

A VOLUNTEER WITH PIKE



ROBERT AMES BENNET



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A VOLUNTEER WITH PIKE

*The True Narrative of One Dr. John Robinson and of His Love for
the Fair Señorita Vallois*

BY ROBERT AMES BENNET

**AUTHOR OF "FOR THE WHITE CHRIST," "INTO THE
PRIMITIVE," ETC.**

With four Illustrations in color by

CHARLOTTE WEBER-DITZLER

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**TO ONE
WHO FOLLOWED AFTER PIKE TO
THE GRAND PEAK
HALF A CENTURY LATER
MY FATHER**

""We go in now, señorita,' I said, offering her my arm"

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BY MR. BENNET



Illustrations

"We go in now, señorita,' I said, offering her my arm"

"We swung out into the current and drifted swiftly away"

"The Grand Peak!' I shouted. 'We'll name it for you'"

"He fell like a steer: my sword blade broke clean off, a span beyond the hilt"



A Volunteer with Pike

***The True Narrative of One Dr. John Robinson and of His Love for
the Fair Señorita Vallois***



CHAPTER I

THE ROSE IN THE MIRE

The first time I was blessed with a sight of the señorita was on the day of my arrival in the Federal City,—in fact, it was upon my arrival. An inquiry in the neighborhood of the President's House for my sole acquaintance in the city, Senator Adair of Kentucky, had resulted in my being directed to Conrad's boarding house on the Capitol Hill.

In the Fall of 1805 Indian Summer had lingered on through the month of November. As a consequence, so I had been informed, Pennsylvania Avenue was in a state of unprecedented passableness for the season. Yet as, weary and travel-begrimed, I urged my jaded nag along the broad way of yellow mud toward the majestic Capitol on its lofty hill, I observed more than one coach and chariot in trouble from the chuck-holes of semi-liquid clay.

It was midway of the avenue that I came upon *her* coach, fast as a grounded flatboat, both of the forewheels being mired to the hub. The driver, a blear-eyed fellow, sat tugging at the reins and alternately plying the whip and swearing villanously. I have ever been a lover of horseflesh, and it cut me to see the sleek-coated, spirited pair plunge and strain at the harness, in their brave efforts to perform a task utterly beyond them.

I drew rein alongside. The driver stopped his cursing to stare at me, purple-faced.

"Are you blind drunk?" I demanded. "They'll never make it without a lift to the wheels."

"Lift!" he spluttered—"lift! Git along, ye greasy cooncap!"

He raised his whip as if to strike me. I reined my horse within arm's-length.

"Put down that whip, or I'll put you down under the wheel," I said cheerfully. He looked me in the eye for a moment; then he dropped his gaze, and thrust the whipstock into its socket. "Good! You are well advised. Now keep your mouth shut, and get off your coat."

Again I smiled, and again he obeyed. We Western men have a reputation on the seaboard. It may have been this, or it may have been the fact that my buckskin shirt draped a pair of lean shoulders quite a bit broader than the average. At the least, the fellow kept his mouth closed and started to strip off his coat.

I rode over to the nearest fence and borrowed two of the top rails. Returning, I found the fellow in his shirt-sleeves. Yet he seemed not over-willing to jump down into the mud. One more smile fetched him. He took his rail and descended on the far side, muttering, while I swung off at the head of his lathered team and stroked them. Once they had been soothed and quieted, I dropped back, took the reins in hand, and thrust my rail beneath the hub of the wheel. I heard the driver do the same on his side.

"Ready?" I called.

"Ready, sir!" he answered.

A voice came from over my shoulder "*Por Dios!* It is not possible, señor, to lift. First I will descend."

The knowledge that I had put my shoulder to the wheel for a Spaniard caused my tightening muscles to relax in disgust. But the don had spoken courteously, his one thought being to relieve us of his weight, at the risk of ruining his aristocratic boots.

"Sit still. *Quien sabe?*" I replied, without looking about, and bore up on the rail. "Heave away!"

The rails bowed under the strain, but the clay held tenaciously to the embedded wheels. I drew the reins well in and called to the willing team. They put their weight against the breast bands steadily and gallantly. The wheels rose a little, the coach gave forward.

"Heave!" I called. The wheels drew up and forward. "Steady! steady, boys! Pull away!"

Out came the forewheels; in went the rear. We caught them on the turn. One last gallant tug, and all was clear. The driver plodded around by the rear, a hand at his forelock.

"Return the rails," I said. "I'll hold them."

He took my rail with his own and toiled over to the roadside. I called up my horse and swung into the saddle, little the worse for my descent into the midst of the redoubtable avenue, for my legs had already been smeared and spattered to the thigh before I entered the bounds of the city.

Again I heard the voice at the coach window: "*Muchas gracias*, señor! A thousand thanks—and this."

He proved to be what I had surmised,—a long-faced Spanish don. What I had not expected to see was the hand extended with the piece of silver. There was more than mere politeness in his smile. It was evident he meant well. None the less, I was of the West, where, in common opinion, Spaniards are rated with the "varmints." I took the coin and dropped it into the mire. He stared at me, astonished.

"Your pardon, señor," I said, "I am not a *Spanish* gentleman."

The shot hit, as I could see by the quick change in the nature of his smile.

"It is I who should ask pardon," he replied with the haughtiness of your true Spanish hidalgo. "Yet the señor will admit that his appearance—to a foreigner —"

"Few riders wear frills on the long road from Pittsburgh," I replied.

He bowed grandly and withdrew his head into the coach's dark interior. I was about to turn around, when I heard a liquid murmuring of Spanish in a lady's voice, followed by a protest from the don: "*Nada*, Alisanda! There is no need. He is but an Anglo-American."

The voice riveted my gaze to the coach window in eager anticipation. Nor was I disappointed. In a moment the cherry-wood of the opening framed a face which caused me to snatch the coonskin cap from my wigless yellow curls.

After four years of social life among the Spanish and French of St. Louis and New Orleans, I had thought myself well versed in all the possibilities of Latin beauty. The Señorita Alisanda was to all those creole belles as a queen to kitchen maids. Eyes of velvety black, full of pride and fire and languor; silky hair, not of the hard, glossy hue of the raven's wing, but soft and warming to chestnut where the sun shone through a straying lock; face oval and of that clear, warm pallor unknown to women of Northern blood; a straight nose with well-opened, sensitive nostrils; a scarlet-lipped mouth, whose kiss would have thrilled a dying

man. But he is a fool who seeks to set down beauty in a catalogue. It was not at her eyes or hair or face that I gazed; it was at her, at the radiant spirit which shone out through that lovely mask of flesh.

She met my gaze with a directness which showed English training, as did also the slightness of her accent. Her manner was most gracious, without a trace of condescension, yet with an underlying note of haughtiness, forgotten in the liquid melody of her voice.

"Señor, I trust that you will pardon the error of my kinsman,—my uncle,—and that you will accept our thanks for the service."

"I am repaid,—a thousand times,—señorita!" I stammered, the while my dazzled eyes drank in her radiant beauty.

She bowed composedly and withdrew into the gloom of the coach. That was all. But it left me half dazed. Not until the driver trudged back and reached for the reins did it come upon me that I was staring blankly in through the empty window at the outline of the don's shoulder. The best I can say is that I did not find my mouth agape.

A touch of my heel and a hint at the bit sent my nag jogging on toward the Capitol, leaving the rescued coach to flounder along its opposite way as best it could, through the avenue already famous for its two miles of length, its hundred yards of width, and its two feet of depth.

Wearied as I was by the last of many days' hard riding from the Ohio, I was the lighter for carrying with me a scarlet-lipped vision with eyes like sloes.



CHAPTER II

PLAIN THOMAS JEFFERSON

It was the third day after my arrival in Washington. The clear sky, which in the forenoon had lured me down from the Capitol Hill along the forest-clad banks of the little Tiber, had brought at the noon hour a warmth of sunshine that made by no means ungrateful the shade of a giant tulip poplar.

I was lolling at my ease on the bank of the beautiful stream when a rider broke cover from a thicket of azaleas and cantered toward me down along the bank. The first glance at his horse brought me to my feet, eager-eyed. It was one of the most mettlesome and shapely mounts I had ever had the pleasure to view.

The rider, attracted perhaps by my ill-concealed admiration, drew up before me with the easy control of a perfect horseman, and touched his cocked hat.

"A pleasant day, sir, for a lover of wild Nature," he said.

His tone, though easy almost to familiarity, was underlaid with a quiet dignity and reserve that brought my hand in turn to my high, stiff beaver and my eyes to his face.

"A day, sir, to tempt even a botanist to forget his classifying," I ventured at sight of the rooted plant of goldenrod in his hand.

He shook his long gray locks with a whimsical manner. "On the contrary, I am of the opinion that the enjoyment of Nature should add zest to the pursuits of Science."

"Since you put it so aptly, sir, I cannot but agree," I made answer, smiling at his shrewdness. "In truth," I added, "this unusual opportunity of enjoying *solidago odora* so late in the season loses nothing by the knowledge that the infusion of those selfsame fragrant leaves is of service medicinally."

He met the careless glance accompanying my words with deepened interest in his thoughtful eyes. Having had the greater part of my attention thus far fixed upon the noble horse, I had not gone beyond my first impression that the man was an overseer from some near-by plantation on the Potomac. Now, roused to

closer observation by his gaze, I perceived that behind his homely features lay the brain of a man of much thought and learning. With this I gave heed to the fact that his clothes, for all their carelessness of cut and condition, were of the finest materials.

I swept him the best of the bows I had acquired from the French creoles of New Orleans.

"Can it be, sir, that chance has favored me with the acquaintance of a fellow physician in what Mr. Gouverneur Morris has so aptly termed the spoiled wilderness of Washington?" I asked. "If so, permit me to introduce myself as a young but aspiring practitioner of the healing art. My name, sir, is one often in the mouths of men,—Robinson,—Dr. John H. Robinson."

Smiling at my attempt at wit, the gentleman swung to the ground before me, and twitched the reins over the head of his spirited mount.

"You were walking toward the Capitol?" he inquired. I nodded assent. "Then, by your leave, I will accompany you part of the way,—not that I can claim the honor of membership in your most useful profession. I am no more than a browser in the lush fields of philosophy. My name, sir, is Thomas Jefferson."

For a moment I stood like a dolt. My hand went up to jerk off my coonskin cap, and knocked smartly against the stiff brim of my beaver. The touch recalled me to my dignity, and I flattered myself that my bow and words would alike prove acceptable: "Your Excellency will pardon me! Had I been aware—"

"You would have known that there are few things I hold in greater detestation than such high-flown, aristocratic terms of address and such undemocratic bendings," he cut in upon me, with a touch of asperity in his quiet voice.

"I stand corrected, sir," I replied, straightening to my full six feet, and seeking to cover my confusion with a smile. "It is not necessarily proof of sycophancy that one has acquired his manners in New Orleans."

"True—true, and that is full explanation of what I must confess puzzled me. You are from the far West, if I do not mistake, and our frontiersmen, as a rule, are as deficient in courtly graces as the European aristocrats are sycophantic. By your leave, we will be moving."

We swung about and sauntered up the stream bank, the horse following at his master's heels, docile as a well-trained hound. For a time the attention of my

distinguished companion seemed fixed upon the romantic arbors of wild grapes which overran the neighboring thickets. But as I was about to remark on the beauty of the autumnal foliage, he turned to me with a direct question: "Have you close acquaintance, sir, among the people of St. Louis and New Orleans?"

"I have practised in both towns, sir, since the cession of Louisiana Territory."

"And you found the former subjects of Spain and France well disposed toward the Republic?"

"I regret to have to say, sir, that Governor Claiborne is not popular even among our American residents of New Orleans."

The President looked at me doubtfully. "Claiborne is a man of undisputed integrity."

"The creoles, Your Excellency, could better appreciate a degree of tact. Governor Claiborne is too much the Western man in his attitude toward people of another race."

"I cannot but trust that our release of them from subjection to despotism—" He paused to study my face with a mild yet penetrating gaze. We walked on for several paces before he again spoke. "I esteem you to be a man of some little discernment, Dr. Robinson."

"You compliment me, sir. Having gone to the Mississippi fresh from my medical studies in New York, it may be that I observed some features of the Louisiana situation unnoted by the local factions. Though a Westerner myself, I trust that four years in college on the seaboard has enabled me to look upon events with a little less of our natural trans-Alleghany prejudice."

"Ah! You are also acquainted in St. Louis—with General Wilkinson? Perhaps you are intimate?"

"No!" I said. Before my mental vision rose the whiskey-flushed face and portly figure of the pompous, fussy old General.

"You speak emphatically."

"Sir, I give you common opinion when I say there are few men of standing in the Upper Territory, or in the Lower, for that matter, who would trust the General out of sight either with their reputations or with their purses."

My companion frowned as severely as it seemed his philosophic temperament would permit. "You forget, sir, that you are speaking of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Republic."

"A commander whose appointment, it is said, was urged on the grounds that it would keep him out of mischief,—a man who is charged with having been implicated in all the separatist plots of the nineties."

"And if so, what then? With the removal of the misguided Federalists from the control of public affairs, and the purchase of Louisiana Territory, insuring for our Western river commerce the freedom of port at New Orleans, all basis for the just complaints of the West have been removed. I trust implicitly in the loyalty of the people of that great region."

"What of the ovations given to Mr. Aaron Burr during his trip this past season?"

"Greatly as I deplored, and still deplore, the death of Mr. Hamilton, it is a fact that the duel terminated the political career of his slayer,—the man whom we alike distrusted."

"Yet Colonel Burr was received with enthusiasm by nearly every man of prominence west of Pittsburg. I might mention Senator Adair, young General Jackson of the Tennessee militia, General Wilkinson, and our richest New Orleans merchant, Mr. Daniel Clark."

"Very true; and easily accounted for by the reaction of sentiment against the Federalist and partisan animus which procured Colonel Burr's disfranchisement in the State of New York and his indictment for murder in New Jersey. No; once for all, Colonel Burr has been removed as a disturbing element in the politics of the Republic."

Having delivered this confident opinion, Mr. Jefferson stooped to pick up an odd pebble, and after gazing at it a moment, abruptly changed the subject. "The West takes some little interest, I trust, in the expedition which I had some share in planning."

"You refer, sir, to the Northwest Expedition under the command of Captain Lewis and the brother of Clark of Vincennes fame."

"The furtherance of unremunerative scientific research is one of the few functions properly within the scope of an ideal government. I am hopeful of valuable results from this expedition as regards the advancement alike of

geography, botany, zoölogy, and mineralogy."

"I trust, sir, that you will be equally gratified by the results of the exploration of the Mississippi by my friend Lieutenant Pike."

"Pike?—Pike?—Ah, the son of Major Zebulon Pike of the Revolution. General Wilkinson duly informed the Secretary of War that he had sent young Pike up the river with a small party. But it is a purely military expedition, equipped by the General on his own initiative; although I may add that his action in the matter has since received the approval of the Government."

"That last statement, sir, is of no little satisfaction to myself as a friend of Lieutenant Pike. I am sure that he will quit himself of his service with no small credit. Allow me to speak of him as one of the Republic's most able and patriotic young soldiers."

"So I have been informed. On the other hand, the young man lacks the scientific attainments most desirable in the leader of such an expedition."

My heart gave a bound that sent the blood tingling to my finger-tips.

"Mr. President," I exclaimed, "the Government is doubtless aware that General Wilkinson has in view another expedition,—one to proceed westward to treat with the tribes of the great plains and to explore the western boundaries between Louisiana Territory and New Spain. I am, sir, only too well aware of my lack of standing alike with the General and with the Government, yet I believe I can say, with all due modesty, that I possess somewhat the scientific attainments you mention as desirable—"

I stopped short upon meeting the growing reserve in my companion's mild gaze. He smiled not unkindly.

"I did not state, Dr. Robinson, that such attainments were the sole requisites. Moreover, this expedition, if in truth such a one is contemplated, rests wholly upon the discretion of General Wilkinson, and will no doubt be of a military character."

"Yet, if I may venture, could not Your Excellency—"

The President stopped and regarded me with severity. "I have already remarked, sir, that such adulatory titles—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Jefferson!" I cried.

His look did not relax. "Nor 'Mister' Jefferson, if you please, sir. I am Thomas Jefferson, the servant of the people and a plain citizen of the Republic,—no more, no less."

Knowing the greatness of the man behind this small foible, I bowed acquiescence to the statement, and he, smiling gravely in response, added with cordiality: "As I have intimated, the Executive will not interfere with any proper plans which General Wilkinson may deem expedient. Yet I will say that, in the event he carries out the contemplated expedition to our Western boundaries, I should be pleased to hear of such a well-qualified assistant as yourself being included in the party as a volunteer."

I covered my disappointment with the best smile I could muster: "In that event, sir, I fear that I must repress my adventurous longings."

I bowed and stepped aside for him to pass on. He mounted with easy agility, but checked his over-willing horse for a parting remark: "Sir, I am pleased to have met you. I shall be more pleased to meet you at my table this evening."

Before I could recover from my astonishment he had touched his hat civilly, and was cantering away across country.



CHAPTER III

AT THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE

It will not be thought strange that my invitation to dine with the President put me in high conceit with myself, and this notwithstanding such information as I had already acquired as to the looseness and informality of the White House etiquette since the retirement of President Adams. Although Mr. Jefferson's custom was to invite many kinds of persons to his elegant little dinners, the guests were generally selected for their compatibility.

On the other hand, my elation was tempered by the fact that another result of my chance meeting with His Excellency in the woods had been a sharp dashing of the hopes which had brought me to Washington. I refer to the matter of General Wilkinson's contemplated expedition to the West. Having reasons of my own for not wishing to apply to the Commander-in-Chief for the leadership of the expedition, I had come on to the Federal City in the fond hope of receiving the appointment from the Secretary of War. Fate had given me the opportunity of making my modest request direct to the source of all Federal patronage, with the results which have been stated.

It was therefore without undue elation that, dressed in my small-clothes and new coat, my best shirt-frill, and highest pudding cravat, I jogged north along the redoubtable avenue which, only three days before, had seen me ride south in my buckskins. My horse, feeling his oats after his days in stall, fretted at the sober pace I set him. A word or even a touch would have put him into full gallop, for all the depth of the mire. Yet, even had I not been in so grave a frame of mind, I had my silk stockings and fine buckled shoes to consider.

In due time we came to the grassy common about the Presidential mansion, and entered the iron gate in the high rock wall built by Mr. Jefferson to enclose the noble building. On dismounting, my first surprise of the evening was that I should be ushered in by a white attendant. I had expected that Mr. Jefferson would be served by slaves from his great plantation at Monticello. Later I learned that he preferred to hire his entire corps of servants, some thirty or more, all of whom were white.

Upon giving my name as one of the dinner guests, I was shown into a pleasant, spacious room, which, from a remark dropped by the attendant, I understood to be the President's cabinet. My first glance took in a view of walls lined with well-filled bookcases, globes, charts, and maps; my second, a brighter picture of window recesses filled with roses and geraniums, in the midst of which was embowered a cage with a mocking-bird; my third glance followed down the long table in the centre of the room to where the tall, slender figure of my illustrious host was rising in courteous greeting.

My second surprise of the evening lay in my recognition of the handsome, dashing little man who sat regarding me, alert and keen-eyed, from the far corner of the table. I had seen that sanguine, high-spirited face before, many a weary mile west of Washington.

The President met my advance with a benignant smile: "You are in very good season, Dr. Robinson. I am pleased that you did not forget my hasty invitation."

"One does not easily forget such an honor from Thomas Jefferson," I responded.

"Tut, tut!" he reproved, and turning to his companion, who rose with graceful ease and quickness, said, "Colonel Burr, I wish to introduce Dr. Robinson—Dr. John H. Robinson of New Orleans—"

"Now of St. Louis," I corrected.

"Of St. Louis."

Had I been the President himself, Colonel Burr's bow could not have been more considerate or his smile more winning.

"If I missed the pleasure of an introduction to Dr. Robinson in New Orleans, it was not due to lack of desire on my part," he said. "Governor Claiborne and Mr. Daniel Clark alike spoke highly of your merits, sir."

"That Colonel Burr should remember such chance remarks concerning an unknown young doctor is indeed a compliment," I replied. "You were pointed out to me, sir, at the dinner given you by Governor Claiborne. An urgent professional call compelled me to leave before I could obtain an introduction. But my misfortune in missing the honor of meeting you, alike in New Orleans and upon your subsequent visit to St. Louis, will now, I trust, be offset by the pleasure of your company as a fellow guest."

"I had in mind that you would count yourself among the Western well-wishers of Colonel Burr," remarked Mr. Jefferson, eying me as I thought with a certain sharpness. "My idea for this dinner was a party whose members would share a common interest in Louisiana affairs."

As he finished speaking, the President stepped past me toward the door by which I had entered. Colonel Burr promptly took his place, still smiling suavely, but keen-eyed as a hawk.

"Sir," he asked, in a low and eager voice, "may I indeed count you among my Western friends?"

It may have been the magnetism of the man, or possibly only the suddenness of the question, but I found myself answering without thought, "We are all your well-wishers, sir."

He smiled and gave me a significant glance which I did not half understand and liked still less. The words were on my tongue's tip to correct his evident misconception of my hasty answer, when he, in turn, stepped past me, bowing and smiling. I turned about, and received my third surprise. The President and Mr. Burr were exchanging bows with my Spanish don of the mired carriage!

Great as was my astonishment, I intercepted and unconsciously made mental note of the look of understanding which as I turned was passing between the don and Colonel Burr.

The former flashed a glance of inquiry from myself to the President, who met it with his ungraceful but ready courtesy—"Don Pedro Vallois, Dr. John H. Robinson."

"And my good friend, señor!" added Mr. Burr, with a warmth of tone that astonished me.

Señor Vallois responded to my bow with one as punctiliously polite as it was haughty. There was no sign of recognition in his cold eyes. The opportunity was too tempting to forgo.

"I trust, señor, that you were not again stalled, and have not been required to inhabit the centre of the avenue these past three days," I remarked.

At this he gazed at me with more interest. No doubt my voice jogged his memory, for in a moment his eye kindled, and he grasped my hand with the

heartiness of an Englishman.

"*Por Dios!* It is our *caballero* of the mire!"

"The same, señor. It is good fortune which brings us together as guests of His Excellency the President," I replied, thinking to divert the conversation. It was in vain.

"How?—What is this, señor? You know Dr. Robinson?" questioned Colonel Burr, his eyes sparkling not altogether pleasantly, and his lips tightening beneath their smile.

Señor Vallois waved his hand for attention and proceeded, with much detail and elaboration, to recount my simple feat with the fence rails. In the midst entered the Honorable Henry Dearborn, the Secretary of War, to whom I had been introduced on the day of my arrival by Senator Adair. His curt nod of recognition forestalled an introduction by Mr. Jefferson, and the señor's account proceeded to the end without interruption.

Mr. Jefferson and Colonel Burr were alike pleased to give the señor close attention. The former was first to make his comment,—*"A friendly deed, and one seldom met with nowadays."*

Colonel Burr was not content so to spare my modesty.

"Friendly!" he exclaimed, "friendly! Gallant is the word, sir! We read of Raleigh spreading his cloak for a queen. Here is an American gentleman who plunges into the mire to pry out a lady's coach, an act by far the more gallant!" He faced about to give me a knowing smile. "You saw the lady beckoning from the carriage window, and, of course, beauty in distress—"

"*Santisima Virgen!* My niece beckon to a stranger in the highway!" protested Señor Vallois, in a tone that would have compelled a far duller man than Colonel Burr to realize his mistake.

"Your pardon, señor!" he hastened to explain. "A mere figure of speech. I infer that the lady looked out, and Dr. Robinson, chancing to see her—"

"No, no, Colonel!" I broke in. "I cannot lay claim to the gallantry with which you would credit me. It was the needless lashing of the horses which prompted me to the action."

"The more credit to your kindness, sir," remarked Mr. Jefferson, with a heartiness which added to my embarrassment. The nod of assent and warm glance of General Dearborn in part consoled me for the stress of the situation.

Whether the grave look of Señor Vallois indicated approval or disapproval of my disclaimer of gallantry I could not tell. But Colonel Burr was open in his protest.

"What! what!" he cried. "Is this the manner of the coming generation? Have romance and gallantry fled with the peruke?"

He looked from my loose, unpowdered curls to the Spaniard's costly wig.

"Youth will have its day," said General Dearborn, offering him his snuff-box. Mr. Burr took a pinch with the affected elegance of a beau. The dose was of such strength that the sneeze which followed flapped the Colonel's queue and lifted a cloud of powder from his hair. The President, Señor Vallois, and myself having in turn declined the box, General Dearborn complemented the Colonel with a sneeze that stirred his own thin queue and powder.

Mr. Jefferson made some remark commending the growing simplicity of fashion with regard to the dressing of the hair. He was interrupted by the entrance of a small, stoutish gentleman in black broadcloth, who bowed familiarly to the President and General Dearborn, and formally to Colonel Burr. I learned without delay that the newcomer was no less a personage than the Secretary of State, for Mr. Jefferson at once presented to him first the señor and then myself.

The introduction brought me to a full realization of the honor which had been conferred upon me. That such notable men as my fellow guests should be dining with the President was a matter of course, but that I should be present as a member of so distinguished a party was, I flattered myself, a most signal honor for an unknown young doctor.

The situation was in part explained by the President, who, as Mr. Madison met my bow with a penetrating glance of his mild blue eyes, remarked, in his easy, informal manner: "My secretary had a fall while riding to the hounds, and Dr. Robinson has been so good as to take his place with us this evening. Dr. Robinson is conversant with matters pertaining to Louisiana Territory."

A servant appeared at the door of the drawing-room, and Mr. Jefferson moved forward beside Señor Vallois, with a word of explanation: "We will join the ladies, gentlemen."



CHAPTER IV

SEÑORITA ALISANDA

My wits would have been those of a dolt had I not foreseen the possibility of the presence of Señorita Alisanda in the drawing-room. The chance of so favorable a meeting set my nerves to tingling between delighted anticipation and dread of disappointment.

Thanks to my ruddy coloring and a natural erectness of bearing, I followed the others to the door with a fair show of confidence, notwithstanding that I had to endure the contrast of so polished a gentleman as Mr. Burr. As we advanced, he had promptly placed himself at my side, in the rear of the others, his yielding of precedence being, as I was not too dull to perceive, a most subtle attempt to flatter me.

That I was flattered was not strange, as may be testified to by those who have come in personal contact with the man. Yet for all his winning manner I gave little heed to his words, my thoughts being fixed on the delicious possibility of an immediate meeting with my glorious lady of the avenue.

Imagine the bitterness of my disappointment, upon entering the drawing-room, to see no one in the remotest degree resembling the señorita among the ladies who awaited our presence. While Señor Vallois was being introduced I had a moment to glance about the room, with the disheartening result that I nowhere saw the graceful figure which I had hoped to discover screened by the shabby crimson damask of the furniture.

The voice of Mr. Jefferson recalled me to the ladies, and I found myself making a melancholy bow to Mrs. Randolph, his surviving daughter. She in turn presented me to the other ladies,—of whose persons and appearance, out of the medley of muslins and fans, bright eyes, bared busts, and thinly veiled forms, I retain only the remembrance that one was Mrs. Dearborn, another a Mrs. Smith, daughter of the renowned Senator Bayard of Delaware, and a third Mrs. Madison. Of the fourth lady, whose name I did not catch, I recall that she was an elderly dame of sedate manners, but far other than sedate in her compliance with the extreme mode. Her gray curls were all but dripping with pomade, and the

gore in the left side of her narrow skirt extended up above mid-thigh. Her jewelled garter was the handsomest one visible, for which reason, I presume, it was more openly displayed than those of the other ladies.

Mrs. Madison, petite and charming, notwithstanding her plainness of feature and the fact that she was nearer forty than thirty, promptly rallied me upon my look of depression. The Colonel and Mrs. Smith joined forces with "Dolly," as the latter addressed her, so that I was compelled to smile, if only to save myself from a general onslaught.

"That is better!" exclaimed Mrs. Madison. "He, a doctor! to think of dining with so gloomy a countenance!"

"Above all, to think of any other than a smiling face in *your* presence!" chimed in Mr. Burr. "I had not thought it possible of one who has proved that he can be gallant even to horses."

At this there was a chorus of curious questions. I turned, seeking a way of escape, and discovered that I was all but touching elbows with my lady of the mire!

Presently I found myself bowing. Though still half bewildered, I realized that I was being introduced to her as Miss Vallois, the niece of Señor Vallois.

Colonel Burr, who had been introduced with the other gentlemen while I stood in my daze, now sought to engage her attention. His eye for feminine charm and beauty is as well known as is his success with the ladies. With such a rival, my utter loss of composure doubtless would have resulted quickly in the more serious loss of the lady's attention, had she not at the last moment recognized me as the buckskin *caballero*.

With a glance of frank pleasure which came near to finishing me on the spot, she signed gracefully to her uncle: "*Santa Maria!* It is he—the *caballero* who so kindly came to our assistance!"

"I have already expressed to the señor the full measure of our gratitude for his service," replied Don Pedro, in a tone which recalled the girl to her first manner of polite hauteur.

"Permit me to join my thanks to those of my kinsman," she said to me.

Nettled by the condescension of her tone and bearing, I shook off my daze, and

rejoined with more wit than courtesy, "Believe me, señorita, no thanks are due me other than from your coach horses."

Another chorus of questions demanded the explanation, and Colonel Burr responded by telling over Don Pedro's account in the form of a wittily brilliant anecdote. I listened unheeding, for my gaze was fixed upon Señorita Alisanda.

At my rude reply her eyes had flashed with a look before which my own dropped,—though not to the floor. As she drew back a step in her displeasure, my gaze dwelt adoringly upon the graces of her lissome form. She was tall, yet not unduly slender, and the queenly dignity and beauty of her presence were enhanced by the flowing lines of her dress.

Of the dress itself I can only say that it was of scarlet sarsenet, covered in part by an overdrape of silver spangles on white *crêpe*, and, in compliance with the Empire mode, cut low enough in the waist to expose her dazzling shoulders and bosom. Her arms, rounding up from the small hands and slender wrists as if carved from new ivory, were bare to the bows of black ribbon on her shoulders. Close about her perfect throat, in place of the usual ruffs, was a double string of black pearls. Notwithstanding the universal acceptance of the new fashions, I had great pleasure in the fact that she had not sacrificed her beautiful hair for a wig.

But, needless to say, I gave slight heed to her dress. My fascinated eyes dropped their gaze to the little arched foot which peeped from beneath the raised front of her dress, snugly cased in its diamond-buckled slipper of scarlet satin. The foot drew back out of view, and I looked up in time to catch a faint tinge of pink beneath the clear ivory of my lady's cheeks. Her look was, if possible, more haughty than before. Yet, emboldened by that faint blush and the intoxication of her beauty, I met her gaze with such a glow in my steel-gray eyes that this time it was hers that lowered.

A change in the light chatter of the company forced me to spare them a glance. Señor Vallois and Mrs. Randolph were leading the way to the dining-room, and the others were pairing off to follow, in a most informal manner. I saw Colonel Burr turning toward us, which spurred me to instant action.

"We go in now, señorita," I said, offering her my arm.

Mr. Burr flashed me a whimsical glance, between disappointment and commendation, and turned to the nearest lady. At the same time the señorita

looked up. Seeing the others all in couples, she hesitated only a moment before accepting my arm.

Of the dining-room I can state no more than that it was a very long apartment, that the furniture was exceedingly plain, and that we sat at an oval table, whose shape was supposed to bring all present face to face.

Thanks to the close imitation of Parisian society at New Orleans, to which I had enjoyed the *entrée*, I managed to conduct my unwilling partner to the table with a *haut ton* that brought an uplift in the brows of more than one of my fellow guests. My elation over this success was short-lived. Colonel Burr adroitly placed himself on her other hand, and for a time I saw no more of her scarlet lips and dusky eyes. Both were given freely to the Colonel, whose reputation was only too well known.

I might have sought to console myself with the rareness of the wines and the epicurean delicacy of the food. The service was simple, yet refined, the cooking such that I at once recognized the art of a Frenchman. Yet even the Madeira failed to cheer me. I could only sit silent over my plate and steal lackadaisical glances at the rounded shoulder which my partner so cruelly turned upon me, and at the silky maze of sable hair which crowned her shapely head.

Until now my feeling toward Colonel Burr had been uncertain, vaguely doubtful, yet by no means hostile. It now hardened of a sudden into deep-seated aversion. So little has reason to do with the affairs of men—and women!

To show the depth of resentment into which my passion flung me, I need only say that I conned over in my memory the fatal meeting between Mr. Burr and Mr. Hamilton, and exulted that I might be able to avenge the great Federalist and myself at the same time by challenging the Colonel to a like encounter. For all his sinister reputation as a duellist, at that moment I would gladly have met him with any weapons he might choose.

Either because of my look, or, what was the more probable, because of his well-known aversion to a divided conversation at table, Mr. Jefferson broke in upon the Colonel's *tête-à-tête* with so shrewd a question regarding the Louisiana situation that Mr. Burr was required to answer at some length.

This fresh turn of the conversation the President, with seeming ingenuousness, deflected to me, so that, from being the one silent member of the party, I found myself most unexpectedly the main speaker and the centre of attention. By

keeping well within the bounds of my certain information, I was able to hold my own in the general discussion which followed, and to reply to all questions with a fair degree of fluency, although subjected by each of the gentlemen in turn to a cross-examination as keen and pointed as it was lightly uttered.

"And your opinion of the Spanish boundaries?" asked Mr. Madison at last. It was a question which I had expected from the first,—the question of all questions among my fellow-denizens of Louisiana Territory.

"We have him there!" said Colonel Burr, as I paused over my reply.

Even the ladies bent forward to catch my words, and I was not surprised to see that Señor Vallois betrayed still more interest than the other gentlemen. For the first time my partner turned and fixed her eyes upon me. I stated my opinion without further hesitancy.

"As to the West Florida boundary," I said, "there can be no doubt. Spain is in the right."

"Your proof?" demanded Colonel Burr.

I cited such clauses bearing upon the point in the Spanish and French treaties as were known, and other facts which I had heard mentioned by Mr. Daniel Clark.

"A plausible statement," remarked General Dearborn. "But with regard to the other Spanish line—the Texas boundary?"

"As to that, would not the opinions of Señor Vallois and Colonel Burr be more authoritative?" I countered. "Colonel Burr at least should be well-grounded as to the points in controversy, in view of his high standing as a lawyer and the commonly accredited report in the West that he is negotiating for permission to found a colony within the Spanish territory."

"It is the first I have heard of the undertaking," remarked the President, with evident surprise. "You did not mention it to me, Colonel, at our meeting the other day."

"Had Your Excellency then considered it expedient to give me the ministry for which I asked, I should have had no need to enter upon speculative projects," returned Mr. Burr, exposing his humiliating rebuff by Mr. Jefferson with a cynical frankness which it was plainly to be seen disconcerted not only the President but his eminent secretaries as well. Mr. Burr paused a moment to enjoy

the confusion of his great adversary, then continued: "The project of a colony is as yet indefinite in my mind. I have considered the possibility of retrieving my fortunes by the purchase of four or five hundred thousand acres in the midst of the most fertile tract of Texas,—on the Washita River."

"Ah, Texas!" exclaimed Mrs. Madison, turning to Señor Vallois. "Is it not the question of the Texas line which most threatens to terminate our fair relations with your Government?"

"Such is the fact, señora," replied the don, with marked reserve.

Mrs. Randolph addressed my partner: "Your uncle takes you to Chihuahua by way of Texas, I believe you said, Miss Vallois."

"No, madam. I fear I was not clear in my explanations. Señor Vallois had intended to return that way before it was decided that I should accompany him from England."

"We go by way of Vera Cruz," explained Señor Vallois.

"So long a voyage!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith. "I should have imagined the passage from England would have wearied you of the water for a lifetime."

"We came in one of your American packet ships, and were only twenty-seven days in crossing," replied the señorita.

"Only twenty-seven days on the ocean!" I exclaimed—"twenty-seven days!"

"It is not an extraordinarily quick passage, with favorable weather and our American-built ships," remarked Mr. Madison.

"Believe me, sir, it was not the shortness but the length of the voyage which compelled my exclamation," I explained. "Miss Vallois will pardon me if I express my admiration of her heroism. I once made a trip from New York to Boston by schooner. I came back on a horse."

This statement was met with a gust of mirth, no doubt due more to the wine which had gone before it than to its wit. Yet it served to throw the conversation into a lighter vein, that ended in a run of repartee as sparkling as the champagne with which it was accompanied. In this contest of wit and airy nothings I soon found myself as far out-distanced as the others were outstripped by Colonel Burr.

Again my partner gave me her shoulder, and my sole consolation for the slight was that she joined but little in the contest, and met the Colonel's gallantry with a reserve unmistakably evident in the poise of her head and the coldness of her perfect profile. She could be haughty with others no less than with myself.

Although she did not favor me with a single glance, the half-averted view of her adorably curved cheek and an occasional glimpse of her profile were far preferable to nothing. All too early, Mrs. Randolph gave the signal for the ladies to withdraw.

In rising, whether by accident or design, the señorita turned toward me. Her eyes were nearer on a level with my own than those of any other young lady I had ever faced, and the erectness of her carriage, so different from the drooping French pose, added to the effect of proud height. She met me with a full open gaze, as devoid of allurements as it was of repellence and hauteur. I seemed to be looking down into the depths of fathomless wells, within which was nothing but velvety darkness.

It was but a moment, and she had turned away with the others, leaving me mystified. Nor could I puzzle out the meaning of the look during the two hours I sat with the other gentlemen, matching them glass after glass, and with them growing steadily more mirthful over the witticisms of Colonel Burr, which were more notable for point than for decorum.

The fine and costly wines of our illustrious host stirred me to this false mirth, behind which, as behind a mask, I found my inner self constantly reverting to the thought of my lady's strange glance. But try as I might, I could not so much as guess at its meaning. As I have said, it had held nothing either of attraction or of repulsion; it had not expressed even the barest curiosity—only that fathomless depth of mystery.

All the more was I eager for the signal to rejoin the ladies in the drawing-room. Another look, I thought, would give me the key to the puzzle, a trace to point me along the way of her meaning.

At last Mr. Jefferson saw fit to lead us in to the ladies, a servant following with the coffee. I pressed in close after Señor Vallois, and, like him, looked about in vain for his niece. Mrs. Randolph hastened to explain to him that Miss Vallois had only just withdrawn, on the plea of a slight indisposition. The señor immediately excused himself, saluting us all with punctilious bows and a sonorous "*Adios!*" and withdrew.

After his departure the ladies were pleased to bestow on me some little attention, and in their seemingly artless manner drew from me much regarding my family, my education, and my fortune,—or, as I should say, my ambitions; for my fortune as yet lay mostly in the future. Presently, to my surprise, I found myself invited to call at as many homes as there were ladies present. This was an honor entirely unexpected by me, in view of the fact that I could claim neither political prestige nor distinguished birth. The disregard for the latter may have been due to Mr. Jefferson's well-known Jacobin principles, the reflection of which is clearly perceptible in the attitude of the greater number of his intimates.

The gentlemen were almost equally cordial when the time came for me to withdraw, General Dearborn alone maintaining a certain reserve, due, as I surmised, to anticipations of a formal application for Government favors.

At the last moment Colonel Burr remarked that he intended to stop over another day before going on to Philadelphia, and gave me his address, followed by a cordial invitation to call. I replied with an expression of thanks for the honor and withdrew before he could pin me down to an outright acceptance.

CHAPTER V

GULF AND BARRIER

There may be more disagreeable tasks than waiting on the uncertain favor of public officials. If so, I have never chanced upon them. Backed by letters of introduction from prominent men in New Orleans and St. Louis and by my father's old-time friend Senator Adair of Kentucky, I had thought to obtain the coveted leadership of the westward expedition for the asking.

To my surprise, even the letter of so great a merchant as Daniel Clark met with scant consideration from the Eastern office-holders, and Senator Adair soon confessed to his lack of influence with the Government with regard to my interest. At the same time he intimated to me that should I be able to gain the good word of Colonel Burr, it was not unlikely I might receive my appointment direct from General Wilkinson.

"But, sir," I protested, "what has Colonel Burr to do with a military expedition planned by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army?"

The Senator gave me a sharp glance, and considered for some moments before replying: "Young man, one of the greatest aids to success in life is the ability to recognize helpful friends. I have received a letter from Colonel Burr in the last Philadelphia post. You met him at the President's House, and I gather from his remarks regarding the occasion that he was greatly taken with yourself."

"Unfortunately the favorable impression was not mutual," I said.

"It is indeed unfortunate—for you, John," reproved the Senator. "Such men as Colonel Burr can pick and choose from thousands."

"I am willing to be passed over."

"Tut! a boyish whim! Do not say no to me. You will cultivate the friendship of the Colonel." I made an impatient gesture. "At the least, you will not rebuff him."

"Sir, I have not sought his advances. But since it is you who ask, I will not take positive stand against him."

"That is better. It might be more—yet enough for the time. Let me tell you, John, Colonel Burr is still a man of mark in this Republic, and I shall be vastly surprised if he does not add laurels to those he has already gathered."

"It is I who am surprised," I replied. "A once successful politician, now discredited from Maine to Virginia,—a man who seven years ago tied with Mr. Jefferson in the vote for the Presidency, and last election was all but unanimously rejected, alike by the people and by the electoral college,—for you to speak of such a man winning other laurels!"

"You forget the West."

"The West?"

"Consider his reception west of the Alleghanies this past year,—his triumphant progress from Pittsburg to New Orleans and return."

"The West will elect no Presidents in many years to come."

The Senator gave me an odd look. "Perhaps not—perhaps not. These people of the original States would not consider it a possibility even of the remotest future," he murmured. Again he considered. At last, "Has it occurred to you, John, that this expedition may have other object than the exploration of our Western boundaries?"

"There will be treaties to make with the powerful tribes of plains Indians,—the Pawnees and perhaps the Ietans, or Comanches, as some call them."

"Ah, yes; with the Pawnees—and others. Did you never hear it said that, could an overland trade with Santa Fe be established, it would be of no small profit to those fortunate enough to obtain the concession from the Spanish authorities? Santa Fe is the nearest gateway to the mines of Mexico,—to El Dorado."

"I know a certain Señor Liza of St. Louis who would not forego a chance to join in such a venture," I replied.

"True—true. But he is a Spanish Creole, and, I fear, not too well disposed toward us. My point is, would it be too great an improbability that a certain projected expedition should chance to come in friendly touch with the authorities of northern New Spain?"

Having given me food for thought to last me many a day, the Senator dropped

the subject. During all my subsequent months of waiting I could not induce him to discuss it again.

The time of this conversation was the third week of my stay in Washington. Being well supplied with funds and on agreeable terms both socially and professionally with Dr. Frederick May, I had settled down in my comfortable boarding-house, prepared, if need were, to besiege the Government throughout the Winter. Should I fail to attain my desired end, I had only to return West to find a fair practice awaiting me either at St. Louis or New Orleans. At the worst there would be ample recompense for my expenditures in the experience of a Winter in the Federal City.

Even had I been certain of the rejection of the formal application which, a few days after the dinner at the White House, I had placed on file in the War Office, I should have prolonged my stay for some time. Within the week I had taken advantage of the invitations to call tendered me by the ladies of the President's party. Within another week I found myself fairly launched in the social swim.

It is not remarkable that a man well under thirty, who has spent many of his years riding the wilderness traces, should plunge into social affairs with a zest unknown to the city dweller. To this zest there was added in my case the keen desire to meet again my haughty Señorita Alisanda. Yet devote myself as I might to attendance at balls, *fêtes*, dinners, routs, and calls innumerable, it was only to meet with repeated disappointments. Although, thanks to the kindness of Dr. May and my lady patronesses, there were few social gatherings, small or great, to which I was not invited, I failed to gain another meeting with the lady of my heart. She was not present even at the grand New Year's *fête* at the White House, when Mr. Jefferson, as was his custom, received and entertained all Washington.

That I was desperately in love with the señorita I had soon found myself compelled to admit. For nothing less than the depth and passion of my feeling could have prevented me from laughing myself out of it for the sheer absurdity of such a thing.

