breeze with her right in, threw up the Stars and Stripes radiantly to the rising sun, before rounding the point. The sound of bells came out to sea and met us while we crept slowly on, abreast of the battery at the water's edge.

"A feast day in the city," said the old negro at the helm. "And here is an English ship of war."

The shipping in harbor was covered with bunting in honor of the feast day. A six-oared custom house galley darted out from the tier of ships, pulling for the American brigantine. One of the uniformed sitters waved his hand at us, recognized an estate drogher, and shouted some direction, of which we only caught the words:

"Steps—examination—tomorrow."

Our steersman took off his old hat humbly to hail back, "My bien, senor."

I breathed freely, for they gave us no more of their attention. Soldiers, alguazil and custom house officers were swarming

aboard the American, as if bent on ransacking her from stem to stern in the shortest possible time, so as not to be late for the procession.

Seraphina crouched on a coil of rope under the bulwark; old Pedro, at the tiller, peered about from under his hand, and I, trying to expose myself to view as little as possible, helped him to look for the Lion. There she is. Yes! No! There she was. A crushing load fell off my chest. We had made her out together, old Pedro and I.

And then the last part of Sebright's plan had to be carried out at once. The forecast of the drogher appeared to part, our mainsail shook, and before I could gasp twice, we had drifted stern foremost into the Lion's mizen chains with a crash that brought a genuine expression of concern to the old negro's face. He had managed the whole thing with a most convincing skill, and without even once glancing at the ship. We had done our part, but the people of the Lion seemed to fall in their unaccountably. Of all the faces that crowded her rail at the shock, not one appeared with a glimmer of intelligence. All the cargo ports were down. Their surprise and their swearing appeared to me alarmingly unaffected; with a most imbecile alacrity they exerted themselves, with small spars and boathooks, to push the drogher off. Nobody seemed to recognize me; Seraphina might have been a peon sitting on deck, cloaked from neck to heels and under a sombrero. I dared not shout to them in English, for fear of being heard on board the other ships around. At last Sebright himself appeared on the poop.

He gave one look over the side. "What the devil . . ." he began. Was he blind, too?

Suddenly I saw him throw up his arms above his head. He vanished. A port came open with a jerk at the last moment. I lifted Seraphina up; two hands caught hold of her, and, in my great hurry to scramble up after her, I barked my shins cruelly. The port fell; the drogher went on creeping alongside, completely disregarded. Seraphina dropped the cloak at her feet and flung off her hat.

"Good morning, amigos," she said gravely.

"Turned up by heavens! . . . Go in. . . . Good God! . . . Bucketfuls of tears . . ." stammered Sebright, pushing us into the cuddy. "Go in! Go in at once!"

Sebright, burning with impatience, pulled me away. The cabin door fell upon Seraphina. When, in the expansion of my heart, I tried to banter him about not keeping his word to look out for us, he bent double in trying to restrain his hilarity, slapped his thighs and grew red in the face.

The excellent joke was that, for the past six days, we had been supposed to be dead—drowned; at least Dona Seraphina had been provided with that sort of death in her own name; I was drowned, too, but in the disguise of a piratical young English nobleman.

"You are the talk of the town," he said, recovering his elasticity of spirit as he went on. The death of Don Balthasar had been the first great sensation of Havana, but it seemed that O'Brien had kept that to himself till he heard by an overland messenger that Seraphina had escaped from the Casa Riego.

Then he gave it to the world; he let it be inferred that he had the news of both events together. The story, as sworn to by various suborned rascals, and put out by the creatures, ran that an English desperado, arriving in Rio Medio with some Mexicans in a schooner, had incited the rabble of the place to attack the Casa Riego. Don Balthasar had been shot while defending his house at the head of his negroes; and Don Balthasar's daughter had been carried off by the English private.

It was reported in town that the private audience the Juez had lately from the captain general was of a most stormy description. They say old Marshal What-d'ye-call-'um ended by flinging his last report in his face, and asking him how dared he work his lawyer's tricks upon an old soldier. Good old fighting cock. But stupid. All these old soldiers were stupid, Sebright declared. Old admirals, too. However, the land troops had arrived in Rio Medio by this time; the Tornado frigate, too, no doubt, having sailed four days ago, with orders to burn the villages to the ground; and the good Lugeranos must be catching colds trying to hide from the carabinieri in the deep, damp woods.

Our admiral was awaiting the issue of that expedition. Returning home under a cloud, Rowley wanted to take with him the assurance of the pirate nest being destroyed at last as a sort of diplomatic feather in his cap.