Reared among a people whose daughters marry at sixteen and their sons at nineteen and twenty, I had safely survived my calf-love, had even run the seductive gantlet of the creole belles of New Orleans,—only to fall victim in my mature twenties to the first glance of this haughty Spanish señorita. What could I hope from one who doubtless regarded me as our Western girls regard the red Indian? I do not mean with the like horror, but with a like contempt.

Not alone was she a Spanish Catholic, to whom marriage with a heretic would mean little less than sacrilege,—she was the daughter of a Castilian family whose name implied kinship with one of the royal houses of France. I was a man without a grandfather, and, what gave me real concern, a citizen of a Republic which, in return for the carrying trade of the world, was grovelling at the feet of England and France, submissive to their contemptuous kicks.

True, Spain also bowed beneath the iron hand of Napoleon, but it was because of the might of that hand, and not, as with us, because of a willingness to endure shame rather than part with the commerce of which our humiliation was the price. Far better war and death than such barter of principles for gold!

As I thought of my abject countrymen I did not wonder that my lady had looked upon me with hauteur; and yet I could not but reflect on the graciousness of her thanks from the carriage window and that inscrutable glance at our last parting. Hope interpreted the glance to mean that she was heart-free and to be won by him who could stir her heart. Despair said that she had gone forever beyond my reach, to the far distant home of her uncle in New Spain. One answer to this last was the wild fancy that, could I but attain the leadership of the Western expedition, I might penetrate the wilderness and seek her out in the midst of her people.

At the height of my fantastic scheming, gossip at last enlightened me to the fact that my lady was yet in the city, stopping with a humble family of Catholics, and precluded from attendance at social functions by the absence of her uncle on a trip to Philadelphia.

Rumor added that the señor had gone to the old Capitol in company with Colonel Burr, who, having spent much time at the British Legation with Mr. Merry, the English Minister, had hurried North to confer with the Marquis de Casa Yrujo. But Rumor and Colonel Burr were old bedmates, and I gave little heed to the report at the time.

My interest was centred on the joyous news that the señorita was still in Washington, not upon the curious information that her uncle and Colonel Burr were supposed to have business with the Spanish Minister, who, though he had severed diplomatic relations with our Government some months since, yet lingered at Philadelphia.

Significant as should have been this report to one with my interests and information, I must confess that not even the mention of Señor Vallois drew

second thought from me. For the time being my whole intent was to find myself once more in the presence of the señorita. The question was how and where? She was not to be seen in society, and I was not quite so mad as to thrust myself in upon her at her retreat.

Hope flamed up again when all seemed darkest. As is well known to all people of information, the Sunday assemblage in the Hall of Representatives at the Capitol is frequently varied by the preaching of distinguished clergymen of various sects and denominations. Being rather given to Free Thought, though not to Atheism, I had thus far refrained from attending these quasi-official services, much as I had heard about them as the social levees of the city.

Chance, however, brought to Washington a noted Catholic bishop, and the announcement that he would preach the following Sabbath in place of the chaplain stirred me with the hope of a pleasant possibility. That Sunday I went early to the assemblage hall, dressed in my best attire, my chin swathed high enough by my pudding cravat to shame a London beau, my trousers cut to the most modish, baggy shape and flapping loosely about my shins.

Early as I arrived, I found no small part of the crowd ahead of me, and I had to thrust and elbow my way here and there among the beaux, across the hall, before I could satisfy myself that the señorita was not present. Dashed, but by no means disheartened, I chose a post of vantage on the elevated edge of a niche, from which I could watch the entrance.

Already I had had occasion to make my bows to the fashionably costumed dames and misses whose gay talk and manners lent to the Hall more the aspect of a ballroom than that of a house of worship or a legislative chamber. As the company thronged in the gallant Representatives yielded their seats to the ladies and stood beside them if acquainted, or, if the fair ones came attended, left the aisles to the escorts and withdrew into the lobbies or warmed themselves at the fireplaces.

Seeing the rapidity with which the seats were being filled by the ladies, it occurred to me to pay one of the House attendants to bring me a chair. By the time the man fetched it the aisles were so crowded with extra seats and the throng of standing men that the only available space left for a chair was in the statueless niche behind me. Though the width of the Hall lay between it and the platform behind the Speaker's chair, I could do no better, and the elevation of the position would, as I had found, enable one to see, if not hear, over the heads of

the noisy assembly. The nearness to the entrance was in another way a decided advantage, since it would enable me to address the señorita without abandoning my seat to capture by the nearest beau of the many chairless ladies.

From the moment the chair was handed me I was subjected to the wordless attack of numerous fair ones, whose glances ranged all the way from soft appeal to scornful reproach. And still the señorita failed to appear!

Mr. Jefferson, as negligently dressed as usual, had come in and taken his seat beside his secretary; and the Marine Band, a resplendent cluster of scarlet uniforms and polished brass instruments in the gallery, had played the opening bars of "Hail Columbia," when a stir at the entrance caused me to redouble my despairing vigil.

Greatly to my disappointment, I saw only the stately form of the Catholic bishop. Ushered by an attendant, the priest made his way with serene dignity through the laughing, chattering crowds whom he was to address.

My heart sank into my boots. The service had begun, the hall was packed almost to suffocation, the bishop had arrived, and still the señorita failed to appear. To have kept waiting longer the nearest of the ladies who had signalled to me for my chair would have been most ungracious. I turned to speak to the lady's friend, hesitated, and turned back for a last look at the entrance.

A rawboned Irishwoman was thrusting her way in through a group of men, who seemed none too willing to give passage to her. The plainness of her dress was enough of explanation for that, even had not the crowd been so close. As she paused for breath, her big face red from exertion and the quick anger of her race, it flashed upon me what a just mockery of the beaux' gallantry it would be to give the woman my cherished seat. No sooner had the thought entered my head than I caught her eye and beckoned her to the chair.

The woman stared. I nodded and repeated my gesture. Promptly she pushed a little to one side and turned half about. The movement brought to my view the figure of another woman who had followed her in. My heart sprang into my throat. Though the face of the second woman was downbent and her dress all of black, it was enough for my enlightenment that the covering of her graceful head was a Spanish mantilla.

At a word from the Irish woman she looked up and toward me, and I thrilled at the level gaze of her glorious eyes. I bowed and pointed to my chair. Without a sign of recognition she turned to look across the hall. Unmasked to the men about her by the changed position of her attendant, they were already making room for her beauty where the rude strength of the woman had met with counter elbowing. Nine in ten of those who surrounded her would gladly have given her their seats had they been in possession of chair or bench. But mine was the only vacant seat in the hall. The Irishwoman, who stood half a span taller even than the señorita, had already perceived the fact. I saw her bend to whisper.

This time the señorita met my salute with a slight bow of recognition, and advanced toward me, followed closely by her duenna. Had there been no other ladies in the throng her passage would have been along an open lane of admiring gallants. But not until she was within arm's-length did I dare step down from my post of defence to meet her. We alike had the other ladies to face and avoid. Half

a dozen beaux were already before me to proffer their assistance. I thrust aside the nearest and offered my hand.

She placed her gloved fingers in my big palm and stepped up, without so much as a word or a glance. For all that I found myself in an exultant glow. Had I not had the forethought to procure the chair for her? and, what was far more, had I not exercised sufficient courage to retain it for her, despite the other ladies? The big Irishwoman gave me a glance as kindly as it was shrewd, and took up her position beside me, her coal-scuttle bonnet on a level with my curls.

Having done the señorita a service, it seemed to me fitting that I should wait for her to speak before pressing her with further attentions. Accordingly I stood with unturned head, gazing across toward the Speaker's stand, and drinking in with appreciative ears the sonorous bars of "Columbia."

With the last note of the national anthem ringing in my ears I became aware of a far more musical sound,—the low-pitched voice of the señorita: "There is space for one to stand beside the chair. Dr. Robinson has my permission to step up and discover for me if Mrs. Merry is present."

"Dr. Robinson accepts the invitation of Señorita Vallois with pleasure," I replied, hoping to bring a smile to the scarlet lips. They did not bend, and I could see nothing but hauteur in her pale face and the drooping lashes of her eyes. I stepped up into the narrow space beside the chair, but it was not to stare about in search of Mrs. Merry.

"You do not look," she said with a trace of impatience.

"There is no need," I replied, my gaze downbent upon her cheek.

"No need?"

"The wife of the British Minister is not here."

"You have heard that she is ill?"

"No, señorita."

"Then how should you know that she is not here?"

"Because I have looked into the face of every lady present."

She smiled with a touch of scorn. "I had not thought the American gentlemen so

gallant!"

"I looked into the faces of all, señorita, searching for one."

To this she made no reply; and I, fearing that I had gone too far, stood silent, under pretence of listening to the service. It was indeed a pretence, for had I been in sober earnest I could have heard little other than the band above the whispering and giggling all about the room, the occasional loud talk in the lobbies, and the open laughter and conversation of the young ladies and their lovers warming themselves at the fireplaces. Throughout the service these gay young couples came and went from their seats whenever the ladies felt chilled or took the whim, the freedom of their movements seemingly limited only by the closeness of the aisles.

When the time came for the bishop to preach there was a lull, owing to his stately appearance and forceful oratory. The lull was brief. Once more the young couples fell to whispering and tittering. A group of Representatives and a Senator near us began a muttered disputation about the question of naval appropriations. The señorita bent forward, straining her ears to catch the words of the bishop. It was hopeless. In the most favorable circumstances the Hall of Representatives has a bad name for its wretched acoustic properties.

In the midst, at the stroke of noon, the attendant who had brought my chair, came in with a great sack and, escorted by an officer of the House, passed across the hall through the thick of the throng to the letter-box on the far side. Having emptied the box, he returned with his official escort in the same fashion, the bag on his shoulder bulging with letters. The spectacle did not tend to lessen the lively spirits of the assembly.

For the first time since I had taken my place beside her the señorita looked up at me. Her face was still cold, but in the sombre depths of her eyes glowed a fire of anger.

"Is it so you republican heretics meet the words of a most venerable prelate?" she demanded.

"From what I hear, señorita, preachers of other churches receive, if anything, still less consideration than this."

"It is a mockery of worship!"

"With the thoughtless, perhaps. I see many who listen. Another time it would be

advisable to come early and find a seat nearer the speaker."

"There will be no other time."

"Señorita!" I murmured, "you leave?"

"Within the week."

"So soon! You go by water. Would that I were a sailor in the West Indian trade!"

She gave me a curious glance. "Why in the West Indian trade?"

"Ships carry passengers. Aboard even the greatest of ships the sailors have glimpses of the passengers."

"Sometimes passengers stay below, in the cabin," she said coldly.

"That may well be in times of storm," I replied. "Then the sailor is above, striving to save those who are in his care from shipwreck. But in the warm waters of the Gulf the passengers show themselves on deck, pleased to leave the narrow bounds of their staterooms."

"There are some who would rather stifle in their staterooms than be stared at by the common herd."

"There are others, born in state, who would rather stand beneath the open sky, side by side with a true man, than share the tinsel display of kings," I persisted.

"Rousseau is somewhat out of style."

"No less is royalty."

"The French murdered their king, and God sent them a tyrant."

"A tyrant not for France alone. All Europe trembles at the word of the Corsican."

"And your country, the glorious free Republic."

The bitter words forced past my lips: "My country writhes and bends beneath the insults of the fighting bullies, and clutches eagerly at the price of shame,—the carrying trades of the world."

She raised her eyes to mine, grave but no longer scornful. "At last I have found an American!"

"There are others beyond the Alleghanies. We of the West are not sold to the shipping trade."

"No; you do not take by commerce. You have ever been given to taking by force."

"We have conquered the Indian with our rifles, and the wilderness with our axes."

"Yet you turned to your East for it to buy you Louisiana, through a conspiracy with that arch-liar the Corsican!"

"No conspiracy, señorita! It is well known that Napoleon bought Louisiana from Spain for the sole purpose of extending his empire to the New World. It was the fear of losing New Orleans to England that induced him to sell the Territory to us—that alone."

"Yet he had given his pledge to my country not to sell!"

"Let your people look to it that he does not sell Spain itself."

"Ah, my poor country!" she murmured, and her head sank forward.

"I had gathered that your uncle was among those who seek to free Mexico from Spanish rule," I said.

"Those whose misrule rests so heavily upon my people in New Spain have little more regard for the welfare of my people in the mother country."

Again there was silence between us, this time until the close of the bishop's sermon. As the prelate left the stand, the Irishwoman turned about with an expectant look.

"Enough of this mockery!" said the señorita.

I stepped down at the word, and had the pleasure of receiving her hand the second time. She made no objection to my escorting her from the hall and to the outer door. In the portico she stopped for the Irishwoman to come up on her other hand.

"You have my thanks, señor," she said.

I was not prepared to receive my dismissal so soon.

"With your kind permission, señorita, I will see you to your door," I ventured, astonished at my own audacity.

Whatever her own feeling, she turned without so much as a lift of her black eyebrows, and signed the woman to drop behind again. We descended the marble steps together, and passed down a side street. She walked as she spoke, flowingly, her step the perfect poetry of motion as her voice was the poetry of sound. Her mere presence at my side should have been enough to content me. But my thoughts returned to the dismal news of her intended departure.

"You go within the week?" I questioned.

"Without regret," she replied.

I passed over the thrust. "You have been nowhere. It must have been dull."

"Less so than may be thought. I have spent much of my time in the company of Mrs. Merry."

"Lord have mercy upon us!" I mocked. "If you have been imbibing the opinions of the Lady of the British Legation—!"

"I have heard some sharp truths regarding the ridiculousness of your republican regime."

"And could tell of as many, from your own observation, regarding the Court of St. James."

It was a chance shot, but it hit the mark.

"I had not thought you so quick," she said, with a note of sincerity under the mockery.

"I am not quick, señorita," I replied. "It is no more than the reflection of your own wit."

"That does not ring true."

"It is true that you raise me above my dull self."

"Have I said that I have found you dull?"

"I have never succeeded in acquiring the modish smartness of the gallants and the wits."

"That, señor, is beyond the power of a man to acquire." I looked for mockery in her eyes, and saw only gravity. The scarlet lips were curved in scorn, but not of myself. "It is only those born as brainless magpies who can chatter. You were right when you said that I could tell of truths from my own observation. I left England with as little regret as I shall—"

"Do not say it, señorita!" I protested.

"You Americans! You have the persistence of the British, with no small share of French alertness!"

"We are a mixed people—" I began.

"Mongrel!" she thrust at me, with a flash of hauteur.

"Not so ill a name for a race," I replied. "History tells of a people called Iberians. The Ph[oe]nicians and Carthaginians landed on their shores. Then came the Romans; later, the barbaric hordes from the North,—Goths, Vandals, Suevi; later still, the Moors."

The last was too much for her restraint. "Moors!—Moors! Mohammedan slaves!" she exclaimed. "We drove them out—man, woman, and child—before your land was so much as discovered."

"Yet not before they had done what little could be done toward civilizing barbaric Europe, and not before their blood had mingled—"

"*Santisima Virgen!*" she cried, in a passion which was all the more striking for the restraint that held it in leash—"I, a daughter of such blood!—you say it?"

"I do not say it, señorita," I replied, with such steadiness as I could command under the flashing anger of her glance.

"Then what?" she demanded.

"I spoke of your race in general, señorita. There are self-evident facts. Even were the fact which you so abhor true as to yourself, would your eyes be any the less wondrously glorious? Your dusky hair—"

She burst into a rippling laugh, more musical than the notes of any instrument. "*Santa Maria!*" she murmured. "You miss few opportunities—for an Anglo-American!"

"A man asks only for reasonable opportunities, señorita,—a fair field and no favors."

"The last is easy to grant."

"You mean—?"

"No favors."

She had me hard. I rallied as best I could. "But a fair field—?"

"Can there be such?" she countered. "You are Anglo-American; I am Spanish."

"Vallois has a French sound."

Her chin rose a trifle higher. "It is a name that crowns the most glorious pages in the history of France."

I thought of St. Bartholomew, and smiled grimly. "I, too, can trace back to one ancestor of French blood. He died by command of Charles de Valois. He was a shoemaker and a Huguenot."

She looked at me with a level gaze. "It is evident you are one who does not fear to face the truth. You have yourself named the barrier and the gulf between us."

"Barriers have been leaped; gulfs spanned."

"None such as these!"

"Señorita, we each had four grandparents, they each had four. That is sixteen in the fourth generation back. How many in ten generations? Who can say he is of this blood or that?"

"I do not pretend to the skill to refute specious logic, and—here is the gate. My thanks to you."

"Señorita!" I protested.

"*Adios*, señor! Open your eyes to the barrier and the gulf."

"I see them, and they shall not stop me from crossing!" Again I encountered the inscrutable glance that opened to me the darkness in the fathomless depths of her eyes. "I swear it!" I vowed.

Still gazing full at me, she replied: "It may be that in the Spring we shall pass

through New Orleans."

I would have protested—asked for a word more to add to this meagre information. But she turned in at the gate, and the Irishwoman was at my elbow.

"Till then, if not before, *au revoir*, señorita!" I called in parting.

She did not glance about or speak.



CHAPTER VI

THE WEB OF THE PLOTTER

Three days of waiting was the utmost I could force myself to endure. On the afternoon of the fourth I called at the house on the side street. The door was opened by the Irishwoman, who met me with a broad grin.

"Oi looked for ye sooner, sor!" was her greeting.

"Señorita Vallois—?"

"Flown, sor,—more's th' pity! Ye're a loikely lad, sor, if ye'll oxcuse th' liberty."

"Gone?" I muttered. "Her uncle—?"

"Came an' packed her off, bag an' baggage, two days gone."

"Two days!—Where?"

"'Tis yersilf, sor, is to foind out th' same," she chuckled.

I held out a piece of silver. "Will that jog your memory, mistress?"

"Divil take ye!" she cried, and she struck the quarter dollar from my hand. "Am Oi a black traitor to sell a fellay Christian to a heretic?"

After that there was nothing to do but turn on my heel and leave the virago. By one false move I had lost her friendship beyond recall.

For weeks I sought to trace the señorita and her uncle. All I could discover was that the don had come from Philadelphia in his private coach, called at the British Legation, and carried away his niece by a route unknown.

Left with no more than that doubtful mention of New Orleans, I plunged back into the social swim of the Federal City; not to forget her,—that I could not have done had I wished,—but to wear away the months of waiting and to perfect myself in the social graces so far as lay within my capacity.

At the same time I did not forget to press my application with Secretary

Dearborn and other members of the Government, who, I found, were all too ready to forget me. It was a hopeless quest, and I was well assured of the fact before midwinter. Yet it served its part as a time-killer; and the season being too far advanced for the descent of the Ohio by boat, it was far more agreeable as well as advantageous for me to while away my enforced holiday in Washington than needlessly to punish myself by the long and wearisome horseback journey to the Mississippi.

So I lingered on, dancing attendance on officials who frowned, and dancing the minuet with ladies who smiled. Each served its purpose in carrying me over what would otherwise have been a most tedious winter.

March came and dragged along more than the due number of weeks of foul weather. Yet with the approach of the vernal equinox I began to overhaul my buckskins. Being well able to imagine the state of the roads, I had started a chest with the bulk of my wardrobe by wagon to Pittsburg ten days in advance, and all my preparations had been made to follow after, when the post from Philadelphia brought me a letter which caused me to change my plans in a twinkling. I should rather have termed the missive a note. It was without date, and ran thus:

"If Dr. Robinson is interested in learning of a project contemplated by two parties whom he met at dinner,—to wit, a certain foreign gentleman and the writer,—he will, on his return West, come by way of Philadelphia, and call upon the writer.

A. B."

Much as this language smacked of intrigue, I had no hesitancy in changing my route to comply with the note. It was not that I felt any interest in the projects of Colonel Burr or his associates. The point was that to my mind "foreign gentleman" spelled "señor," and I had met but one señor at dinner in the company of Aaron Burr. If señor, why not señorita? The rest follows as a matter of course.

My faithful nag had not gone unriden through the winter. A man does not always give over the habit of a daily outing because of balls and routs and tea-sippings. Yet the roads north might have been better—which is not saying much,—and there are limits to the endurance of a beast, though not to the miriness of a seaboard road in the spring rains. I did not make the trip to Philadelphia in record time.

Upon my arrival I found that even the beast's master would be the better for a night's rest. Directed to the Plow Tavern, I demanded food and drink for man and horse, and having washed and supped, soon found myself pressing the clean linen of my Quaker host.

Business justifies calls at early hours, and I did not breakfast late. It was as well, perhaps, that I missed my way in the square-laid but narrow Quaker streets, and did not find myself upon the doorstep of Colonel Burr until midmorning. Even as it was, I had a wait of several minutes in the drawing-room before the Colonel entered, wigless, unshaven, and loosely attired in nightgown and slippers.

While waiting, a casual survey of the room had surprised me with its evidences of a lavish establishment. Gossip had reported that the Colonel was not meeting all his extensive indebtednesses when due.

He greeted me with bland cordiality, notwithstanding the inapt hour of my call.

"Welcome, doctor, welcome!" he exclaimed. "Better late than never, eh?"

"You are kind," I replied. "I fancied that I had come too early."

He glanced at his dress with a shrug. "Wine and late hours carry through many a successful conference. You will join me in a cup of coffee and a roll?"

Though I had no wish for food, I assented, for I saw that he had not yet breakfasted. We were soon seated in a snug little den of a room, sipping as good coffee as I had ever tasted at any other than a creole table.

Few men whom I have met have greater command of their features than has Colonel Burr. On the other hand, few are as over-sanguine. He must have inferred that my speedy response to his note meant outright eagerness to share in the projects at which he had hinted. Scarcely pausing for a few civil inquiries as to mutual acquaintances in the Federal City, he interrupted my answers in the midst.

"Let that wait, let it wait, doctor!" he exclaimed, with an ingratiating smile. "There is something of greater moment to us both. I take it from this personal response to my note that you are not uninterested in the plans of Señor Vallois and myself."

The mention of the señor's name drew from me a sharp nod of assent. The plans of Señor Vallois could not but concern his niece, and consequently myself. The

Colonel nodded back, and his smile deepened.

"You are aware," he began, "that I have contemplated the purchase of a large tract of land beyond the Mississippi, within the Spanish boundary, on a tributary of the Red River."

"The project was mentioned by you at the President's house," I replied.

"But the ulterior purpose of the scheme—"

"It is reported that you have planned for a colony."

"As a move necessary to the advancement of the real project," he explained.

My look of interest was not assumed. For months past many hundreds of persons, enemies no less than well-wishers of the astute Colonel, had been guessing at the real object behind his rumored schemes.

He nodded shrewdly, and went on, almost in the words of Senator Adair: "Have you considered, doctor, the fortune in store for whoever opens an overland trade with Santa Fe?"

"Granted, sir. No less have I considered the improbability of obtaining such trade concessions from the Spanish authorities. It is only too well known that their policy is set upon jealous exclusion. Their desire for contact with our Western borderers is as slight as their racial and religious aversions are deep-seated and abiding."

"Say rather, their political aversion. Better still, say the political aversion of the authorities alone. I have reason to believe that the people of Mexico would welcome closer relations with us."

"It is not possible!" I protested.

"Have you never thought that the Spanish colonies may be as desirous of achieving independence from foreign oppression as were our own?"

"There is the contemplated expedition of Miranda to Caracas to speak for that," I assented.

"We have the outcry of our insolent friend the Marquis of Casa Yrujo to testify as to the Spanish view of Miranda. The point is, if an expedition to South America, why not one to Mexico?"

"A conquest?" I inquired—"an extension of the vast westward boundaries of Louisiana Territory? It is true that war with Spain now seems inevitable. There is no doubt that the Government would proceed to hostilities, were it not that the French Minister intimates that the Emperor will not permit the war."

He gave me a cunning look. "Ay! With a Napoleon behind him, General Torreau has no difficulty in intimidating our meek philosopher of the White House. Yet the Emperor is powerless. England's fleets guard the high seas. The time is ripe to strike at Spain. We shall precipitate the war, and to us shall fall the prize! Let our object remain unnamed. Enough that Señor Vallois speaks for certain fellow hacendados of wealth and influence living in the northern part of New Spain, that portion of the country above the territory of the viceroyalty and under the government of General Salcedo."

"Whom they term the Governor-General of the Internal Provinces?"

The Colonel nodded. "These friends of Señor Vallois are far from content with present conditions. They would gladly throw off the yoke of Spain if the occasion presented itself. My plan is to present the occasion by means of an army of invasion, to be allied with the revolutionary party. There are thousands of adventurous riflemen west of the Alleghanies not unready to follow an able leader to the land of the Montezumas."

"I have lived on the frontier too long, sir, to doubt that the tide of our westward emigration will roll on until it breaks on the vast desert of the Western plains."

"I care not for the tide, sir! We shall set in motion a wave that will roll across the desert into the golden paradise of El Dorado!"

"And you would tell me a man of Señor Vallois's intelligence invites the entrance of that wave?"

Again the Colonel gave me a knowing smile. "It will be for the Mexicans to care for their own interests when the time comes. Men do not traverse deserts and destroy governments without thought of reward. My fiery friend General Jackson of Tennessee is champing with eagerness to share in the conquest of the Spaniard. Would he be so eager were it explained to him that the object of the invasion went no further than the freeing of the people of that remote land? But there will be glory and recompense for all, and to spare. I have pledged Señor Vallois that he and his friends shall gain a free government, and with it security for their estates. It is his own concern if he and they misconstrue the statement

too much in their own favor. On the other hand, Jackson is a man far hungrier for glory than for gold. He will lead our victorious army south into the viceroyalty, to capture the city of Mexico, while we are shaping the new Government for the whole."

The magnitude of the scheme struck me dumb. The Colonel noted the fact with satisfaction. He tapped the table significantly. "That Government, doctor, is already in process of formation. As originator and leader of the project, I claim the supreme office. Certain other of the higher offices are allotted. But you, sir, are a man of scientific attainments and proven courage, and, what is no less important in a royal court, you are a gentleman."

"Royal court?" I muttered, wondering what more might follow.

"The Spanish-American is not qualified to enjoy a republican form of government. Upon this Señor Vallois and myself are clearly agreed. The plan is a constitutional monarchy or empire, with a restricted franchise, the voters to be confined to the ranks of the wealthy and the intellectual."

"In neither of which classes will be found the bulk of your invading army. I foresee a revolution to cap your conquest," was my comment.

"Men can be managed," he replied. "There will not be lacking the spoils of office and the plunder of the enemy to lull their discontent. With all their leaders bound to us by self-interest, it will not be difficult to hold the mass in check. Señor Vallois guarantees a stout auxiliary force of native militia."

"With whom our rough frontiersmen will make short work, in sport, if not in deadly earnest."

"Perhaps,—if brought in contact while not under the fire of the common enemy. Pray do not imagine me so dull, sir. The point has been foreseen, and has been discussed with men of military training. The army of invasion will remain the army of invasion. West of Nuevo Mexico is the remote Pacific province of the Californias; south of the city of Mexico—"

"You think to conquer an empire!" I cried, overwhelmed.

"Why not?" he returned, with an assurance which for the time swept me off my feet in the current of his flashing dreams.

But this giddiness was not alone due to his bare statement. Behind the daring

words I had seen what to me was the lure of lures. I had been offered in substance, if not in words, an office of dignity in the court of this future royal personage, among whose lieutenants was numbered the kinsman of Señorita Vallois.

What wonder if for the moment I forgot the worth of republican citizenship in the glittering dream of titled office? What wonder if in the intoxication of the moment I saw the barrier flung down between myself and her, and thought to barter my birthright as an American for a vassal estate which should bring me within reach of her?

"An empire!" I repeated. "The spoils to the victor—and to his followers. At what, sir, do you appraise my worth?"

His answer was ready to glibness: "The title of marquis, an estate to support the dignity, and a seat in my privy council, or such other office as your merits may indicate during the consummation of our projects."

"You have made sure of Señor Vallois?" I demanded.

"He is with us hand and glove. I have planned to cross the Alleghanies about midsummer. Señor Vallois has gone before, to negotiate with certain persons at St. Louis and New Orleans, whom otherwise I might find difficult of approach."

"He has gone west?" I repeated, unable to credit my ears.

"At my request. It was required that he should go by way of New Orleans, in any event, and the coastwise voyage is far from pleasant at this season. Hatteras has an evil name in equinoctial weather. Also there is danger of Spanish pirates off Cuba and in the Gulf. It is hard to find passage in other than an American ship, and a cannon-ball or musket shot fired by a Spanish pirate at a Yankee hull would not turn aside to avoid the Spanish don who chanced to be aboard that selfsame Yankee."

Masking my eagerness with a smile at the conceit he pictured, I remarked in as casual a tone as I could command: "The don, then, is well on his way to St. Louis?"

"Not he!" snapped the Colonel. "It is now only seven—no, eight days since he started. Knowing the condition of the roads, I advised that he should take to the saddle, and leave his charming niece to continue her visit with my daughter Theodosia, who, as doubtless you have heard, is the wife of Senator Allston of

South Carolina. I may mention in confidence that my son-in-law is one of the foremost of all those interested in our grand project. When I begin my second Western tour, both he and my beloved Theodosia and my little grandson will accompany me."

"From all that I have heard, sir, Mrs. Allston has only to make an acquaintance to find a friend," I said.

His fond ear was quick to catch the sincerity of my tone, and a look of the most profound and unselfish love ennobled his crafty face. But my own love cried out for an ending of the bitter-sweet suspense.

"So Señor Vallois was so ill advised as to take with him his niece?—or was she not his daughter?" I commented.

"His niece. Did you not meet her at the table of our Jacobin philosopher? To be sure you did! I have not so soon forgotten that gallant exploit with the fence rails!... Thanks to the obstinacy of her uncle, she will be muddying that dainty arched foot in the wayside bog for days to come. There will be few Dr. Robinsons between here and Pittsburg to pry out the carriage of the bemired Dulcinea."

"Ah, well," I observed, "doubtless the señor will arrive in time enough to take advantage of the spring fresh. What he loses on the road he will regain by the added swiftness of the Ohio's current."

"True—true."

"I had myself thought to take advantage of the early floods. My interests impel me to return to Louisiana as speedily as possible."

The Colonel gave me another of his shrewd looks. "You will not take it amiss, doctor," he said, "if I repeat current gossip that the object of your Winter in the Federal City was not attained." I nodded, without show of offence, and he added quickly, "As well, as well, my dear sir! It has brought you better fortune, and your wish atop! You shall have a letter from me to General Wilkinson."

The suddenness of this took me unawares, but he had turned at the words to summon the servant, and did not observe my confusion. Calling for pen, ink, and paper, he turned again to me with outstretched hand.

"Your hand to it, doctor!" he cried. "You are with us?—you cast in your fortune

with the future Empire of the West?"

"A word, sir," I protested. "The heritage left me by my father was scant as to property, but I have found it rich in wisdom. It included this old adage, 'Look before you leap.'"

"Good! good, sir! Most excellent advice! Yet have I not shown you the prospect?"

"You have, sir, and not without avail. It is an alluring prospect. I confess myself tempted. Yet—I have seen what the French term the mirage. I should prefer to hold my decision until I have dipped my cup in the lake and found it filled."

"Eh! eh!" he chuckled. "I'll wager there's Scotch blood in your veins—Scotch blood!"

"At the least, I would look closer at the water," I insisted.

"You shall, sir—my word for it!" he responded, with an assurance which shook my last doubt. "You shall have the letter to Wilkinson. When it has brought you your wish, then, and not until then, need you consider your pledge binding."

"Sir," I said, tempted beyond my strength, "I accept the terms."

"Your hand to it!" he cried, and his soft white fingers closed about mine with a strength of grip that astonished me. "To you, sir, shall be entrusted the double mission of opening communication across the Western boundaries with our Mexican allies, and of negotiating with the present Spanish authorities for the Santa Fe trade. I need hardly mention to a man of your intelligence that such projects as we contemplate are not carried to completion without funds. To me falls the task of collecting the sinews of war."

"To me the leadership of the scouts!" I cried. "I am doubly hot to take the road. Dawn shall see me in the saddle!"

"The fire of youth!" he exclaimed, again clasping my hand. "Go, make your preparations. You will ride none the less swiftly that you carry a packet of letters for me."

"Willingly!"

"You think to go south to New Orleans?" I bowed. "Then a letter as well to Daniel Clark."

"I am known to him."

"True; but I have word to send him—no less to Wilkinson—regarding the death of Pitt."

"It is months since that event," I remarked. "The Prime Minister died in January."

"The post to Louisiana is uncertain. Wilkinson at least may not have heard, and I have comments to make. You will deliver the letters for me?"

"I should be pleased to do so, sir. It is a small enough favor to undertake, even for a chance acquaintance."

"But a favor that shall be remembered, doctor. Your lodging?"

"The Plow Inn."

"The packet shall be in your hands by evening," he replied.

I rose at the words, and he showed me to the door, with repeated assurances of confidence and esteem.



CHAPTER VII

SHIP AND CREW

The promised packet of letters was delivered to me at the Plow shortly after dark, by the man who had served coffee at the Colonel's. It was accompanied by a note in which Mr. Burr pleaded pressing business as an excuse for not delivering the packet in person. To this he had added a postscript empowering me to break the seal of the packet upon my arrival at St. Louis.

It struck me as most odd that the packet should have been sealed at all. But upon reflection, I concluded that this was a very proper precaution against a chance inspection of the contents by prying busy-bodies who should happen to handle the packet. The letters might well contain statements open to misconstruction by the Colonel's numerous and powerful enemies, or details of plans, publicity of which, owing to the necessity of secrecy, might disconcert the progress of the great project. The instruction to me to open the packet upon my arrival prevented any questioning of the Colonel's confidence in myself.

Thanks to a large hostler-fee, my horse came from the stable after his day of rest as fresh as when we left Washington, and hardened by the trip. He had need for all the endurance within his nature. Before dawn his hoofs were clattering across the great new bridge over the Schuylkill.

In the dense night of the bridge's enclosed roof and sides, it was like riding through a hall of vast length, with no guidance other than the faint starlight at the far end. The thought struck me that this was apt symbol of my love-quest. The darkness was as the night of my lady's fathomless eyes, through which in the uncertain distance I could no more than fancy a dim starlight of hope.

Musing on the conceit, I continued the allegory as we left the bridge and splattered away on the old colonial road to the Monongahela, with the fancy that in spirit, as in body, I had passed from the shut-in blackness out into the openness of space, and that before me was promise of fair dawn.

The day's dawn came as promised, bringing me still greater elevation of spirit. And within the mile a mischievous farmer's brat by the wayside tumbled me from heaven to muddy earth by howling in a voice of lively concern that my

horse had lost his tail. So near does the ridiculous skirt the sublime! I had begun my journey on the Day of All Fools.

Perish superstition! Who but the ignorant believes in signs and omens? And if mine was in truth a wild-goose chase, the sooner I reached the end of my running the better. I neither would nor could have checked myself had the thought come to me to turn back.

A journey tedious enough in the best of seasons is not improved by April rains and boggy roads. On the other hand, I had that drawing me Westward which would have spurred the tortoise into striving for the hare's leap. It is sufficient evidence of my haste to state that, for all the condition of the roads, I made in fifteen days the trip which is considered well covered if ridden in nineteen.

Let me hasten to add that this was not done on one nag. Even had not my love of man's second friend served to prevent so brutal an attempt, failure would have been inevitable. With the best of roads, not a horse in the Republic could have carried through a man of my weight in the time. The attempt was not necessary. Thanks to a kindly acquaintance here and there along my route and to a sufficiency of silver in my saddlebags, I managed to obtain a fresh mount on an average of twice in every three days. With such relays, I was able to ride post-haste, yet leave behind me each horse, in turn, none the worse for his part in the race.

Up hill and down dale, pound, splatter, and chug, I pushed my mounts to their best pace, along the old Philadelphia road. In other circumstances and under clearer skies I might have paused now and again to enjoy the pleasant aspect of the Alleghany scenery,—its winding rivers and brooks, its romantic heights and budding woods. But from the first my thoughts were ever flying ahead to the Monongahela, and the sole interest I turned to my surroundings was centred upon such urgent matters as food, lodging, and fresh mounts.

At the end of the journey I found myself in clear memory of but three incidents,—a tavern brawl with a dozen or more carousing young farmers, who chose to consider themselves insulted by my refusal to take more than one glass of their raw whiskey; the swimming of the Susquehanna River, because of a disablement of the ferry; and a brush with a trio of highwaymen at nightfall in the thick of a dense wood. The rascals did not catch me with damp priming. When they sprang out at me, I knocked over the foremost, as he reached for the bridle, with a thrust of my rifle muzzle, and swung the barrel around in time to shatter the shoulder

of the second fellow with a shot fired from the hip. The third would have done for me had not his priming flashed in the pan. He turned and leaped back into the thicket, while I was quite content to clap spurs to my horse and gallop on up the road.

But even this last adventure failed to hold a place in my thoughts when at last, near mid-afternoon of the fifteenth day, I came in view of Elizabethtown on the Monongahela. Here it was I had reason to hope that I might overtake Señor Vallois and his party. With roads so difficult, it was more to be expected that he would take boat from this lively little shipping point than rag on through the mire to Pittsburg.

Cheered by the thought, I urged my horse into a jog trot, which, however, soon fell back into a walk as the weary beast floundered through the deeper mire of the town's main street. I rode as directly as possible toward the leading tavern. Señor Vallois was not the man to lie at any other than the best of inns when choice offered.

With quick-beating heart I made out the sign of the tavern I sought, and again attempted to urge my horse into a jog. He was slow to respond either to word or spur, and I suddenly gave over the effort at sight of a tall and dignified figure which stepped from the inn door and swung easily upon the horse which a half-grown lad had been holding in wait.

The first glance had told me what I most wished to know. My chase had not been fruitless. The Spanish cloak and hat and high riding boots of the don were unmistakable, even had I not recognized the Spanish dignity of his bearing. Certain of his identity, I would have preferred to postpone a meeting until I had found opportunity to bathe and to change to the one shift of linen and clothes which I carried behind the cantle of my saddle. Yet I made no attempt to avoid him when he wheeled his horse about and rode directly toward me.

Had it not been for our first meeting in the yellow clay of Washington's famous avenue, I doubt if the don were unmistakable, even had I not recognized buckskins. With that memory in mind, it is not unlikely that my mud-smirched condition only served to add to the quickness of his perception. We were almost passing, when he raised his eyes, which had been staring down into the miry road in frowning abstraction. His glance swept over me and rested on my face. A moment later he had drawn rein and was bowing to me.

"*Por Dios!* It is our gallant *caballero* of the mire!—*Buenos dias*, Dr. Robinson!"

"To you the same, Señor Vallois!" I returned.

"It is a strange chance which brings us to a meeting in this wilderness bog," he remarked, with what I thought was a shade of suspicion in his proud black eyes.

There was every reason for me to seek at once to place myself on the footing with him that I desired. Meeting his glance with a careless nod, I answered readily: "It is a pleasant chance which brings us together here, but not a strange one. Little travel comes from Philadelphia to the Ohio other than on the road we both have such cause to remember."

"From Philadelphia?" he questioned.

"I carry despatches from Colonel Burr."

"You!" he cried, thrown out of his aristocratic reserve. But in the same breath he was bowing his apologies. "Your pardon, señor! I was not aware that you and Colonel Burr—"

"Nor he, señor, until a few days ago," I hastened to explain. "Senator Adair of Kentucky was formerly my father's friend and camp-mate. He advised me to see Colonel Burr. When I started upon my return West, I came by way of Philadelphia. It did not take me long to come to an agreement with—" I lowered my voice and leaned nearer the don—"the man who professes an intention to strike off the fetters of a land dear to Señor Vallois."

"*Poder de Dios!*" cried the don, reaching his hand to me with a fiery impetuosity of which I had believed him incapable—" *Santisima Virgen!* You are one of us! You have cast in your lot with the new league of freedom!"

It angered me that I must qualify. "Hold, señor! I did not say that. I have not gone so far—as yet."

"As yet?" he demanded.

"Your pardon, señor, but many such projects are schemed, and in the end prove to be—'castles in Spain.'"

He smiled gravely and without offence. "Señor, I give you my word that I and my friends are prepared to build the Western wall of the castle."

"Your word, señor, is sufficient. But there remains the Eastern wall, and I am doubtful of the builders. I did not ask for Colonel Burr's word. I preferred

something more substantial. He has promised that I shall receive such proof upon my arrival at St. Louis."

"Then you, too, go to the—to St. Louis?"

"To the General," I responded, surmising that it was General Wilkinson whom he had hesitated to name.

"You spoke of despatches."

"Letters from the Colonel to parties we both seek, in St. Louis and New Orleans."

"Colonel Burr entrusted me with numerous despatches."

"He mentioned the day of my visit with him in Philadelphia as the eighth after your departure. That week may have seen developments or changes which required fresh despatches."

"*Poder de Dios!*" he exclaimed. "You left Philadelphia eight days later—and are here!"

"At your service, señor."

"*Santisima Virgen!* And I had four horses to my carriage!"

"I had nine horses beneath my saddle, in succession."

"*Virgen!* What a *caballero!*"

"When a man is in haste to see his journey's end, señor, he does not loiter about taverns on the way. You came in yesterday?" He bowed. "Then you may be able to tell me what are the chances of obtaining quick passage down the river."

He looked across toward the shipyards with a frown.

"I am now on my way to inquire, señor," he answered. "Against the better counsel of Colonel Burr, I was so ill advised as to bring a seaman from the seaboard to have charge of the water journey."

"A salt-water sailor on an Ohio flat!" I exclaimed.

"The señor forgets that I am a stranger to his forest wilderness."

"Your pardon, Señor Vallois!—Permit me to ride with you. It may be I can assist

you."

"*Na-da-a!*" he protested. "I cannot permit it. You have ridden for fifteen days at more than post speed. You must first refresh yourself."

"The señor forgets that I am no less eager than himself to arrange for the river passage. Rest assured I am good for another day in the saddle, if need be, at your service, señor."

As I wheeled around, and we started for the riverside, he looked me up and down with a wondering glance.

"*Por Dios!*" he muttered. "I had thought none could ride as ride our *vaqueros*. You are a man of iron."

"I am the son of my father," I replied. "How other than hard could be the sons of the men who wrested this Western land from the savages,—who have driven the Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws south of Tennessee, and pressed back the Northwest Indians to their present fastnesses about the Great Lakes?"

"It is true," he said. "I have been told no little of that most cruel and ferocious warfare waged by your savage enemies. I myself know the fearsomeness of the raids of our equally ferocious Apaches and Yaquis. Therefore I do not wonder that the men and the sons of the men who met their painted enemies in this gloomy wilderness should have become not only hard, but rude and harsh in their manners."

"Given that and the prevailing craze for raw whiskey, and we have—what we have. Yet they are the men whose fathers met the Indian on his own ground; who themselves have met the ravaging war parties, and who will doubtless again meet them,—though I trust not again on the banks of the Ohio."

"May the Virgin grant that your trust is well founded!" returned the señor, with deep earnestness. "Yet the British soldiers still hold your lake forts, and it is rumored that the British agents are ever at work conspiring with the Northern tribes against the interests of your people. Let me predict that unless Britain is humbled by the great Emperor, she will make excuse of your many differences to crush your Republic and regain these lost colonies."

"Let her try!" I cried. "Let her turn loose her savage allies upon us, and we will hurl them back into the lakes! We will cross over and drive redcoats and redskins alike down the St. Lawrence into the sea! Even the abject people of the seaboard,

who now lick the foot that spurns them, will remember their fathers of the Revolution, and strike the enemy as Paul Jones and his fellows struck them,—on the sea."

The señor met my enthused glance with unmoved gravity. "I have heard mention of what is called President Jefferson's mosquito fleet."

Our arrival at the shipyards gave me welcome excuse to change the subject. I pointed to the scores of river craft, afloat in the stream or in course of construction. "Had you in mind, señor, to take a bateau or a flat?"

"Bateau?—flat?" he repeated. "Your pardon, doctor, but the terms—?"

"A bateau is a boat of flat bottom but with keel. A flat is a great scow without keel, and often provided with deal cabins."

"I had been told how to proceed, but left all to that rascal of a seaman. Immediately upon our arrival, he told me, with many foul oaths, that he intended to make no ventures on fresh water, and to show his contempt for the saltless fluid, has sat ever since in the taproom of the inn, guzzling whiskey."

"You are better off without the fellow," I said. "There are scores of men to be hired here who are well used to river travel. Is it your intention to hire passage, or to purchase your own boat?"

"Privacy is desirable. I have disposed of my coach and horses with less loss than I had feared. If boats are not too high in price—"

"Rest easy as to that, señor. Boats are one of the cheapest products of the shipping towns. The question first to decide is whether you prefer a keelboat or a flat."

"Señor, I must rely upon your good advice," he replied.

I pointed at the swollen, turbid current of the Monongahela, swirling high along its banks. "As you see, the river is in full flood. It is what the rivermen term the Spring fresh. The Ohio now runs no less swiftly, at times fully eight miles an hour. I should advise you to choose a flat, because it will travel little less speedily than a bateau, and with its house, will prove a far more comfortable craft for so long a voyage."

"Comfort is an important consideration, doctor. With me travels my niece, whom

you may remember."

I kept such command of my features as I could. "I have a clear memory of Señorita Vallois. It is unfortunate."

"Unfortunate!" he exclaimed, with a lift of his black brows.

"That you have no servant skilled in handling a river boat."

"Ah—that!"

"A single man could manage your flat, provided you were willing to lend a hand on occasion at steer-oar or pole—a few minutes, it might be, once or twice a day. There are, as I have said, numbers of skilled rivermen to be hired. But—" I paused as if to consider—"No. I could bring you more than one for whose faithfulness I could vouch, but none who is not foul-mouthed and—to a foreigner—insolent."

Shifting my gaze to the nearest flat, I waited in eager suspense. He answered with a question: "Do I understand you to say that with my help one man could guide so clumsy a craft?" I nodded, with assumed carelessness. "And you are yourself skilled as a riverman, señor?" Again I nodded. I could not trust myself to speak. He continued with polite hesitancy: "Would you, then, think it odd, Dr. Robinson, if I requested you to make the river journey with me?"

"Señor!" I cried, "it would give me great pleasure!"

"*Carambo!*" he muttered, at sight of my glowing face.

A moment's hesitancy would have lost me all the vantage I had gained. I held my left hand level before me, and swept off the upturned palm with my right. There are few of the Indian signs which do not pass current from the lakes of the North and the swamps of the South to the most remote of the tribes in the Far West. I was right in my surmise that they were known even across the Spanish borders.

The señor bowed in quick apology: "A thousand pardons, Señor Robinson!"

"A man does not ride post-haste without expense," I said, with a seriousness which was not all feigned.

"A thousand pardons!" he repeated. "My purse is at your disposal, Señor Robinson. I do not speak in empty compliment. Such funds as you may require —"

"*Muchas gracias!*" I broke in. "I have enough silver left to jingle in my pocket. My thought was that it would be more agreeable to work my passage with an acquaintance than with strangers. At this season it is unusual for persons of culture to undertake the river trip. The voyage is becoming quite the fashion among young gentlemen of means and enterprise, but they seldom venture over the mountains before settled weather, and the rivermen, as I have remarked, are not always the best of company."

"Señor, no more! We share this voyage as fellow-travellers—my boat and your skill. Is it not so?"

"Señor, my thanks!" I replied. "Yet first, there is the question of Señorita Vallois's pleasure. It is a long voyage. I would not thrust myself upon your intimacy against the lady's inclinations."

"My niece will be no less pleased than myself to travel in company with a gentleman of your acquaintance. I will answer for that. My niece has lived for three years in England. While we travel in Anglo-America, we are agreed to comply with such customs of the country as do not differ too widely from our own."

I bowed low to hide my extreme satisfaction. It was the rarest of good fortune to have penetrated the reserve with which a Spanish gentleman surrounds the ladies of his family. But it was not my part to dwell upon the fact. I hastened to point out a flatboat which had caught my eye when we first rode down to the bank.

"What is your opinion of that craft?" I asked.

"So large a boat—for two men? *Santa Maria!*"

"Hardly forty feet over all," I replied. "Let us go aboard."

He swung to the ground as quickly as myself, and we hitched our horses to the nearest stump. As the flat was moored alongside the rough wharf, we had only to step aboard. The height of the water brought the craft almost on a level with the wharf.

A glance or two showed me that the boat was already fitted out with steer-oar, sweeps and poles, a kedge with ample line, and a light skiff, snugly stowed in the ten-foot space of open prow. Having next made sure that she was well calked and dry, I led the señor through the house. It was divided into three apartments or rooms, of which the one nearest the stern was some five feet the longest.

"Here," I said, pointing to the rude but well-built fireplace, "is the kitchen, salon, and dining-room of our floating inn."

We passed on through the middle and forward rooms. Like the kitchen, both were limited to a width of seven feet by the need of a runway without, along each side of the boat. But Señor Vallois looked about approvingly.

"We could share this cabin," he said, glancing about the forward room.

"My thanks, señor, but I can make shift to sleep on deck," I replied.

"There will be rain—there is always rain in this northern country of yours. No. You will do me the favor of sharing this cabin with me. There are two berths, as you see."

I looked gravely at the rude bunks built, one above the other, on the left wall, and bowed my acceptance of the offer.

"It is well," he continued. "My niece and her woman will share the middle room. There remains only the question of purchase."

"Leave the bargaining to me," I said quickly, at sight of the shrewd-faced Yankee who came down the wharf as we stepped out into the open prow.

"The affair is entirely in your hands, doctor," assented the señor.

The Yankee stepped aboard with an air of brisk business.

"I cal'clate ye want a boat," he began. "Let ye have this 'un dirt cheap."

"How much?" I demanded.

"One seventy-five."

"Lumber cordelled by keelboat from New Orleans?" I rallied him in smiling irony.

He looked me up and down with a speculative eye.

"We-ell, stranger, I might knock off ten dollars."

"You mean fifty."

Again he surveyed me; then appraised the rich broadcloth of my companion.

"Be ye buyin' fer him?" he queried.

"We make the trip together. I can go as high as a hundred and twenty-five. We could do better at Pittsburg, but are willing to give you the bargain, to save our boots."

He looked again from my mud-smeared buckskins to the señor's fine apparel, and smiled sourly. "Ye'll git no such boat at the price, here or at Pittsburg, if ye wait till the next freeze. One fifty is my best offer. Take it or leave it."

"Skiff, kedge, sweeps, poles, and steer-oar included," I stipulated.

He assented, with well-feigned reluctance: "As she stands—lock, stock, and barrel."

I handed him a five-bit piece. "Taken! Yet I'd have had you down fifteen more if we were not in haste."

"I'd ha' eased your high-nosed don of a round two hundred, my lad, had he done his own dickering," muttered he, as, at a word from me, the señor drew out a bulging purse and counted into my palm the hundred and fifty dollars in American gold.



CHAPTER VIII

THE HOSPITABLE BLENNERHASSETS

While our sour-faced boat-dealer made out his bill of sale, I wrote down a list of provisions and furnishings for the boat. Upon reading this to the señor, he suggested the addition of some articles which I would have regarded as needless luxuries. Leaving these to his own selection, I jogged to the store of a gruff old German ship-chandler, one of the Hessians against whom my father had fought at Monmouth and Trenton, and whose wife, on my last trip, I had been so fortunate as to cure of a quinsy.

The good Frau came in as I was giving my list into the charge of her husband, and would not take a refusal to her offer of hospitality. Horse, list, and all were taken from me before I could defend myself, and I am not sure but what the Frau would herself have put me into the tub she made ready in the bedroom had I not begged for a dish of her sauerkraut and corned beef.

Cleansed and filled, I was given no peace until she had me safe between clean, dry sheets in their canopied fourposter. Having then been given sufficient respite to write a note of explanation to the señor, I rolled over and sank into that profound slumber of which I had so great need.

I awoke to find the sun up a good two hours and the hospitable couple beaming upon me as brightly as the sunrays which shone in through the diamond panes of the latticed window. The Frau held up my buckskins, all cleansed and dried and softened; the man showed my list, with every item checked and double checked, and a receipt from the party to whom I had agreed to deliver my last mount.

Between them I soon learned that the flatboat was well stocked for the voyage, and that the señor had sent word he was about to go aboard with his party. This last would have forced me to rise and accept the good wife's intended assistance with my dressing, had she not feared that I should rush off before she could serve my breakfast. I gulped my coffee while she tied on my moccasins. There was no question of other garments than my buckskins, since saddle and all had been stored aboard the flat. When I at last made my escape, it was with a hot sausage in either hand. These German delicacies followed the rye bread and

coffee which had gone before, while I was riding to the wharf in my host's rattling ox-cart.

Greatly to my relief, despite the plodding pace of our beasts, we were first to reach the boat. I had time to overhaul the craft and say farewell to my good German friend. As he drove off, gruff-voiced but beaming, the well-remembered cherry-wood carriage came churning through the mire. The señor had retained the right to use it for this last service.

I was at the door, with my hand on the knob, as the driver swung around. The señor stepped out, with a sonorous, "*Buenos dias*, doctor!" For a fraction of a moment he seemed about to turn. Then he stepped aside, and left my way clear.

My lady drew out an arm from the depths of her great ermine muff. Her plump, bare little hand lay in my brown fingers like a snowy jasmine bloom. There was mockery in the depths of her eyes, but the scarlet lips arched in a not unkindly smile.

"*Buenos dias*, señor!" she greeted me.

"It is truly a good day which brings me sight again of Señorita Vallois," I replied. "May this clear sky prove true augury of the voyage we are to share!"

"May it prove true augury of clear sunshine to follow! These weeping skies of England and your Republic! I long for a week of dry weather." She shivered in her single-sleeved French cloak, whose white floss net and tassels added little to the warmth of her gauzy muslins. As for her head, even her light mantilla would have been more suitable to the weather than the jaunty cap of velvet and tigerskin.

"You are cold!" I said. "There is a fire aboard our craft."

I drew her hand beneath my arm and started to lead her down the wharf as a swarthy, hard-featured woman stepped from the carriage. The señorita spoke a few words in Spanish, and the woman turned to help the driver lift down the chests and boxes from behind, under the direction of Señor Vallois.

Handing the señorita down into the boat's stern, I led her into the living-room, or kitchen, and laid more fagots upon the fire which I had kindled. In another moment I had her seated before the blaze, with a blanket about her graceful shoulders. As I knelt to place a stool for her little feet, she gazed down with the velvety eyes which had looked out upon me from the coach window in

Washington.

"*Maria purisima!*" she murmured. "There are tales of gallant knights—"

"Who served and adored their ladies!" I added.

She glanced about at her uncle, who was entering through the middle room.

"*Madre de los Dolores!*" she called. "These physicians! Pray, reassure him, my uncle. He is convinced I shall suffer a chill."

"Not after the precautions I have taken," I rejoined with professional gravity as I rose. "The wonder is that Señorita Vallois has so long survived the sudden changes of our seaboard climate. I know little of temperatures abroad, but on this side of the Atlantic these thin Empire gowns are sheer murder."

"Granted," replied the señor. "Yet as a physician you have doubtless long since learned the futility of arguing the cut or material of a gown with a woman."

"Only too well, señor! Fortunately every day will now carry us both nearer a milder climate and nearer the Summer. Your chests are all aboard?"

"All. And yours, señor?"

"Mine will be waiting on the wharf at Pittsburg. We will put in for it as we drift past."

"It is well," he replied. I moved toward the outer door. "A moment, if you please, doctor. We voyage together many leagues. Among my friends I am addressed as Don Pedro."

"And I as Alisanda," added the señorita gayly. Her uncle raised his brows, but said nothing. She called toward the inner door, "Chita!—Chita!"

The woman appeared, and at a sign from her mistress, crossed toward me.

"Dr. Robinson, you have not before met my faithful Chita, because she was ill and had to be left in Philadelphia when we went to Washington. Chita, this is he of whom I spoke."

The woman courtesied with a grace which belied her stout figure, her beady eyes riveted upon my face. When she straightened I ventured to surmise from the half smile which hovered about her hard mouth that if she was not already well-disposed toward me, she was at least not an enemy.

"It is well," said Don Pedro.

"All well—and ready to cast off," I added. "If the señorita—"

"Alisanda!" she corrected, with a flashing glance.

"If—Alisanda is quite warm, she may wish to witness the event."

"I will join you immediately," she responded.

With that I led Don Pedro out to the steer-oar and showed him how to hold it to aid in bringing us about. As our craft lay in a slow eddy, I had no difficulty in casting off. The townfolk and shipyard workers were far too busy with the rush of the Spring shipping to give heed to so common an event as the departure of a flat. But it was enough to call out all my skill and strength that I thrust off under the eyes of Alisanda.

A side shove from the prow, and a rear thrust from the inner corner of the stern as the prow swung out, cleared us from the wharf and sent us gliding out aslant the eddy. The river was in such full flood that the bottom, even alongside the wharf, was beyond poling depth. But I called Don Pedro to aid me with the sweeps, and a few long strokes carried us out into the swirling current of midstream.

Our voyage had begun. We were afloat in the grasp of the river, and for the time need only to fold our arms and gaze at the changing vistas of forest-clad hills on either bank, past which the current swept us along at more than post speed.

Before the noon meal we had passed in turn the important shipping town of McKeesport, at the mouth of the Youghiogheny, and the hillside ravine near Turtle Creek, where, within a gunshot of the river bank, the British General Braddock met with his disastrous defeat at the hands of the French and Indians, and where he whose life was to prove so precious to his countrymen came so near to losing it beneath the edge of the tomahawk.

In the midst of our meal we came so close under the heights of Pittsburg that I had need to leave the table to take advantage of a slant in the current which would bring us shoreward. Before the others joined me, I had the boat fast alongside the warehouse wharf where I hoped to find the chest of clothes I had sent on from Washington. My expectations were not of the firmest, for I knew the Cumberland Pike to be quite as miry as the Philadelphia road. It had been,

indeed, a close shave, for on inquiring of the warehouse keeper, I learned that my box had come down from Redstone by skiff only the previous evening.

We had no letters to deliver in Pittsburg, and no desire either to wade the unpaved streets or to linger beneath a sky whose shower of soot bore out only too well the boast of the townsfolk that good coal could be bought in their streets at five cents a bushel. For my part, I would prefer to pay more for wood fires, and escape the smearing of house and garments with lampblack. However, the residents may consider this inconvenience offset by their numerous social and cultural advantages, which are unequalled among all our trans-Alleghany towns, unless it may be at Lexington or Cincinnati.

As we put off again into the stream, I pointed out the site of Fort Pitt, built by the British to replace the French Fort Duquesne. But a storm cloud drove down over the Pittsburg hills, and Alisanda hastened to withdraw with her uncle into the cabin to escape the April rain which soon poured upon us in torrents. It was not, as I had hoped, a mere squall. With the passing of the first roaring wind gusts that rocked our heavy craft, the rain settled into a steady drizzle, which obscured river and banks for the rest of the afternoon, and sheeted us in like a black pall throughout the night.

With the nightfall, trusting to the height of the flood to carry us over all shoals and rocks, I made no attempt to effect a landing or to tie up to the half-submerged willows along the bank. We had wood enough aboard to last for three days or more, and our fireplace, with its pots and ranger, saved the necessity of a shore camp to prepare food.

As there was no call for Don Pedro to suffer a needless wetting, I argued that I could not trust him on watch so dark a night,—which was no more than the truth of the matter. My supper was brought to me in the prow by Chita, and her peppery stew was doubly welcome after my afternoon's drenching. She carried back with her instructions to obtain one of my dry suits from Don Pedro and take it through to the kitchen. About midnight, the boat chancing to swing about stern foremost in the current, I left my watch long enough to shift into dry garments before a crackling fire.

With the first gray glimmer of dawn through the breaking rain clouds, Don Pedro came to take my post, and Chita slipped out in her nightshift to set on her coffee pot. By the time I had breakfasted, the sun had dispelled the mists, and I saw that we were already in the Long Reach, having passed during the night by

Steubenville and Wheeling. It was a run possible only at the height of the Spring fresh.

Upon my inquiry, Don Pedro informed me that he did not wish to stop at Marietta, that prim New England village planted by Rufus Putnam and his fellow Yankees on the site of Old Wyandot Town. He had, however, a letter to deliver to Mr. Harmon Blennerhasset, owner of an island some fourteen or fifteen miles below Marietta. So, having made a rough calculation of the speed of the current, I went in to my bunk, after explaining that they need not waken me before midday, unless the boat tended to leave the current.

Sharp upon the noon hour I was roused by the don, and informed that we had already passed Marietta, some five miles back. His description of the Muskingum River and the block houses and other buildings of the town would have convinced me that it was indeed Marietta, had I not known that it was the only settlement of the size between Wheeling and Gallipolis. What was more, I recognized the greater width of the river bottoms, which were now flooded to the higher levels, the many islands which divided the current, and the lowness of the densely wooded hills.

But having, as I felt sure, something over an hour to wait before sighting Mr. Blennerhasset's well-known island, I made my toilet, and leaving Don Pedro at the steer-oar, indulged myself in the great pleasure of sitting down at table with the señorita. Either because of her determination to live up to the customs of the country, or owing to my watch in the rain,—which any riverman would have taken as a matter of course,—she was most friendly and gracious in her manner, greeting me with a smile and giving me her hand to salute. Not content with this, she saw to it that Chita served me with particular attention, and herself pressed food and drink upon me.

Only one who has lived among the Spanish people can realize what a privilege it was to be thus received into the intimate society of my travelling companions. We conversed with cousinly gaiety and freedom on all subjects which came to mind, from the ambition of the great Corsican to the latest fashionable ditties, and Alisanda filled me with delightful anticipations by stating that amongst her baggage was a guitar, which she and Don Pedro were not unskilled in fingering.

After the dessert of sweets, or *dulces*, to use the Spanish term, I went out to relieve Don Pedro at the steer-oar and to inquire whether he wished to stop over at the island. He replied that it might be necessary to confer at some length with

Mr. Blennerhasset.

A half-hour later we were sheering our craft toward the Virginia bank, to make the wharf which faced the Ohio shore, near the upper end of Blennerhasset Island. As the channel which separated the island from Virginia was scarcely a stone's-throw across, our course brought us well to the left of the river's centre. With the ready aid of Don Pedro at the steer-oar, I managed, between sculling and poling, to bring the flat alongside the wharf. Before I could leap out, a negro ran down the bank and made fast the line tossed him from the stern by Chita.

Another slave who had sighted us from the crest of the bank turned and ran with the news of our landing, so that before we could straighten our garments and step ashore, Mr. Blennerhasset himself came hastening down the bank to welcome us. Our visit had been unheralded, and, so far as he knew at the moment, we were no more than chance strangers. But it was enough for this cultured, unworldly Irish gentleman that persons of quality had stopped at his gate.

Señor Vallois introduced Alisanda and myself with all the stateliness of a Spanish hidalgo, and followed by delivering over the letter from Colonel Burr. With no more than a glance at the address, Mr. Blennerhasset thrust the letter into his pocket, and pressed us to accompany him at once to his house, where, he said, Mrs. Blennerhasset would be anxiously awaiting her guests.

Such warmth of hospitality would have melted even a reluctant visitor, and we were far from unwilling to view the famed beauties of the place. My one regret was that I could not claim the privilege of escorting the señorita. Don Pedro and I ascended the bank behind the others, Chita remaining aboard the boat.

Entering through the handsome stone-columned gateway at the top of the bank, we passed between the shrubbery and a meadow, along a gravelled walk, for somewhat over a hundred paces, to the front of the mansion. The façade was remarkable for the semi-circular shape of the pillared porticos which curved forward from each front corner of the main body of the house. Though built of wood, the handsome proportions and two stories of the mansion lent to it an air of distinction rarely to be found west of the mountains.

Mr. Blennerhasset bowed us into a small front parlor, where we found his comely and charming wife waiting to receive us, in the company of their two little sons. After we had been welcomed by this pleasant lady no less cordially than by her husband, Don Pedro stated that there might be matters of mutual

interest to discuss when our host had read his letter.

At this Mrs. Blennerhasset suggested that the gentlemen should be left to their privacy, and Don Pedro invited me to share in the conference. But I explained that I did not consider myself at liberty to do so, in view of the fact that I was not yet irrevocably committed to the projects of Mr. Burr. Mrs. Blennerhasset at once invited me to join with her and Alisanda in an inspection of the mansion.

We entered first a dining-room of ample proportions, where our hostess gave the little boys into the charge of their nurse. The apartment was furnished with a richness and taste which compelled a look of surprise even from the señorita. We were soon to learn that the mansion was furnished throughout in the same lavish style.

What most interested me at the time was Mr. Blennerhasset's scientific workroom in the rear of a second parlor which led off behind from the dining-room. Here it was our host conducted his experiments in chemistry and physics, and here he had properly arranged a fair-sized apothecary's stock. Upon my remarking that I wished to purchase a quantity of Peruvian bark and calomel,—my stock of which, in my haste, I had neglected to replenish before leaving Washington,—the lady immediately requested me to measure out the quantity I desired, and absolutely refused any compensation.

We next visited the library at the end of one of the curved porticos. Here, much against my desire, I was given permission to remain while the ladies visited the kitchens in the other wing.

Tactfully as I was dismissed, the shaft rankled none the less sorely. Yet happening to open a choice volume of European travels, I so lost myself in the printed pages that the appearance of my host some two hours later came as a surprise.

He explained that arrangements had been made for our party to join them at dinner, and would not take a refusal from me. A servant had already been sent aboard the boat, that Chita might attend on her mistress. The man had orders to remain until morning, should I, following the example of Señor Vallois and his niece, agree to lie the night in the house. Unwilling to tax their hospitality so far, I excused myself from this last, on the plea of my duties as boat captain, but before leaving I gladly accepted his invitation to return and join them at dinner.

In due time I returned, and I trust that my appearance did full credit to my

country. Enough said that my hat, shoes, breeches and waistcoat were of the latest mode, that my coatcuffs extended to my finger tips, that my shirt-frill was like a snowy waterfall, and that my coatfront was padded to the fulness of a swelling bullfrog. As for my luckless throat, it was so swathed about with its bandages of cambric that my chin had a most supercilious elevation, and to look about I must first turn my body. The neck was all but immovable.

This martyrdom was, however, small price to pay for my evening. Of all costumes calculated to reveal and enhance the lovelinesses of women, the Empire modes are by far the foremost. Indeed, such is the thinness of gauzy materials and the scantness of breadth required, that,—if I may venture my opinion not alone as a physician but as a gentleman,—the flimsy, graceful costumes, though to be praised for the absence of injurious stays, are too apt to over-expose the forms of the fair sex.

Yet a modest woman, by stopping short of the utmost extremes of fashion, and no less by comporting herself with dignity and decorum, can suggest thoughts no less elevating than enravishing through the graces of this mode. With this by way of guide to my meaning, I shall not be misunderstood when I speak of my rapture over the swell of my lady's firm white bosom and the exquisite curves of her lissome young body beneath the clinging sarsenet of her low-cut waist and narrow skirt. I looked and adored as the artist adores the perfect lines of a masterpiece. Yet with my adoration there flamed a fire of passion of so white a heat that it burned away all dross of base imaginings.

I say nothing of our hostess,—not that she lacked in beauty or charm; but who looks at the moon when the sun is in the sky?

The dinner did not disappoint the expectations roused by the lavish display of the household; though I cannot say that Mr. Blennerhasset's wines compared well with those of President Jefferson, unless it might be the Madeira.

Upon the withdrawal of the ladies, Mrs. Blennerhasset urged me so cordially to join them soon, and Alisanda seconded the invitation with so sweet a smile, that I did not linger at table above half an hour. My going was hastened by the conjecture that our host and Don Pedro might wish to resume their conference. That I was not mistaken in this was evidenced by the fact that they did not follow me for two hours or more.

In the meantime I had been led up a spacious stairway to the drawing-room, directly above where we had dined. The room was notable for the stucco work of

the rounded cornices and ceiling, and the harmonious tones of the wall-hangings, of which those above the chair rail were green, bordered with gold, and those below reddish gray.

My entrance found the ladies seated together at a large forte piano, in the execution of a duet which gave full display alike to their accomplished skill and to the genius of the composer, the noted German musician Beethoven. After the duet, our hostess favored us with a ballad, and Alisanda no less readily followed with a Castilian song in the Spanish. Her voice, even better trained than Mrs. Blennerhasset's fine high soprano, was a liquid contralto that had in it the murmur of sparkling waters, the sweetness of silver bells, and the sadness of tears. I was affected almost beyond self-control, and it was as much this as the disability from my high cravat which forced me to decline my turn.

At my request, the ladies returned to another round of duet and song, and followed with the reverse,—playing solos and singing a duet. In the end they persuaded me to join them in a trio, and afterwards were so gracious as to compliment me on my baritone.

On the whole, it was the most heavenly evening I had ever known, and when, upon the appearance of the other gentlemen, I begged my leave of our hostess, it was to dance my way down to the boat on winged feet. Such a feast of divine music and diviner beauty seldom falls to the lot of mere mortals.



CHAPTER IX

MY INDIAN TALE

Dawn found me clad in my buckskins, ready for the start. All my articles of finery lay again in their snug retreat, and with those nightmares of beaudoim disposed of in a way to give me most comfort, I was once more at my ease. Of all costumes suitable to action, there is none to equal our old-time forest ranger's dress of fur cap, buckskin shirt, thigh leggings, and good elk or buffalo moccasins.

To my surprise, the Spanish woman came aboard while I was toasting my bacon, with word that her mistress and Don Pedro would follow as soon as they had risen from the breakfast table. Alisanda had sent her down to prepare food for me. The announcement of this brought a glow to my face which I saw did not pass unnoticed by the woman. But she masked all expression under her hard stolidity, and when I declined her services, set about arranging her mistress's evening attire and returning it to its box.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Blennerhasset and his wife made their appearance, escorting my fellow travellers to the river bank and down to the boat itself. I hastened to add my adieus to the others, and the tactful couple, seeing that I was impatient to be under way, cut short what had threatened to be a protracted parting.

With repeated last calls of farewell and wavings of hat and handkerchief, we swung out into the current and drifted swiftly away from our over-hospitable host and hostess. A few minutes carried us below the cultivated upper portion of the island, and I noticed Don Pedro eying the wooded remainder with a peculiar intentness. Afterwards I was told that certain of the huge cypresses shadowed a bayou, in which at the time we passed there were already being collected boats and munitions for the flotilla that was to form the nucleus of Colonel Burr's ill-starred expedition.



"We swung out into the current and drifted swiftly away"

Of this and the nefarious plans since charged to that great dreamer, I then had not the remotest suspicion, and soon turned my attention from the pondering señor.

Scattered up and down the midchannel for three miles or more was a string of barges, flats, and keelboats, laden with flour, lumber, and other up-river products, for the market at New Orleans. Like ourselves, they were coming down from the higher shipping-ports with the Spring fresh.

At my request, Alisanda kept within the house, until, by a vigorous bit of sculling, I had sent our craft beyond earshot of the nearest of these barges. The huge, clumsy craft, which must have been upwards of four hundred tons burden, was manned by the usual crew of twenty-five or thirty rowdy, drunken rivermen, whose ribaldry and rude jests were unfitted for the ears of a gentlewoman.

By adroit steering and an occasional return to my sculling, we were fortunate enough to keep our distance from these other boats, and for the greater part of the day I had the pleasure of pointing out to Alisanda the beauties of the river scenery. Rightful in fact, and most appropriate in truth, is the interpretation which tells us that "Ohio" means "the beautiful river."

A day of clear, warm sunshine, marred by only one shower, gave us our first chance to share the ever-shifting views of headlands and rolling, wooded hills. Though the forest was as yet only half in leaf, and the height of the flood covered all other than the highest of the bottoms, the nature of the scene was an unending wonder to my companions, who in turn compared it with the sterile mountains of Old Spain and the deserts of New Spain. They could not liken it to the tamed woodlands of England; for, notwithstanding a generation of settlement, with the river long since the main artery of a great commerce, these banks were as yet in many places unbroken wilderness, the abode of elk and deer and wolf, of tigerish panther and lumbering bear.

High above us soared eagles and turkey buzzards, spying for carrion and live prey, each according to his nature, as they had soared and spied in the late sixties and early seventies, when Gist and Boone and the great Washington first threaded the untraced wilderness and skimmed downstream in their bark canoes to the dark and bloody hunting-grounds of the hostile tribes. Since then what

vast changes had come over the land! What thousands of homesteads hewn out of the gloomy depths of beech and oak, walnut and maple forest! What scores of settlements and towns, ranging in size up to Cincinnati, with its three hundred and more houses, many of brick and stone, its fifteen hundred whites and thousand slaves, its genteel coaches and chariots, and its educational institutions!

Yet, aside from the slaughtered buffalo and the backward-driven savage, how small the change in the forest life! Along the rocky banks the deadly rattlesnake and copperhead still lay coiled in wait; the deer came timidly down to the water along old game traces where the panther still lurked; and flocks of screaming, chattering paroquets still flew up river from the southwest, their emerald plumage contrasting with the bright hues of the redbirds and woodpeckers, the orioles and kingfishers.

The following day, below the mouth of the Scioto River, we had view of one of the strangest sights of the West,—a flight of passenger pigeons. The flock passed upstream above the left shore in a dense column and with a tremendous roaring sound of their millions of wings. Though we were going in a contrary direction, hours passed before we saw the last stragglers of their amazing multitude, and this despite the fact that they are among the swiftest of birds. While making a southward bend of the stream, we came beneath them, the lowermost flying so near overhead that I was able to kill a number simply by flinging fagots among them. As their flesh, though dark, is choice eating, we enjoyed a most savory pie at the evening meal.

During the night the boat caught me nodding and gave itself into the grasp of an eddy, which held it fast for two hours or more. My regret over the delay was short-lived, since at dawn I made the welcome discovery that it had caused us to part company with the last of the cargo flotilla. The rivermen were well supplied with skiffs, and as some of them are not above theft and even outright piracy, I had spent most of these two nights in vigilant watch, with my rifle and Don Pedro's pistols charged and primed against a night attack.

Less welcome than the absence of such consorts was the cold rain which set in before dawn and lasted well along toward noon, with now and then a slashing drive of sleet. I spent the dreary hours fast asleep in my bunk, for Don Pedro insisted upon his right to share the hardships of our voyage.

When I turned out, the sun had burst through, and the leaden clouds were rolling away to the eastward. My first act was to sweep the Ohio shore with an anxious

glance. The swiftly changing vistas of winding river and pleasant hills that undulated beneath their cloak of budding green, told me that we had entered upon the run of the Great Bend. By good fortune, I was just in time to sight the well-remembered hills of my childhood home. Another twist of the channel brought us in view of the Little Miami.

Cap in hand, I stepped to the side of the flat, and stood quiet and apart, gazing at the rough, white stone that rose clear against the sky-line on the first crest below the stream's mouth. What memories of childhood rushed in upon me! what bitterness and grief!

At last the envious river swept us around a masking hill. I turned slowly about, with all my heaviness plainly written in my look. Less than three paces behind me stood the señorita, her dark eyes fixed upon me with a soft pity far different from their usual mockery.

"You grieve!" she murmured.

"It is the grave of my mother."

Don Pedro dropped the handle of the steer-oar and turned to me with a courtesy that went far deeper than outer form. "Your mother? May the Virgin bless her!"

Alisanda made the sign of the cross, and her lips moved in quick prayer: "*Ave Maria purissima*—"

After a little the don ventured a word of consolation: "It is a beautiful place for a tomb,—serene and grand on its solitary hillcrest. When my own time comes, may I rest as well!"

Serene!—beautiful! The words roused me from my unmanly weakness.

"You do not know!" I cried. "Her grave was dug among the ashes of our home. She was murdered by the Shawnees."

"You speak of the Indian savages?" murmured Alisanda. "Is it so long ago as that?"

"In my boyhood—in ninety-one—the Spring before St. Clair's terrible defeat. The northern tribes raided the settlements from above Pittsburg to the lower Kentucky, with a fury before unknown. The ferocious braves crept by night through the very streets of Cincinnati and under the walls of Fort Washington.

Our home, outlying yonder on the Little Miami, was one of the first struck. The memory of that morning is burned deep into my brain. My father had gone into town to barter some skins for flour, and my mother was part way down the hillside, ploughing for corn. I had gone up to the cabin to fetch a jug of cider, and was half-way back, when a score of Shawnees in their black war paint leaped from the ravine and set upon my mother.

"I ran to help her, but she, striking bravely at the treacherous savages with the ox-goad, screamed to me to fly for the guns. I turned as she fell under the stroke of a tomahawk. The murderers leaped after me, yelling and firing. Rifle balls and arrows whistled about me, some piercing my shirt. But I gained the cabin unhurt. On the pegs beside the door lay my father's rifle and his old Queen Anne musket of the Revolution, which I had that morning charged half to the muzzle with swanshot in preparation for a bear which had been stealing our porkers.

"Barring the door with one hand, I caught down the musket with the other, and fired through the nearest loophole. My pursuers were coming on fairly in a body, and the distance was such that the swanshot scattered just enough to cover the foremost warriors. One fell dead and three more were wounded. In a twinkling all others than the one killed leaped to either side and checked their rush.

"But their chief came bounding up from the rear through their midst, flourishing his bloody tomahawk and yelling to them to come on. Young as I was, if given a support for the heavy barrel, I could handle my father's rifle as well as he himself. The chief fell within twenty paces of the door, with the hole of the rifle ball between his glaring eyes. At this, fearful that they had run upon a trap, the red warriors ran dodging and side-leaping to the nearest brush, while I caught up a knife and rushed out to scalp the chief—"

"*Por Dios!*" cried Don Pedro. "You ran out!—you took the scalp of the chief under the eyes of his followers?"

"My mother's scalp hung at his belt. I was mad with fury. I would have struck the murderer even had the others already turned."

"They did turn?" asked Alisanda, her eyes widening with the horror of the vision she pictured.

"They turned as I burst from the cabin. I was surrounded—seized fast—but not before I had torn off the scalp of their chief and shaken it in their painted faces!" My eyes flamed at the memory of that fierce vengeance.

"*Madre de Dios!*" breathed the Spaniard—"You stung them to wildest fury!"

"I sought to make them strike me down. Better death under the tomahawk than the slow agony of torture at the stake. What greater shame to them than for a boy of twelve to kill two of their most famous warriors,—to taunt them with the bloody scalp of their chief?"

"Yet they spared you!" whispered Alisanda, her eyes fixed upon my flushed face.

"For the torture. When they took me north to the Shawnee towns, I was made to run the gantlet. Being quick-footed and nimble, I avoided most of the heavier blows and midway of the line dodged out sideways, tripping up the old squaw who sought to stop me. Before the rabble could overtake me, I had set myself in the midst of the chiefs and foremost warriors of the village, whose dignity had prevented them from joining in the lesser torture.

"My craft in tripping the squaw and avoiding the greater number of my tormentors won me the protection of the chiefs, and while they waved off the boys and squaws, the young warrior Tecumseh, one of the brothers of the chief I had killed, claimed me for adoption in place of his kinsman. The other brother, Elskwatawa, promptly seconded Tecumseh. After much dispute, their claim was allowed, and for three years I lived as a member of the tribe, always watched against escape, yet treated with utmost kindness.

"That Fall the leading members of my tribe were present with the braves of the Miamis, Delawares, Wyandots, Iroquois, and other tribes, who made a second Braddock's Defeat of their battle with General St. Clair. They brought back no captives, but such quantities of plunder and such tales of slaughter that I could hardly credit either my eyes or my ears.

"After this I was taken to the neighborhood of the British fort near the Maumee Rapids, where the notorious renegade McKee proved that even the worst of men have their better nature. He sought to ransom me from my adopted brothers. This was refused, but I was permitted to come and go freely to the fort. One day, chancing upon a book of physic in the scant library of the post surgeon, I showed such interest that the portly old doctor seized upon me as a *protégé*.

"Within a year I was forced to return to the Shawnee towns, but with me I took a Latin grammar and my precious treatise on physic. Again I was brought to the Maumee, and there placed for safekeeping in the fort during General Wayne's cautious but steady advance north from Fort Washington. This meant months

more of study under the tuition of my kindly surgeon; so that upon the day of Wayne's glorious victory at Fallen Timbers, when he drove the routed warriors of the allied tribes past the very walls of the fort, I was further advanced in my studies than many an English schoolboy of seventeen or eighteen, and, I must confess, fast acquiring British sympathies.

"But the sight of Wayne's victorious cavalry, who rode up defiantly within pistol-shot of the palisades, roused in me such a feverish desire to escape that I should have flung myself upon the bayonets of the sentinels rather than have remained. Fortunately the garrison was so intent upon the burning of the dwellings and trading establishments without the fort by our army, that I was able to slip over the stockade with the aid of a rope, and make off safely in the darkness."

Alisanda sighed her relief of the suspense that had held her tense. "So you escaped!" she exclaimed.

"To the American camp where I found both my father and my mother's cousin, Captain Van Rensselaer. The captain had been shot from his saddle during the battle, but was able to return with us to Cincinnati when my father's term of service as a mounted volunteer expired. It was Captain Rensselaer who, upon his return to New York, sent for me to complete my medical and other studies in Columbia College."

"*Por Dios!* What a life!" cried Don Pedro. "We also have our Indian battles. But to live among the ferocious savages—*Santa Maria!* Small wonder you men of the forest wilderness are men of iron!"

"Many settlers of soft fibre have come over the mountains since the days of peace. But the men who first hewed their homes in the wilderness had to be of iron. Such are those who now press on to the new frontiers of the South, the Lakes, and the Mississippi."

"Among whom is our friend Don Juan," replied Alisanda.

I looked, thinking to see a mocking glance, and instead found myself gazing down into the fathomless depths of her eyes.



CHAPTER X

THE FATHER OF WATERS

So far I have written at some length of our voyage, for it was these first days that set the stamp upon the relations of our little party. From the hills of Cincinnati, which we sighted as I ended the story of my boyhood, on down the long descent to Natchez, I was as one of Don Pedro's own kinsmen. The name spoken by Alisanda, seemingly in jest, became the name by which all addressed me, only that before we entered the Mississippi both the señor and she had begun to drop the "Don" in favor of the familiar "Juan."

So "Juan" and "Alisanda" it became between my lady and me, and Don Pedro looked on and smiled. Yet with and beneath it all, both held to a subtle reserve which told me plainer than words that the barriers were down only for a truce, and not for a treaty,—that our freedom of conduct as fellow-travellers would at the journey's end be barred by a return to customs not of the country.

At times when alone on watch at night, I thought with misgiving of the approaching days when my lady would resume her fine Castilian hauteur and Don Pedro his punctilious politeness. But on the whole I was content to make the most of my opportunities,—to drift with the current of our companionship as the boat drifted with the stream.

Milder days came to us as we floated down into the Southwest,—days of grateful sunshine and lessening rains,—heavenly hours beneath the blue sky, when, inspired by the blossoming springtime upon the verdant shores, we sat together in the open stern and sang solos and duets and trios to the accompaniment of the guitar.

With the coming of nightfall I learned to look longingly for fog or wet, for a clear moon meant a night on watch, that we might lose nothing of the drift. But a dark sky gave me excuse to tie up to the bank for the night and join in an evening of music and genteel talk about our crackling beechwood fire.

Then there were lessons for me in Spanish from the don, and in the playing of the guitar by Alisanda. It was strange how clumsy were my fingers and how repeatedly I had to ask my fair teacher to place them correctly.

And so we swept on down the beautiful river, the swirling depth of the Spring fresh bearing us clear over the rocks of the Ohio Falls at Louisville, as over the hundreds of miles of inundated flats and shoals above and below.

At Lusk's Ferry Don Pedro had planned to leave the river and cut across country horseback, over the forty-league road to Kaskaskia, which would have saved nearly half the keelboat journey up the Mississippi from the mouth of the Ohio to St. Louis. For this we should have taken aboard our horses at Louisville or at the little settlement of Shawnee Town below the Wabash, since at Lusk's Ferry suitable mounts for our party were not to be had at any price. In the outcome, however, the miscarriage of plans proved truly fortunate.

Having no other choice, we dropped on downstream past the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers, to Fort Massac, our lonesome American stockade, built near the site of the old French post of the same name. We tied up to the steep bank of clay and gravel, and I made a landing. Upon inquiry at the post, Captain Bissell, the commandant, whom I had met the previous Fall on my eastward journey, informed me at some length as to the movements of General Wilkinson. Report having been received that General Herrera, the Spanish commander in Texas, was gathering a force to march upon Natchitoches, the Commander-in-Chief had descended the Mississippi for the double purpose of strengthening the forts at New Orleans and of assembling a force to repel the expected invasion.

I intimated to the captain that Señor Vallois was not averse to a war which might give his country opportunity to throw off the Spanish yoke. At this he confided to me as his opinion that the long-impending hostilities seemed now inevitable, and that he would welcome a change which would not only relieve him of his *ennui* in this solitary post, but would tend to break up the general stagnation of the service.

His urgent invitation brought Don Pedro and Alisanda ashore for a much needed change. Neither had set foot on shore for days, and I persuaded Don Pedro that the recreation was well worth the delay. But my pleasure over the enjoyment of the exercise was not added to by the sight of the gallant captain and his no less gallant lieutenant receiving the smiles of Alisanda for their attentions. As a good excuse for avoiding the painful spectacle, I secured some spare jars of sweetmeats from Chita, and bartered them in the little settlement near the fort stockade for chickens, eggs, and butter,—all of which would be still higher in price and harder to obtain after we entered the Mississippi.

Soon after the landing of my companions, so strong a head wind set in that we were forced to lie moored over night. Toward morning it fell to a pleasant breeze, and I put off at dawn, without waiting to rouse the others.

Midday found us afloat on the broad bosom of the Father of Waters, whose noble flood, swollen above St. Louis by the silty downpourings of the Missouri, and here by the Spring torrent of the Ohio, rolled on gulfwards in full-banked majesty. It was a grand sight, but one to which Don Pedro and Alisanda gave more thought than myself. Captain Bissell had dropped me a word of warning as to possible trouble from canoe parties of Chickasaw and other Indians, which, in view of Alisanda's presence, gave me no little uneasiness.

That night and the next I called upon Don Pedro to watch, turn about, with myself. I even went so far as to land at New Madrid; but the villagers knew nothing of the Indians. At last, late in the afternoon of the third day, we sighted a canoe full of warriors putting out from the left bank, with the evident intention of intercepting us. At my command Alisanda and her woman sought shelter in their room, while I left the steering to the don, and stood ready with my rifle and his pistols.

When I signed the party to hold off at hailing distance, the foremost warrior signed back that they were friends. But they were now near enough for me to see their black war paint. Again I signed the leader to keep off, and he in turn hailed me in Shawnee, demanding lead and gunpowder. Before I realized what I was saying, I had answered him in his own tongue, telling him to bring his party around under our stern.

At this unexpected address, the chief raised the hand which I knew had been grasping his rifle. I responded with three or four quick signs that drew a guttural exclamation from the least stolid of the warriors. They were not used to meeting white men who could claim fellowship in their tribe. But as they paddled nearer, I stared back at their chief, hardly less astonished. There could be no mistaking his noble, powerful features. He was my adopted brother Tecumseh!

The instant I recognized him with certainty, I laid down my rifle, and called to him in Shawanese: "Tecumseh, many years have come and gone since we parted at the British fort on the Maumee, yet do you not know again your white brother Scalp Boy?"

At the word he rose from his knees and stood grandly erect in the bow of the canoe, staring at me from beneath his levelled palm. The craft was now within

twenty yards of us, and Don Pedro could not withhold a muttered exclamation of apprehension and warning. Almost at the same moment Tecumseh stooped, and catching up a corner of his blanket, wiped the grim war paint from his face. The paddlers at once paused to follow his example.

"*Santisima!*" muttered Don Pedro. "Why do they rub their faces?"

"They remove the war paint in proof of friendship. Their chief is one of my Indian brothers, who saved me from torture."

"But they come close! You will not permit them to enter the boat, with Alisanda —"

"Fear nothing," I hastened to assure him. "We are safer now than when we were alone. My brother and his people can be trusted with our lives and our property."

"It is true, señor," remarked Tecumseh in clear though guttural English. "Scalp Boy and his friends are sacred in the eyes of all Shawnees. He is a member of our tribe and my brother."

I reached out and grasped the hand of the chief as the canoe came alongside.

"Come aboard and feast with us," I said.