"What he is most anxious for," said Sebright, "is to get the notorious Nichols into his hands; take him home for a hanging. It seems clear to me that they are humbugging him ashore. Nichols! Where's Nichols? There are people here who say that Nichols has had free board and lodging in Havana jail for the last six months. Others swear that it is Nichols who has killed the old gentleman, run off with Dona Seraphina and got drowned. Nichols! Who's Nichols? On that showing you are Nich-

ols. Anybody may be Nichols. Who has ever seen him outside Rio Medio? I used to believe in him at one time, but, upon my word, I begin to doubt whether there ever was such a man."

"But the man existed, at any rate," I said. "I knew him—I've talked with him. He came out second mate in the same ship with me—in the old Thames. Ramon took charge of him in Kingston, and that's the last positive thing I can swear to, of him. But that he was in Rio Medio for two years and vanished from there almost directly after that unlucky boat affair, I am absolutely certain."

"Well, I suppose O'Brien knows where to lay his hand on him. But no matter where the fellow is, in jail or out, the admiral will never get hold of him. If they had him they could not think of giving him up. He knows too much of the game. And remember that O'Brien, if he waddles in the socket, is by no means down yet. A man like that doesn't get knocked out like a ninepin. You may be sure, he has twenty skeletons put away in good places that he will haul out one by one rather than let himself be squashed. He's not going to give in. A few days since a priest—your priest, you know—turned up here a foot from Rio Medio and went about wringing his hands, declaring he knew all the truth and meant to make a noise about it, too. O'Brien made short work of him, though; got the archbishop to send him into retreat, as they call it, to a Franciscan convent 100 miles from here. These things are whispered about all along the gates of this place."

I imagined the poor Father Antonio, with his simple resignation, mourning for us in his forced retreat, broken-hearted and murmuring, "Inscrutable, inscrutable!" I should have liked to see the old man.

The unfavorable circumstances for us was that the captain had gone ashore. The ship was ready for sea, absolutely cleared, papers on board; could go in an hour if it came to that, but at any rate next morning at daylight, before O'Brien could get wind of the Riego drogher arriving.

"But don't you expect Williams back on board directly?"

He shook his head.

"No, not even tonight. He tipped me the wink. This evening he will send a note that the consignee detains him for the night because the letters are not ready."

I was greatly cast down. What about getting him back on board at once?

Sebright was biting his lip. The necessity was pressing, he admitted.

He had an idea where to find him. But for himself he could not go—that was evident. Neither would I wish him to leave the ship, even for a moment, now Seraphina was on board. An unexpected visit from some zealous police understrapper, a momentary want of presence of mind on the part of the timid servant, there was enough to bring about our undoing. Not one of our own crew knew anything more of Spanish than a few terms of abuse, perhaps. Their hearts were in the right place, but as to their wits, he wouldn't trust a single one of them by himself—no, not an inch away from the ship. How could he send one of them ashore with the wine shops yawning wide on all sides, and not enough lingo to ask for the way. Sure to get drunk, to get lost, to get into trouble in some way and in the end get picked up by the police. The slightest hitch of that sort would call attention upon the ship—and with O'Brien to draw inferences. He rubbed his head.

"I suppose I'll have to go," he grunted. "But I am known; I may be followed. They may wonder why I rush to fetch my skipper. And yet I feel this is the time. The very time. Between now and 4 o'clock tomorrow morning we have an almost absolute certainty of getting away with you two. This is our chance and your chance."

He was lost in perplexity. Then, as if inspired, I cried:

"I will go!"

"The devil!" he said, amazed. "Would you?"

I rushed at him with arguments. No one would know me. My clothes were all right and clean enough for a feast day. I could slip through the crowds unperceived. The principal thing was to get Seraphina out of O'Brien's reach. At the worst I could always find means to get away from Cuba by myself. And if I missed Williams by some mischance and failed to make my way back in time, I charged him solemnly not to wait, but sail away at the earliest possible moment.

The American brigantine was berthed by then, close astern of the Lion, and Sebright had the idea of asking its mate to let its boat (it was in the water) put ashore a visitor he had on board. His own were hoisted, he explained, and there were no boatmen plying for hire.

His request was granted. I was pulled ashore by two American sailors, who never said a word to each other, and evidently took me for a Spaniard.

I thanked them in Spanish and, traversing a piece of open ground, made a wide circle to enter the town from the land side, to still further cover my tracks.

(To be continued.)