He shook his head. "No, Scalp Boy; that may not be. It warms my heart to again grasp your hand; but you are an American white man; you have long ago forgotten your Shawnee kindred—"

"No, no, Tecumseh! I have always remembered you and Elskwatawa, my true-hearted brothers—"

"Tecumseh does not blame his white brother for returning to his white kindred. There is no enmity between us. But Elskwatawa our brother has become a communer with the Great Spirit, and he has told the redman how evil are the customs and food and firewater of the white man. It is evil for the redman to mingle with the white people."

"Have you then taken the warpath, my brother? Is that why you came out against us in war paint?" I asked.

"We came out to attack you because we had need of powder, and I would not beg. But we are not on the warpath."

"You are far from home," I remarked.

He swept his hand around in a grand gesture. "Elskwatawa the Prophet and I make a great journey to our red cousins. We visit all the tribes from the Great Lakes to that greater water in the South which the white people call the Gulf."

"To form a great conspiracy against my people!" I exclaimed.

"Your people!" he repeated. "No, we seek to convince the tribes of my people that they are all brothers, and should join in one nation."

"That they may seek to destroy the white people!"

"That they may hold back the white man from stealing any more of their land."

He had me there. I could only look my regret; for I knew that, whatever his intent, the result must be war.

He returned to the object of his averted attack. "Give us powder and lead, Scalp Boy. We cannot eat the white man's food. We need powder and lead to shoot game."

"Not to make war?" I asked.

"I speak with a straight tongue," he said.

At this I went into the cabin and fetched out a small keg of powder and a quarter-hundredweight of lead. He motioned me to hand the gifts to the warrior in the stern of the canoe, and when I turned again to him, he held out a beautifully wrought belt of wampum.

"It is little I can give to my brother," he said.

"I take the gift because my brother offers it," I replied. "What I have given is nothing. All that I could give would not repay what Tecumseh did for me in my boyhood!"

He looked me up and down with an approving glance. "Scalp Boy has grown to be a great warrior. I will ask the Great Spirit that we may never meet on the battlefield."

Before I could respond, he signed his warriors to push off, and the canoe shot away at arrowy speed. At once Alisanda slipped out of the cabin, to peer after the darting craft and the grim savages, whose naked, bronzed forebodies,

fantastically streaked with the war paint, swayed to the paddle strokes so vigorously as to bob their plumed war locks about in a most comical manner. It was a sight she was not apt to see again even on the Mississippi, if only because of the redman's dislike to exert himself except when hunting or on the warpath.

Though we had come so well through this adventure, the accident of our escape from attack did not lessen my fear of visits from Indians belonging to other tribes. To my vast relief, the following day brought us safely in the approach of a great flotilla of flour-laden flats, whose draught of water gave them better headway than our boat. The drift of our craft, which sat so much higher in the water, was at times more retarded by the head winds. The difference was so slight that we were able to keep the others in sight until another flotilla overtook us. In fact, so vast was the extent of the river traffic that from this point until our landing at Natchez, we were never beyond view of one or more descending vessels, while even keelboats, ascending under sail or poles, were not uncommon.

Though far from as swift as the flooded Ohio, the Mississippi bore us rapidly on our way. Divided by island after island and contorted this way and that by out-jutting points, its mighty current, swollen to vast width, yet swept on in majestic grandeur past towering bluffs and inundated lowlands and wildernesses as virgin as in the remote days of De Soto the Spaniard, and La Salle the Frenchman, other than for an occasional plantation and, at longer intervals, the log cabins of the little settlements.

I will not speak of our difficulties from snags and sawyers and delaying eddies, or of the extreme difficulty of shooting the waterfowl, which, though abundant, had long since been taught wariness by the guns aboard the swarming river craft. I shot a swan and now and then a duck, but for the most part was held too close to the navigation of our awkward flat to hunt such shy game.

On the other hand, our well-stocked larder supplied us with all else than fresh meat and milk, and to obtain fish we had only to trail a line over the stern. The season was favorable to the avoidance of fevers and agues; the high water obviated in a measure the danger of shoals and sawyers, and I had had the forethought to provide nettings, which saved us when within the cabin the torments which at night we would otherwise have suffered from mosquitoes and gnats, even out in midchannel.

So, on the whole, our days would have passed pleasantly, even without those

joys of companionship of which I have written. Aside from an occasional fierce thunder storm, our May days on the lower river were ideal to southern-born persons like my companions, though the fervid sunrays on the water darkened Don Pedro's aristocratic face to a coffee brown, and burned my ruddy complexion until it presented one unvaried expanse of brick red.

When not at work, Chita was accustomed to doze, uncovered, in the full blaze, mumbling in answer to my repeated warnings, that it would take a lifetime of basking to draw the fog and wet of England and my country from her bones. But she took great care that her mistress should never venture out into the sun-glare unmasked. Though the señorita could endure the heat as well as herself, there was always the señorita's complexion to be considered.



CHAPTER XI

GENERAL WILKINSON

By tacit agreement, throughout our long voyage no mention had been made of its purpose since the evening of our visit with the Blennerhassets. Intimate as had been my relations with Alisanda and her uncle, it was not the part of an honorable man to receive confidences bearing on Don Pedro's plans, until I had seen General Wilkinson and learned whether Colonel Burr's test of influence would stand. Unless committed to the furtherance of the far-reaching projects which the Colonel had outlined to me, I felt that I had no right to share the secrets of the scheme.

In compliance with my wish, Don Pedro had refrained from all allusion to the subject, going so far as seldom to mention his home and country. In consequence, this being Alisanda's first voyage to New Spain, I learned so little of their plans that when we landed at Natchez I knew only that they expected to sail from New Orleans to Vera Cruz, and from there to travel either by *diligencia* or private coach to a town named Chihuahua, in the desert interior, where the don was possessed of a great estate. Even of the nature and customs of the country I had gathered few facts to add to the vague information acquired in past years from the Spanish Creoles.

But with our approach to Natchez, that which had been least in my thoughts became the uppermost. General Wilkinson was at Natchez, and the nature of his response to my letters from Colonel Burr was a matter of vital importance to me. A few days after our arrival would bring about my inevitable parting from Alisanda. If that parting took place without the knitting of new ties for the future, what hope had I of ever again looking into the depths of her dark eyes?

But should the Commander-in-Chief prove the feasibility of Colonel Burr's plans by agreeing to precipitate war and support the invasion of Mexico, and should he, in addition, give to me the leadership of the Western expedition, how strong my cause for hope! At once I could enter into the plans of Don Pedro, and while he journeyed back to Chihuahua, to prepare his friends for the revolution, I could lead my expedition across the great plains, my approach to Santa Fe to be the signal for the uprising. With war raging on the Sabine River and in Texas, the

interior provinces would be drained of Spanish troops; so that the revolution could be gotten well under way before the Viceroy could send up an army from the City of Mexico.

Though not a man of military training, I then believed, and am still convinced, that this plan of campaign would have met with certain success. Thousands of our hardy frontiersmen were ready at the word to fling themselves across the Spanish borders, and with such men as the fiery General Jackson to lead them, they would have soon crushed all the forces which General Herrera could have brought against them. Their march across Texas and to the City of Mexico would have been marked by an unbroken succession of victories, while I, fighting side by side with Don Pedro in the revolutionary army of Mexico, with Alisanda to win!—

But enough of idle dreams! Those who base their plans on the leadership of wild schemers and double-dyed traitors should be grateful if the outcome finds them unsmirched by the company they have kept.

We moored to the wharf under the bluff at Natchez, and I, dressed fittingly for the occasion, had the pleasure of escorting Alisanda up to the little town on the hilly slope behind the bluff-crest,—my companion finding much to interest her in the motley crowd of Spanish and French Creoles, Americans, negro slaves, and Chickasaw Indians.

The don had not expected to stop at this seat of the Government of Mississippi Territory; else I have no doubt Colonel Burr would have provided him with a letter to insure hospitality from the persons who had so *fêted* that statesman the preceding Fall. As it was, I arranged for the best accommodation to be had at Mickie's Hotel, and at once set about the disposal of our floating home.

It being understood that I might be required to hasten north to St. Louis, Don Pedro had decided to sell the flat, since, without my company, it would be more convenient to continue the voyage to New Orleans in a passenger boat. A flat is worth so little at this end of the river trade that I was glad to bargain the craft for twenty dollars to a family of French creoles. At New Orleans I might have sought in vain for a purchaser. Scores of flats are there abandoned by the rivermen, many of whom return to the upper shipping towns afoot.

After some hours of delay at the water front, I returned to Mickie's Tavern with a cartload of impedimenta, including my own chest. Don Pedro met me at the door, with the information that he had already seen General Wilkinson, who,

upon learning that I also bore despatches, had sent him to summon me to the headquarters. The don's expression, so far as one might read his proud features, told me that the interview had not been over-satisfactory.

"You are not pleased at General Wilkinson?" I asked.

"*Nada*, John," he answered with a terseness which spoke volumes.

I could well imagine what he would have said, had not his courtesy prevented.

"I will hasten," I said. "It may be he will meet you in a more favorable mood after he has seen the letters I bear."

"God knows! Who can tell?" he murmured in Spanish.

"I hope to know within the hour," I replied.

"*Sabe Dios—Quien sabe?*" he repeated, as I set off.

I found the General's headquarters without difficulty, and upon mentioning my name, was at once passed in by the sentinel on guard in the piazza. When I entered the office, I found the General studying a map of Lower Louisiana, in company with Colonel Cushing, his second in command. For a moment he stared at me with stupid pomposity, as if he had been overcome with the whiskey, a bottle of which stood on the table before him. But even as I gave my name, he recognized me and beckoned me to a seat at the table, with a fussy show of cordiality.

"Of course, of course, Dr. Robinson! Take a seat! I'm pestered with all kinds of visitors in these days of impending war. But a gentleman is always welcome. Colonel Cushing, you have met Dr. Robinson?—No?—One of our most promising young physicians,—already favorably known for his skill, both in the Upper and Lower Territory. He has, I understand, a private claim to present for my consideration. That is my understanding, doctor."

"You have been so kind, sir, as to give me opportunity to present a matter of private business, if I am not mistaken."

Colonel Cushing promptly rose, excused himself, and withdrew. The General leaned toward me, his fat, red face flushing still deeper, his breath hurried and labored.

"You bring me letters?" he puffed.

I took out my packet, broke the seal before his eyes, and handed over the first two letters, which were addressed to him. He tore open both with pudgy fingers that shook, either from excitement or excess of drink. The more bulky one he stared at for a moment, with knitted brows, only to fling it into a drawer.

"Cypher again!" he muttered.

"You spoke to me, sir?" I asked.

He glared across at me, with what I could have sworn was panicky fear. His voice shook: "You—you—Do you know what is in these letters?"

"You saw me break the seal of the packet," I replied. "I do not know the contents of Colonel Burr's messages; though, from what he told me, one letter relates to myself, and the other bears upon the death of Pitt."

"Pitt!—Pitt dead?" he gasped, losing thought of the one fear in another.

"Have you not heard?" I asked, astonished. "It is months since his death—midwinter."

"But—but—that puts another face on the plans! Without Pitt—without the British ships—"

"British ships!" I exclaimed.

He started, and sought to gather together his scattered wits, hastily pouring out and drinking half a glass of raw whiskey before again speaking. I waved aside the bottle and a second glass which he thrust toward me, and pointed to the other letter. "Your Excellency, may I ask you to read what Colonel Burr has written with regard to myself?"

He caught up the letter, and after a hasty glance about the room from door to window, began to read. I could see by the quickness with which his eyes followed the lines that, unlike the first, it was written in a legible hand. At the end he went back and re-read the latter part. Coming again to the end, he laid the letter down, and addressed me with a most bombastic assumption of dignity: "Sir, Colonel Burr takes too much upon himself—far too much! The granting of your request, sir, is impossible—impossible!"

Away puffed my aircastles at a word, and left me stunned and heartsick. I had not looked for so sudden a blow. Yet I managed to protest: "Your Excellency, I

have ventured to imagine that I am not altogether lacking in the qualities needed by the leader of such an expedition."

He unbent a trifle. "Sir, I do not question your qualifications."

"Then what prevents my appointment, Your Excellency? Is it that you wish further recommendations? If only my friend Lieutenant Pike were here to speak for me!"

"That, sir, is the point. I cannot give you the place, because Lieutenant Pike has already been assigned to it."

"He!" I cried. "But he is at the sources of the Mississippi!"

"He was, sir, and the Government shall hear of it, to his just credit. He has explored the headwaters of the river; entered into treaties with the powerful tribes of the Sioux and Chippewas; hauled down the British flags at the fur-trading posts, and compelled an agreement of the Northwest Company to pay us our import duties at Michilmackinac."

"And he has returned!" I muttered.

"In April. By now he is fitting out this present expedition."

I rose and bowed. "Such being the case, Your Excellency, permit me to wish you good-day."

"One moment," he said, leaning toward me, with a leer which doubtless he meant for an ingratiating glance. "Has your ambition so narrow a range, doctor?"

"My ambition?" I inquired.

"Your ambition and your interest in the projects of one who shall at present go unnamed. I must read and consider what the gentleman has written to me. Whatever my decision as to—those matters, I cannot give you what you have asked; but—you will understand—there may be possibilities—vast possibilities!—a vast Empire, stretching westward from the Alleghanies—"

"Alleghanies!" I cried, astounded.

At sight of my face, his own turned a mottled gray. He caught at the whiskey bottle and poured himself out a second drink. Fortified by the draught, he gasped something about an attack of bilious fever, and added, with a crafty smile: "You,

sir, as a physician, know how this cursed malaria flies to the head. I have the word Arkansas on my tongue, yet say Alleghany."

The explanation at once allayed the terrible suspicion which had flashed into my mind. It was common knowledge throughout the West that this man had been involved with Innes and other conspirators of the separatist plots in the nineties. But that he or Colonel Burr or any other man not insane could dream of such treason to the Republic in these days was a thought seemingly so preposterous that it needed only the pompous old fellow's word of explanation to make me banish the suspicion. Yet I realized that I had had quite enough of his company.

"Sir," I said, "my interest in the affairs of Colonel Burr hinged entirely upon this question of the expedition. Since the honor of its leadership has fallen to my friend Lieutenant Pike, I have nothing to ask of you."

"You will remain in Natchez a day or two?" he inquired.

"I cannot say."

"It might prove to your interest to delay over. I may again send for you, notwithstanding your reluctance to receive other favors than the one I cannot grant."

I bowed and withdrew, leaving him in the act of pouring a third drink of whiskey.



CHAPTER XII

AU REVOIR

It was not with a light heart that I returned to Mickie's Hotel. I had made my cast, and fortune was against me. In the afternoon I had left Alisanda smiling down upon me from the balcony of her inn window; I was returning at nightfall to meet—Señorita Vallois. Though to the last she and Don Pedro might hold to the familiar "Juan," how little might even her smiles lighten the shadow of a hopeless parting!

As I entered the inn door, Mickie bustled forward to inform me, with an air of vast importance, that at the request of the Spanish grandee, he had arranged to serve the evening meal to the señor's party above stairs. When he added that a plate was to be laid for myself, I hastened to my own room for a change of linen.

My heart was too heavy for me to linger over foppish details of dress. It was not long before I found myself at the door of the room set apart for the private dining-parlor. Chita, who was overlooking the spreading of the cloth by the negro attendants of the inn, conducted me through to the balcony, where I found the don indolently puffing at his *cigarro*.

Before I could take the seat to which he waved me, Alisanda floated out into the moonlight from the window behind him. She was a vision all heavenly white but for her scarlet lips and sombre eyes and brows. Even the soft tresses of her hair were hidden beneath the gauzy white drape of tulle and lace which took the place of her black mantilla.

"*Buenas noches*, Juan," she greeted me, in a tone of liquid silver.

"God be with you, Alisanda!" I responded.

"Be seated, *amigo*," urged Don Pedro. "You have a weary look."

"I bring what to me is heavy news," I replied.

"You had in mind to ask a favor of General Wilkinson," said Alisanda. "You have asked the favor, and—he has refused it?"

The note of sympathy in her voice soothed my despairing anger. I did not stop to wonder at the intuition by which she had divined the object of my visit to the General. It was enough for me that she had perceived my heaviness, and held out to me her sympathy.

"It is true," I said, and in a few words I told them of my shattered plans,—how I had hoped to gain fame by leading an expedition of exploration to the West, as Lewis and Clark were exploring the Northwest, and as my friend Pike had explored the headwaters of the Mississippi; and how the statements of Colonel Burr had led me to hope for still greater fame as a sharer in the freeing of Mexico.

Don Pedro leaned toward me, his eyes glowing with friendly fire. "*Por Dios!* Your one thought was to help us break the yoke! You would give your life for the winning of liberty!"

I looked across at Alisanda, and the soft loveliness of her beauty in the moonlight filled me to overflowing with the bitterness of my blasted hopes.

"Do not think me so noble!" I replied. "I thought to fight for the freedom of your country, but it was in hope of a reward a thousandfold greater than my service!"

Alisanda raised her fan and gazed at me above its fluted edge with widened eyes,—I feared in resentful wonder at my audacity. But Don Pedro was too intent upon his own thoughts to perceive the meaning of my words.

"*Por Dios!*" he protested. "Those who have risen against Spanish oppression have ever met with short shrift. Shall not they who brave death in our cause look for glorious reward in the hour of victory?"

"That is true of those who may be blessed with the chance to join your ranks. As for me, the opportunity which I had thought to be golden has turned to ashes in my grasp."

"*Sabe Dios!*" murmured Alisanda in so soft a tone that the words came to me like a whisper of the evening breeze. Was it possible that after all I still had cause for hope?

Chita's voice, drawing the usual Spanish phrase, summoned us to the table. We rose, and Alisanda accepted my arm with a queenly graciousness of manner which in the same moment thrilled and disheartened me. I read it to mean that she was in a kindly mood, but that the kindliness was due to the condescension

of Señorita Vallois, and not to the frank companionship of my fellow-traveller Alisanda. This surmise was borne out by her manner at table, where she rallied her uncle and myself upon our gravity, and with subtle skill, confined the talk to the lightest of topics. The Don was as abstemious as most of his countrymen, and Mickie's wine was a libel on the name, yet he soon mellowed to the gay chit-chat of his niece.

It was beyond me to enter into this spirit of merriment. I forced myself to smile outwardly and to meet their lively quips and sallies with such nimbleness of wit as I possessed. But it went no deeper than show on my part. The longer we sat, the heavier grew my heart. I had no joy of my food. Even the peaches and the other fruits of the lower river tasted bitter in my mouth. For with each fresh turn of the conversation I saw my Alisanda slipping farther away from me, her kindly glance giving place to the haughty gaze of the Spanish lady of blood, her familiar address cooling to stately condescension. I was no longer "Juan," but "doctor" and "señor," and, near the end, "Doctor Robinson."

We had come to the sweetmeats, and I noted with despair that she was on the point of withdrawing. She had even thrust back her chair to rise, when, with scant ceremony, a young soldier in uniform entered and stated that His Excellency, General Wilkinson, desired the immediate presence of Señor Vallois.

"*Carambo!*" exclaimed Don Pedro, looking regretfully at the sweetmeats. "He might have chosen a fitter time! It is in my mind to wait."

"Is not your business with him the affair of others no less than your own?" murmured Alisanda.

"*Santisima Virgen!* You do well to remind me! Juan, with your permission—"

"*Adios!* Good fortune to you!" I cried, as he rose.

Another moment and he and the soldier had left the room. I was alone with Alisanda. She rose, with a trace of inquietude beneath her calm hauteur. I moved around the table to join her.

"Spare yourself the trouble," she said, with repellent sharpness. "It is unkind to take a man of English blood from his wine."

"Señorita," I answered, "since we came in to table, you have told me all too plainly that you no longer wish to conform to the customs of the country. I do not wonder. Our voyage as fellow-travellers is at an end. There is no longer need

for such slight service as I was able to render—"

"Service?" she repeated, with a curl of her scarlet lip.

Though cut to the quick, I could not give over.

"Alisanda," I said, "has it been nothing to you, all these golden days since we met on the Monongahela?"

She raised her hand to arrange her scarf, letting fall a loose strand of hair down her cheek.

"*Santisima Virgen!*" she murmured, with fine-drawn irony. "It has ever been a marvel to me—so chance a meeting."

"Chance, indeed!" I replied. "Chance that the utmost of my effort could not trace the road by which you left Washington; chance that Colonel Burr gave me the clew for which I sought; chance that of the nine horses I rode to a stand between Philadelphia and Elizabethtown, none failed me in my need."

She gave me a mocking glance over her fan. "*Madre de los Dolores!* What a pity! A little time, and the gulf will roll between."

"I will cross that gulf!"

"Not so; for it is the gulf of the Cross," she mocked. "I go the way of Vera Cruz—the True Cross. No heretic may pass that way."

The words struck down my last hope. It was the truth—a double truth. The way of my body was barred by the city of the Cross; the way of my spirit by that which to her the Cross symbolized.

"So this is the end," I replied. "We have come to the parting of the ways. Do not fear that I shall weary you with annoying persistence. I shall go my way before sunrise to-morrow. Only—let me ask that this last hour with you may hold its share of sweetness with the bitterness of parting,—Alisanda!"

"An hour?" she repeated. "The air in here is close."

She laid her fingers lightly upon my arm, and we passed out into the moonlit balcony. For a time we sat silent, she gazing out across the broken slopes of the town, I gazing at her still white face and shadowy eyes. Her loveliness was part with the night and the moonlight and the scarlet bloom of the climber upon the

balcony rail.

At last I could no longer endure the thought that she was lost to me; I could no longer deny utterance to my love and longing.

"Alisanda! dearest one! Is there then no hope that I may win you? I have no gallant speeches—my love is voiceless; no less is it a love that shall endure always. Alisanda! *my* dearest one! is my love of no worth to you? Let your heart speak! Can it not give me one word of hope?"

My voice failed me. Throughout my passionate appeal I failed to see the slightest change in her calm face. I had failed to stir her even to mockery. Truly all was now at an end! I bowed my head and groaned in most unmanly fashion.

The low murmur of her voice roused me to despairing eagerness. She spoke in a tone of light inconsequence, yet I seized upon the words as the drowning man clutches at straws.

"Love?—love?" she repeated. "The word has become a jest. Men protest that they know the meaning of love—that they suffer its bitterest pangs. Yet speak to them of the days of chivalry, when gallant knights bore the colors of their ladies through deadly battle, and the ogling beaux turn an epigram on *les sauvages nous ancêtres!*"

"Show me the way to the battlefield—I ask no more!" I cried.

"Words—words!" she mocked. "The Cid would have found his way to the field of glory without asking. Were the way barred, El Campeador would have hewn his way through, though the barrier were of solid rock! But the men of to-day—!"

"Wait!" I broke in. "Have you not yourself said that the way of the gulf is impassable for me?"

"True," she assented, "true! And not alone the gulf, but the barrier—the gulf of water and of the Cross; the barrier of rock and of blood."

"Blue blood and red have been known to intermingle," I argued.

"With love for solvent!" she murmured. The softness was only for the instant. "Yet what of that other barrier?" she demanded. "Between your land and the land to which I go lies the blood of Christ."

"Is it then religion that is the insurmountable barrier—the impassable gulf? You have not lived all your life in Spain. I had hoped that not even your faith could close your heart against me, if only I might prove to you the greatness of my love."

She sat silent for what seemed an endless time, toying idly with her fan. When at last she spoke, it was again in that light, inconsequential tone: "To the eastward or northeastward of Santa Fe lies a vast snow-clad sierra. My kinsman once saw it from a great distance. He says it is called the *Sangre de Cristo*."

"*Sangre de Cristo*—the Blood of Christ!" I said, lost in wonderment. Then a great light flashed upon me. I knelt on one knee and caught to my lips a white hand that did not seek to escape my grasp. "The barrier—the barrier of rock!—Alisanda! you give me hope! If I come to you there—if I cross that barrier? Dearest one!—dearest! can you doubt it? Though I have to find my way alone among the fierce savages of the vast prairies; though I find that snowy range a mountain of ice and fire, I will come to you, Alisanda—my love!"

I saw the quick rise of her bosom and the blush that suffused her cheeks with glorious scarlet before she could raise her masking fan.

"*Santisima Virgen!*" she murmured, and broke into a little quavering, uncertain laugh. "They speak of the cold blood of your race!"

"Alisanda!—Dearest one! Tell me I may come!"

She rose quietly, already calm again, and cold as the moonlight which shone full upon her face. I rose with her, still clasping her hand.

"Tell me, Alisanda, may I come?"

"Why ask me that?" she said, in an even voice. "Could I prevent if you wished to try?"

"If I cross the barrier, may I hope?"

"There would yet be the gulf."

"Gulf or barrier, I swear I will find my way to you, though it be through fire and flood! I will seek you out and win you, though you hide your beauty beneath a nun's veil!"

Such was the force of my passion, I again saw her bosom rise to a deep-drawn

breath and the edges of her sensitive nostrils quiver. Yet this time she did not blush, and her voice cut with its fine-drawn irony: "Words—words!"

"I offer love. I ask nothing in turn but a word or a token—nothing but—my lady's colors."

She turned and opened her eyes full to my gaze as she had opened them at our parting in far-off Washington, and I looked down into their depths, vainly seeking to penetrate the darkness. At last it seemed to me I saw a gleam far down in the wells of mystery—a glow, faint yet warm, that seemed to light my way to hope.

Suddenly the glow burst into a flame of golden glory—She was swaying toward me, a line of pearls showing between her curving lips. But even as I sought to clasp her in my arms, she eluded me and glided away, vanishing through the farther window.

Half mad with delight, yet unable to believe my own eyes, I sought to follow, the blood drumming in my ears from the wild intoxication of my love. None too soon I heard behind me the sharp call of Don Pedro: "*Hola, amigo!* Have you gone deaf, that you do not answer?"

This, then, was why she had eluded me! It was his return which had robbed me of that moment of all moments. My look as I turned was as bitter as his was keen. My voice sounded to me like that of another man: "What! Back so soon, señor?"

"Señor?" he repeated, taken aback by the formal address. "Yet it is as well, Juan. All our plans are blasted. Hereafter it would seem we are to be strangers. I have no faith in the promises of that man."

"You do well to distrust him," I said. "I might have foreseen the outcome of plans in which he was to play a part."

"Whom can we trust in this self-seeking age! I find myself doubting even the fair promises of your great statesman Burr."

"Of our discredited politician Burr!" I cried. "Don Pedro, he has no claim upon me, and you have many. Let me tell you, I begin to doubt him, even as I doubt our pompous General. I have reason to believe that Colonel Burr plans to take your country from Spain, not for the benefit of you and your friends, but for his own aggrandizement. He thinks himself a second Napoleon."

"*Por Dios!* I see it now. He plots to sell us to Spain, that Spain may aid his plot to make himself king of your Western country,—king of all that part which extends from the Alleghanies even here to New Orleans and north and west to the Pacific. I know; for did he not enter into negotiations with Marquis de Casa Yrujo?"

"With the Spanish Minister?" I exclaimed.

"With Casa Yrujo, after the death of Pitt deprived him of the hope of British ships and money."

"So—he is but a crack-brained trickster," I muttered. "We have chased his rainbows and landed in the mire. This is the end, señor. I go now. Tomorrow's sun will see me on my way up-river to St. Louis. May you find brave men enough in your own land to win freedom, without the costly aid of tricksters!"

"There are others than tricksters that share my plans—true-hearted men at New Orleans. The Mexican Association stands pledged,—three hundred and more loyal workers in the cause of my country's freedom."

"Creoles," I said. "You could count upon a hundred of my backwoods countrymen to do more, should it come to the setting of triggers."

"We shall see. But there are others than creoles in the association. Already Señor Clark has made two voyages to Vera Cruz, to spy out the defences. I go now to tell him more. You know something as to the power of our religious orders. At New Orleans are two such. But what is all this to you now?"

"Much, Don Pedro! My heart is with the success of your plans!"

"*Muchas gracias, amigo!* Would that you might journey with me to my people! But the gate at Vera Cruz is narrow for heretics. *Adios!*"

"*Adios*, Don Pedro. May we meet under brighter skies!"

"God grant it, Juan!" he cried, with unfeigned friendliness.

I clasped his hand, and hastened away. My heart was too full for words.

Early as I expected to start in the morning, I did not seek my bed. I could not sleep. Having bargained for my upstream passage with a St. Louis friend, in command of a keelboat, I wandered out and strolled through the sloping streets of the town. But even the wild revelry of the rivermen, for which Natchez is so

evilily noted, failed to win from me more than passing heed. My own thoughts were in wilder turmoil. In beside the memory of the golden love-glory which had shone in her eyes, and fit mate to the bitter disappointment of the loss that Don Pedro's entrance had cost me, there had crept into my mind a maddening doubt that I had seen clearly,—a fear that the glow in her eyes, the swaying of her dear form nearer to me, had been only the fantasies of my passion.

Unable to endure the torment of such doubt, I hastened back, to linger in the shadow beneath my lady's balcony. After a time, so great was my longing, I found courage to murmur the refrain of a song we had sung together on the river. I dared not raise my voice for fear Don Pedro would hear and divine my purpose, and my low notes seemed lost in the drunken ditties and outcries of the carousers in the tavern taproom.

An hour dragged by its weary length, and no soft whisper floated down to me from above, no graceful vision appeared at the vine-clad balustrade. Despair settled heavily upon my heart. The cadenced Spanish vowels died away upon my lips. I turned to go. A small white object dropped lightly from above and fell at my feet.

In a trice my despair had given place to hope and joy no less extravagant. I snatched up the message, and rushed in to open it before the waxen taper, in the privacy of my room. The wrapping was a lace-edged handkerchief of finest linen, in the corner of which was an embroidered "A. V."—my lady's initials.

But when I opened it, thinking to find a written missive, there appeared only a great, sweet-scented magnolia bloom. Yet was not this enough? Was it not far more than I had expected—than had been my right to expect?

I held it close before my eyes, my thoughts upon the sender, whose cheeks were still more delicate in texture than these creamy petals. I turned the blossom around to view its perfections. She had held it in her hand!

Upon one of the delicate petals faint lines had appeared. They darkened into clear letters under my gaze, and those letters spelled "*Au revoir!*"



CHAPTER XIII

AGAINST THE CURRENT

Had I been in funds, I should have preferred a horse for the up-river trip. As it was, I was glad of the opportunity to make the passage by boat with my friend the captain, and in so doing, to earn a pocketful of wages. It is not, however, a proceeding I should advise to be undertaken by one who lacks the strength and experience necessary for poling and cordelling.

At times, to be sure, we were able to relieve our labors by an occasional resort to the sails, when the wind chanced to be fair. But in the very nature of the case, this aid could never be more than temporary, since the windings of the river were bound, sooner or later, to make a headwind of what had been a fair breeze.

So, for the most part, our voyage all the way from Natchez to St. Louis meant one continuous round, from morning till night, of setting our poles at the boat's prow, each in his turn, and tramping to the stern along the side gangways, or walking-boards,—there to raise our poles and return to the prow, to repeat the laborious proceeding. I can say that keelboat poling is a splendid method of developing the muscles of the back and lower limbs, provided the man who attempts it begins with a sufficient stock of strength and endurance to carry him over the first week.

This does not mean that I enjoyed the trip. Softened by my Winter in Washington, the first few days out of Natchez were as trying to me as to the regular members of the crew after their carousals and excesses in New Orleans and Natchez. Our boat, which had come down with a cargo of lead from the mines about St. Louis, was returning with a consignment of the cheap calicos and the coarse broadcloth called strouding, which form the basis of the Indian barter in the fur trade; and cloth in bolts, closely stowed, is not the lightest of cargoes.

But, once we had worked ourselves into condition, we shoved our craft upstream from daylight till nightfall at an average speed of over three miles an hour. Whenever the bank and channel permitted, we eased our labor at the poles by passing a towline ashore and cordelling the boat, while our captain, one of the

best on the river, was ever alert to hoist sail with every favorable breeze.

If I did not enjoy the voyage, I nevertheless had cause to feel thankful for the hard work which held my melancholy thoughts in check and sent me to my bunk at night so outspent that I slept as soundly as any man aboard. A man treading the walking-boards, bowed over his pole, may brood on his troubles for a week or two, but none could do so longer unless his system were full of malaria. For the constant, vigorous exercise in the open air is bound to send the good red blood coursing through every vein of the body, until even the most clouded brain must throw off its vapors.

Once free from the melancholy which had oppressed me the first few days, I gave most of my thought to the problem of how I should fulfil my vow to cross the barrier that was so soon to lie between my lady and myself. My main hope lay in the possibility of obtaining Lieutenant Pike's permission to join his expedition as a volunteer. But he was so strict in his adherence to the most rigid requirements of his position as an officer, that there was grave reason to doubt whether he would accept my services without an order from the General.

There were other plans to be considered, one of which was that I should throw in my fortunes with Señor Liza and his creole fellows. The idea was distasteful, yet, reflecting on what little I had learned of the plans of Colonel Burr and his friends, I was not so sure but that Liza's party were quite as loyal. At the least, I could see no harm in aiding Liza to carry a trading expedition into Santa Fe. So far as my own plans were concerned, the venture would promise more at the other end than if I joined Pike's party. If I reached that other end, I should be going among the people of New Spain in company with persons of their own blood.

There remained the most desperate plan of all. I could set out alone, and trust to my unaided craft and single rifle to carry me safe across the hundreds of miles of desert and the snowy mountains of which Alisanda had spoken. I had travelled the wilderness traces and the trackless forests too often alone to have any fear of wild beasts. But there was the uncertainty of being able to kill enough meat to keep from starving in the Western wilds, and on the other hand the certainty of encountering bands of the little-known Pawnees and Ietans.

Rather than not go at all, I was resolved to attempt this desperate venture. But my plan was to seek first to attach myself to my friend's party, and, failing that, to open negotiations with Liza.

After a brief stop at Kaskaskia, that century-old trading post of the French, we undertook the last run to St. Louis with much spirit. The greater part of the crew were eager to reach St. Louis in time for the celebration of Independence Day. In this we were disappointed, being so set back by headwinds that we did not tie up to the home wharf until the evening of the sixth of July.

My first inquiries relieved me of my fear that Lieutenant Pike had already started. He was waiting with his party, fourteen or fifteen miles upstream, at the Cantonment Belle Fontaine, established the previous year by General Wilkinson. I had already learned at Kaskaskia that the General had passed us in his barge far down the river, and had arrived in St. Louis several days before us. To this was now added the news that he had gone on up to Belle Fontaine.

Such an opportunity to meet the General and my friend together was not to be lost. I made my plans over-night in St. Louis, stored my chest, provided myself with a new hunter's suit, and obtained letters of recommendation to the General from two gentlemen of influence.

Dawn found me at the convenient river front which gives St. Louis such an advantage over the other up-river settlements of twice its size and age. The rock bank not only prevents the incutting of the current, but, owing to its lowness, gives easy access to and from the water, unlike the high bluffs upon which most of the settlements have been located.

Looking about for an up-river party, I was so fortunate as to fall in with Mr. Daniel Boone, who with his son-in-law, Flanders Calloway, had come down from La Charette with a bateau-load of furs. Seeing me in hunting dress, the old gentleman showed the keenest interest in my intentions, and upon learning that my immediate purpose was to reach Belle Fontaine, invited me aboard their bateau.

On the way upstream he made me sit beside him in the stern-sheets, and his look betrayed such an eagerness over my plans that I could not resist confiding them to him. It was sad to see the youthful fire flash and sparkle in his bright old eyes, only to dull and fade to the grayness of forced resignation.

"My days are past, John," he said, in his quiet, almost gentle voice. "You have heard me tell of the trip I took with your father through the Choctaw nation; but I'm now past my threescore years and ten, lad. Take off the ten, and I'd be with you on this traceless quest to the Spanish country. It's hard to be tied down to a scant fifty miles or so of free range. But my old bones stiffen and call for rest

after their wanderings. I reckon, though, I've done a man's share in my time. Not that I make any boast of it; only I feel that I was an instrument in God's providence to open the wilderness to our people. I feel it none the less that there were all those others before me. Captain Morgan founded New Madrid in sixty-six—"

"But that was under Spanish rule," I exclaimed. "Yours was the first of the advanced American settlements in Kentucky. If only I may have a share in a like tracing of our great Western plains!"

He gave me a shrewd glance. "You fear they won't let you go with the expedition. Why not follow their trace, and join their party in the Pawnee country? This young lieutenant is your friend, you say. He will be sure to take you into camp."

Simple as was this stratagem, it had not occurred to me in all my scheming. Yet it was so practicable that I at once assured Mr. Boone I would, if need were, carry out the suggestion. A few minutes later he landed me at Belle Fontaine, and we parted with a warm handshake. Though deprived by litigation of the bulk of his Spanish grant on the Femme Osage, as he had been in the early nineties of his Kentucky lands, Mr. Boone remains one of the most even-tempered and kindest men I know.

Upon reaching the cantonment, my first intention had been to seek out General Wilkinson. But within a few paces I caught sight of a company of the Second Infantry on parade, and one glance was enough to tell me that the officer in command was my friend Lieutenant Pike. Though I could see only his trim back, there was no mistaking the odd manner in which he stood with his head so bent to the right that the tip of his chapeau touched his shoulder.

Before many minutes he dismissed the company, and turning about, saw me waiting within a dozen paces. In another moment he was grasping my hand, his blue eyes beaming and his fair cheeks flushing like a girl's beneath their sunburn.

"Good fortune, John!" he cried. "I feared you had gone on down to settle in New Orleans. The General spoke of meeting you in Natchez."

"Did he tell you the cause of that meeting—and the outcome?"

"Surely you cannot blame him!"

"No, no, Montgomery!—since it was you who had forestalled me!"

"Yet you must have had your heart set upon leading the expedition."

"It was to obtain the leadership that I went on to Washington."

"No!"

"A wild goose chase, as you see. But, worst of all, I am now more than ever anxious to go."

"Yet—even if the General should remove me—"

"He would not give the place to me. Nor could I ask your removal. Yet I *must* go with you, Montgomery!"

"You are not in the Service."

"I will offer myself as a volunteer."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure! And we need a surgeon. Still—"

"I am aware that the General does not regard me with favor. Yet if you should second my application—"

"By all means! Have you met the General's son, Lieutenant James Wilkinson?" I shook my head. "Here he comes. I will introduce you. He is my second in this expedition. Stop and talk with him, while I see the General. I will have you on with us if it can be done."

I turned and saw approaching a tall young lieutenant whose sallow but pleasant face was altogether unlike that of his father. Owing to this and to his cordial greeting when we were introduced, I was able to enter into a lively conversation with him, while my friend hastened away. A few remarks brought us to the subject of the expedition, and I found the Lieutenant so agreeable when I intimated my desire to volunteer that I ventured to ask his good services in the affair. To this he very readily assented, and upon the return of my friend, held a conference with him, the decision of which was that I should wait over a day, in view of the fact that the General had received Pike's intervention in my behalf with disfavor.

It was an irksome wait, little as was the time given me to brood. Young Wilkinson put me up in his own quarters, but Mrs. Pike insisted that I should take all my meals with the family. I repaid this hospitality as best I could by detailed descriptions of all that I had seen during my visit in Washington, which

proved no less interesting to the Lieutenant than to Mrs. Pike. Also I was able to cure the children of a slight seasonable indisposition.

Of his own affairs my friend had little to say. His modesty and reserve prevented him from giving any other than the most meagre information as to his recent trip, while my first inquiry regarding the present expedition was met by the prompt statement that he was under orders not to discuss it. The most I learned was that, with few exceptions, his party was made up of the men who had proved themselves so brave and enduring on his Mississippi trip.

On my part, I contrived to say nothing about my dealings with Colonel Burr, and so little with regard to Alisanda that not even Mrs. Pike divined my romance. This was not that I shrank from confiding in them. My idea was to keep the information as a last resort, in the event that I should be compelled to undertake the stratagem suggested by Mr. Boone. The confession of my love-quest would then add strength to my appeal to be taken into camp.

Shortly after noon of the following day Pike brought me the welcome news that young Wilkinson advised an immediate call upon his father. I hastened over to headquarters, and, upon sending in my name, was shown into the presence of the General. He was still seated at table, and with the same gesture that dismissed his waiter, waved me to a seat across from him.

"So," he puffed, eying me curiously, "I understand that you have reconsidered the position you took at Natchez."

"I confess, Your Excellency, I have become so infatuated with the idea of this adventurous expedition that I wish to join it, even though in a subordinate position."

"Your reasons?" he demanded, with unconcealed suspicion.

"There is the love of adventure for its own sake, Your Excellency. I was born on the frontier. For another thing, I should perhaps gain some little standing by reporting on the mineralogical and other scientific features encountered by the expedition."

"You would be willing to give your services as surgeon?"

"Certainly, sir!"

He pushed across a glass and his whiskey bottle, and I thought it discreet to

accept the invitation. As I sipped my toddy, he drew a sealed document from his pocket, and fixed me with what was meant for a penetrating stare.

"You are willing to do all within your power to further the success of the expedition?"

Though certain that this covered something more than my medical services, I answered without hesitancy: "Anything within my power, sir!"

"Good," he replied, and he nodded. "Here is a question to test that—Supposing the expedition, in exploring our unknown boundaries, should chance to find itself in the vicinity of the Spanish settlements—"

I started, and leaned toward him, eager-eyed. "Yes!" I cried. "You mean—?"

"By ——!" he muttered. "What do *you* mean? You're like a hound on a blood trace!"

"Who is not eager to get at the secrets of El Dorado?" I parried.

"So?" he said. "I fear that Colonel Burr has been plying you with his harebrained schemes."

"He spoke to me of the Mexican mines."

"You are not the first of his dupes."

"Dupe, sir! I thought that you were yourself one of his friends."

"Friend?—to him!" The General swelled with what seemed to me over-acted indignation. "But I forgive you your ignorance, sir. Let us return to the point under discussion. The question is, would you, under the supposition I have stated, be willing to risk yourself among the Spaniards?"

"You mean, sir, as a spy?"

"It is a question of patriotism, sir, patriotism!" he puffed. "Though war now seems averted for the time being, hostilities may occur even before this expedition can return. In the event of war, I need hardly mention to you that information bearing upon the situation of the Spanish in their northern provinces would be of inestimable value to our country."

"Your Excellency," I said, "I bear the Spanish authorities no love, and my country much. I will undertake what you have mentioned, so far as lies within

my power."

"Lieutenant Pike has assured me as to your abilities. You speak French and some Spanish?"

"Some French, sir; very little Spanish."

"Enough to serve." He took up the document, with its beribboned seal. "Here is a paper for your consideration. It is a claim upon the Spanish authorities, prepared according to the treaties between the United States and Spain. Two years ago Mr. William Morrison of Kaskaskia intrusted one Baptiste Le Lande with a large stock of trade goods for barter among the Western tribes. According to reports which have lately come to Mr. Morrison through the Indians, Le Lande has reached Santa Fe and there settled, without intention of accounting for the property intrusted to him."

"I understand, Your Excellency," said I. "This claim is to serve as a cloak for my spying."

"No need to use so harsh a term," he mumbled.

"It is the term the Spanish authorities will use if they detect me," I answered.

"We are at peace with Spain. I reached a good understanding with General Herrera before coming up the river. There will be no hostilities for some months, at the least. The Spaniards will not dare to resort to extremes against you."

"Their authorities bear us no love," I rejoined. "Those in so remote a province as Nuevo Mexico may well argue that it will be quite safe to hang a spy, war or no war."

He took up the document, with a frown. "Then you do not care to venture it?"

"Your Excellency mistakes me. I wish merely to point out the risk. In my opinion, the danger could be no greater if hostilities had already begun."

"And if I admit the risk?" he demanded.

"It is, in a sense, a military service. Supposing it successful, is it not Your Excellency's opinion that a recommendation to a commission might be in order?"

He studied me for some moments. Then: "A commission as a subaltern—

possibly."

"Sir, I could obtain that by means of a little political begging. I had in mind a captaincy."

"Captaincy!" he repeated, taken aback by my audacity. "Captaincy! That is beyond all reason."

"Yet if I succeed beyond reason—?"

"In such event—But let that wait until your return."

"If ever I do return," I added.

"True; but you can thank yourself that you are thrusting your head into the noose, with your eyes open."

"Then Your Excellency gives me leave to join as a volunteer?"

"We shall see—we shall see."

"But, Your Excellency, a man likes time for preparations."

"That is your own affair, sir,—though I may say that, at present, I feel disposed to grant you the favor. I shall let you know in good time."

With this I was forced to be content. The General rose to enter his office, with a pompous gesture of dismissal.

But upon my return to my friend's quarters, he and Mrs. Pike and Lieutenant Wilkinson joined in assuring me that, since the General had not refused me point blank, I had every reason to expect a favorable decision.



CHAPTER XIV

THE LURE

It was well in line with the General's character that he kept me on tenterhooks until the very afternoon before the intended day of marching. Then, as it were at the eleventh hour, he included in his written orders to Lieutenant Pike, to march the following day, a brief paragraph to the effect that I was to accompany the expedition as a volunteer surgeon.

Notwithstanding the orders of the General, we did not start in the morning, but were forced to wait over until the fifteenth of July, owing to the unreadiness of our savage charges, the Osage captives who had been rescued from the Pottawattomies and who were to be returned to their people under our escort.

The first stage of our journey, up the devious Osage River, was one tedious to all and exceedingly laborious to those whose duties confined them to the navigation of the boats. In confirmation I need only add that the Summer was fast nearing its close before we arrived at the Osage towns.

There, instead of the generosity which we had a right to expect from an Indian tribe to whom we had restored so many members, we were delayed many days by their ungrateful reluctance to supply us with horses, and in the end obtained with greatest difficulty only a few of their least desirable animals.

Yet, relieved of the boats and our Indian charges and possessed of these few pack-beasts and saddle horses, our march on toward the Pawnee Republic, when at last we did get under way again, soon carried us into the prairie which lies westward of the three-hundred-mile belt of half-forested lands along the Mississippi. We had come to that vast extent of desert plains which, though abounding in game, is all but destitute of timber. In consequence of this fact, young Wilkinson and I agreed with Pike that the arid waste is destined to serve forever as the Western boundary of the Republic's settled population.

About the middle of September I was sent on ahead of the party to the Pawnee Republic, accompanied by a young Pawnee called Frank, one of the half-dozen of his people attached to the expedition at St. Louis. We were well mounted, and travelled rapidly in a northwesterly direction, across the lower fork of the Kansas

River and the three branches which flow into the Republican Fork from the south and west.

At first we kept a sharp outlook for hunting and war parties of the Kans, who at the time were not on the best of terms with their cousins the Osages. But throughout our trip we saw nothing more dangerous than the numerous panthers which thrive on the superabundant game. Though bold, these tawny beasts were too well fed to trouble us. The same was true of the gray wolves, a small pack of which followed us day after day to feast upon the carcasses of the buffaloes we killed.

Evening of the fourth day brought us into the vicinity of the Pawnee Republic. We were riding along over a broken, hilly country, and my savage companion was telling me, in a mixture of bad French and worse English, that we should soon come within sight of the Republican Fork and his home village, when suddenly we rode into a broad track which could only have been made by a large body of horsemen, over two hundred at the very least.

"Hold!" I cried, reining up and pointing at the signs. "Look. Many people went south, on horses, two or three weeks ago. Your people? They have gone to the Arkansas?"

"*Non!*" grunted Frank, and leaping off, he caught up and handed to me a tent pin. "Pawnee? *non!* Stick no grow in Pawnee hunting-ground. White man's knife cut him. *Voilà!*"

"White man!" I repeated in amazement.

How was it possible that there could have been so large a party of white men traversing this remote wilderness? As I sat staring at the wooden pin, studying its grain and shape, Frank circled around through the beaten grass in search of further signs. A guttural cry from him compelled my attention.

He was holding up a broken spur.

"España!" he called.

One glance was enough to convince me that he was not mistaken. The spur was of Spanish make.

More puzzled than ever, we clapped heels to our horses, and galloped up the track, which Frank declared led direct from the village. Within a few minutes we

topped a line of high hills, and found ourselves looking down into the valley of the Republican and upon the rounded roofs of the big Pawnee lodges.

One look was enough to relieve our fears regarding the safety of the village. I had never seen a more peaceful-appearing Indian town. The women were at work dressing buffalo robes near the lodges or harvesting their corn and pumpkins in the little patches of field near-by. The children were scattered far and wide, the girls playing with their puppies or tagging their mothers, the boys practising with bows and arrows or watching the hoop-and-pole games of the few men who were to be seen. The young warriors, probably, were off on hunting or war parties, and of the men who remained in the village, most were dozing in their lodges or lolling in the shade outside.

But I did not look long at the savages. My eye was almost immediately caught by a red-and-yellow flag afloat above the front of the great council-lodge. Even at that distance I could not fail to recognize it as the flag of Spain. So astonished was I at the sight that I drew up short, unable to credit my eyes. The flag solved the mystery of the track, only to raise the puzzling question of the presence of so large a body of Spaniards at so great a distance from their present boundaries.

A loud shouting and commotion in the village roused me from my bewilderment. We had been sighted. The women and children were fleeing to the lodges, and all the men capable of bearing arms were advancing toward us, with threatening guns and bows and lances. However, Frank at once made the wolf-ear sign which showed them that he was a Pawnee, while I held up the wampum belt intrusted to me by Pike. A moment later Frank was recognized, and the news shouted back to the village.

At the same time the men, both mounted and afoot, charged down upon us, whooping and piercing the air with their shrill war whistle and flourishing their weapons as if about to tear us to pieces. A man unused to Indians, no matter how brave, might well have trembled at finding himself thus confronted by hundreds of yelling, half-naked savages. The Pawnee warriors are particularly formidable-looking, being tall and well shaped, and their height accentuated by the bristling roach of short hair which runs back over their shaven heads to the feathered scalp-lock. I was, however, too well versed in the Indian character either to show or to feel any trepidation.

As the wild band closed about us in mock attack, a stately warrior whom Frank said was Characterish, or White Wolf, the grand chief of the nation, forced his

horse through the mob and greeted me with a guttural "*Bon jour!*" Upon my return of the salute, he invited me to his lodge. This was gratifying, for I could see by the Spanish grand medal he wore suspended from his neck that he had been particularly favored by the Spaniards, and so might very well have felt ill-disposed toward all Americans.

When we advanced, escorted by the warriors, we were met by all the rest of the population, running and shouting and leaping with excitement at the arrival of their fellow-tribesman and the white man. But at a word from Characterish, not only the women and children but the warriors as well quitted their clamor and gave us free passage into the village.

Unlike the mat and slab lodges of the Osages, the Pawnee houses are substantial structures. Their wattled walls and grassed roof, supported by a double circle of posts, are covered with a thick layer of sods and earth above and over all. This makes them cool in Summer and warm in cold weather; yet, like the Osages, the Pawnees always move down into the timbers for the Winter.

Arriving at the lodge of White Wolf, I was shown in through the covered portico which gave the lodge quite the aspect of a civilized home. Within I found the chief's wives and men-servants busily cooking a meal for us on the fire in the middle of the wide pit which occupied the greater part of the lodge's interior. That there might be no doubt of his hospitality, the chief at once assigned to me one of the snug little curtained compartments built against the wall, around the edge of the pit. My room was in the place of honor, beneath the sacred medicine bundle, on the far side of the lodge.

By the time I had my rifle and saddle stowed away, the chief's cook, a maimed old warrior, called us to come and eat. I sat down with my host and his two sons to a none too savory stew of dried buffalo meat, thickened with pumpkin. To this was added a mess of corn cooked in buffalo grease. But a prairie traveller is seldom troubled with a dainty stomach, and I managed to compliment my host by making a hearty meal of it.

As soon as we had eaten, White Wolf sent out a crier to call in the chiefs and a few of the foremost warriors of the village. They seated themselves with us in a circle, and the head chief's calumet was passed around without any man refusing to smoke.

When the pipe came back around to White Wolf, he addressed me in Pawnee, which was interpreted by Frank: "Let the white man speak; tell why he come

Pawnee terre."

I held up the wampum belt, and answered briefly: "I come in friendship from the war chief of the great white father at Washington."

"Ugh! Washington!" grunted the least stolid of the warriors. Even these remote prairie savages knew that illustrious name.

"—From the war chief sent by the high chief of my people to bring gifts and peace to the Pawnee people," I continued. "It is his wish that you send out your young men to guide him to your town as a guest."

As Frank interpreted this I thought I could detect a shade of change beneath the stolid look of the grim warriors. What was still more ominous, when the pipe was passed around the second time, no one smoked. But when it came back to White Wolf, after some delay and hesitation, he smoked, and thereupon announced laconically: "I go—heap grand comp'ny meet white capitan."

Again the pipe was started around. It was taken by one of the sub-chiefs. When he had smoked, he rose majestically, and, drawing up his buffalo robe about his naked body, pointed dramatically to the westward. There could be no mistaking the menace in his terse, guttural declamation.

I looked to Frank, who explained, with evident trepidation: "He Pitaleshar, grand war chief. He say: 'Merican white braves no go to setting sun; no march over Pawnee hunting-grounds. España chief grand—heap big; Pawnees grand—heap big; 'Merican soldiers *non!*' *Voilà! Comprenez-vous?*'"

"That's to be seen!" I muttered. "Tell them: What the white chief will do is for him to say when he comes."

Whatever impression this made, none present gave any sign, and the emptying of the ashes of the sacred calumet by White Wolf's pipe-bearer brought the council to an end.

As it was now close upon sunset, and I was greatly wearied from my long journey, I at once sought my fur-padded couch in the rear of the lodge, and gave myself over to profound slumber.

Upon waking, I was astonished to find that the sun was well up the sky, and that White Wolf and Iskatappe, the second chief of the town, had already set out, with a large party, to meet the expedition. The old warrior cook, who had been

left to attend me, and who spoke a little French, went on to explain that Frank, having like myself been found asleep, had also been left undisturbed. At this I hurriedly bolted my buffalo stew, and stepped outside the lodge, intending to look for Frank.

But as I paused before the entrance of the huge council-lodge to glance about and drink in the pure, sunny air, the flapping of the Spanish flag in the morning breeze compelled my attention.

The first glimpse of those red and yellow folds was sufficient to catch and hold my gaze. They spoke to me of my lady—of my Alisanda!—and of the tyrannical power of that Government whose hatred of foreigners interposed between us a barrier harder to pass than the snowy sierras of which she had told me. Such at least was the dread that seized upon me as I gazed up at that symbol of lust for gold and blood.

Presently, as I yet stared at the mocking banner, my glance was caught by a little tracing of white lines on the outer corner. Prompted by idle curiosity,—or it may have been by an unconscious premonition,—I waited until a lull in the breeze brought the flag drooping down within my reach. I grasped it to look closer at the tracing.

Whether I stood gaping at that little sign for a few brief seconds or many minutes I cannot say. I was too overcome with wonder and delight to sense the passage of time. All I can say is that, rousing at last to action, I slashed off the corner of the flag with my knife and thrust it into my bosom.

The tracing was a duplicate of that upon the lace handkerchief which, wrapped about a withered magnolia blossom, I carried in an inner pocket of my hunting-shirt. It consisted of two letters embroidered in white silk, and those two letters were—"A. V."

What a volume of joyous news those few stitches of dainty needlework conveyed to me! My lady had arrived at Chihuahua before the starting of the Spanish expedition; she had known at least something of the plans of the Spanish commander, and she had placed her initials upon the flag as a message to me should I be attempting to cross the barrier and chance to meet her countrymen.



CHAPTER XV

THE PAWNEE PERIL

The escort party led by White Wolf returned three or four days after their start, but without the expedition. They had gone almost due east, which had brought them north of our party. Great was their disgust when Frank explained how, when leaving the Osage villages, our Osage guides, in their dread of the Kans, had led our party far around to the south of the direct course.

At once Frank was sent out with two or three other runners on the right track, and by forenoon of the next day one of the scouts came back with word that the others were bringing in the Americans. Immediately the chiefs rode out with all the warriors, to receive the visitors in state. The ceremonies opened with a mock charge, during which the balls from the old fusils and trade guns of the savages flew about far too promiscuously for comfort. There followed a horse-smoke, in which some of the Pawnees presented ponies to the few Osages with the party.

After this White Wolf shook hands with Pike, and invited him and myself to dine at his lodge. We did so, while Wilkinson marched the party on across the river to a strong position on a hill.

This welcome to the village could not have been more ceremonious and friendly. But a few days later, when we met the chiefs and warriors in grand council, the situation took on a much less favorable aspect. Lieutenant Pike effected a burial of the hatchet between the Osages and three or four Kans warriors who had come down from their village on the Kansas River. He then distributed honorary presents and a quantity of goods to the Pawnee chiefs, explaining that President Jefferson was now their great father, instead of the Spanish Governor-General Salcedo, and that he had been sent with these gifts to show the good-will of their new father.

The Pawnees accepted the presents readily enough, but I doubt if they either understood or cared about the transfer of Louisiana Territory. To them the prairies,—north, south, east, and west,—were their own land so far as their guns and bows could hold back the other prairie tribes. Judging from what little they knew of the two rival nations of white men, they had better reasons to turn to the

Spaniards than to us, for the Mexican expedition had come among them with a force fifteen times greater than our little band.

Yet in the face of this disadvantage, Pike was determined to press home his point to the great ring of chiefs and headmen which encircled us and to the crowds of younger warriors without. Owing to the great number who had wished to share in the council or to witness the proceedings, we had met in the open space before the entrance of the council-lodge. Standing thus in the midst of the hundreds of red warriors, with none but Wilkinson, myself, and Baroney the interpreter to back him, Pike turned and pointed to the Spanish flag.

"Men of the Pawnee nation, how comes that flag here?" he demanded. "Is that the flag of your father in Washington, from whose people you receive in barter all your guns and powder and lead, your strouding and beads? No! it is the flag of a far-off chief, who lives beyond your deadly foes, the Ietans. This land is no longer under his hand; that flag has no right to float over these prairies. Take it down and give it to me."

"It is a gift to us from those other white men," protested White Wolf.

"It is the flag of a people who have no right in this land," rejoined Pike, and he unrolled the glorious Stars and Stripes which he held in his hand. "Chiefs and men of the Pawnee Republic, this is the flag of your great father. I command you to hand over that flag of Spain to me and raise instead the banner of my chief!"

At this audacious demand, even the stolidity of the chiefs could not hide their concern, and the warriors began to mutter and scowl. Yet Pike stood stern and resolute, awaiting the answer. After a full minute, one of the older warriors rose, took our flag, and going to the lodge, raised it in the place of the Spanish banner, which he handed to Pike. At this I am not ashamed to confess that inwardly we all breathed a sigh of relief. I say inwardly, for it was no time to show other than a bold front.

The Pawnees were not so successful in the concealment of their feelings. It was all too evident from their looks that they were in deadly fear that this insult to the Spanish flag would bring upon them the vengeance of the white men of the Southwest. For it seems the Spanish leader had told them his people would return the following year in great numbers, to build a large town. But Pike, having gained his point, relieved their fears by at once returning the flag, under condition that it should not again be raised during our stay.

Throughout this exchange of colors, my apprehensions of a treacherous outbreak had not prevented me from watching for some one to discover and remark upon the tattered corner of the Spanish banner. But if it was noticed at all, the mutilation was probably laid to the thieving hand of some young brave who might have thought himself in need of a bit of bright cloth.

Pike now stated the wish of the great father at Washington that the Pawnee chiefs should make him a visit, in company with a few of their Kans brothers. To this White Wolf replied that the matter would be considered. Next Pike explained that he wished to secure the services of one of their Ietan, or Comanche, prisoners, to act as interpreter on our westward trip; also that he wished to barter for several good horses. Again White Wolf replied that the wishes of the white chief would be considered. With that the council rose.

There followed some days of anxious waiting, during which our savage hosts suddenly took on a hostile attitude. In the end we were given to understand that they would not comply with any of our requests, but on the contrary would seek to prevent our marching on westward, according to their agreement with the Spaniards.

It was in the midst of the stress and anxiety caused by this delay and the menacing actions of the Pawnees, that we received from two French traders the joyful news how Lewis and Clark had brought their expedition safely back from the far Pacific, and should by now have gone on down the Missouri to St. Louis.

A few days later, near the beginning of the second week in October, having at last secured a few miserable horses out of the splendid herds of the Pawnees, we struck our tents and packed for the march. It was a ticklish moment, for there was not a man among us who did not fear that noon might find our scalps dangling above the Pawnee lodges. Our little party, barely over a score, all told, was about to defy the power of an Indian town which numbered over five hundred warriors.

For the first time since our start at Belle Fontaine I had occasion to observe the mettle of our eighteen soldiers. Not one among them required the admonitions of the lieutenants to ram full charges into their muskets, to fix bayonets, and look to their priming. I was no less ready, having provided myself with a sabre, in addition to my rifle and tomahawk and brace of duelling pistols. I told Pike that I did not consider myself bound by his orders to reserve fire, in the event of an attack, until the enemy were within half a dozen paces. After a little argument on

the point, he consented that I should seek out their chiefs with my rifle the moment the savages commenced hostilities. With Indians, no less than with whites, it is good strategy to pick off those in command at the beginning of an engagement.

By way of explanation of what followed, it is as well to state that during the night two of our horses had been stolen by our light-fingered neighbors, and though one had at once been delivered up when we sent over to the village, the other was still missing. As we fell in about the pack horses, I saw Pike turn back to address a question to young John Sparks, his waiter. The bright-eyed lad saluted and stepped out, with evident eagerness, to mount one of the led horses. Pike signed him to take position at the head of our little column, and himself rode forward with Baroney.

The moment they reached the van, he gave the order to march, and we swung away down the hill toward the river. Across in the village we could see that the savages had made preparations which bore out in most menacing fashion their threats to oppose our march westward. Every woman and child had been sent away during the night or else hidden in the lodges. This of itself was a most ominous sign. But that was the least of it. All about the lodges we could see swarms of warriors, armed with guns, bows, and lances, while here and there one of the naked young braves showed the hideous black and vermilion markings of the war paint.

But if the savages thought to awe and turn us back by this warlike display, they were never so mistaken. The Osages had slipped off at dawn, with the explanation that they wished to hunt, and would join us later in the day. None of our men wished to hunt. They swung along down the slope as steadily as on parade, some of the younger ones a trifle flushed, some of the older a shade paler beneath their tan and sunburn. Sergeant Ballenger marched along as stiff as his ramrod. Sergeant Meek rocked a little in his step from sheer exuberance of feeling over the prospect of a fight. His grim, scarred face fairly glowed.

We came down to the river bank a little above the town, and crossed over without breaking column, those on foot holding their muskets and powder horns well up above the water. When all were across, command was given to halt and look to the primings. Again the order was given to close up and march. We swung steadily up the bank, but obliquely, that we might pass by the village. Already we could see every movement of the savages, who swarmed over to the near side of the village, waving their buffalo-hide shields and their weapons and

shouting insults at us. Once or twice we heard the shrill Pawnee war whistle. In the midst of this wild uproar, when we were directly opposite the upper side of the village, Pike wheeled and raised his hand.

"Halt!" he shouted. "Stand ready to repel attack according to orders. Baroney, Sparks, follow!"

Wheeling again, he galloped straight at the yelling mob of savages, followed closely by Baroney and Sparks. The Pawnees trained their guns upon him and levelled their lances. Without checking the pace of his horse, he held out his bare palm to them. They opened their ranks to let pass the three mad white men, and closed quickly in their rear. But Pike and his two followers galloped on without check until they came to the lodge of White Wolf.

We now perceived that the head chief was standing before the entrance of the lodge, wrapped about in his buffalo robe; but whether or not he held his weapons concealed beneath the cloak we could not tell. He waved back with a grand gesture the warriors who would have crowded around, and stood like a statue while Pike, sitting his horse no less calm and impassive, addressed him with the aid of Baroney.

The savages, yet more astonished than ourselves at this strange parley, for the most part turned to stare at the mad white chief who had so dauntlessly ridden into their very midst. We had looked to see them instantly fling themselves upon our three lone comrades and massacre them before our eyes. In anticipation of the murder, more than one among us picked his man for reprisals, Wilkinson singling out Pitaleshar, the war chief, while I drew a bead on White Wolf. Iskatappe was not to be seen.

The very air seemed to tingle with that feeling which thrills a man's nerves and sends the blood leaping through his veins when lives hang by a thread. More than one of the younger warriors, infuriated at the delay in the attack, bent their bows. Had a single arrow been shot at us another instant would have seen us in the midst of a bloody battle. All hung upon the will of White Wolf. He had only to make a sign, and my ball would pierce his brain, Pike and his companions would be stabbed and mutilated, and we ourselves rushed by a furious mob of bloodthirsty savages.

Fortunately for all alike, White Wolf had arrived at years of wisdom. As they watched his impassive face, the warriors gradually stilled their ferocious yells and gestures. Within two minutes all was so quiet that we could hear the quick,

guttural syllables of Baroney's translations.

"It is over!" said Wilkinson, as White Wolf suddenly made a gesture of assent. We saw Pike turn to Sparks, who promptly dismounted and walked into the chief's lodge. Baroney took the riderless horse in lead, and rode back to us with Pike, through the now silent but still scowling crowds of warriors.

The moment they had joined us, our leader, as cool and steady as throughout his daring venture, gave the word to march. The savages continued to stand silent and motionless, watching us slip out of their clutches without so much as a parting yell. Yet had it not been for the unequalled courage and firmness and sheer cool audacity of our leader, there can be no doubt we should have been in for a most desperate fight.

In justice to the rank and file, I must add that the men had borne themselves throughout the affair in a manner fully creditable to their leader, who afterwards told us that he had counted upon our disposing of at least a hundred of the enemy before being ourselves rendered *hors de combat*. The men, I believe, half regretted that they had not had the opportunity to test the accuracy of this estimate. This was certainly true of Meek, than whom no man was ever more maligned by his name.

Baroney was no less courageous than the enlisted men, as was shown by the cool manner in which he returned the following day to look for Sparks. Both the brave lads overtook us during the afternoon, safe and sound, and Sparks riding the stolen horse!

They arrived shortly before we came upon the first outgoing encampment of the Spaniards, and relieved by their safe return, we swung away at our best pace in the tracks of the invaders. Our immediate purpose was to follow the trace made by these soldiers of His Most Catholic Majesty, and so discover in what direction their expedition had turned after the visit to the Pawnees.



CHAPTER XVI

THE BARRIER OF ROCK

After several adventures and misadventures, during a march of several days to the southward, over a broken, hilly country, in which we lost the Spanish trace, we came to the broad, shallow channel of the Arkansas River. Here Lieutenant Wilkinson and a party consisting of Sergeant Ballenger, four privates, and the two or three Osages who had continued with us thus far, were detached to descend the river for the purpose of exploring the unknown reaches of its lower course to its junction with the Mississippi. A canoe was hewn out for them from the trunk of a cottonwood tree, and another made of skins on a frame of branches, and they set off bravely downstream, though the river was at the time covered with drifting ice.

Having seen our companions embarked on their perilous voyage through the almost unknown country to the southeast, we set off westward on our ascent of the stream which they were descending. Despite a snowstorm and the ice in the river, we crossed and recrossed the channel, until at last we rediscovered the camps and trace of the Spaniards, which here indicated a force of fully six hundred soldiers.

After this we marched steadily upstream, along the trace, for over two weeks, despite the hindrance and annoyance resulting from the weakness of the greater number of our horses, three or four of which had finally to be abandoned. Unfortunately we lacked both the skill and the means to replace the beasts from the herds of spirited wild horses which we frequently saw interspersed among the great droves of buffaloes. Yet despite the depletion of our pack train and the grim prospect of being weather-bound for the Winter out on these bleak plains, we felt assured that where the Spaniards had led the way we could follow, and so pushed on into the wilderness, ever farther and farther from home and civilization.

Since the second day after leaving the Pawnee Republic we had encountered none of the savage habitants of the prairies. But now at last we were again put on our guard by the discovery of occasional Indian signs along the river banks. As a precaution against falling into an ambushade, Pike and I took to scouting some

little distance in advance of the party.

On the fifteenth of November, a day ever memorable to us, we were riding along in this manner, when, two hours or so after noon, as we topped one of the numerous hills, the Lieutenant abruptly drew rein and pointed off to the right.

"Indians?" I demanded, looking to the priming of my rifle.

"No," he replied. "Wait."

At the sight of his levelled spyglass, I too stared off a little to north of west, and at once made out what appeared to be a faint, half-luminous point of cloud. Its color was a spectral silvery blue, much like that of the moon when seen in the daytime. Before I could utter the word that sprang to my lips, my friend forestalled me.

"'Tis a mountain!—the Mexican mountains, John!"

I caught the spyglass which he thrust out to me, and fixed it upon that distant peak with burning eagerness. The Mexican mountains, the fabled sierras of New Spain! Had we at last sighted the snowy crest of their nearest peak? Was this one of that sierra of which Alisanda had spoken, my Barrier of Rock, the Sangre de Cristo?

We rode on, too overcome to speak, held in throbbing suspense between delight over our discovery and dread lest it should prove to be some illusion of cloud and light. But within another two miles there came an end to all doubt. Before us, from one of the higher hill-tops there stretched out along the western horizon an enormous barrier of snowy mountains, extending to the north and south farther than eye or glass could see. My heart gave a great leap at that wonderful sight. In my mind there was no longer the slightest doubt. I knew that before me upreared the barrier that I must cross to reach my lady.

Not until the men came up with us and burst into cheers for the great white mountains of Mexico did I rouse from my daydream of Alisanda. Before me, as real as life, I had seen imaged her beautiful pale face, with the scarlet lips parting from the pearly teeth, and the velvety black eyes gazing at me full from beneath the edge of the veiling mantilla. Such was the vision—whose reality I knew to be awaiting me somewhere south and west, beyond that snowy sierra. I drew in a full breath and joined in the loud cheering of my comrades.

While the air yet rang with the last of our wild cheers, our commander faced

about, with upraised hand, and called in resolute tones: "Men! we have toiled, we have undergone dangers. We know not what dangers lie before us: Winter is at hand; our horses are fast failing; we are outfitted only for Summer travel. Yet what of all that? We have outfaced the Pawnees; we have traversed this vast desert; we have held to the track of the Spanish invaders of our territories. Before our eyes uprear the unknown mountains of the West,—mountains upon which our countrymen have never before set eyes; of which no American has ever heard, unless it be the vague and misleading reports of the Spaniards. Men! we will not turn back with the goal of our toilsome marches in view!"

"No! no! Lead us on, sir!" shouted Sergeant Meek, and every man caught up the cry: "Lead us on, sir! lead us on! No turning back!"

Our commander flushed, and his blue eyes sparkled. "Ah, my brave men! I was certain of your mettle! We will ascend these mountains; we will explore the utmost boundaries of Louisiana; and if the Spaniards seek to check us—"

"We'll raise a little dust, sir!" cried young Sparks, flourishing his musket.

"Perhaps!" returned the Lieutenant, looking about at us with a shrewd smile. "If it comes to that, they will not find us backward. But do not count too much on hostilities. We are here, not to fight, but to explore the limits of the Territory."

"But, sir, should we fall in with the Spaniards?" ventured Meek.

"Should we meet a Spanish party, we may be invited to go in with them to Santa Fe. It would serve our purpose no little to be the guests of the Spanish authorities. Enough. Fall in! By to-morrow night we should be encamped at the foot of that grand peak."

He wheeled his horse about, and rode off again in front. I hastened to join him, my thought intent upon a surmise drawn from his last speech. When we had ridden ahead beyond earshot of the others, I put my thought into words.

"Montgomery," I said, "you have other orders from General Wilkinson than those given out. It is not I alone whose instructions are to attempt communications with the Spaniards."

"And if your guess is right?" he asked.

"God forbid!" I cried.

"What! I see no cause for dismay in the simple fact that I am to further your efforts to obtain information. I and the party will be in much less danger from the Spanish authorities than yourself, John.

"It is not that," I muttered.

"What, then? I declare, John, there are times when I cannot bear the thought of your venturing in among the Spaniards alone. It is now my resolve to march into Santa Fe with you."

"No, no!" I protested. "You must not—cannot!"

"Cannot? Do you think I fear the danger?"

"Of death, no; but of dishonor."

"Dishonor! Should the Spanish dare—"

"No, not the Spaniards—not that. But our own people."

"Explain!" he demanded.

I opened my mouth to accuse his General—and paused. After all, what proof had I of Wilkinson's connivance in the plans of Colonel Burr? What proof had I that even Burr's plans were treasonable? I should have been an outright imbecile to have entertained the slightest doubt of the zealous loyalty and patriotism of my friend,—and Wilkinson was his General and his patron. Why poison his mind against one who had shown him great favors and was in a position as Commander-in-Chief to show him even greater favors? We could not now hope to return to the Mississippi settlements for several months. Why fill my friend's mind with anxieties over plots and projects which might never develop, or which, even if *not* stillborn, might well be counted upon to reach maturity long before we should have a chance to oppose them?

So, instead of Wilkinson's name, it was Burr's which passed my hesitating lips; and in my account of the little I knew of the late Vice-President's grand projects, I took care to omit the name of Wilkinson. My companion listened with his usual seriousness, but at the end smilingly shook his head, and declared that he believed the Colonel's schemes were all based on pure speculation, and would end in air. As I have stated, I could not tell him my reasons for suspecting that his General had plotted with Burr. Yet this was the very crux of the affair. It was evident, in my opinion, that at about the time of my visit to him in Natchez

Wilkinson had become frightened, and was rapidly coming to the decision of withdrawing from Burr's projects. But supposing he, the military chief of the army and the Governor of the Upper Territory, should gain heart to cast in his fortunes with the great plotter, would those projects then be so visionary?

My friend went on with an argument which proved only how little he suspected any connection between our expedition and Burr's plot. He explained at great length—to his own satisfaction, though not to mine—that our secret instructions to spy upon the Spaniards related only to the far-from-probable event of war between their country and our own.

On his part, he then came at me with a shrewd inquiry as to my real motive for volunteering with the expedition. I immediately confided to him everything relating to my romance. There was now no reason why I should hold back anything about Alisanda, and indeed I should have told him all long before, had it not been that since our start from Belle Fontaine we had never chanced to be alone together other than at times when matters of great concern to ourselves or the expedition absorbed our interest.

My confession won me, as I had foreseen, a most ardent ally. He listened with all the joyful sympathy of one who has been happy in the love of a true-hearted, beautiful wife.

"John! John! To think of it! All these months, and you never so much as whispered a word! A señorita from Old Spain? Never fear!" He looked me up and down with an air of severe appraisal. "She'll take you; she's bound to take you!"

He went on with a list of reasons as long as my arm. There is nothing like a friend to lay it on with regard to your good qualities, when he is in the mood.

"Hold! hold!" I broke in on him. "Save that to tell to Señorita Vallois. I'd rather you'd inform me as to how soon I'm to reach Santa Fe."

"That's the question," he replied. "We've first to round the headwaters of this stream, then those of the Red River. Afterwards it is not unlikely we can manage so to lose ourselves as to contrive to wander into the midst of the Spanish settlements."

I stared glumly at the snowy peaks towering upon the western horizon. "That may be months hence. We cannot travel fast among the mountains. Why not

strike first for Santa Fe?"

"The Spanish settlements must all lie to the southward of yonder grand peak. Santa Fe is rumored to have a mild climate; hence it must lie to the south of our present position," he argued. "Therefore we must first explore the sources of the Arkansas. When we go south among the Spaniards, there is no telling what they will do with us, but it is fair to presume that they will at least do their best to check our explorations."

"Very true," I assented. "Suppose, then, that I part company from you here, and strike out to cross my barrier alone?"

"No!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"You surely would perish. I could not spare you a horse. We shall need all for the packs before the week is out. Without a horse, and alone, you surely would perish, either in this bleak desert or among those mountain wilds."

"Yet I am willing to chance it. I hoped to have crossed the barrier—to have reached her side—before now."

"If not for your own sake, John, then for ours! You are the best shot among us. Since Wilkinson left, you have in effect taken his place as second in command. You know how highly the men regard you. Should aught happen to me, you are the only one of our number capable of taking my place and carrying out the various objects of the expedition."

"Meek is a fine soldier," I said.

"A good sergeant and a brave man—so brave that we could count upon him to 'raise a little dust' at the first opportunity. He's brave to rashness, but quite incapable of keeping notes, either of our route or of the many scientific features which we are certain to encounter."

"Yet—to wait, it may be months longer!"

"We need you, John."

"Very well," I replied. I could not do other than give way to that argument.

Such was the quenching of my newly aroused hopes. I should cross the barrier to

Alisanda; I vowed I would cross it, or die. But the attempt must now wait until we had penetrated to the headwaters of the Arkansas; until we had rounded the sources of the Red River,—if in truth we were ever to find the unknown upper reaches of that stream; until we had spent weeks, and it might be months, wandering about the snowy wildernesses of these vast Western mountains.

It was a sickening prospect for my eager love to contemplate. Yet I needed only the quiet words of my friend to realize what I already knew in my heart. It was true what he said. I could be of service to my comrades. There was my duty to them, if not my patriotism, to bind me to their company. I could not have left them at the time, even though the way to Santa Fe and on to Chihuahua had been an open highway before my feet, and the season midspring.



CHAPTER XVII

THE GRAND PEAK

The Lieutenant's prediction that the following evening should see us encamped at the foot of the Grand Peak was not borne out by the event. Notwithstanding our many days on the prairies, we were yet far from realizing the deception of distances in this high altitude and clear, dry atmosphere.

That next day we lost many hours on a large fork of the river, where the turning of the Spanish trace led us to believe that the party had set off southward. Finding that they had returned and continued their ascent of the main stream, we did likewise. This gave us but little progress for that day.

But the next morning we set out, confident that we should reach the Grand Peak within a few hours. Our astonishment was great when, after marching nearly twenty-five miles, we found ourselves at evening seemingly no nearer the mountains than at sunrise. Yet we had thought to encamp at their base that night!

The following two days we spent in hunting buffalo and jerking the meat. The marrow bones gave us a feast fit for a king,—fit even for citizens of the Republic.

The second day of our march onward, still keeping to the Spanish trace, we at last found ourselves appreciably nearing the mountains. What was not so welcome, we came upon the fresh traces of two Indians who had ascended the river very recently. Warned by this, we proceeded in the morning more than ever wary of ambuscades. There was good reason for our precautions.

Scarcely had the Lieutenant, Baroney, and myself ridden out in advance of the party, when of a sudden the interpreter sang out: "*Voilà! Les sauvages!*"

A moment later we also caught sight of the Indians, a number of whom were circling about us on the high ground, while others raced directly upon us out of the dense groves of cottonwoods. All were afoot; which, taken with the unmistakable cut of their hair and their red and black paint, told us all too plainly that they were a war party of Pawnees returning from an unsuccessful raid upon one of the Western tribes.

Knowing well how apt are the warriors to be evil-tempered after the humiliation of a failure to strike their enemy, I prepared to sell my life as dearly as might be. All the probabilities pointed to the supposition that the party was made up of Skidis, or Loups, and I, for one, had no desire to become a captive in their hands. It was enough to have escaped in my boyhood from the stake and fire of the Shawnees. I had no intention of now letting myself be crucified and mangled and burned as a sacrifice to the morning star by these prairie savages.

But Pike, cool as ever, restrained Baroney and myself from firing, and the Indians seemed to justify his moderation by flinging down their weapons and running to us with outstretched arms. In a moment they were all about us, in a jostling, jabbering crowd, patting and hugging us as though we had been blood kinsmen. So urgent were they with their friendly requests for us to dismount that we finally complied. On the instant an Indian was upon each horse and riding off.

Still the others held to their friendly gestures, and upon looking back, we could see the rest of their party making no less friendly demonstrations among our soldiers. We were partly reassured when we learned that the warriors were not Loups, but a party from the Grand Pawnee. But the confirmation of our surmise that they were returning from an unsuccessful raid upon the Tetans, or Ietans,—whom the Spaniards call Comanches,—caused us to fall back upon our main party and work it around to a camp in a little grove as speedily as possible.

During this manoeuvre more than one of our unwelcome visitors bent their bows. But the firm insistence of our gallant leader won its way with the savages. Soon all sixty were seated about us in a ring. The Lieutenant then sat down opposite their chief, with the council pipe laid out before him.

At his orders, gifts of tobacco, knives, and flints were placed beside the chief. The present was greeted with guttural cries of dissatisfaction, and the chief demanded with great insolence that we should give them a quantity of our most valuable equipage, from ammunition to blankets and kettles. To this, despite the advice and even urgent plea of Baroney, our commander firmly refused to accede.

At last, after no little grumbling and threatening, they presented us with a vessel of water, and drank and smoked with us, in token of amity. Not satisfied with this, and warned by Baroney, I kept on my feet, watching the treacherous warriors. Our wariness was justified by the contemptuous manner in which many

of their number threw away their presents. When, immediately after this, we began to reload our pack horses, the entire band pressed into our midst and began to pilfer right and left.

For a time all was in the most perilous confusion, Pike and I having to mount our horses to save the very pistols in our holsters. On every side the savages were snatching articles, which the soldiers were doing their best to wrest from them.

"The rogues!" cried Pike. "Baroney, command the chief to call off his men. I'll not submit to open robbery!"

Even while Baroney interpreted the order, the chief slipped a knife from the belt of one of the privates who was turned the other way, and hid it behind his shield. Almost in the same moment he faced the Lieutenant, and flung out his hand in a gesture of injured innocence.

Baroney hastily interpreted his ironic, hypocritical reply: "The great white chief has an open hand, a good heart. It cannot be he grudges his poor red friends a few small gifts. My braves are wretched; they are needy; they hunger."

"Hungry, are they?" shouted Pike. "Then we'll give them lead to eat! Stand ready to fire, men!" He rose in his stirrups and pointed his pistol at the chief. "By the Almighty! I'll shoot the next scoundrel who touches our goods!"

I looked for an instant acceptance of the challenge. Intermingled among us as they were and so greatly superior in numbers, the savages had every advantage. In hand to hand fighting their clubs and knives and stone tomahawks would have been as efficient as our weapons, while our firearms, once emptied, would have taken us more time to reload than an Indian would require to shoot a quiverful of arrows.

For a long moment our fate hung in the balance, while the enraged pilferers gripped their weapons and glared at us with murderous hate. The tense silence was broken only by the sharp clicking of our hammers. Suddenly Sergeant Meek, far too well disciplined to fire without orders, yet unable to restrain his pugnacity, seized a brawny young warrior by the shoulder, and whirling him around like a child, sent him flying off with a tremendous kick.

"Begone, ye varmint!" he roared.

It was the last straw to the savages. Overawed by our unquailing boldness in the face of their superior numbers, they followed their staggering fellow, sullen and

scowling, muttering threats, yet afraid to strike.

We waited with finger on trigger, until the last of their long file had glided beyond gunshot. Then the Lieutenant, half choking with rage, ordered us to take stock of our losses. It did not soothe him to find that the thieves had managed to make away with some thirty or forty dollars' worth of our property. Not even the ferocious Sioux and Chippewas had dared to rob him in this brazen fashion. But with only sixteen guns, all told, it was wiser for us to submit to the outrage than to imperil the expedition and perhaps lose our lives in an attempt to follow and punish the rascals.

That evening the Lieutenant and I went back and lay in wait beside our trace, thinking that the thieves might return and attempt to steal our horses. It would have been only too well in keeping with the habits of these savages, for the Pawnees are the most noted horse-thieves of all the prairie tribes. Fortunately our watch proved needless.

By noon of the day after this encounter we came to the third large southern branch of the river, immediately beyond which a fork on the north bank ran off about northwest toward the Grand Peak which we had first sighted so far out on the prairies. As the Peak now seemed only a day's journey distant, the Lieutenant decided to attempt its ascent with a small party. But first we joined in erecting a breastwork,—the first American building in all this vast wilderness; the first structure south of the Missouri and west of the Pawnee Republic to float the glorious Stars and Stripes!

Shortly after noon of the second day the Lieutenant marched for the peak with Miller, Brown, and myself.

Instead of reaching the foot of the peak by nightfall, as we had expected, we were compelled to camp under a cedar tree, out on the bleak prairie. Severe as was the cold, we felt still greater discomfort from the lack of water. Again we marched for the great mountain, in the fond expectation of encamping that night upon its summit. Instead, we hardly reached the base of the lofty rise. Fortunately we there found a number of springs, and succeeded in killing two buffaloes.

Still untaught by experience, we foolishly left our blankets and all other than a pocketful of provision at our bivouac, and set off up the mountain at dawn, assured that we could reach the top by noon and descend again by nightfall. Almost at the start I brought down a deer of a species unknown to us, it being

larger than the ordinary animal, and its ears much like those of a mule. The carcass was flayed without delay, and the skin hung well up in a pitch-pine, together with the saddle.

Made impatient by the delay, we began our climb with a will, determined to reach the summit even earlier than we had planned. In this, however, we were to be most sadly disappointed. After clambering up the steep slopes and precipices all day without arriving at the crest, we were forced to take refuge for the night in a cave. While preparing to creep into this cheerless shelter, our discomfort over the utter lack of blankets, food, and water was for the moment forgotten in the curious sensation of standing under a clear sky and gazing at a snowstorm far below us down the mountain.

Morning found us half famished with thirst and hunger and bruised by our rocky beds, but we needed no urging to resume our laborious ascent. The view from our lofty mountain side was the grandest I had ever seen. Above us arched the translucent sky in an illimitable dome of purest sapphire, rimmed before our upturned eyes by gaunt, jagged rocks and fields of dazzling snow. Behind and below us the vast desert of prairies stretched away to east and north and south, far beyond the reach of human eye, its tawny surface closely overhung by a sea of billowy white clouds. Far to the south, at least a hundred miles distant, we noted in particular a vast double, or twin, peak, which stood out from and overtopped the heights of the front range even as our Grand Peak dwarfed its neighbors.

But we did not linger long to gaze at this sublime prospect. Though our thermometer here registered well below zero, we struggled on upward through the waist-deep snow to the first of the summits which rose before us. An hour found us close upon what we took to be the goal of our efforts.

At last, panting from our exertions and the rarity of the air, we floundered up the final rise to the crest. In this wild, scrambling rush Brown dropped to the rear, while the Lieutenant, though physically the least robust of the party, forged ahead even of myself, upborne by his zealous spirit. He, the leader of the expedition, should be—must be—the first to set foot upon the summit of the Grand Peak!

With a final rally of his wiry strength, he uttered a shout and dashed up over the thin, hard-crusts snow of the summit to the crest,—only to stop short and stand staring off beyond, in bitter disappointment.

"Look!" he cried. "The Grand Peak!"

"The Grand Peak!" I shouted back, too excited to perceive the import of his tone and bearing. "The Grand Peak! We'll name it for you,—for the first American to sight it; the first to mount its crest; the first—"

"The Grand Peak!" I shouted. 'We'll name it for you'"

My exultant cry died away on my lips. I halted and stood gaping in speechless amazement at the peak that loomed skyward over beyond the lesser height we had mounted. What we had taken for the Grand Peak was no more than a satellite that had masked the Titan from our view! As we gazed from our hard-won crest, there uprose before us, grander than ever, the vast bulk of the mighty mountain, its sublime summit glittering with eternal snows. But the nearest ridge of its stupendous pyramidal base was yet a full sixteen miles distant!

I turned and shouted the discovery to Miller and Brown, who toiled up beside us to stare at the awesome beauty of the Peak in dull wonderment.

At last Pike regained his usual firm composure.

"We will begin the return march," he ordered, without betraying a trace of his keen disappointment either in look or voice.

"Send them back," I replied, nodding toward Brown and Miller. "Let us go on and make the attempt alone."

"My thanks to you, John!" he exclaimed. "But it would be madness, sheer madness. Through these snows we could not reach the base of the Peak short of a day's march; and look at that ascent! I doubt if any man could scale those heights."

"Not at this season. Yet, if you give the word to make the attempt—"

"No!" he rejoined. "Without food, and clad as we are in summer wear, no! It is enough to have ascended this peak, without our being so mad as to attempt the

impossible."

"Then the sooner we reach the plain, the better," I said, pointing to the mountain side behind us.

While we had stood viewing the indescribable grandeur and sublimity of the Peak and the snow-clad sierras which stretched away in savage majesty to north and south of their mighty chieftain, the clouds below us were rolling upwards, were enveloping the entire mountain upon which we stood. Fearful of being lost in a snowstorm upon these bleak heights, we descended rapidly down a cleft, and regained our bivouac at the foot of the mountain just as the snow began to fall.

Here we found our blankets and other camp equipment as we had left them. But the ravens had robbed us of all our food, other than an unstripped fragment of the deer's ribs. Though one of the men had killed a partridge during our descent, the bird and the lean deer bones together formed a scant enough meal for four men who had not eaten in two days.

About noon the next day we shot two buffaloes, upon whose flesh we gorged ourselves like Indians, and I, for one, am convinced that we had well earned the full meal.

In the valley, all up and down the creek, we found many old Comanche camps, but the Indians had undoubtedly gone south for the Winter.

The next day brought us back to our little stockade on the Arkansas.



CHAPTER XVIII

FAMINE AND FROST

Many even of our Western-bred officers would have considered themselves justified in lying about camp for at least a day after such a trip. Not so Pike. Toward noon of the next day, which was the last of November, our entire party marched on up the main stream, in the thick of a heavy snowstorm.

We had at last come to the real hardships of our voyage. Within the week two or three of the men suffered frosted feet. The temperature fell to nearly twenty degrees below zero, so that even I felt the cold keenly through my hunting clothes, while the Lieutenant and the others, clad only in their cotton wear, suffered still more from the stinging frost.

Yet, despite all the troubles and hardships of ourselves and our half-starved horses, we held to our explorations, day after day, killing an occasional buffalo or deer, and gradually working our way into the midst of the mighty mountains, northward and westward behind the Grand Peak, along what we thought to be the Spanish trace. At last we came to a large stream, which, to our astonishment, ran to the northeast. Though against all our previous theories, we were forced to believe that this must be the river La Platte. Ascending the stream in a northwesterly direction, all alike suffering greatly from the cold of these high valleys, we passed signs of an immense encampment of Indians. But we saw no more of the Spanish trace, or rather of the Indian trace which we had followed into the mountains, thinking it to be the Spanish.

Turning back upon our own trace some little distance, we crossed over a pass in the mountains to the southwest, and descending a small stream, came upon what we thought to be the upper waters of the Red River. Here, while our wretched, famished beasts were recruiting themselves upon a favorable bit of pasture land, the Lieutenant marched with a small party to explore upstream. At the same time Baroney and I marched down the river, our mission being to kill game for the others, who were to follow us in a day or two.

It was not, however, until three days later, on Christmas Eve, that our party found itself reunited in one camp. After two days of unsuccessful hunting,

Baroney and I had at last killed four buffaloes, and young Sparks had shot four more. In view of the fact that we had all been for two days without food, the meeting brought us great happiness.

Yet I cannot say that Christmas Day, which we spent in camp, smoking and drying our meat, was as merry as it might have been. The contrast with all our previous experiences of that holiday was far too sombre. Some of the men even drew unfavorable comparisons between this and the past year, when they were at the head of the Mississippi. Though then in a still colder climate and among the fierce Chippewas, they had at least enjoyed far better food and shelter. As for our present food, though now for the first time in weeks we had an abundant supply, it was limited to the one item of meat, which we must eat without so much as a pinch of salt. Our summery clothes were rent and tattered; many of our blankets torn up for stockings; our outer footwear reduced to clumsy moccasins of raw buffalo hide.

To these physical privations was added the consciousness of the grim fact that between us and the nearest of our far-distant frontier settlements lay all the mountain wilderness we had traversed, and more than seven hundred miles of desert plains. Yet, taken all in all, we managed to spend the day in fairly good cheer, despite the snow which came whirling down upon us.

On the afternoon of the next day we marched down to where the mountains closed in on the river valley. From here on, each succeeding day until the fifth of January found our way rougher and more difficult. The valley became ever deeper and narrower, so that we had to cross and recross the river repeatedly, our horses frequently falling upon the ice. Even harder upon them were their no less frequent slips among the rocks of the banks.

Much to my relief, I was not required to witness the sufferings of the poor beasts coming down through the worst of that terrible canyon. On New Year's Day Brown and I were sent ahead to hunt. Within the first few hours we had the good fortune to bring down a huge-horned mountain ram. Leaving this in our path for the others to skin and dress, we struggled on down the ever-narrowing valley all that day and the next without sighting any other game.

On the third of January we found ourselves fighting our way along in the gloomy depths of a cleft that wound and twisted through the very bowels of the mountains. The bottom of this tremendous gorge was almost filled with the foaming, roaring torrent of the river, while on either side the cliffs towered

skyward in sheer, precipitous precipices, thousands of feet high. Never before had I seen or heard of such a terrific chasm, and may I never again be caught in its like!

Leaping and slipping over the icy rocks beside the furious rapids and falls, and creeping along the narrow ledges of ice that here and there rimmed the less torrential stretches of the stream, we at last gained a spot where a little ravine ran up through the face of the precipice. We saw that it was impossible for us to descend that gloomy gorge even a few yards farther. The icy waters of the roaring cascades swept the bed of the chasm from wall to wall.

Yet to ascend the side cleft seemed no less beyond our power. The water, running down from above earlier in the season, had coated the rocky surface from top to bottom with an unbroken slide of ice. It seemed outright madness to attempt that dizzy ascent. However, a man never knows what he can do until he has tried. We set to, I with my tomahawk and Brown with his axe, and by cutting footholds, turn about, in the ice of the ravine's bottom, we slowly worked our way up the giddy rise. Again and again we came near to slipping and so plunging headlong down that glassy slide. After the first hundred feet, we dared no longer look back below, for fear of being overcome with dizziness. Yet at last we came to easier climbing, and, scaling the side of the ravine, found ourselves safe on the mountain ridge, far above the river and its cavernous gorge.

Here we soon killed a deer, and leaving the greater part of the carcass for our companions, pushed on another day across the mountains. We had at last sighted the prairies from our lofty heights, when, pressed by hunger, I was so ill advised as to eat some of the berries we found hanging to the bushes. As a result I suffered such vertigo that I was compelled to lie quiet in camp. But Brown put in the time very well by killing no less than six deer.

Early in the forenoon of the sixth, as we hastened down out of the mountains, we again came within earshot of the torrential river of the gorge. Drawn by the sound, we scrambled around the point of an out-jutting ridge, and found ourselves on the river bank where it flowed from the gorge. It was not the first time I had stood on that selfsame spot.

"Good God!" I groaned. "After all our toil, and only this!"

"You may well say it, John," echoed a melancholy voice from beneath the cliff upstream.

"Montgomery!" I cried. "You here?"

He appeared from around a big rock, sad and dejected; but at sight of my companion, instantly assumed a look of unbending resolve.

"We scattered," he explained, as I grasped his hand. "The others took the horses up out of the gorge by the least difficult of the side ravines. I followed your trace down into the midst of that awesome cleft and up the icy ascent. But I lost the trace on the mountain top, and so came on down here—"

"To find that, after all our toil and privation, it is not the Red River!" I cried.

"Ah, well, it is something to have rounded the headwaters of the Arkansas," he replied. He turned to Brown: "You will find two of your fellows downstream at the old camp. Join them, and see what the three of you can do toward killing meat against the coming of the others."

"Aye, sir!" responded Brown, with ready salute.

He was striding off when I interrupted: "Wait! Montgomery, he has six deer already hung."

"Good! The more the better! Fetch the other lads, Brown, and bring in your game. If you see more deer, do what you can to bring them in too."

Brown saluted the second time, and started off at a dogtrot.

I looked inquiringly into the Lieutenant's darkening face and thought I read his purpose. "If any of the horses come through alive, they will nevertheless be too outworn for farther travel within many weeks. You propose to go into winter quarters?"

"No!" he answered almost angrily.

"Yet the horses?" I argued.

"Poor beasts!" he sighed. "Would that I might put them out of their misery—such of their number as the men may bring alive out of that rocky waste! Yet we cannot spare them, and the fewer the survivors, the greater our need to cherish them. We will build a stockade, and leave the beasts here in the charge of two or three of the men."

"Leave them! And what of ourselves?"

"We will go on in search of the Red River."

"Afoot? In midwinter?"

"Southward. There must be passes over the mountains to the southwest,—passes leading over into the warmer valleys. All reports agree that the Spanish settlements enjoy a mild climate."

"The Spanish settlements!" I cried. "You would head for the Spanish settlements! Give the word, Montgomery; the sooner the better. Ho, for Nuevo Mexico and my lady!"

He shook his head soberly. "It is well you are not in command, John, else I fear you would have even less chance than now of winning your way to your lady. It is a desperate move we are about to undertake."

I smiled. "Can anything be more desperate than our present situation?"

"We must leave the horses to recuperate," he replied. "With the horses we must leave a guard. Two men will be as many as we can spare. They must have a stockade for defence should they be attacked by Indians or Spaniards."

"Come!" I exclaimed. "Only show me the place, an axe, and a grove of pines. I will have your stockade well under way by nightfall."

He took me at my word, and at once led the way downstream to the site of our last camp on the river before we struck off into the mountains behind the Grand Peak. On the way we met Brown and his two companions, going to fetch his deer. We borrowed from them two of their axes, and, arriving at the camp, at once set about felling pines.

Before nightfall we were rejoined by Brown's party and two others, the latter bringing in four sadly disabled horses. The least wearied of the men were at once sent back in search of the remaining parties, carrying a plentiful supply of deer meat to supply those who might be famished. To make a long story short, the ninth of January saw the last member of the expedition in camp, safe and sound, with a loss all told of only four horses.

To hunt down a sufficient store of game and complete the blockhouse for Baroney and Smith, the two men detailed to stay in charge of the bruised and half-famished beasts, occupied the party a full five days. But between times in helping and directing the others, Pike and I managed to take several observations

to determine the latitude and longitude of the camp. I also spent much time copying the records of all our courses and distances up to the time of our entry into the mountains, and in elaborating my own notes on the mineralogy, etc., of the vast rocky ranges traversed by us.

When finally we started on our next desperate venture, it was with hearts far lighter than backs. I was overjoyed at the thought that I was at last to march toward the Spanish settlements—and Alisanda! The others had their own good reasons to be pleased. Ignorant of what lay before us, we were alike happy in the thought that our faces were now turned southward, and gladly shouldered our heavy packs for the march.

Each one of us carried a forty-five pound load, made up of Indian presents, tools, ammunition, and scientific instruments. To this were added our weapons and other necessary equipage and a small quantity of half-dried meat, bringing our burdens up to an average weight of seventy pounds. Some packed a few pounds more, some less, each according to his strength. Our leader was among those who carried more. As for myself, being the biggest man of the party, I found that I could make shift to start off with a hundredweight.

Thus, as we thought, well provided for our trip, we struck out boldly over a ridge and southwardly up a valley which lay behind the front, or easternmost range of mountains. We had taken to calling these the Blue Mountains, for though at this season they were where barren hardly less snow-clad than the stupendous sierra to the westward of them, the pine-clad ridges of their slopes, no matter how far distant, appeared colored a clear dark blue, without a trace of haze.

At the beginning of our journey the White Sierra stood so far to the westward, and our course lay up a winding stream through such hilly country that we did not sight their towering peaks until the morning of the fourth day. After this they remained always in view, for the range trended to the east of south in such manner as gradually to approach the front range, or Blue Mountains, which trended south and seemingly a little to the west.

Meantime on the second day, the Lieutenant, Sparks and myself had the good fortune each to bring down a deer. Deceived by this seeming abundance of game, we added little of the fresh meat to our already over-heavy loads, and some of the men even threw away what remained of the dried meat in their packs. Far better had we cast away our Indian trinkets, and even the greater part of our tools!

Within half a day the very last of our food was exhausted, and as no more game was seen, we at once found ourselves face to face with famine. To add to our distress, in crossing over the valley toward the White Mountains two days later, to reach a belt of woods, we had to wade the creek, and the cold coming on extreme, the feet of nine of the men were severely frozen before we could get fuel and warm ourselves. We did what we could to draw out the frost with snow-chafing, but in several instances the injury had gone beyond that remedy.

Our camp that night was in truth a most miserable one. Not an ounce of food had we eaten in nearly two days, and though we had an abundance of pitch-pine for fuel, this meant only that we were free to crouch before the fires, in our thin tatters, and roast one side, while the other was pierced by the terrible frost. Hungry, exhausted, and shivering, we huddled about the fires, even those who were suffering the least being hardly able to obtain a few hours of broken sleep.

It was all too evident that we must soon find food, or perish of starvation in this fearful mountain wilderness. At dawn Pike and I took our rifles and set out, aware that the lives of all depended upon the success of our hunt.

Spurred on though we were by this dreadful necessity, our wide circuits through the pine groves and around the hills brought us no sight of any game throughout that dreary day. At last, near nightfall, we came upon a gaunt old buffalo bull, and stalked him with extreme care. But though we succeeded in creeping within range and wounding him three times, our aim was so unsteady that none of our balls reached a vital spot. He made off and escaped us.

Bitterly disappointed, and weary from our long hunt, we sought shelter in a group of rocks, and spent a sleepless night, without food or fire. Neither of us had the heart to go into camp and tell our starving companions of our failure.

The long hours of midwinter frost and darkness at last drew to an end, and, half dead from cold and hunger, we set off again, in the first gray light of dawn.

After hours of searching, we sighted a small drove of buffalo. Immediately we circled about to get down the wind from them, and, by creeping on all fours nearly a mile through the snow, stalked within fair range of the nearest. By this time, however, we were both so faint and quivering from starvation and over-exertion that neither of us could hold his gun steady. Again and again we fired and reloaded, the stupid beasts standing all unconcerned at the report of our guns, though we repeatedly hit the nearer members of their band. With muskets we could surely have soon brought down one or more, if only from their loss of

blood. But the tiny wound made by a rifle ball is of little effect unless a vital part is pierced.

In the end we must have succeeded by a chance shot. But while we were yet blazing away as fast as we could load and fire, one of the herd chanced to drift around to where a flaw in the wind bore our scent to his sensitive nostrils. In an instant he had alarmed the herd, and all raced off, snorting with fear, the wounded running no less swiftly than their fellows. To follow such a stampede was useless. Once started, the animals would run for hours.

We staggered to our feet and gazed after the fleeing herd in utter despair.

"It is the end!" I groaned—"the end! We have lost our last chance!"

"We are outspent!" murmured my companion. "We can do no more! My poor lads! faithful ever to their rash leader! To think that I have led them into this death-trap!"

"They are men!" I cried in bitter anger. "What is death to men?—even this hideous agony of hunger? We can bear that. But to die now—my God!—that I should die before seeing her!—my Alisanda!"

"No! not now!" He turned upon me with a flicker of feverish resolve in his hollow, bloodshot eyes. "Not now, not here! We are not cowards to give up the struggle while we can yet drag ourselves along."

"As well here as a few paces farther on," I muttered.

He dragged at my arm to rouse me from the black stupor of mind and body into which I was fast sinking. "John! think of her!" he cried. "You'll not give up! Keep fighting, for her sake, keep fighting, lad!"

"For her sake," I whispered. I caught at his clutching hand and sought to rally from that benumbing stupor. "For her sake!"

"And I—for the sake of those—who await the return of husband and father!" he panted. "Come! We'll fight—to the last!"

Death alone might conquer that indomitable spirit! We staggered on through the bleak wild, our eyes inflamed and half blinded by the snow, peering about in vain search for game. We did not turn back. To return to camp empty-handed would have been the bitterest of mockeries, supposing we could have found

strength to go so far.... We staggered on, but we were upon the verge; we had all but reached the utmost limit of human endurance. For four days we had marched over broken ground and through the snowdrifts in this midwinter cold—four days without food! Even Pike's iron resolve could not force his wasted muscles to perform miracles.

I found myself dulling even to the thought of Alisanda. The end was close upon us. A darkness was gathering about me. We were upon the verge of exhaustion. Several times Pike fell, half fainting, and presently I also began to stumble and sink down at the slightest misstep. Certain that we were about to perish, we bent every effort to reach the nearest trees, reeling and staggering like drunken men, or crawling, between times, when we found ourselves unable to stand.

Half stunned by one of my falls, I lay outstretched, gasping and quivering, when I heard Pike utter a stifled cry. I strained my head about, and to my astonishment saw that he was on his feet and running forward. Staring beyond, over a snowdrift, I caught sight of a little herd of buffaloes advancing at an angle to our course. For a little my strength came back as had my friend's. Staggering up, I tottered after him. By the most fortunate of chances, the wind was in our favor, so that the dull-sighted beasts came on without heeding us.

Pike had already gained a clump of cedar trees. Resting the long barrel of his rifle across one of the low branches, he took quick aim and fired. The shot struck the young cow which was at the head of the herd. She stopped short. The others, sighting us, wheeled and made off at their lumbering gallop. But to our amazement and joy, the wounded animal stood as if dazed. I rested my rifle across a limb, and managed to give the beast a second wound. A moment later Pike flung out his ramrod and fired his second shot. The cow wheeled half about, and moved slowly off to the left.

I had already poured a double charge of powder down my rifle barrel. Upon this I drove home a ball without stopping to patch it, and dashing the pan full of priming, took hasty aim behind the animal's shoulder. By good chance the ball struck her to the heart. Yet even when she fell we kept our places, hastily reloading our rifles. Not until she had lain for some moments with outstretched head did we venture to advance, for even a desperately wounded beast is apt to leap up and make off at sight of the hunters.

Our hunger and exhaustion were so great that, once beside our kill, we could not even wait to devour the raw flesh, but slashed open a vein in the neck and drank

the warm blood. Nothing could have revived us more quickly. Before many minutes we were strong enough to set about the dressing of our game. As we worked, we devoured bits of meat, which eased our famished stomachs and added yet more to our slowly returning strength. By nightfall we had managed to butcher the carcass, and loading ourselves with as much of the meat as we could carry, we staggered off in search of the camp.

When at last we sighted the welcome blaze of the fires and dragged ourselves into camp, it was past midnight. Neither of us could have gone another furlong. As we threw off our loads and sank down beside the fire, Pike was seized with so severe a vertigo that it was some time before he could sense the joyful greetings of our camp-mates.

Even before they caught sight of the burdens we bore, the brave sufferers had hailed our approach with heroic cheerfulness. Now, with every mouthful of frozen meat, our leader recovered from his dizziness, and generous strips of steak sizzling on the green-wood spits, the spirits of all rose even to the pitch of merriment. Desperate as was still our situation, it yet seemed like paradise after the anguish of body and mind through which we had passed.

No men, I venture to say, ever bore pain and privation and hardship with more heroic fortitude than was shown by these poor fellows. All but three had been compelled to endure the agony of their frozen feet, in addition to the pangs of starvation, and the sad truth that these injuries went beyond a mere frosting was all too evident in the morning, when, upon examining the men, I found that two of them, at the best, would have to give up their packs and hobble along with the aid of crutches. As for Dougherty and Sparks, both were too disabled to march at all.



CHAPTER XIX

BEYOND THE BARRIER

But I will dwell no more in detail upon our sufferings in that terrible valley of frost and famine. Enough said that, after bringing in the remainder of the meat for Sparks and Dougherty, we left them and struggled onward in search of a pass. To linger in camp with our disabled comrades would have meant certain death to all. But many among us wept at the parting, for few believed we should ever return.

Indeed, having eaten in one scant meal all the meat we had found heart to take from the injured men, we again suffered a famine, this time of three days' duration. It was then, for the first and only time during all our privations, that one of the men murmured openly. So evident was it that his outcry had been wrung from him by anguish and despair that the Lieutenant, instead of shooting him down in his tracks in accordance with the usual rigor of military discipline, chose to pretend that he had not heard the mutinous words. A few hours later we were the second time saved from starvation by a fortunate kill of buffalo, and it was then, after we had feasted to repletion around a roaring camp-fire, that Pike called the mutineer before him and reproved the repentant man for his conduct.

At this camp we left the greater part of the meat of the four buffaloes killed, in the charge of Hugh Menaugh, one of the two men who, aside from Sparks and Dougherty, had suffered the worst from the frost. This time, however, meat being so abundant, we did not fail to take with us on our onward march enough of provisions to last us for several days.

Though recuperated by two days of feasting,—for we had lingered that length of time with Menaugh,—our first march out of his camp proved one of the very hardest we had yet made. We were by now near the top of a high plateau, where the travelling was even more difficult than in the lower valley; yet we could discover no break in the white barrier, which, despite our high altitude, still towered up many hundred feet above us.

It was almost nightfall, and Pike and I—as usual in the lead breaking a way through the drifts for the others—were beginning to look about for a favorable

camp-site, when, topping a knoll, we found ourselves staring down upon a little stream whose course ran to the westward.

"Look!" I shouted. "A pass! That brook flows to the mountains—into the mountains!"

"It may twist about again to south and east. We have reached the top of a divide," cautioned Pike.

"No, no! it cannot be!" I cried, wild with delight. "I see a cleft in the mountain side! The sun dazzles our eyes, but look beneath, in the shadow."

"Thank God!" he sighed. "It is a cleft! It must be that the stream flows through the mountains. If only we can find a way down its bed!"

"We can—we must!" I wheeled about to the weary men. "Hurrah, lads! Stiffen your knees! We've found our pass! Another day will see us beyond the mountains!"

The brave fellows answered with a ringing cheer. Drooping heads straightened; tottering steps gave place to firm, eager strides. Buoyed up by renewed hope, we hurried down the hillside and along the stream bank until in the gathering twilight we could see with certainty where the stream wound its way into the mountain cleft. Assured of this all-important fact, we made our bivouac in a grove of pines, and settled down to the happiest night we had known in weeks.

Bright and early in the morning we broke camp and trudged along through the snow, down the bank of the creek. Soon we found ourselves within the flanking shoulders of the mountains, descending a gorge that was walled on either side with almost sheer cliffs. I should speak of these precipices as stupendous had I not first seen the terrific chasm of the far narrower and deeper gorge of the Arkansas.

To our vast relief, the bed of the pass proved to be broad and open throughout, being clear even of blocking snowdrifts. That it was habitually open was evident from the number of trees we found painted with Indian signs, clear proof that this was one of the accustomed paths of the roaming savages of the Far West. What most astonished us was the length of the gorge, which wound and twisted its way through the heart of the White Mountains in seemingly endless extent.

At last, after we had marched downward for twelve or fourteen miles, a sudden turn unmasked to our gaze a view that brought us up short in our tracks, with

cries of astonishment and delight. Instead of the narrow mountain valley that we had expected to open before us, there burst upon our vision the panorama of a vast park-like country, dotted with scattered woods and groves, through which meandered numerous branching streams whose main trunk flowed to the southward. It was many miles across to the mountain range which bounded the western side of this beautiful valley.

Pike was the first among us to find his voice. "Men," he said simply, "we have won free. The worst is now behind us. This Western country is far lower than the plateau on the east side. It must be less cold; see the wide stretches of open ground. There must be game—"

"Ay! look!" I said, pointing to a multitude of black dots drifting across a snowy hillside. "Deer! a herd!"

"An' more on 'em to yan side, sir!" sang out one of the men.

"No more fear of famine!" exulted Pike. "We're safe at last!"

"But how as to savages?" I rejoined. "I see no smoke; yet in a country so abounding in game—"

"Say rather, the Spaniards, John."

"What! You surely do not think—Yet that main stream runs southward. All the accounts tell how the Rio Grande del Norte flows from the north down through the Province of Nuevo Mexico. Montgomery! can it be—"

He checked me with a gesture. But the twinkle in his eyes belied the soberness of his answer: "We have crossed the mountains in search of the Red River. Who among us can swear that yonder stream is not the Red?"

"Yet I, for one, am ready to wager it is the Rio Grande!" I cried. "The Rio Grande! Only think what that means to us—to me! I have only to descend its banks to the Spanish settlements—"

"To land in a Spanish gaol!" he rejoined. "No, John; it is for the Red River we have been seeking, and the Red River it shall be, at the least until we have built a stockade and brought up all the members of our party."

"You would defy the Spaniards!" I exclaimed.

"We will at least put ourselves into a position of defence before seeking to

communicate with them."

"But a stockade on Spanish territory?"

"A small party should be conceded the right to provide against the attacks of savages. Besides, we have wandered far into a region unknown to us. If this is the Red River, our side of the stream lies within the boundaries of Louisiana Territory."

I nodded my understanding of his position. "You are right. We have a very fair argument, and can present it to Don Spaniard quite favorably—from behind the walls of a stockade."

"Or without any walls, sir!" put in Sergeant Meek. "Even with this dwindled squad, sir, give us a bunch of trees or scrub, and we'd stand off a troop of Spanish dragoons, or my name's not Meek."

"Small doubt of that, you old fire-eater!" rejoined the Lieutenant. "It's harder to keep you in hand than it will be to whip any enemy we are like to find in this region."

The men all chuckled appreciatively at the joke.

"But just a little brush to liven us up, sir!" pleaded Meek.

"That may come, all too soon! Yet it is not our game. We did not come here to fight the Spaniards, any more than we ascended the Mississippi to fight Sioux and Chippewas and British fur-traders. No. Bear in mind that this is a peaceful expedition. So far am I from desiring a hostile encounter with the Spaniards, it is by no means certain that I could bring myself to refuse an invitation to visit their settlements, should they tender us their hospitality."

Again catching the twinkle in his blue eyes, I exclaimed impulsively: "True! why not? Why not march on down the Rio Grande without delay?"

He shook his head. "Hold hard, John. You forget that this is supposedly the Red River. Also you forget your own observation as to how much more convincing is an argument when made from behind a fortification, and," his voice sobered, "you forget those whom we must first rescue."

"God forgive me!" I cried. "That I should for a moment lose thought of those poor lads! Give me a detail, if no more than a single man. I will go back at once

and fetch them."

"No," he replied. "We are still weak; you could not bear them through the drifts, and they cannot walk as yet. We must first build a stockade yonder in the valley. They had food enough to last many days. In good time I will send back a detachment to the Arkansas for the pack train. The injured lads can be brought through on horseback."

"I will go now!"

"You will go with us," he commanded. "If, as is possible, we have come within measurable distance of the Spanish settlements, we must establish a fort without delay. It is imperative. I need every man of you."

When the Lieutenant spoke in that tone, there was nothing to do but obey. I turned on my heel and swung away down the pass, all the more eager to advance, since I might not turn back.

To advance! The word thrilled me throughout every fibre of my being. To advance! Well enough was it for Pike to express doubts—to talk solemnly of the Red River. He had to bear in mind the problem of diplomatic explanations to the Spaniards. But as for myself, I rejoiced in the conviction that the stream before us was in truth the Spanish River of the North; that within the distance of a few days' journey southward lay the upper Spanish settlements, beyond which, somewhere in the interior of New Spain, lay Chihuahua, the seat of government for the northern provinces, and the goal of my love-quest! I no longer doubted, I knew! We had crossed the Sangre de Cristo! I had passed the Barrier!

Small wonder was it that I chafed during the many days which yet intervened before I was free to fare away on the road which led toward my lady! First of all came our check at the west base of the mountains, where a vast line of sand hills blocked our advance into the valley and compelled us to skirt along some distance to the south before we could march out toward the river. It took yet two more days for us to reach the main stream and cross over, up one of its tributaries, to a favorable site for our stockade.

The first few days of February we spent in hunting and in hewing down cottonwood trees for the stockade. Of buffalo we saw no sign in the valley, but succeeded in killing a few deer, and sighted such vast droves that the last thought of famine was dispelled.

As soon as we had made some progress on the fort, I pressed the Lieutenant to permit me to return for our comrades on the back track. But he, knowing the keenness of my desire to be off southward, positively forbade my returning, and instead detailed Corporal Jackson and four men to bring in Sparks, Dougherty, and Menaugh, together with the four packs we had been forced to leave behind. Baroney and Smith, we thought, could wait on the Arkansas until later, when the horses should have had more time to regain strength.

It had been arranged that Jackson and his men should leave on the afternoon of the seventh. But I did not linger to see them start. Making hasty preparation, I marched in the opposite direction at sunrise of the same day. The parting with my fellows in the midst of this remote and unknown wilderness affected me deeply. Despite all our sharing of famine and toil and bitter cold, I had not before realized the warmth of attachment between us. The men crowded around to grasp my hand and wish me Godspeed, and one and all swore that if I came to harm among the Spaniards, they would follow their commander to the death in his effort to avenge me.

After this Pike walked out with me half a mile or so on my way, where we could say our farewells in private, and none might see the tears which would come despite our efforts at calmness. By now he was quite convinced that I was going to my death.

"Farewell, my friend, my companion!" he exclaimed, wringing my hand. "God keep you from harm!"

"Wish me more than that, Montgomery," I protested.

"Ah, more—more, with all my heart!" he cried. "God grant you win your way to your lady—that you win her sweet self!"

"My thanks, dear friend!" I choked, gripping him by the shoulders. "We talk of patriotism; but I know, and you know, it is for her sake alone I am putting my neck into the noose."

"No, no," he rejoined. "It is not alone love, it is duty as well that calls you. And I fear the worst. Would that I might even now dissuade you from the attempt!"

"Dissuade me?—now? I should go, even though I felt as sure as you do that the outcome will be the garrotte or a blank wall and a firing squad. No; what grieves me most is the thought that we may never again meet. I hope to win my way to

Chihuahua; I must win my way to—her! But can I then leave New Spain? Never one of Nolan's men has come home."

"It may chance that you will wish to stay, John."

"No, not even for her sake, unless—" I hesitated—"unless the Spanish creoles rise and throw off the rule of Old Spain."

"A revolution? That would be a grand opening for you!" His eyes flashed with militant fire, only to darken again with grief. "But the people of New Spain are too dispirited to revolt. If you linger in that tyrannical land, it will be as a prisoner in one of their foul gaols—or worse!"

"For her I'd risk the worst a thousand times over! Take cheer! They will never suspect me as a spy. The Le Lande claim will carry me through."

"God grant it!" he cried.

I gave his hand a last grip. "Farewell for a long time, my friend! That you may not waste thought over the chance of my return, I confess that I have resolved to go to my lady, whatever may befall."

"Then you will not come back even if they rebuff you at the upper settlements?"

"I have crossed the Barrier. Now I go to Chihuahua."

"Farewell; God keep you!" he repeated.

A final glance at the little log fort, with its shallow moat, bristling, staked abatis, and loopholed walls, above which floated our glorious banner, then I tore myself from him, and started off on my solitary journey.

Having meat enough to last me some time, I did not stop to hunt, but continued on at my best pace, southwest and then more nearly south. Mid-morning of the second day I came upon a pair of the ugliest Indians I had ever seen. Fortunately they were not so stupid as their swarthy, flat faces made them appear. After no little sign talk, I at last overcame their fear of me, and by an offer of a few trinkets, gained their assent to take me into the Spanish settlements.

For the night they took me to a camp in the woods where their women were waiting. Being unacquainted with the customs of these savages,—who I afterwards learned were Yutahs,—I passed the night without sleep, for fear of treachery. But whether because of my rifle and pistols, or owing to their treaty

with the Spanish whites, my ugly guides made no attempt to attack me. Next morning we set out upon our way to Agua Caliente, the first of the Spanish towns, which we reached mid-afternoon of the same day.

It was with the keenest of emotions that I first made out what I took to be the mud-wall stockade, or rampart, of this northernmost of the Spanish settlements. At last I had arrived at the inhabited parts of New Spain,—I was about to venture into the midst of our secretly, if not openly, hostile Spanish neighbors. For all I knew, the long-threatened war might have broken out months past; it might now be raging with utmost fury. Yet even the thought of this far from improbable situation did not cause me to waver for an instant. I needs must go on in search of my lady, though a thousand Spaniards lined the road with guns loaded and primed to shoot me down.

As we drew near the town gate, one of the tame Indians of the place ran in with the news of my coming. I stopped, and was in the midst of paying over the agreed articles to my guides, when a bewhiskered Spanish corporal and a squad of dragoons came charging out as if to ride me down. Some held their long lances levelled at my breast; others, who had rushed off without their lances, flourished the short rifles which they call *escopettes*; while one man had only his big horse pistol. All, however, carried their thick leather shields, which it seems the soldiers in these parts bear as a protection against the arrows of the savages.

Greatly to my relief, I soon perceived that all this display of weapons and horsemanship was intended rather as a greeting than a menace. As they replaced their lances in the sockets and brought their curvetting mounts to a stand, the corporal saluted me in a most hospitable manner. At this, having good reasons for concealing what little knowledge of Spanish I possessed, I demanded, in French, to be taken before the commanding officer of the place. Whether or not the fellow understood my words, he sprang off courteously beside me, and made a sign for me to accompany him into the town. The others took his horse in lead, and followed us at a few paces.

As we passed the gate, I perceived that what I had taken for a great stockade of unbaked mud brick was in fact no other than the rear walls of a continuous row of houses, built in the form of a hollow square, and with inward-facing doors. The town was thus of itself a most effectual fortification against the savages of this region, the walls of the houses extending up above the flat roofs so as to form a convenient parapet for the defenders against the arrows and even the guns of their assailants. Very few of these Southwest Indians, however, possess

firearms, and as they also lack scaling ladders, it does not detract from the effectiveness of the defence that none of the houses is above a story in height. This last was also true of the rows of like buildings laid off in streets within the square.

At the time, however, I had little opportunity to observe either this Moorish architecture, which the Spaniards brought with them from Old Spain, or the curious appearance of the tame Indians, who made up the majority of the town's inhabitants. The corporal at once led me into the presence of the commandant, who, finding that I claimed to be of French blood, expressed himself in French as vastly astonished at the presence of an American in this remote region, particularly in view of the season.

Before we had finished our interview, I was no less astonished to learn that I was not the first American to arrive in the country. This does not refer to the French creole Le Lande, who had settled between here and Santa Fe and had done so well with his stolen goods that he was already known as a *rico*. Something over a year before our coming, one of our daring Western fur-hunters named Pursley, an American by blood as well as allegiance, had traversed the prairies from the Missouri, and falling in with a great party of Kyoways and Comanches near our Grand Peak, had come down with them to the Spanish settlements.

I received this account while dining with the commandant, he being so hospitable as to invite me to his table, notwithstanding my tattered and wretched appearance. But first, having learned my ostensible reason for coming to New Mexico, he had sent off a soldier, post-haste, with despatches to Governor Allencaster at Santa Fe.

After weeks and months of dieting on the flesh of wild game, much of the time without salt, and even longer without so much as corn to vary the monotony, it was only with the greatest effort that I could restrain myself from gluttonizing on my host's fiery *chili con carne*, his hot corn-cakes and beans, his delicious chocolate and *dulces*. All the time he was repeating polite apologies for the meagreness of his fare. To me it was no less than a banquet, and I feasted until prudence forced me to deny myself another mouthful.

That night, for the first time in seven months, I slept upon a mattress, which, according to the custom of New Spain, was laid upon the floor. The nearest approach to a bedstead in this benighted land is a bench-like bank of mud brick along the wall, in some of the houses. Chairs and divans are none too plentiful, even in the homes of the cultured rich, the people in general preferring to recline or to sit Turk-fashion upon mats or mattresses laid along the floor.

Early in the morning I was informed that an escort was in waiting to guide me to Santa Fe. The kindness of the commandant in providing me with numerous

articles of civilized comfort induced me to accede without protest to his politely worded hint that it would be better for me to leave behind my weapons and ammunition, which he promised to send on in a few days.

Having given myself singly into the hands of the Spanish, I knew that diplomacy was now my sole resource, the thought of a resort to force being sheer madness.



CHAPTER XX

A MESSAGE TO MY LADY

During the journey to Santa Fe, while stopping over at the town of San Juan, where I was treated with the utmost warmth of hospitality, I was able to inform myself as to the prosperous condition of the trader Le Lande, who had married and settled in the vicinity. But my apprehensions as to my reception by the Governor of this remote province prevented me from taking as deep an interest either in that rascal or in the strange customs and appearance of these Mexican people as I should have felt in easier circumstances.

Unlike Agua Caliente and some of the other small settlements we had passed, I found Santa Fe a town widely scattered in the outskirts. Many of the low adobe buildings which made up the bulk of the place stood each in its tiny patch of field, which, early as was the season, the people were beginning to cultivate with their rude ploughs and mattocks. Within these suburbs, however, the houses crowded closer and closer together, until they were for the most part separated only by streets that were no less narrow and crooked than dirty. A more striking difference between this two-century-old settlement and the ones up-country was the presence of the two huge adobe churches which towered among the hovels, all the more imposing for the contrast. Their windows, like those of the better houses, were glazed with sheets of thin, transparent talc.

I was at once taken past the rectangle of the soldiers' barracks to the great open court, or plaza, in the midst of the town, where we came to the house of the Governor. By this time I and my escort were surrounded by a number of *mestizos* and tame Indians, all of whom, however, drew away when we entered the palace through an open, brick-paved portico, or shed. After the plainness of the exterior, I was astonished by the ornate furnishings of the rooms within, whose limed walls were hung with bright-colored drapes and whose floors of beaten clay were spread with skin rugs.

Little time was given me to wonder at what to my unaccustomed eyes seemed most magnificent decorations. I was quickly shown on into a large apartment, at the upper end of which sat a sallow-faced, corpulent Spanish don. I had no need to look at the secretary and the other attendants grouped about his high chair to

realize that I was in the presence of Don Joachin Allencaster. The harshness of his glance as I was led before him was enough of proof; for until now, all whom I had met, even to the most ignorant and dogmatic of the priests, had treated me with the deference of true hospitality.

Not until this moment had I fully realized the wretchedness of my appearance. Though the kindness of the commandant at Agua Caliente had provided me with a bath and a cotton shirt, I still wore my tattered buckskins; upon my head was my old coonskin cap, which had been half singed by a fall in the fire; my limbs and feet were clad in moccasins and leggings of fresh buffalo hide, the raw surface outward; while about my shoulders my unkempt hair fell down in loose and shaggy locks, as barbarous as the eight months' beard upon my lean, starved face.

"*Por Dios!*" exclaimed His Excellency. Having doubtless been informed in the despatches that I claimed to be a Frenchman, he addressed me in that language: "*Sacre!* You have come here, the second American in two years, to spy upon my province!"

"Your Excellency," I replied, "I had thought the Commandant of Agua Caliente wrote you regarding the purpose of my visit to New Spain. As to this Pursley, if it is to him you refer as my fellow spy, I had never before so much as heard of the man until told at Agua Caliente. The Commandant can tell you how astonished I was when he informed me of Pursley's exploit in penetrating the wilderness. For my part, I should surmise that he is no more than one of our venturesome fur-hunters. But if you insist upon your suspicions, why not include Baptiste Le Lande with us in a trio of spies?"

Throughout this the Governor had continued to regard me with great austerity. Quite unmoved by my attempt at lightness, he now signed to his secretary, and spoke to me in a most peremptory tone: "Your papers, fellow!"

I drew out the documents relating to the Le Lande claim and handed them over to the secretary. His Excellency demanded their purport, which I gave as clearly and briefly as my French would permit.

"We shall see," he commented, when I ended my account. "Your papers will be examined, and I will send for Le Lande. Meantime you will consider yourself under arrest. You will be given quarters in the rooms assigned for officers in confinement, but you are at liberty within the bounds of the town, if accompanied by your guard."

With this, he appointed a corporal of the regular dragoons to attend upon me both as guard and waiter, and I was promptly led out. During the short delay which followed, I had no cause to complain of my treatment. The corporal proved a most accommodating servant, and my meals were sent to me from His Excellency's own table. In addition, the hospitality of the leading people of Santa Fe was so cordial that I should have enjoyed greatly the two days I had to wait, had it not been for my fears that the Governor might detain me for an indefinite period, or send me eastward out of the province, into the country of the Comanches.

When, therefore, he again called me before him, and stated that he had inquired and found that Le Lande was incapable of discharging the claim presented by me, I declared boldly that I knew this to be a mistake, and that it appeared to me His Excellency was seeking to shelter a refugee debtor of my country, in violation of the treaties between Spain and the United States.

"Look to it, Your Excellency!" I concluded, with all the heat and indignation I could affect. "Look to it! This is no light matter. The man is an outright thief, and the treaty rights of Monsieur Morrison are clear. I insist upon the payment of this claim. If I cannot obtain justice of Your Excellency, I will appeal to the Governor-General."

This last stirred him out of the daze of astonishment into which he had been thrown by the audacity of my heated protest. Governors of Spanish provinces are not accustomed to being bearded by their inferiors in rank, much less by lone foreigners suspected of espionage. But at my mention of his superior, he found his voice.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and I marked the change in his tone. "*Madre de Dios!* You would go to Chihuahua?"

"No offence to Your Excellency," I hastened to protest, affecting to believe him alarmed for himself. "It may well be that your authority is so limited that you cannot satisfy my claim. My complaint against your refusal will be purely formal. In truth, I prefer to have the decision of the Governor-General, if only to obtain a precedent in the adjudication of similar claims which may be presented in other provinces under his rule."

"*Por Dios!* You wish to go to Chihuahua!" he repeated. I believe he would have been less amazed had I urged him to let me go to the gallows. "To Chihuahua! to Salcedo!" he murmured.

"Why not, Your Excellency?" I inquired.

His sallow cheeks darkened with a sudden return of his suspicions, and he sought to transfix me with his glance.

"*Caramba!*" he muttered. "Tell me clearly how you came across all that vast desert. You came from the northward. Did you then cross the mountains?"

I described briefly that terrible march south and west from the Grand Peak. He listened with growing wonderment.

"*Poder de Dios!* It is impossible!" he cried. "Malgares has told me of that gigantic peak and the sierra you crossed. It is not possible! The Sangre de Cristo, and in midwinter—afoot!"

"Yet it is true, Your Excellency."

Again his eye sought to pierce me with its suspicious stare.

"Your party?" he demanded. "You have spoken of hunters. Who are they?—and where?"

Having now some of the details of Pursley's adventures to copy, I told a connected tale of having accompanied some Osages from St. Louis to the Pawnee country, in search of the recreant Le Lande, when, learning of his flight to New Mexico, I had wandered westward with a small party of hunters to the Grand Peak and then southwest over the mountains, until we came to what was supposed to be the Red River, where my companions had stopped to hunt.

At the end of my recital, he sat for some moments studying me. Then, with a most disconcerting suddenness: "Señor, you will honor me with your presence at table."

He rose at the words, and leaving all the others gaping, conducted me down a corridor to his dining-room. It was now high noon, and we found the table already spread for the midday meal, which is the principal repast of the day among the Spaniards in Mexico.

A plate was laid for myself opposite His Excellency's, and we sat down in civilized fashion to a meal which would have graced the table of the richest Spanish creole in all Louisiana. There were trout from the neighboring streams, a variety of meats and fowl, good wheaten bread altogether unlike the

unappetizing corn *tortillas* of the commonfolk, chocolate and *dulces*, fine raisins from the Paso del Norte, and a bottle or two of most excellent wine.

Throughout our repast His Excellency addressed himself to me as one gentleman to another, so that I found myself continually in a stress of excitement between apprehension and hope. Our conversation was for the most part directed to European topics, dwelling much, as must every discussion of transatlantic affairs, upon the career of that most marvellous of men, the Emperor of the French.

But with the wine and the *cigarros*, His Excellency seemed to recollect for the first time the small but none the less important affairs of our own personal concern.

"I begin to be convinced, señor physician, that you are indeed a man of genteel breeding," he said. "If, however, you will pardon the remark, I have grave doubt whether a Frenchman of your education would commit so many errors in the use of his native language."

I smiled. "*Mon Dieu!* Your Excellency, we of St. Louis have not the facilities for visiting *la belle* France possessed by our fellow creoles of New Orleans. It is a century or more since my ancestors came to the New World."

"And you have dwelt much among the Anglo-Americans," he insinuated.

"It is true," I replied with candor. "I obtained my diploma as a physician from the college of Columbia in the city of New York."

He stiffened with a sudden return of austerity. "Señor, I no longer doubt that you are a *caballero*—a gentleman. I will not press you to confess your ulterior motive in coming into the domains of His Most Catholic Majesty. Yet, if you carry secret documents (I am disinclined to have you searched), I ask you to give me your word whether or not you carry such despatches."

"Your Excellency," I answered, "I give you my word that I do not. The documents I handed over into Your Excellency's keeping were all I brought with me."

"*Satanas!*" he cried, his face flushing with sudden violent anger. "Such duplicity! Such treachery!"

"If you will be so kind as to explain, señor," I said with unaffected astonishment.

"You hold to it? *Carrajo!* How then of the packet in your bosom?"

"That?" I exclaimed, at once perceiving the cause of his continued suspicion. Some one had spied upon me and seen the packet. I reached my hand into my hunting-shirt, only to hesitate and draw it out again, empty. It seemed a profanation to expose my treasures to his gaze.

"You pause! You dare not produce the packet! In it lies your condemnation!" he cried.

The folly of my course flashed upon me. Why should I set a mere fanciful sentiment against the lulling of his suspicions? If I did not myself hand over the packet, he would have it taken from me by force.

He started to rise, but I caught the little bundle from my bosom and reached it across the table. Instead of rising, he bent forward, and, with forced deliberation, began to open the folds of the waxed parchment cover. First exposed was the corner of the flag.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing across at me in fieriest anger. "Explain that, if you can!—a malicious desecration of the flag of His Most Catholic Majesty!"

"Not so!" I flung back at him. "Look what is marked upon it. Those letters were a message to me. I found it within the undisputed boundaries of my country, at the town of the Pawnee Republicans. It was a message to me, and I took it, for it was mine."

"Ah! ah! a message! You confess, señor spy!"

I pointed to the last unwrapped fold. He turned it open, his face keen with exultant expectation. The now powdered leaves of the magnolia bloom puzzled him for the moment. Not so the handkerchief. His eye was instantly caught by the initials in the corner. Without a second glance, he averted his gaze until he had drawn up the edge of the snowy damask cloth over my stained and crumpled treasures.

"*Perdone, hermano!*" he murmured, with a most apologetic bow. "Be pleased to regain your property."

With that he left the table and stood with his back to me until I had folded up the packet and replaced it within my bosom.

"Your Excellency," I said, "the world has heard much about the chivalrous gallantry of your people. I am now convinced the half has not been told of it!"

"*Muchas gracias, señor!*" he returned. "You pardon my stupid error? Yours is the act of a true *caballero*! If the question does not trench upon delicate ground, may I venture an inquiry as to the possible relation of your daring journey—?"

"I have reason to believe that the lady is at Chihuahua, Your Excellency," I explained.

"Ah! ah! now I perceive! Yet what an *amor* to bring any man across the vast desert!—above all, over the Sangre de Cristo in midwinter!"

"It was the barrier which lay between myself and my lady, Your Excellency."

"*Por Dios! You Americanos!* You will yet be flying to the moon! Malgares told me fully of the perils of the desert, and he had six hundred men, and it was in the pleasant season. But one man or a mere handful, however brave—*Santisima Virgen!*"

"Malgares?" I repeated.

"Lieutenant Malgares, who led the expedition to the savages of the East and North. On your way to Chihuahua you will have opportunity to learn that he is a true *caballero*."

"Chihuahua?" I exclaimed. "Your Excellency will then permit me to go to Chihuahua?"

"*Quien sabe?*" he smiled. "God alone knows the future! But I will send despatches, and it may well happen that they will not be in disfavor of your going. But as for the decision, that is with His Excellency, Don Nimesio Salcedo, the Commandant-General."

A sudden thought aided me to rally from my disappointment.

"Your Excellency," I asked, "if I should seal and address one article contained in my packet before your eyes, might I not ask the favor that it be delivered at Chihuahua to the lady addressed?"

"*Santa Maria!*" he returned, "it is always a pleasure to aid a lover. Come now! We will seal your message with my own seal. There are those between us and your Dulcinea who might otherwise peer within the cover. The address you shall

write upon it in private with my own quill, and none shall see the name of the señorita. She is not married?" (I signed that she was not.) "None shall see her name except my messenger when he opens the despatch-pouch for delivery at Chihuahua."

"*Muchas gracias*, Your Excellency!" I murmured, overcome.

"Ah! ah!" he murmured, leaning upon my bony shoulder as we started. "The years pass, but I, too, once had my romance, señor!"



CHAPTER XXI

HO FOR CHIHUAHUA!

So it was that for the time being I found myself received into the society of the most powerful official of the North Province with a favor as cloudless and warm as the blue sky above his chief town. Yet, on the other hand, having been requested by His Excellency to prescribe for the dropsy with which he was afflicted, I laid myself open to trouble by giving a treatment different from that previously prescribed by the monk who was his regular physician. The result was soon evident in the poisoning of His Excellency's mind against the heretic.

But in the few hours of practical liberty which intervened, I had the good fortune to meet my fellow-countryman, James Pursley. He proved to be one of our typical gaunt, long-legged Kentuckians, with a bearded face as resolute and formidable as that of our fighting sergeant Meek. Still better proof of his daring character lay in the fact that he had been wandering on the prairies for two years or more before he fell in with the great company of Comanches and Kyoways whose encampment we had found on the headwaters of the Platte, and with whom he had come south to the vicinity of the Spanish settlements. Venturing into Santa Fe, he had been fairly well received by the Spanish, and though forbidden to leave certain bounds, was otherwise free, and doing quite well as a carpenter.

As my attendant corporal knew nothing else than Spanish, Pursley and I were able to talk with the utmost freedom. When, in the midst of the account of his truly remarkable adventures, he told how he had found gold on the upper reaches of the Platte, westerly of the Grand Peak, and how he had refused to divulge the place to the Spaniards because it might lie within the bounds of Louisiana Territory, I became so convinced of his stanch loyalty and patriotism that I confided in him the circumstances of our party.

He was immensely interested, but shook his head over my suggestion that he should attempt to join the expedition. He did not see how this could be of any benefit either to the party or to himself, especially, he explained, as Allencaster had already sent out well-mounted spies to find and report on the party of hunters with whom I claimed companionship. He, Pursley, could not hope to

overtake these expert horsemen; while, on the other hand, if caught trying to escape, he would surely be jailed in the terrible *calabozo*.

In the midst of our argument of the question, I was summoned into the presence of the Governor. He met me with a frown, and showed how closely I had been watched by peremptorily ordering me to hold no further communication with Pursley. My attempt at a French shrug flung him into a passion, in which he decreed my exile to San Fernandez, a tiny village four days south of Santa Fe, there to remain in the charge of Lieutenant Malgares until word should come from Chihuahua.

Finding His Excellency thus once more harshly disposed, I was not altogether reluctant at being banished, more especially as my exile was in the direction I wished to travel. Nor did I regret the change when I came to San Fernandez and made the acquaintance of Lieutenant Don Faciendo Malgares.

He was, I soon learned, the son of one of the royal judges of the Kingdom of New Spain, and immensely wealthy. But neither his birth nor his wealth prevented him from being the most courteous gentleman I have ever met. That he was a daring and dashing officer was evident from his modest account of that remarkable excursion through the heart of the Comanche country and north to the Pawnees.

The question of his expedition chanced to come up within a week after my arrival, and having already gauged his gallant character, I felt free to rally him upon his invasion of our domain.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" I mocked, as he concluded by telling how his party had returned southward from the Arkansas, along the outer face of the front range of mountains, and into Santa Fe through an easy pass eastward of that town. "*Nom de Dieu!* you invade territory indisputably ours with a force little short of a regiment; yet when I would repay the compliment,—one lone man, lost in the Western wilds, your righteous Governor has a mind to garrotte me!"

"Not he, señor," replied Malgares. "Rest assured he will leave that to the decision of the Governor-General."

"He will send me to Chihuahua!" I exclaimed.

"I fear as much, señor. There can be little doubt that General Salcedo will order you before him."

"*Quien sabe?*" I muttered, affecting a doleful tone. My fear had been that I might be sent the other way. A sudden thought brought my hand to my bosom. "*Perdone*, señor lieutenant, if I seem impertinent, but is it usual for Spanish officers to present savages with banners embroidered by the ladies?"

He stared at me blankly. "Embroidered banners?"

"I chanced to visit that Pawnee town some three weeks after yourself. Examining the flag you left, I observed upon its lower corner—"

"Ah!" he interrupted, "I comprehend. The flag from Señorita Vallois. But I assure you, Señor Robinson, it was the lady's own whim. She requested me to fly her banner at the point where I should make nearest approach to your settlements."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, in turn, masking my delight with difficulty. "So your Spanish señoritas still send out their knights errant bearing their colors."

"True," he replied. "Yet you mistake in part. It was not Señora Malgares who gave me the banner in question, but her friend, Señorita Vallois."

"Vallois?" I repeated;—"Vallois? That is a French name."

"No less is it Spanish, señor; though it is in point that my friend Don Pedro claims descent from French royalty. One can well believe the claim in the presence of his niece."

"My word to that!" I cried. "She's the most beautiful lady under heaven!"

"*Santisima Virgen!*" he exclaimed. "You know her?"

"I had the honor of meeting her in my own country."

By a flash of intuition he divined all on the instant. "*Dios!*" he murmured, and he swept me a wide bow. "A love that could draw a man across that vast desolation of desert and sierra! Most unjust the fate that would not requite the deed!"

"You have seen her. Do you wonder that I should have made the venture?"

"Less than a year has passed since I won my own lady," he said. "The Virgin grant that I may be the one to escort you to Chihuahua! I have not seen my señora since I marched north, last year."

When a Spaniard opens his heart to you, count on it you have found a friend. I

nodded understandingly.

"Ah, my Dolores! my *niña*!" he sighed.

"But she is yours; you have already won her; while I—!"

He nodded, in turn. "My Dolores writes that every bachelor of Chihuahua, from the greatest *haciendados* to the youngest sub-lieutenants, are suitors for the hand of Señorita Alisanda. Yet take heart. At the last writing, not even Medina had won recognition from her."

"Medina?" I inquired, full of jealous inquietude.

"Salcedo's favorite aide-de-camp,—a braggadocio fellow."

"Could you not take it upon yourself to hurry me south at once?" I urged.

"*Poder de Dios!* I, a soldier, to march without orders? But be assured. The order will come before many weeks. In the meantime we should prepare." He looked me over smilingly. "It will never do for you to come before your lady in this savage costume. Great is my regret that in this remote village we cannot find you garments after the European mode, yet there are worse attires than that of a Spanish country gentleman—a *caballero rusticano*."

Notwithstanding my protests against imposing upon his generosity, he insisted upon at once conducting me to a man qualified to tailor the Spanish modes. Within the next fortnight I was completely fitted out *à la Española* from top to toe. But although it was the first time I had ever worn the costume, I cannot say that in the company of similarly attired Spaniards I felt ill at ease in these garments. In part at least they were well adapted to the needs of this hot, arid climate, particularly the broad-brimmed shade-hat, or sombrero. Silk stockings and Spanish breeches, buttoned down the outer seams and open below the knees, took the place of my tattered pantaloons and buffalo leggings. For belt I wore a sash of scarlet silk, with ends dangling like a lady's drape. Above it was a waistcoat as large as the jacket was short, while the circular cloak over all gave me quite the air of an hidalgo. My one difficulty was with the stiff jack-boots upon which jangled my barbarously gaffed spurs. After months of freedom in pliant moccasins, my feet found this hard confinement barely endurable even when I was mounted.

In return for the numberless courtesies of Malgares, I was able to make part payment by practising gratis among the people. It was, at the same time, a most

interesting experience to come into intimate contact with the population, from the *gachupines*, or Spaniards of Old Spain, and the native-born Spaniards, whom we call creoles, to the far more numerous *mestizos*, or mixed-bloods, and their half-brothers, the pueblo, or tame Indians.

One day I had gone up to see a patient at Atrisco, a little village next below Albuquerque. It was, as I remember, the seventh of March, exactly a month after I had left my comrades at the stockade in the valley. The Commandant, at whose house I was staying, had borrowed for me a Spanish grammar from Father Ambrosio, and I was deep in the verbs, when my host stepped into the room, with a bow and a sonorous introduction: "*Perdone, hermano! Present usted Señor el Capitan Mun-go-meri-paike, your compatriot.*"

I started up, and found myself confronting—Pike!

He stared back at me, half in doubt that it could be I, so vast was the change in my appearance and health.

"John!" he exclaimed. "It cannot be!"

"Yet it is," I replied, aglow with delight.

There could be no mistaking him, if only that he still wore his scarlet fur-lined cap and blanket cloak,—though much of his dress was new, and his face presented far other than the ghastly, emaciated aspect it had worn at our parting.

But as I reached out to clasp his hand, he suddenly recalled our agreement not to recognize one another, and drew back with feigned hauteur. "Who are you, sir? I do not know you."

"'T is of no use, Montgomery!" I cried. "I cannot hide my friendship. I should call out to you though they had the garrotte at my neck. What is more, the secret is out. I have already confessed my connection with the expedition to Lieutenant Malgares, who, though a Spaniard, has proved himself a true friend. I could no longer endure the thought of concealment from him. It has not cost me his friendship; and I am prepared to risk the worst his superiors can inflict upon me."

"No, no, John!" he protested. "We shall all come through safely, and you shall win your lady."

"Ah! Alisanda! My thanks for the good wish. But you?" I demanded. "Are you

and the men also prisoners in the hands of that capricious Governor?"

"Prisoners!" he repeated, dropping his hand on his sword-hilt. "Does this look like it? No! They lured us into Santa Fe with false promises. But my men still carry their guns and ammunition. Let the tyrants so much as raise a finger against us, and we will flee to their enemies the Apaches, and lead the savages against their settlements!"

"We could do it!" I cried. "Yet first—"

"First you would go to Chihuahua; and so would I," he assented, his blue eyes twinkling. "I made a loud protest when this over-wise Governor said it was necessary for me to go south. But we are going as 'guests under constraint'—not as prisoners, please note, John. The addle-pated don did not know enough to send us packing the shortest way out of the country, to the Red River,—which, it seems, lies far to the eastward, in the Comanche nation. No! he must needs march us down through the heart of the Northern Provinces. Could we ask more?"

"Not if Salcedo sets you free."

"Sets me free? No less yourself, John!"

I shook my head dubiously. But at the moment there entered a Captain D'Almansa, whom I had met at Santa Fe, and who, I now learned, was conducting down the Lieutenant and his men to place them under the escort of Malgares. When Pike explained to him that I had been a member of the expedition, the old captain smiled knowingly. Few among the Spaniards had doubted my connection with the mad *Americanos* after the party was brought in.

We left D'Almansa in the house, seated over a bottle of ardent spirits with my host, and went out to where the six privates who had come with the Lieutenant from the stockade were in waiting. I was rejoiced to see that, though still for the most part clad in their tatters, their rounding cheeks showed the welcome effects of Spanish hospitality, and that the ones worst frosted now hardly limped in their gait. Not one of them had been required to walk a mile since leaving the fort, horses having been provided them from the first.

It was no less affecting than amusing to see the manner in which, obedient to orders, they stared at me with an air of stolid indifference even when I came up to them with their Lieutenant. But the moment he had explained that all was

discovered, they crowded about me with exclamations of joy. It was truly a happy meeting for us all, despite the uncertainty of what might befall us in the hands of the tyrannical Spanish authorities.

As soon as I had sketched my adventures, Pike, in turn, told theirs.

"For several days after you left," he began, "I spent the time in hunting, reading, and exploring the valley around the fort. But a fortnight ago, while out with Brown, we fell in with a dragoon and an Indian of the militia, who, after telling us of your arrival at Santa Fe, insisted upon following us to the fort. In the morning, after we had made them a few gifts, they started back to Santa Fe, from which place they had been sent out to spy upon us."

"True!" I broke in. "Allencaster must have suspected from the first that my party of hunters was no less than the American expedition. I have learned that Señor Lisa sent word from St. Louis of the expedition's plans, to the Spanish authorities in Texas. All the Northern Provinces have been on the lookout for us for months, and Malgares has told me that the real purpose of his great expedition was either to capture us or to turn us back."

"That I have myself learned," replied Pike. "Well, they have us now. May they have joy of their find! But to return. The same day that the spies left, Jackson and his party came in with Menaugh. But poor Sparks and Dougherty, alas! neither had been able to take a dozen steps, and the others could not bear them through those deep drifts."

"Good God!" I cried. "They left their comrades again, in that terrible valley, famished, crippled, sick! Had I but gone—!"

"No, John, they are not famished, nor are they sick. Jackson found them well nourished. The gangrene had not spread. They will recover. You yourself said they would recover if the disease did not spread in this time. Jackson restocked them with meat, and within three days after his return Meek and Miller volunteered for a second rescue-party. As their orders were to go first for Baroney and Smith and the horses, there can be no doubt that this time our poor lads will be brought in."

"Then they are not at the fort?" I asked.

"I cannot say. They had not yet come in when the Spanish dragoons came to lure us away. But you know the obstinacy and combativeness of Meek. *He* will bring

them in. Yes, by now they must be over the mountains and on their way to Santa Fe, guided by the Spaniards left at the fort for that purpose. Allencaster has promised to send them after us as soon as they can march. By the way, he has complimented you with the return of your rifle and pistols. As I positively refused to be disarmed, the diplomatic supposition is that we need our weapons to provide against attacks of the Apaches."

"Your papers?" I inquired, "all those invaluable charts and journals?"

He gave me a rueful look. "The enemy have them trapped in my little paper trunk, most of them. When we first came into Santa Fe all the more valuable ones were concealed in the clothes of these lads." He shook his head sadly at the six privates. "But the over-hospitable ladies plied them so freely with wine and ardent spirits that I feared some of the papers might be lost during their tipsy antics. So I returned to the trunk all except your copy of my courses. Immediately afterwards the trunk was seized, and is now in the charge of our escort."

"They may be returned," I argued.

He shook his head.

"You say they lured you into Santa Fe?"

"Upon the report of his spies, Allencaster sent out a force of a hundred men, under pretence that the Yutah Indians were about to attack us. They were extremely courteous, and invited me to come into Santa Fe, stating that the Governor wished to know our reasons for entering his territories. When I had expressed our strategic supposition that we were on the Red River, and they had explained that these were the waters of the Rio del Norte, I at once hauled down our flag and agreed to accompany them.

"As with yourself, Allencaster was at first exceedingly haughty to me. But after I had expressed my opinion of their invasion of our territories, and stated that I had come in merely to be directed how to find the Red River, that my party might follow it down to Natchitoches, he mellowed exceedingly. I believe the old fox thought he was playing me a sly trick in thus sending us south through the heart of his country."

"He will be hoist by his own petard!" I cried. "Papers or no papers, Salcedo is bound to free you at least, and you have a fine memory. My fate will not affect

the splendid advantages which will accrue to our country from this blunder of the dons."

"Your fate?" he demanded.

"I am now a spy confessed. But enough of that when we reach Chihuahua! Until then we shall have no cause for complaint. We go under the escort of Malgares, than whom there is no truer gentleman under the sky."

Pike shook his head doubtfully.

But the next day I had the great pleasure of introducing him to Malgares, who promptly talked himself into the Lieutenant's good graces, and entertained us that evening by ordering a *fandango* to be danced in our honor by the prettiest girls of the vicinity.

Of our southward journey, which we began on the ninth of March, I will mention only that the first stage alone carried us some three hundred and fifty miles down the valley of the Rio del Norte, to El Paso. The most prominent features of this trip were a notorious arid desert called the Jornada del Muerto, or Journey of the Dead Man, which we avoided by a long detour, and two ranges of mountains to the eastward of the river,—the glittering, snow-clad Sierra Blanca and the Sierra de los Organos,—in whose fastnesses lurk the murderous Apaches, said by Spaniards to be the most terrible of all Indians.

The second day south of El Paso we had to toil across a region of shifting sand hills similar to those at the west end of our pass through the Sangre de Cristo. The stop that evening was made at the Presidio of Carrazal, where, for the first time since our meetings with Governor Allencaster, we were received without the effusive hospitality to which we had become accustomed. When Malgares introduced us to the Commandant, the latter bowed with utmost coolness, and muttered in Spanish an ungracious statement to the effect that Malgares was welcome to his quarters, but that *los hereticos* could lodge themselves, together with their privates of infantry, in the common hovel provided for travellers.

Malgares bowed his grandest. "*Perdone*, señor!" he replied. "I could not bring myself to trouble your hospitality. What is good enough for my friends is good enough for me."

Such was Malgares's stateliness of manner that the Commandant, although his superior officer, was bowing in most apologetic fashion before our friend had

ceased speaking.

"*Perdone, hermano!*" he murmured. "I erred most deplorably in imagining that *los señores Americanos* came as persons under constraint. *Con permiso*, I hasten to rectify my error by urging them to honor my humble abode with their presence."

"I fear that the Señor Commandant will have to excuse *los Americanos*," I said.

"The sky is ever a welcome roof to us," added Pike, no less offended than myself.

"But that is impossible, señores!" urged the Commandant, with growing concern. He turned appealingly to Malgares—"Pray persuade them, Don Faciendo! Should they refuse my hospitality I could never forgive myself!"

"From the first our countrymen have given them the warmest of welcomes," remarked Malgares, his chin still high.

"*Por Dios!* Do I deny it? Yet consider, I have but now received the gazette from the City of Mexico."

"The gazette?" inquired Malgares, unbending.

"With the account of the terrible Colonel Burr."

"Señor, we will be pleased to accept your hospitality," said Pike.

Immediately there was a general exchange of amicable bows, and the Commandant conducted us to his quarters. I could see that Malgares was hardly less eager than Pike and myself to hear the news about Burr. But diplomacy, no less than etiquette, compelled us to repress our burning curiosity until our host had exemplified his hospitality with a light evening meal. As we rose from the table, he remarked that we might better enjoy our *cigarros* under the starlight, on the *azotea*.

"*Perdone, amigo*," replied Malgares, suavely. "You spoke of the gazette. I would hardly venture to say how old was the last gazette which I saw at Santa Fe."

"*Con permiso*, señores," said the Commandant, bowing to Pike and myself.

At his command the attendant fetched the gazette, which he took into his own hands and tendered to us, with a polite bow. When we shook our heads over the

Spanish text, he waved us back to our seats, and proceeded to translate into French a most extraordinary mess of wild and contradictory rumors regarding Aaron Burr.

The redoubtable Colonel had descended the Ohio with an immense army; he had invaded the Province of Texas; he was marching upon Santa Fe; he had captured New Orleans; he was operating against Pensacola, with a view to the conquest of the Floridas; he had joined forces with the British fleet and had sailed to invest Vera Cruz; he was fighting the Eastern *Americanos*; no! the atheist Jacobin Jefferson had sent a second army to help him to conquer New Spain. Only the firm stand of the honest and most upright *Americano* Commander-in-Chief, General Wilkinson, had prevented *los hereticos* from breaking their sacred pledge by crossing the Sabine River into the disputed territory. Risking the anger of the hypocritical Jefferson, the brave Wilkinson had met the treacherous and ferocious Burr in a terrific battle; had defeated the desperadoes and either slain or captured the would-be conqueror of the domains of His Most Catholic Majesty, King Ferdinand.

So the account ran—a bushel of chaff heaped about a few scant grains of fact. Yet even out of these garbled and fantastic details of an evidently panic-stricken Spanish scribe, we could extract at least an inkling of the truth. There could be no doubt that Colonel Burr had actually embarked upon one or more of his venturesome enterprises, and that there had ensued more or less public agitation, if not an armed conflict.

To my wider knowledge of the Colonel's schemes many things were clear which puzzled and bewildered my friend, and I was not altogether surprised to see by Malgares's look that he understood the situation nearly as well as myself. When, however, at the first opportunity, I sought to obtain an intimation that he had been a sharer in the Mexican end of the great project, he avoided the inquiry with his usual tactful reserve.

For my own part, I concluded that my worst suspicions regarding the treasonable intentions of Colonel Burr were all too true. Evidently relying upon Wilkinson to force hostilities on the Texas border, he had planned to sweep down the Ohio and the Mississippi, with the rallying cry of "War with Spain!" to bring the frontiersmen flocking after him in a vast army. With all the loyal-hearted marching to the conquest of Mexico under Wilkinson and Jackson, it would then have been a simple matter to seize New Orleans, declare a separation of the West from the East, and appeal to the States and Territories west of the Alleghanies to

join in creating an empire which should extend westward to the far distant Pacific and south to remote Panama.

That the West was, and for years had been, far too loyal to listen to the traitorous proposal, was not the question. The point was, that, had Wilkinson supported the arch-plotter so far as the seizure of New Orleans, the result would have been a bloody internecine war among our people, with France and England alike gloating upon our dissensions, and waiting, eager-fingered, to tear us asunder at the first opportunity.

So it was that, taking matters at their face value in so far as I could conjecture the facts, I gladly gave General Wilkinson credit for the part he seemed to have played in checkmating the alleged invasion of the lower Mississippi by Burr.

The manner in which our host watched our faces as he read the gazette to us, explained the discourtesy of his first greeting. It was evident that he regarded our expedition as a reconnoitring party sent out by the hated *Americanos* to explore a road for the expected army of invasion.

For my part, I firmly believe it was in fact so intended by General Wilkinson, who had been known to boast that he could take all New Mexico in a single campaign. But whether or not he had intended to use our discoveries to further the treasonable projects of Burr, I will leave to the verdict of History. At the time, it was enough for me that he had not joined forces with Burr, but, on the contrary, it would seem had averted the possibility of the dashing Colonel's capture of New Orleans.

CHAPTER XXII

GLIMPSES OF FATE

The day before our arrival at Chihuahua, when Lieutenant Malgares despatched ahead a courier with letters to his wife's father and General Salcedo, I was suddenly struck with the fact that this First of April, like that other Day of All Fools out of Philadelphia, was bringing me to the señorita high in hopes yet none the less uncertain. Then I had chilled with the dread that my journey's end would find her dear presence vanished beyond my reach; now I suffered the far more poignant fear that I might find her heart lost to another.

With such a thought lying like a torpid snake upon my breast, it is not strange that I slept ill that night. But I was astir in the morning no earlier than Malgares, who betrayed the liveliest apprehension over his coming interview with the Commandant-General. It was the first time that he had been permitted to come south to the seat of government since leaving it for his daring expedition into our territories, nearly a year past. Pike and I were astonished to find that he was not beaming with expectation of the rewards his gallant exploit deserved. Instead he rode along between us in silence, his fine Castilian face creased with lines of anxiety, almost of dread.

We were now passing over the last few miles of the vast mountain-encircled plain which surrounds the city of Chihuahua and upon which, as well as similar vast ranges in this Province of Nuevo Viscaya, *los haciendados* pasture herds of thousands and tens of thousands of cattle. Only in the most favored spots was the dreary landscape broken by trees, most of them the acacia-like mesquite, which here grows to a height of thirty or forty feet. There was little cultivation of the soil in this region, whose inhabitants depend upon cattle and the rich silver mines for their subsistence. A far from pleasant proof of this fact was to be seen in the great number of smoking ore furnaces and the enormous extent of the cinder heaps all about the city.

From the time we swung into our high-pommelled, high-cantled saddles, my gaze was fixed through the smoke haze of the furnaces upon the lofty towers of the *Parroquia*—the magnificent parish church of Chihuahua—and the older and lower structure of the Jesuit Church of the Campaña. Noticing my intentness,

even in his distraction, Malgares courteously told the story of how the *Parroquia* had been paid for by a contribution from the silver produced by the great Santa Eulalia mine, in all something over a million dollars, estimated in our money.

Aside from the *Parroquia* and a few other imposing stone edifices, such as the royal treasury, the hospital, the military academy, and the three or four lesser churches, the city of Chihuahua proved to be interesting but not magnificent. A few of the private buildings were of stone and of more than one story, but the greater part of the city was built of the ubiquitous unbaked mud brick.

Passing within sight of the huge arches of the great aqueduct, or waterway, which bends around from the south to the east side of the city, we at last found ourselves in the neat, close outskirts of Chihuahua. Our course carried us toward the plaza through the better streets, and it was evident from the number of ladies who crowded out into their balconies to see us pass that the news of our coming had been announced.

That Malgares was well and favorably known among these bright-eyed señoras and señoritas soon became apparent as we swept along at the head of our clattering, swashbuckling dragoons. Fans were waved, *rebozas* and mantillas fluttered, and greetings called. Despite the anxiety which damped his spirit, our companion responded with the most gallant of bows and compliments.

In the midst, a gay young señorita, more daring than her sisters, cried out: "*Viva, los Americanos!*"

Our response, I trust, was as gallant in spirit if not in effect as the bows of Malgares. I qualify because Pike had to endure the mortification of riding beneath the gaze of all those sparkling eyes in a costume better fitting a backwoods farmer than a military gentleman. He was still in his scarlet cap and blanket cloak. Yet, encouraged by our acknowledgment of the first greeting, others of the ladies caught up the cry, until we found ourselves being welcomed no less warmly and frequently than Malgares himself.

This should have been fair enough augury to reassure the most despondent of travellers. But as we jingled past house after house, I found myself, between bows, scanning the gay groups on the balconies with a sinking heart. We were nearing the plaza. I could see the trees between the blank, bare walls of the dwellings which flanked the narrow street. In a little more we should pass the last of the balconies,—and I had seen no sign of my lady.

We neared the last balcony. Upon it were only three ladies, one of whom held back behind the others, so much of her head and shoulders as showed being muffled in a silk *reboza*, the Mexican head-drape or shawl. The other two leaned eagerly forward over the balustrade, and the younger, a plump beauty with the blackest and most brilliant of eyes, flashed at Malgares a look that told me she was his wife, even before he called to her in terms of extravagant endearment. Unlike so many of the Spanish marriages, his had been a love match.

The señora and her yet plumper companion at the rail called down a welcome to *los Americanos*. Pike and I swept off our hats and bowed our handsomest. I straightened and looked up. Malgares had not checked his horse for an instant, so that we were now opposite the balcony, and I, being on the right, was almost directly beneath it. My heart gave a great leap. Smiling down upon me, over the rail, I saw the lovely face of my lady. I started to cry out her name: "Al—"

But already her finger was on her scarlet lips. I checked myself so quickly that my exclamation sounded more like an "Ah!"

My lady let fall her *reboza* over her face and drew back out of view. When at last I gave over craning my head about, Malgares met me with a smile. "So you have discovered her already, Don Juan!" he remarked in French.

"My señorita!" I murmured. "She is the loveliest lady in the world!"

"The most beautiful—that is true, but I cannot admit that she is the loveliest," he returned, with the loyalty of a true gentleman.

"I trust soon to repeat that last to your señora!" I exclaimed. "She was the one to whom you called."

He bowed in confirmation of my surmise. "It is the house of Señor Vallois. That other was Señora Marguerite Vallois, his wife. The house of my wife's father is on the cross-street. She came to the house of her friends to see me pass, for she knew I could not turn out of my direct way to the *palacio*."

"What! Not a few moments to greet your lady after an absence of almost a year?" I cried.

"This is not a free republic as is your country. Our ruler—" He checked himself, and looked from me to Pike with an anxious glance. "Friends, I have not darkened your journey with sombre anticipations. But now is the time for warning. Do not be surprised if a few hours hence you find yourselves in the

calabozo."

"No!" said Pike, without raising his voice, but speaking in a tone of indomitable resolution. "Your people may kill us, Don Faciendo, but they shall neither disarm nor imprison us so long as there is breath left in our bodies. My men have their orders."

Malgares shook his head sadly. "You free-born *Americanos*! You do not yet know what it means to stand before a despot!" He glanced back over his shoulder as if fearful of being overheard. The nearest of the escort was beyond earshot. He drew in a deep breath, and murmured bitterly: "You see what it means. I am not accounted a coward, yet I turn cold at the very thought of the man who can dishonor me."

"Dishonor!" I repeated.

"Death is a little thing! But who does not fear a life—or death—of disgrace?"

Our looks assured him of our sympathy. We came into the *alamo*, or shaded ride, through the plaza. He pointed across at the fort-like mass of the Governor's residence. "There lies the fate of all the Northern Provinces, from the borders of Louisiana Territory to the Pacific, in the grasp of one man!"

"You have an appeal to His Catholic Majesty," remarked Pike.

Malgares shrugged his shoulders in the manner of a Frenchman, a gesture of which we would have considered his haughty pride incapable. "It is a long journey to Old Spain to one who would oppose the Commandant-General, and a far longer journey through the Court to the Hall of Justice. No, *amigos*. Be advised. Discretion is sometimes the better part of valor. Diplomacy wins many victories beyond reach of the sword."

"You have our thanks, Don Faciendo," replied my friend, soberly. "I shall not forget that I am here as an officer of the Army of the Republic. My first and only concern is the interests of my country, and I will use all means to conserve those interests."

We were by now approaching the great arched gateway which gaped in the centre of the *palacio's* stuccoed *façade*. The guard turned out with a smartness which I could see impressed Pike not a little. There was a moment's halt, and then we all clattered through the tunnel-like archway into the brick-paved court enclosed by the building.

This was not the first *patio* we had entered, but it was by far the largest. Here and there the court was ornamented with small trees and potted shrubs, some already in flower. A line of them screened off in the rear the view of the kitchens and stables. All around this court ran the arched entrances of the building's inner tiers of rooms, the gallery of the upper story being reached with outside stairways in opposite corners.

As the audience chamber was on the lower floor, we were ushered with Malgares into the hall of the guards by one of the aides-de-camp, a heavy-set, dark-browed Andalusian whom Malgares introduced as Lieutenant Don Jesus Maria de Gonzales y Medina. Our six privates were left outside in the care of the dragoons of the escort, with whom they had long since come to the best of terms.

Word had at once been taken in to the Captain-General that we were awaiting his pleasure. Presently an aide appeared and bowed to Malgares. This left Pike and me seated alone on a stone bench, under the eyes of the guard and of a rabble of house and stable servants, who had pressed in to gape at those strange creatures, *los Anglo-Americanos*. It was no easy test for my temper to bear, nor, I judge, for Pike's. Added to this, we were by now fairly on needles and pins as to the manner in which this despotic ruler should choose to receive us.

Lieutenant Medina had withdrawn. In his place appeared a ferret-eyed little Frenchman, who snuffled complaints of how he had been abused in this vile land, and sought to draw from us expressions of opinion regarding the Spanish Government. Suspecting him to be a spy, Pike pointed to the outer door, and gave him his *congé* in Spanish: "*Vaya, carrejo!*"

The scoundrel went, followed by a muffled yet none the less hearty laugh over his discomfiture from the rough, honest soldiers. After a time Medina returned with a sandy, pale-eyed but well-built young officer whom he introduced as Alferez Don Juan Pedro Walker. The newcomer hastened to explain, in English, that he was the same John Peter Walker of New Orleans who in 1798 aided Mr. Ellicott in surveying the Florida line.

At this moment Malgares appeared in the doorway of the audience chamber, and requested Pike to enter. I started to follow, but he waved me back, with an anxious frown. This boded ill for us. To conceal my concern, I expressed to Walker my surprise that an American should have entered the service of Spain. He answered quickly that he was not my countryman, since his father was English and his mother French, and he had been born and reared in New Orleans

under Spanish rule.

While he was explaining this, in rather an apologetic tone, Medina was called away. There followed a summons to Walker to attend upon the Governor-General, and I found myself left quite alone in the midst of the gaping, muttering rabble. This was no throng of simple, hospitable rustics such as I had met and liked in the North Province; but a stable and kitchen mob, the low scullions and hostlers and lackeys of a great man, puffed with reflected pride and saucy with second-hand arrogance.

Soon I began to overhear jeers and scurrilous flings, of which the word "spy" was the least galling. Before long all my apprehensions as to the Governor-General were drowned in the swelling tide of my indignation and anger. It was unendurable to sit for what seemed an endless time before the insolent leers and coarse raillery of this scum. The soldiers looked on, without attempting either to join in their scoffs or to silence them.

At last, when I was about to seize the foremost two of the rascals by the scruff of the neck and crack their heads together, the aide-de-camp Medina sauntered back from out in the court. I cried to him sharply in Spanish: "Señor lieutenant! do you not know whether it is time to take me in?"

Such at least was what I intended to say. But, in my heat, I must have slipped on my Spanish verb. The aide, mistaking me to mean that I had been summoned before the Governor-General, immediately ushered me into the audience chamber.

My first glance gave me a general impression of a large apartment, severe in its furnishings; the second took in a table at which sat Pike and Walker and two or three others, all engaged in sorting books and papers which I ruefully recognized as the charts and journals of our expedition.

The sight of Malgares, staring at me in open consternation, caused me to fix my gaze upon the gray-headed, irascible little man at the head of the table. We had expected a great show of regalia and the other trumpery of court display about the Commandant-General. Of this there was no sign to be seen anywhere in the room. Yet the bearing of the man at the head of the table and the attitude of all others present in facing him, told me that this was none less than His Excellency, Don Nimesio Salcedo, the despotic ruler of provinces greater in total extent than the United States and all their possessions other than Louisiana Territory. Yet by now I was so goaded to indignant anger that I held my head high and met his

stern glance with the curtest of bows.

"*Caramba!*" he swore, turning to Malgares. "Whom have we here?"

"Señor Juan Robinson, Your Excellency," explained Malgares—"that most excellent physician of whom I spoke, the surgeon attached to the expedition of Lieutenant Don Montgomery Pike."

It was only a fair example of Malgares's noble courtesy and friendliness to seek thus to mollify in my favor the man whose single word could send me to the garrotte as a spy. I thanked him with a look.

Salcedo flashed a fiery glance at the luckless Medina. "Why do you bring him in—*imbecil*? Let him retire."

I turned on my heel, too heated now to care, whatever the tyrant might have in mind to do. But the moment the door closed behind me, I found Lieutenant Medina at my elbow, and he was as angry as myself.

"*Satanas!*" he hissed, his little beady eyes snapping with fury. "I have lost standing with His Excellency by this frightful blunder. Explain! You told me I was to conduct you in! Explain!"

"*Na-da!*" I drawled. "I did not tell you."

"You said it!" he insisted.

I gave him the Spanish equivalent for our adage not to cry over spilt milk, adding that I preferred his room to his company. At this he went off fairly boiling with rage, fearful, I take it, that if he stayed he would explode, and so draw upon himself the wrath of his lord and master. As by this time the rabble had dispersed, I was left to my own bitter reflections.

Surely if Salcedo had not scrupled to seize the records of the expedition, he would not scruple to treat me as an outright spy. The best I could forecast from that meant an indefinite confinement in the terrible Spanish *calabozo*, compared with which the worst of our filthy flea-and-fever-infested seaboard gaols is a palace of comfort. Yet the thought of Alisanda spurred me to wild resolve. Let them fling me into their dungeons. I would break through their bars and stone walls. I had not crossed the Barrier to be daunted now. Nothing should keep me from her!

In the midst of my angry scheming, the door opened to permit the exit of Walker, Pike, and Malgares. Walker bowed, and addressed me in French, out of courtesy to Malgares: "If you please, Dr. Robinson, the General has expressed his wish that yourself and Lieutenant Pike should honor me by becoming my guests while you are in Chihuahua. We go now to permit yourself and Lieutenant Pike to arrange your dress before returning to dine with His Excellency."

This was decidedly different from being invited to descend into a dungeon. I bowed my acknowledgments.

Malgares held out a hearty hand to Pike and myself.

"God with you!" he exclaimed. "Pardon my haste. But I will see you again at dinner. Now I fly to my Dolores!"

"*Vaya usted con Dios!*" we replied, waving him not to linger.

It would have been cruel to delay his departure an instant, seeing that he had been separated from his señora for the greater part of a year. I saw Pike heave a sigh, and knew he was thinking of the beloved wife and children whom he had not seen for so many months, and might not see for many other weary months to come, possibly never.

My own thoughts, however, turned back to Alisanda. As Walker conducted us across the plaza to the house where, in company with other young bachelor officers, he had his quarters, a question or two set him to gossiping upon the ladies, and, inevitably, to singing the praises of Señorita Vallois. That was music to which I could have listened unwearying for hours.

But time pressed. Walker insisted upon loaning both of us neckcloths, and Pike various other articles of dress suitable to the occasion. He would have been as insistent upon sharing his wardrobe with myself had not my size prevented. I had to content myself with the neckcloth and a pair of silk stockings which I had in my saddlebags. In our prinking we enjoyed the officious services of Walker's quaint old negro servant Cæsar, who had been taken in Texas with other members of Captain Nolan's party, and was said by Walker to be the only man of his race in all this region.

Washed and dressed, we returned to the *palacio* still escorted by Walker, who had seen to it that we should not for an instant find opportunity to speak a word in private. Arriving at our destination, we found Malgares there before us, his

fine eyes still beaming from the meeting with his loving señora.

This time we were shown in without delay to the *sala*, or salon, where Salcedo received us with a formal bow, and then directed his attentions to Pike and Malgares with an urbanity which belied the gash-like crease between his shaggy gray brows. I was introduced to Señor Trujillo, the treasurer, who, however, paired off with Walker. This left me to go into table with the portly padre Father Rocus, who was the only other member of the party. Our seats proved to be at the far end of the longish board, and as the padre at once contrived to divert and hold my attention, I heard and saw little of what took place among the others.

Unlike the native-born priests I had met in the north, Father Rocus was a man of profound learning and ability. Without allowing the conversation to interfere in the least with his enjoyment of our elegant French-cooked repast and the very superior wines, he quickly sounded the none too profound depths of my learning in the sciences. He then touched adroitly upon politics and religion. The thought flashed upon me that he was seeking to lead me into some snare, yet I stated my convictions candidly. If Salcedo wished to condemn me, he would condemn me, and that was all there was in it.

At the end Father Rocus sat for some moments sipping his wine, holding the glass as daintily and caressingly between his plump white fingers as I would have held my lady's hand. He set it down to be refilled by the assiduous lackey at his elbow, and addressed me in English: "Republican, heretic, and Anglo-American—it is unfortunate. None are popular in the domains of His Most Catholic Majesty."

"I did not come here to curry favor with your people, padre," I replied.

"Not with all, perhaps, but—" Again he raised his glass and sipped for several moments. Yet I observed that his half-shut eyes were fixed upon me in a penetrating gaze. "You are acquainted in Chihuahua?" he remarked, in a tone as much of statement as inquiry.

"Lieutenant Malgares has honored us with his friendship."

"Are there not others?" he queried.

"If so, I am not at liberty to mention their names," I said.

"Good!" he commented. "Discretion is the one quality in which I thought you lacking. I now feel justified in returning to you an article which I have reason to

believe is your property."

"An article—my property?" I repeated, not a little puzzled.

He smiled, and, unobserved by the attendants, handed me my lady's handkerchief. I gazed at it, first astounded, then dismayed. It was all too clear that my message had been intercepted, probably by Don Pedro, and intrusted to this priest, to be returned as a courteous hint that my suit for the niece's hand was not acceptable. But as, greatly downcast, I thrust the handkerchief into my bosom, the padre raised his brows, and spoke in evident surprise: "You do not appear pleased, señor doctor. From what she said, I was led to infer—"

"What she said?" I broke in. "She? You mean—"

"A certain señorita who voyaged down a long river in company with her uncle and a certain gallant young heretic," he answered over his glass.

"She—my Alisanda! Then it is from her you bring the kerchief! You are our friend!"

"I am her confessor, and, I trust, her best friend," he replied. "As for yourself, God grant I may also become your friend and confessor."

"Friend—yes!" I assented eagerly.

"And confessor!" he urged. "Remember, you are now in the Kingdom of New Spain. It is in point to remark that a heretic was burned at the city of Mexico within the last three years."

My head sank forward in gloomy meditation. I had crossed the Barrier, it is true; but now I saw yawning before me the abyss of the Gulf.



CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOUSE OF VALLOIS

Before I could pluck up my depressed spirits sufficiently to ask Father Rocus the thousand and one questions about my lady which for months I had been longing to have answered, the Governor-General rose from the table with an abruptness that surprised us. Though by now somewhat informed as to the Spanish-Mexican custom of the siesta, we had supposed that at a formal dinner, served in the usual mode, there would be some lingering over the wine.

We had sat scarcely an hour, all told. Yet His Excellency led us into the *sala*, and awaited our adieus with a manner which, though urbane, did not encourage extended farewells. As his bearing toward myself was markedly less gracious than toward Pike and Malgares, I for one was not so ill-pleased as I might have been over this hurried leave-taking.

In the outer gateway Malgares for the second time excused himself to gallop off to his señora, while we returned afoot across the plaza with the ubiquitous Walker. Upon reaching his quarters, the latter invited us to recline on the mattresses which had been provided for us by old Cæsar. He himself preferred one of the long net hammocks such as are used among the Spaniards of the tropical coast lands. We chatted a few minutes over our *cigarros*, and then Walker dropped asleep.

Pike at once informed me that Salcedo had taken possession of all the papers in his little despatch trunk other than the letters from Mrs. Pike. These last, prompted by the same chivalry which had induced Allencaster to restore me my treasures, the Governor-General had permitted my friend to pocket without examination, upon the statement that they were from a lady. But that all the really valuable papers, such as our charts, astronomical observations, and journals, would be retained the Lieutenant now had little doubt.

"However," he concluded, "worse come to worse, we have your copy of the courses and distances, covering everything except that side excursion to the Platte and down the Upper Arkansas."

"And there is your keen eye and retentive memory," I added. "We have already

seen enough of New Spain for the information to more than offset the loss of the papers—if they really are lost. Had we headed straight for the Red from the Rio del Norte, we should have saved the papers, but should have gone home as ignorant of New Spain as we came."

"And you without seeing your señorita!"

"Ah, that!" I murmured. "It may be I shall pay dearly for the venture. You saw how Salcedo varied his manner toward me. But it is worth the risk. I could not have done otherwise!"

"I believe you, John. I myself caught a glimpse of your lady. I no longer wonder! But if Salcedo really is ill-disposed toward you, the sooner you get in touch with the señorita and her people the better. It may be they have influence."

"I shall make every effort to do so before the day is over," I said. "The difficulty is this Walker."

"He is an informer," said Pike. "Of that I have no doubts. I propose to give him enough and to spare of material for his tale-bearing."

"Good!" I cried. "A bold front is the best. Salcedo is bound to release you; while as for myself, if they garrotte me, they shall not have the satisfaction of saying that I cringed. No! we will tell this informer what we think of matters Spanish."

Before Pike could reply, we were startled by a sudden out-clanging of bells in the towers of the *Parroquia*. Walker started up and stared at us. Pike yawned, stretched, and remarked to me, in a casual tone: "You're right. This government is one fit only for masters and slaves."

"You mean, a master and slaves," I returned.

"No—one master here and one in Old Spain."

"Why not put it, a master there and an overseer here? The comparison is in point between this arrangement and that of one of our Virginia or Carolina plantation-owners who lives in town and leaves his estate under the care of an overseer. You could hardly call the overseer a master."

"The difference is that he drives people of a race born for slavery, while here—"

"Here," broke in Walker, his face quivering—"here some who were not born to slavery fall into it unawares!"

"What!" I said. "Do you, who voluntarily joined the cavalry of New Spain, complain of the Government to which you owe allegiance?"

"Voluntarily?—No, gentlemen. New Orleans is not Chihuahua, nor was it so even under Spanish rule. I did not realize what I was venturing when I entered this service. I have attempted to withdraw, but they refuse to accept my resignation."

"Ah, well," said Pike, "since it seems we are to be your guests, lieutenant, I am pleased that you understand and share our opinion of this despotic Government. Discontent is a hopeful sign when tyranny is rampant. Only let a few of the bolder spirits among you pluck up courage to seek open redress for your wrongs, and Mexico will soon fling off the yoke of Spain, as our glorious States broke their bondage to Britain."

I saw our host's eyes begin to widen. To keep the ball rolling, I chimed in along the same line. Walker did not again speak, but sat staring in open amazement at our audacity,—of course with both ears wide. Having started off at such a pace, we were almost out of material when Cæsar thrust in his woolly head and announced Señor Vallois. Walker promptly called out a floridly complimentary invitation for the visitor to enter.

Don Pedro came in, every inch the gentleman and grand *haciendado*. As he straightened from his bows to our host, I had time only to observe that since our parting his face had lost several shades of tan and gained many deep lines of anxiety. A moment later he gripped my hand and shook it with cordial heartiness. But at the end, instead of releasing his clasp, he slipped his left arm around my waist and pressed himself to me until our cheeks touched. It was the first time I had either seen or experienced this curious custom of the country, and it so surprised me that I stood unbending to his embrace.

"How is this, Don Juan?" he demanded. "Are your friends so soon forgot?"

"No, no, Don Pedro! It is only that I did not look for so warm a greeting from you. You must be aware that I am here under a cloud."

"The more reason for your friends to support you!" he protested with generous fervor.

"Señor, I should have known that so noble a gentleman as yourself could have done none else!"

We bowed together, and I then introduced him to Pike, adding for Walker's benefit that the don was an acquaintance I had met in Washington. So far we had held to the French. Now the don delighted Pike by addressing him in English: "Sir, I am more than pleased to meet you. I have heard rumors of your extraordinary trip to the headwaters of the Mississippi."

"You are kind, sir. But it was nothing worth mentioning. The soldiers of the Republic are accustomed to doing their duty."

"But this present expedition!" added the don. "I understand that you crossed the Sangre de Cristo in February."

"It was cross over—or perish."

"*Madre de Dios!* That is the point. It seems that you and Don Juan did cross over when most men would have perished. Do you then marvel that my wife is desirous of meeting two such heroes?" He turned to Walker with a bow. "With your kind permission, Lieutenant Walker, I will borrow your guests for the evening."

"Ah—yes—indeed—" hesitated Walker.

"My sincerest regrets, sir," broke in Pike. "You will pardon my declining the kind invitation. This long ride from Santa Fe and the heat have fatigued me more than I realized."

"*Santisima Virgen!*" exclaimed Don Pedro, unfeignedly disappointed. "Yet as you need rest, I must console myself with the hope that you will honor us with your presence in the near future. As to this evening, however, I must urge Don Juan to accompany me."

"By all means!" I assented.

This, as was plainly evident from his manner, put Walker into a quandary. To have ordered me to remain would have exposed the hand of the Governor-General. Yet how could he watch both Pike and myself if we separated? It was an impossibility. He hesitated for a long moment, and then bowed to Don Pedro: "With your kind permission, señor, I will pay respects to Señora Vallois. Lieutenant Don Montgomery should be allowed to repose in quiet."

"Your pleasure is mine, señor," replied Don Pedro, with a punctilious note in his politeness that told me he was not altogether pleased at Walker's self-invitation.

It occurred to me that the Governor-General might have as much or more reason to spy upon him as upon myself. If the don was in the thick of a revolutionary conspiracy, as might well be, he was vastly more dangerous to the Government than myself. The thought filled me with sudden dread for the safety of my lady's kinsman. But on the heels of this fright came the reassurance that, after all, Walker's interest might well be accounted for by the presence of a certain señorita in the home of Don Pedro. We had taken for granted that he was an informer. Yet his present course was quite as reasonably explained by his desire to see Señorita Vallois.

Leaving Pike to his own devices, we left the house and walked leisurely around the edge of the plaza. This brought us past a number of the city's largest merchandise establishments, to which groups of *reboza*-veiled señoras and señoritas were beginning to saunter for the evening's shopping. Now and again a bright, coquettish eye peeped out at us from among the folds of a close-drawn headwrap. But I was not curious to look twice at any of these over-rotund brunettes. To me there was only one lady in all the world, and now I was going to see her, to hear her exquisite voice, after almost a year of separation.

A few minutes, which to my impatience seemed hours, brought us to the door of Don Pedro. I should say, to the wicket in the great iron gate of the archway. At sight of us the porter within sprang to free the bolt. But before we could enter there sounded a clatter of hoofs in the nearest side street, and Malgares came galloping into view. Don Pedro paused for him to ride up, and a moment later they were exchanging that curious salute of handshake and cheek-to-cheek embrace. Malgares then explained that his wife was at the house of Don Pedro, and that he had just secured relief from his duties to follow her.

As we entered, a groom ran forward to take charge of Malgares's horse, while the don conducted us up the stairway in the nearest corner of his beautiful garden-court. A short turn along the gallery brought us to the entrance of a large *sala*. By now I was so wrought up that I found it necessary to pause beside the open doorway to regain my composure, the result of which was that all the others passed in before me.

I followed close behind Walker. The first glance showed me that my lady was not in the room. Malgares, who had entered with Don Pedro, stood before his wife and Señora Vallois, clasping the hand of the latter. The ladies, I observed, wore the full petticoats and short jackets of their countrywomen, though their costumes were of the richest and most elegant materials. As I stood gazing at

them, I was astonished to see Malgares and the rotund lady exchange that same odd embrace of greeting with which our host had favored myself and Don Faciendo.

Knowing the fiery jealousy of the Spaniards, I looked for Don Pedro to strike the audacious soldier, and Doña Dolores to burst into angry tears. Instead, they stood by, beaming at the affectionate pair with utmost complacency. Malgares turned to his smiling wife, and Señora Vallois gave Walker her hand to salute. When he also stepped aside, Don Pedro introduced me, first to his señora, and then to Doña Dolores Malgares. Each permitted me to salute her hand.

Straightening from my second bow, I was overjoyed to see Alisanda crossing the room toward us. But Malgares was before me. He met her with a bow. They grasped hands in that cordial manner, exchanged a few words of greeting, and—embraced!

This was too much! It might be the custom of the country—doubtless it was the custom of the country—But for my lady to welcome another man than myself, not of her family, was more than I could endure. I stepped forward, frowning. Alisanda slipped from Malgares's embrace and came to meet me, her lips parting in a demurely mischievous smile.

"*Hola, amigo!*" she murmured. "It is joyous to meet a friend after so many months!"

"It is heaven!" I mumbled, attempting to read her eyes.

But she drooped her long lashes. I clasped her little hand and bent to kiss it. Again I was frustrated. She drew the hand back. But her firm clasp did not relax. In the excess of my emotion, I did not realize her purpose until she had drawn me close, and her left arm began to encircle me. Then the truth flashed upon me. She had welcomed Malgares according to the custom of the country that I too might enjoy that most delightful of greetings! The discovery was too much for my discretion to withstand. Swept away by my love and adoration, I caught the dear girl to me and kissed her fairly upon her sweet lips.

I heard a sharp exclamation from Don Pedro, and Alisanda thrust herself free from me, her pale cheeks suddenly gone as scarlet as her lips. Her dark eyes flashed at me a glance of scorn and anger which sobered me on the instant. I half turned to the others, who were all alike staring at me in angry amazement.

"Señora Vallois!" I exclaimed, "can you not pardon this blunder—my deplorable ignorance of your customs? This is my first experience with your gracious salute of friends. The offence was absolutely unintentional. Believe me, my esteem and respect for Señorita Vallois is such that nothing could cause me greater grief than the consciousness I had offended her."

"Do not apologize further, Señor Robinson," replied the señora, melting more at my tone and look of concern than at the words. "Your explanation is quite sufficient. I am certain my niece will pardon you the error."

"If only she may!" I cried, turning to Alisanda. "Señorita, will you not forgive me? Do not hold it against me that in attempting to conform to your etiquette I passed the bounds! You must know that no disrespect was intended—Far from it! I meant only to express my great esteem."

"My aunt has spoken for me, Señor Robinson," she answered coldly. "The incident is already forgotten."

"But not Señor Robinson," remarked Señora Malgares. "I am consumed with curiosity to hear more about his marvellous adventures. My beloved Faciendo has told me that the señor doctor and his fellow *Americanos* crossed and recrossed the northern mountains in the very midst of the Winter."

"They were a barrier in our way, señora. We could do none else than cross them," I replied, with a side-glance at Alisanda.

This time she met me with that calm, level gaze which I had always found so inscrutable. Now, as then, I looked deep into those lovely eyes and saw only mystery. But Doña Dolores would not be denied.

"*Santa Maria!*" she exclaimed. "When am I to hear about your heroic journey, Señor Robinson?"

"Pardon me, señora," I replied. "Don Faciendo is better qualified to serve as historian. He insisted upon learning the facts alike from Lieutenant Pike and myself."

"If Don Faciendo will graciously ease our impatience," urged Señora Vallois.

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure, Doña Marguerite," assented Malgares.

"Be seated, friends. I am sure we are all eager to hear," said the señora. Even

Walker bowed quick assent to this. "I am most interested of all present, because Señor Robinson showered endless courtesies and favors upon my beloved Pedro and Alisanda while they were journeying through his country."

"Believe me, señora," I protested, "what little I was able to do fell far short of the favors I received."

"One word or glance from Señorita Vallois were worth the service of a lifetime!" put in Walker.

My feeling went too deep for verbal compliments. I stood dumb, and watched Walker receive a smile over my lady's fan that repaid him a hundredfold. The others were now moving toward the end of the *sala*, where were grouped three or four low divans. Alisanda glided after Doña Dolores, and Walker promptly stepped out beside her. I followed last of all, too fearful of another false move to force myself forward.

Yet somehow, when we came to seat ourselves, I was delighted to find myself beside Alisanda at the end of the divan, while Walker was hedged off from her on the other side by Doña Dolores. As the plump little señora chose to tuck up her limbs Turk-fashion, the interval was not narrow. Walker had to perch on the extreme far corner of the divan.

Malgares and our host sat across from us, while Doña Marguerite reclined upon the third divan. Alisanda was the only one of the ladies who sat upright. She did not look at me. But for the moment it was enough that her shoulder touched my arm.

When all were settled, Malgares plunged into his account, which he rendered in a crisp, clear French that made every statement stand out like a cameo. First of all he gave a brief and modest recital of his own remarkable expedition, dwelling strongest upon his arrangements with the savages to stop us; the vast extent of the all but treeless prairies, and the grandeur of the mighty snow mountains of the North.

He then described how our little party had come to the Pawnees and braved their might; how, late as was the season, we had pushed on westward, and how, in the midst of the midwinter's cold, we had clambered about among those huge sierras of rock and snow. As told by him, the account drew *bravo* after *bravo* from the little audience. When he described our ascent of what we had supposed to be the Grand Peak, Alisanda flashed at me a glance that put me into a glow of bliss.

Malgares was a flattering historian. But he was not satisfied with his own efforts. When it came to the descent of the terrific gorge of the Arkansas by Brown and myself, he broke off in the midst and insisted upon my picturing that awful canyon in my own words.

"*Nada*," I hesitated. "I cannot tell it."

"You must, Juan!" murmured my lady.

To say "no" to her was impossible. I went on with the tale as best I could in my rude French, and related how Brown and I had made our way up the icy ascent of the side ravine. As I described the cutting of footholds and our slow clambering higher and higher out of the chasm, Alisanda's eyes widened and her hands met in a convulsive clasp. Before I had finished she was breathing hard with excitement. The other ladies were hardly less thrilled. Women are so easily startled by the recital of dangers which a man risks as a matter of course.

But when I came to our terrible journey in the valley of starvation it was not alone the ladies who were moved. Aside from Walker I felt that all my listeners were friends, and I could not forego the opportunity to describe fully the heroic fortitude with which my indomitable friend and his men had endured their sufferings and struggled on against all odds. If my eyes were wet when I told of the injuries of the poor lads Sparks and Dougherty, there was at least one present who did not consider my emotion unmanly. She bowed her head in her hands and wept.

I went on to tell how the unfortunate men had sent the bones from their frozen feet, in pitiful appeal to their commander, and how they were being brought after us, maimed and unable to walk. It was not my desire to harrow my listeners needlessly, but I knew that the Malgares and the Vallois were among the richest families in New Spain, and felt certain that to tell them the piteous truth would insure the injured men the best of care so long as they should be detained by the Governor-General.

Having covered this point, I went back and described how we had fought our way on up the desolate plateau and across the Sangre de Cristo, and had at last found relief from toil and frost and famine in the broad valley of the Rio del Norte.

"So there was an end of our hardships," I concluded. "We had crossed the barrier."

"You had crossed the barrier!" murmured my lady, and through the tears which still glistened in her eyes she shot me a glance that repaid in full for all my months of journeying to find her.

"But that is not the end, Señor Robinson!" cried Doña Dolores, with the sweet petulance of a young bride. "Faciendo, you must let them know how Don Juan left his companions and came alone all the way to Santa Fe, fearless of the hideous Apaches."

"The Apaches do not range so far north, *niña*," corrected her husband. "Yet is it dangerous for a man to go alone among any of the wild tribes, or even among the tame Indians, if they have reason to believe his murder will not be discovered. That, however, was a small matter compared to the courage required to brave condemnation as a spy."

"Spy?" exclaimed Señor Vallois.

I saw Alisanda shrink at the word, and Walker bend forward to catch the answer.

"You must remember that Don Juan and his companions had been absent from the nearest of their frontier settlements for seven or eight months," explained Malgares. "How was he to foresee whether or not war had been declared?"

"War or not," interrupted Walker, "Señor Robinson not only invaded our territories in company with a military force, but, as I understand the event, he ventured into Santa Fe in disguise and without acknowledging his relation to Lieutenant Pike."

"How about it, Don Faciendo?" I asked. "Is an incursion into the territories of a neighboring Government necessarily an act of war?"

"*Por Dios!*" he laughed. "You have us there! I trust that His Excellency will consider his own proceedings, and be moved to look with a lenient eye upon the mistake of our *Americano* friends."

"So exalted a personage must be a man of discretion," I said, looking fixedly at Walker. "His Excellency will think twice before exacting vengeance for so small an offence. The garrotting or imprisonment of one or all the members of the expedition would be a bad bargain if it resulted in the loss to His Catholic Majesty of the Floridas. Mr. Walker can tell you that the riflemen who muster for our backwoods militia could, unaided, sweep the Floridas from Louisiana to the Atlantic. What is more, they will do it at the first excuse. They are already at full

cock over the manner in which the British agents are allowed by your people to come up from the Gulf and foment trouble against us among the Creeks, Cherokees, and Choctaws. Let General Salcedo go to extremes with our peaceful expedition, and there will be a setting of triggers from Georgia to Louisiana."

"*Madre de Dios!* Be prudent, I pray you, Juan!" warned Don Pedro. "Such words are best left unsaid."

"Are they?" I demanded. "If to-morrow every free-minded man in New Spain spoke out his real thoughts, to-morrow this land would be free from Old Spain."

"*Maria santisima!*" gasped Doña Marguerite, dropping her fan and sitting erect.

"We forget that Don Juan is a citizen of the Anglo-American Republic," said Alisanda, calmly. "In his land men are not accustomed to wear muzzles."

"Because our fathers rebelled and triumphed over the tyrant who oppressed them," I added.

There followed a tense silence. The sun had set, and I could barely distinguish the features of the others in the fast gathering twilight. There was a shadow upon them, not alone of the night.

Before any one spoke, the silence was broken by the peal of a huge church bell. Instantly all others than myself bent forward, crossing themselves and murmuring hasty prayers—"Ave Maria purisima!" "Ave Maria santisima!"—while slowly the great bell pealed forth its deep and sonorous note.

In the midst a little hand slipped out and rested for a moment upon my hard knuckles. I turned my palm about to clasp the visitor, but it flitted like a butterfly. An instant later *la oracion* was brought to a close by a merry chime of smaller bells. The señoras began to chat in lively tones, and servants hastened in with waxen tapers to relieve the deepening gloom.

Greatly to my annoyance, Walker rose to leave. I might have surmised that he was prompted to the action by jealousy, but my ignorance of local etiquette made me apprehensive of another blunder. This forced me to follow his lead and join in his polite refusals of the pressing invitations of our host and hostess to remain for the evening. In a land where, upon an introduction to a man in the plaza, he presents you with his house, and later is not at home to you when you call at that same house, it is as well to take the most urgent of invitations with a grain of salt.

As we bowed to the ladies, Doña Dolores demurely slipped aside and drew the attention of the others by a piquant remark about one of the fine paintings upon the wall. Alisanda took the opportunity to flash me a glance which set my heart to leaping with the certainty that I had lost nothing by my crossing of the barrier. Just what I had gained was yet to be seen. I knew I had gone far toward winning my lady's heart—I had crossed the barrier of nationality and birth. But I did not forget that I had yet to cross the gulf of religion.

With that one swift glance, she drew back, and Don Pedro escorted us to the door. We exchanged bows with him, and moved down the gallery to the head of the stairway. Here we turned and again exchanged bows. We descended to the first landing, and paused to return the bow which he made to us over the gallery rail. Another exchange of bows from the edge of the beautiful flower-and-shrub-embowered court, and we at last escaped out through the tunnel-like passage to the great gate.

Passing through the wicket into the street, which was lit up by the red glare of a resin torch, we found ourselves face to face with Father Rocus and Lieutenant Don Jesus Maria de Gonzales y Medina. The aide-de-camp bowed stiffly and stared from Walker to myself with a glance of fiery jealousy. I gave him a curt nod, and hastened to grasp the proffered hand of the beaming padre.

"God be with you, my son!" he exclaimed.

"My thanks for the kind wish, padre!" I replied "I see you are coming to call upon my friend Señor Vallois."

"Your friend!" muttered Medina, for I had spoken in French.

"My friend," I repeated. "I had the pleasure of meeting Don Pedro in my own country. But now, señor, with regard to our misunderstanding this morning, I wish to express my regrets and to explain that the error was committed through inadvertence."

"Ah—if you apologize," he said, with a complacent half-sneer.

"You mistake me, señor. I do not apologize. I merely explain."

He turned, without answering, and swaggered in through the archway.

"You *Americanos!*" protested Father Rocus, reaching up to lay a hand upon my shoulder. "Can you never be prudent? Medina is a swordsman. Your friend here

will tell you that out of five duels, the aide has to his credit three deaths on the black record of Satan.

"If he is a swordsman, I am a pistol shot," I rejoined.

"Then all turns upon the chance of who challenges and who has choice of weapons. God grant the choice fall to you! He is in strong need of a lesson."

"That is true!" muttered Walker, with a shrug.

"Meantime, my son, it will be well for you to consider the peril of your soul and come often to the *Parroquia* to hear me preach," admonished the padre. He spoke in a severe tone, but I fancied I caught a twinkle in his eye as he turned to enter the gate.

Walker took me familiarly by the arm, and as we sauntered back to his quarters, first inquired particularly as to my skill with the pistol, and then went into the details of Medina's duels. Before he had finished I divined that he and others of the officers at Chihuahua would be more than pleased to see some one trim the comb of the braggadocio aide-de-camp. If an outsider could be inveigled into taking the risk, so much the better.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SERENADE

The following morning I assisted Pike in the preparation of a sketch of our trip, which had been most courteously requested by Salcedo. Walker offered his services, and would take no refusal. But we found more than one opportunity for a word apart, and Pike told me that he was already in touch with the woolly-headed old Cæsar, who had at once offered to help us to obtain information as to the country's mines, ranches, and Government. He had begun by pointing out to my friend the closet in which were secreted the Government maps that had hung on the walls before our arrival.

After dinner and the siesta, we received calls from a number of the most prominent gentlemen of Chihuahua, including Malgares's father-in-law, Colonel Mayron, and Don Manuel Zuloaga, one of the under secretaries. Almost in the first breath the latter insisted upon our visiting him that evening, and as he chanced to be the first in the field, we assented.

Other invitations showered upon us thick and fast, so that it soon became apparent we should not lack for social entertainment, despite our equivocal position in the eyes of the Governor-General. More than once we were urged to move to the luxurious homes of these generous gentlemen, but declined because Salcedo had intimated his wish that we should stay in Walker's quarters. Otherwise there seemed to be no check upon our liberty. We were free to come and go in the city as we chose. To save us the annoyance of arrest by the night patrols, we were even given the especial countersign of "*Americanos*."

During the afternoon Malgares and Señor Vallois pressed Pike and myself to receive loans from them of sufficient money to replenish our wardrobes. We declined, but later accepted a loan from Señor Zuloaga, on his representations that Salcedo would soon comply with my friend's application for an official loan, and that we owed it to the dignity of our country to present a favorable appearance. Accordingly, we went out with him to his tailor and to the stores, and made provisions for complete costumes in the prevailing mode of Europe and our own country.

This occupied us until vespers, or *la oracion*, after which, having donned such articles of our new outfit as were ready for wear, we accompanied Señor Zuloaga to his house. As the señor was a bachelor, we spent a most interesting hour alone with him on the *azotea*, or flat earthen roof of his house, discussing the great questions of politics and religion.

Our host talked with freedom, telling us, among other things, there was reason to dread that Emperor Napoleon had designs to seize Spain and dethrone King Ferdinand. In such event, he added, many of the loyal subjects in New Spain would consider it the highest patriotism to declare for independence. As Americans, Pike and I heartily commended this revolutionary sentiment.

Before we could further sound the position of our host, other callers arrived, and he shifted the conversation to less perilous topics. We descended to the *sala*, where there soon gathered a number of our new acquaintances and other persons of wealth and station who expressed themselves as eager for an introduction to the *Anglo-Americano caballeros*.

My truculent friend Lieutenant Medina came in early with Walker, to whom he seemed to have much to say on the side. He greeted Pike effusively, myself with marked reserve. After this he avoided us both, and soon sat down to gamble at cards with other officers. The rest of the company stood around or lolled on the divans, puffing their *cigarros*, and *cigarritos*, the younger men chatting about women and horses, the older ones adding to these stock topics the third one of fortune.

As politics was a subject unmentioned, Pike attached himself to the group which seemed most disposed to discuss silver and gold mining and the other important industry of stock-raising. I kept more among the younger men, gleaning in the chaff of their sensual anecdotes for grains of information on military affairs. My harvest was so scant that I gave over the attempt at the serving of the *dulces* and wine, an hour or two before midnight.

This light refreshment proved to be the signal for a general change. The gamblers gave over their cards, the others their barren chatter. A guitar was brought in, and Lieutenant Medina sang a rollicking wine song, nearly all present joining in the refrain. The aide was gifted with a rather fine tenor voice—and knew it. At the end of the song, he tendered the guitar, with a flourish, to the *Americano* lieutenant. Pike declined the honor; upon which Medina turned to me, with a yet deeper bow, his lip curled in a smile of malicious anticipation.

There was a general flash of surprise when I gravely accepted the instrument and set about readjusting the strings to my own key. I did not look at Medina, for I had need to keep a cool head. After so many months my fingers bent stiffly to the strings. But I had not forgotten my lady's lessons, and as the refrain of the first song had enabled me to test my voice, I was able to render a Spanish love ditty with some little success.

"Bravo!" exclaimed our host as I handed him the guitar. "I did not know that you *Americanos* were singers."

"We are not, as a rule," said Pike. "For the most part, our people have been too intent upon hewing their way through the wilderness and fighting for life and freedom to find time for skilled voice-training. Yet we have our singing-schools even on the outer frontiers."

"It is quite evident that Señor Robinson has found time to cultivate his fine voice," remarked one of the crowd.

"There will soon be a baritone beneath the balconies," added Medina. "Beware, all you who have wives and daughters!"

Señor Zuloaga handed the guitar back to me. "Pray accept this little gift from a friend, Don Juan," he said. "The señoritas of Chihuahua will be deprived of a great pleasure if you lack the means to serenade them."

"Señor," I replied, accepting the guitar, "it would be most ungallant to refuse a gift presented in such terms. Though I lack the skill and voice of Lieutenant Medina, I will do my best. May I ask if His Excellency, the Governor-General, is the father of one of your charming señoritas?"

A sudden hush fell upon the company at the mere mention of their master. The silence was broken by Pike.

"Better sheer off from that shore, John. Should your ditties fail to please His Excellency, you are apt to land in the *calabozo*."

"And the other fathers are apt to drop tiles upon my head," I sighed.

"Not they," reassured Zuloaga. "Keep in the shadow, and it will not be known but that you are the suitor favored by the parents."

"Yet what if I am discovered to be a stranger?" I inquired, with feigned concern.

A dozen voices hastened to reassure me that a serenade from one of the gallant *Americanos* would be taken in good part by the most hard-hearted of parents.

"But how do you find the window of the fair one?" I asked.

"That is to be seen, señor doctor," put in Medina. "My way is to station myself across the street and sing the first verse. That never fails to lure the coyest of coquettes from her secrecy."

"But, then, you have the voice," I mocked.

"It is true," he replied, taking me seriously.

"But what if the señorita's chamber is located in a remote part of the house?" I questioned.

"You are in truth a stranger to the women," he jeered. "Count upon it that every señorita in Chihuahua, however ugly, has a balconied chamber, either upon the front or the side street."

"*Muchas gracias*, Don Lieutenant," I said, and turned to Pike. "*Hola*, Don Montgomery! Would you keep the ladies waiting for their serenade?"

This raised a polite laugh, in the midst of which Pike, Walker, and I essayed the prolonged ceremony of leave-taking. At the door of the *sala* an attendant relieved me of the guitar, and for a little I thought Zuloaga's presentation had been a mere formality. But as we passed the gate into the street the attendant returned the instrument, in a handsome case.

"You are in fortune, doctor," remarked Walker. "That is as fine a guitar as is to be found in Chihuahua."

"So?" I said. "Then I really believe I will try it to-night."

"You may lose yourself, or be struck down by the knife of some murderous *ladrone*," he objected.

"Not he," reassured Pike. "I'd back him to out-wrestle a panther."

"What is more, I carry one of my pistols," I added. "So if, between you, my guitar case will not prove too much of a burden—"

"*Sacre!*" muttered Walker. "You may fall into trouble."

"That's my risk," I replied with unaffected cheerfulness, and handing the guitar case to my friend, I swung away up a side street before our *dueño* could interpose further objections.

As I sped along in the shadow of the houses, I could have leaped up and cracked my heels together for joy. I was alone and free for the first time since joining company with the two Yutahs in the valley north of Agua Caliente. But my coltish impulse was short-lived. I had not questioned and planned for the last hour, to caper about in solitary darkness now.

The street up which I had bolted did not lead in the direction in which I wished to go. This was soon mended by turning at the first corner. The towers of the *Parroquia*, looming high against the starlit sky, guided me to the plaza. I then needed only to skirt edge of the square to come to the street corner upon which stood the great mansion of Don Pedro.

More than once on my way I had heard the long-drawn notes of serenaders, and the thought that there might already be one beneath my lady's balcony hurried me into a run. But when, mindful of the counsel of the complacent Medina, I slipped into a shadowy archway across from the stone *façade* of the Vallois mansion, I could hear no music within two or three hundred paces. This surprised me not a little, and I stood for some moments wondering at it, for my brief stay in Chihuahua had already confirmed all that Doña Dolores had written to Malgares as to the great popularity of Alisanda.

It was, however, no time to ponder mysteries. Whatever reasons her other suitors might have for staying away, I was here to woo her, and woo her I would. I keyed my strings, and with my gaze roving from one to the other of the balconied windows across, began to sing that love ditty I had sung beneath my lady's window at Natchez. The first verse brought me no response. Every balcony remained empty, every window gaped black between its open hangings.

After a short interval I sang the second verse. But though I stared at the dim, ghostly outlines of the white stone mansion until my eyes ached, I saw no sign of my lady. It then occurred to me that her chamber might face upon the side street. I stepped out from my dark archway, to walk around. But as I crossed over I could not resist gazing up at the nearest balcony and whispering her dear name: "Alisanda! Alisanda! It is I—John."

Almost instantly a little white object darted out over the balcony rail and came fluttering down through the limpid darkness. I caught it in the air, and felt in my

closing palm a roll of paper twisted through a ring. That it was a note and from my lady I had no doubts. But I could not read it here, and my love made me too impatient to be able to content myself with this dumb favor. I thrust the missive into my pocket, and called again: "Alisanda!—Alisanda! Speak to me, dearest one!"

I waited a full minute. But she gave no sign. By now I was in desperate earnestness.

"Alisanda!" I appealed to her, "is it for this I have come to you all these many leagues? Speak to me, dearest! I will not go—I cannot—until you speak to me!"

This time I did not call in vain. A shadowy form glided out the window and bent over the balcony rail, and the sweet notes of my lady's voice came down to me in heavenly music.

"Juan! Juan!" she murmured, in tender distress, "you must not take this risk! You will lose all! Go now, dear friend, before you are discovered. Go, read what I have written."

"What is a little risk, Alisanda, to one who has crossed the barrier to reach you?"

"You do not know! The risk is that you may find you have crossed the barrier in vain. There is yet the gulf. Go quickly! I hear a step—some one comes! He is almost here!"

"But, dearest one—!" I protested, as she vanished.

There came a sound of quick steps behind me, and an angry voice muttered the fierce oath, "*Carrajo!*"

A man reared in the wilderness acquires the instinct of the wild creatures to act first and consider afterwards. I leaped away from that angry voice before the last syllable of the oath hissed out. Even at that I felt the prick of a sword point beneath my shoulder as I bounded away. The owner of the voice had thrust—and thrust to kill. As my feet touched earth again I had out my pistol; as I spun about, I set the hair-trigger. The glint of a steel blade directed my gaze on the instant to the dim figure crouching to spring after me.

"Halt, señor assassin!" I commanded. "Take a step, and I shoot you down like a dog!"

"*Peste!*" he cried, lowering his sword point. "It is the *Americano* physician."

"And you are Medina!" I muttered between my hard-set teeth—"Medina, the aide-de-camp and bravo of Salcedo,—Medina the assassin."

"*Peste!*" he repeated. "It is a lie."

"You had better pray than swear," I warned him. "The trigger of my pistol is set. The slightest touch of my finger, and you go straight to hell."

"*Santisima Virgen!*" he protested, a trace of concern beneath the continued anger of his tone. "You do not comprehend."

"I comprehend that you, an officer in the service of His Most Catholic Majesty, sought to stab me in the back without warning. It was vile—it was cowardly! Can you name a single reason why I should not shoot you?"

"You do not comprehend!" he insisted. "I mistook you for one of those whom I have warned."

"Mistook me?" I repeated, catching at the chance for an explanation. It is not pleasant to think of a gentleman and officer turned assassin.

"Yes," he answered. "I have made this my privilege. Any man in Chihuahua who wishes to serenade Señorita Vallois has my pledge that I will kill him."

"I am in Chihuahua, and I have serenaded Señorita Vallois," I replied.

"But you did not know of my pledge. I will spare you this time."

"*Muchas gracias*, señor. Yet it seems to me it is a question of my sparing you."

"In that case, Señor Robinson might do well to consider that His Excellency, the Governor-General, would gladly welcome an excuse to garrote a certain *Americano* spy."

"That may be. Still, a sword prick in the back is fair evidence against a dead assassin, even in a prejudiced court."

"True. Then it may be that the *Americano caballero* is sufficiently gallant to consider the scandal of a slaying beneath the window of a señorita of his acquaintance."

"A scandal which, it seems, one Lieutenant Medina did not consider. For all that,

the argument is sound, *Vaya!*" I ordered, lowering my pistol.

"No!" he rejoined. "I will not go and leave you here."

"You shall!"

"*Nada!*"

For a moment I stood quivering with fury, wild to leap in, sword or no sword, and strike him down with my bare fist. But he had spoken truth. A death, or even a loud quarrel, beneath my lady's balcony, would draw upon her the talk of all Chihuahua.

"You are right in this," I forced myself to say; "we owe it to the lady not to involve her in any scandal. You will give me your word, and I will give you mine, to start in opposite directions, and neither return here to-night."

"Agreed!" he responded. "You have my word to it, señor physician."

"And you mine," I said, wheeling.

With punctilious precision he wheeled the other way and swaggered up the street as I stalked down. With a last glance at the empty balcony of my lady, I darted off across the corner of the plaza. Almost in front of Walker's quarters I ran plump into the midst of a night patrol.

"*Arreste!*" cried the officer in charge, and I stopped short with half a dozen lances at my breast.

"*Americano!*" I exclaimed.

"*Vaya,*" said the officer.

The lance points flew up. I darted on through the gateway and around the court to the rooms assigned to Walker. Our host and Pike had retired, but old Cæsar was dozing beside the door. I sent him hobbling to bed with a few *medios* to tickle his black palm, and the moment he had disappeared, drew out my precious missive in the light of the guttering candle.

The ring was a plain gold band without any setting. Yet to me it was far more precious than any seal or gemmed ring, for on the inner side were engraved my lady's initials. I kissed the band and hastily forced it upon my little finger, that I might read my note without further delay. Though the message was written in

English, the paper had been so crumpled that I had to smooth it out with care before I could decipher her dear words.

"My Knight," it began, "you have proved yourself a true champion. There is now no Barrier between us. I pray the Blessed Virgin that you may also cross the Gulf! But you still wear my colors. You have not honored them with your faith and courage to shrink now from the greater task! You should know, dear friend, that according to the Spanish law my uncle, who is my guardian, has the bestowal of my hand. Therefore be discreet. He will refuse your suit for a reason which I will tell you another time. Talk as you please. It is the custom to pay the ladies of my people extravagant compliments. But for a time restrain yourself as to action, and pray be prudent in what you say about political affairs. I fear for you! He who is to decide your fate is in doubt as to how far policy will permit him to venture. He would like to execute you as a spy, or at least fling you into his dungeon, but hesitates for fear the outrage might precipitate war with your Republic. Such was the representation made to him by my uncle and the friends he has interested in your fate. Therefore do not infuriate him beyond his self-control. Seek out Father Rocus. He is a true gentleman and my friend. You have made a good impression upon him. He may be able to aid you to cross the Gulf and avoid the danger which besets you. Then it will be for me to overcome the objections of my uncle. Now farewell. God preserve you, dear Knight! I press my lips to that name, for you have earned the salute many times over. *Au revoir*, my Knight!"

CHAPTER XXV

A VICTORY

Delighted as I should have been, and was, to receive such a missive from my lady, its effect was to rouse in me all the greater longing to see her and win from her dear lips the admission that she loved me. In this thought I now forgot all else. Even the demand of patriotism that I should exert every effort on behalf of my country found me deaf.

I stilled my conscience with the argument that if I, the accredited spy, should devote my whole effort to a personal affair, it would tend to divert attention from the splendid work of Pike. Every day saw important additions to his notes and memoranda, and he had already hit upon the ingenious plan of securing the notes in tight rolls inside waxed wrappings and packing them down into the barrel of one of the muskets of the men, who were quartered in the same building as ourselves. As the gun's muzzle was of course kept plugged with its tampion, there was no danger of discovery, and with five more barrels to fill, we felt that whenever the Governor-General chose to release the Lieutenant and his men, they would be able to march out of the territories of His Most Catholic Majesty fairly *loaded* with information against the tyrant.

So, casting aside every thought of duty, I allowed my mind to dwell constantly upon my wooing, and, frivolous as it may appear, was more concerned over our visit to the tailor than to the magnificent hospital in the old Jesuit edifices on the west side of Chihuahua. That institution of healing was finely situated and furnished. But when I ventured to suggest an improvement upon some of the antiquated and barbarous methods of treatment, I met with such a heat of jealous prejudice from the clerical physicians that I was forced to silence.

Returning to the plaza, we were agreeably surprised to find our little French tailor most modern not only in his knowledge of the modes but also in the quickness of his work. He and his assistants had already completed our suits. As the following day was a Sunday, it was particularly gratifying to find ourselves becomingly costumed for genteel society.

Pike and our host slept late in the morning, but I had given old Cæsar orders to

rouse me early. Donning my new garments, I slipped out and hastened across the plaza toward the Parroquia. The bell was already intoning for mass, and I passed numbers of *rebozo*-shrouded women streaming churchward. With my Anglo-American eyes and complexion I suppose I presented rather a striking figure among these people, who are so very rarely other than brunette,—though it may be I attracted more attention because of the fact that few other men had sallied out so early to attend mass.

Whatever the cause, I received enough smiles and alluring glances from pretty señoritas and, I fear, señoras, to have quite turned my head, had I not been far too intent upon the hope of seeing my lady to heed these charming coquettes. What I did heed, however, was the fact that the prettier the girl, the more jealously guarded was she by a keen-eyed duenna. What hope had I of a word apart with Alisanda if she came in company with Doña Marguerite?

Between the thought of this and the need to scan the scores of approaching ladies, I was not in a favorable frame of mind to appreciate the grandeur and beauty of the *Parroquia*. Yet so splendid were the two pillared towers, which reared against the sapphire sky a full hundred feet above the front corners of the high edifice, and so ornate was the white stone *façade* with its carvings and numerous statues of saints, that even my brief and preoccupied glances brought me a strong consciousness of the church's magnificence. I even looked twice at the carvings of the great round-arched entrance, so different in design from the pointed style of our Gothic ecclesiastical architecture.

That was as far as my observations went at the time, for as I again glanced out, I saw approaching among the throng of Moorishly draped figures one so tall and graceful that I knew her on the instant. I sprang from the entrance to meet her, but checked myself at the thought that it would be as well first to see who it was that accompanied her.

Alisanda wore her black lace mantilla, her companion a *rebozo* of finest silk, and both walked with heads reverently bowed. Yet I needed no second glance to feel assured that the duenna had not so portly a figure as that of Señora Vallois. If not Doña Marguerite, who then?

I was not long kept waiting for my answer. Standing with my stiff hat in hand, I looked eagerly for a sign of recognition from my lady. She did not so much as raise her head. But her companion straightened a little and parted a fold of her *rebozo* to bestow on me the mischievous flash of a sparkling eye. It was hardly

the glance of an instant, yet it left me pleased and wondering why I had not at once recognized that plump, petite figure. The duenna I had so feared was none other than the wife of my friend Malgares, Doña Dolores. What was more, her look gave me the impression that she knew all, and, with the national love of intrigue, if not because of friendship for Alisanda, would aid us in our plans.

Vastly relieved at this discovery, I followed them at a respectful distance into the lofty domed interior of the *Parroquia*. As my eyes were fixed upon my lady, that I might not lose her in the throng which moved up the centre of the stone-flagged nave, I gathered at first only the vaguest of impressions with regard to the church's interior. But when she and Doña Dolores piously knelt upon the hard flagstones, in the midst of the peon women and the filthy beggars, I could not resist the impulse to look up and around.

At once, in place of the vague impression of magnificence, there burst upon my vision a glory of ornamentation almost dazzling. In all the Republic we have no church or other edifice to approach the *Parroquia* of Chihuahua in richness and splendor of ornamentation. The windows were filled with pictures of saints and angels wrought in stained glass, which cast over all a rich coloring well in keeping with the gold-and-silver-bedecked altar, the brass screens and railings, the silver candelabra, and the brightly colored and gilded images and pictures and crucifixes on the walls.

Add to this splendor of decoration the rich vestments of the officiating priests, the incense and wax tapers, and the solemn service of music and prayer,—and the effect was one to impress the most frivolous of believers in the Romish faith.

Yet as I stood beside one of the carved pillars and watched the devout bendings and prayers of Alisanda, I could not but compare her real worship with the formal movements and parrot-like invocations of those about her. Her religion was of the heart; theirs mere outward display. So at least I surmised from the manner in which, between times, they whispered and nibbled at *dulces*, and stared about at one another. Of course Alisanda and her friend were not alone in their real devotion, but I speak of the crowd.

I followed the service as closely as the different accenting and pronunciation of the Latin by Spanish tongues permitted. In justice to Alisanda, it was my duty to learn all I could with regard to her religion. I felt an added interest from the fact that the foremost of the priests was none other than Father Rocus.

Yet the closing of the ceremonies came as a vast relief to me. When for the last

time the congregation crossed themselves and rose to leave, I leaned against my pillar and watched them pass out with as idle and careless a gaze as I could assume. All the time I kept the mantilla upon Alisanda's gracefully bowed head within the rim of my circle of vision. But I was certain she never once cast a glance in my direction, nor did Doña Dolores.

Untrained as I was in the intricacies of Spanish courtship, I might have been discouraged had I not observed that in their advance toward the exit the two were drifting, so to speak, sideways. This brought them angling through the crowd toward my pillar. Señora Malgares was on the nearer side, and I fancied it was her purpose to speak to me. Instead, they both swept by without so much as a glance.

Only, as she passed, the señora raised an arm beneath her *rebozo* as though to adjust its folds, and the fringed edge swept over my hat, which I was holding at my hip. A slight tug at its brim induced me to look down, after a moment's prudent wait. Within the hat's crown lay a scrap of paper upon which was written, in French, the single word, "Follow."

My height and dress, and the fact that I was one of the *Americanos* about whom the city was so curious, made me a marked man in the crowd. But if any among the hundreds of interested eyes that followed my movements had for owners some who suspected the purpose of my visit to the church, I flatter myself the sharpest were unable to distinguish which one of the ladies it was I followed into the open. To divert attention I glanced about at the peeping señoritas with feigned interest, until one angel-faced little coquette who could not yet have seen her sixteenth springtime fairly stared me out of countenance.

Once in the plaza, I had more room to man[oe]uvre, and started off at an angle to the course taken by Alisanda and her friend. To my chagrin I was at once surrounded by a tattered crowd of filthy *leprosos*, who exposed their sores and whined dolefully for alms. I flung them the few coppers I chanced to have with me, but that served only to whet the edge of their persistent begging. Suddenly I remembered that Don Pedro had given me the Spanish method for relieving oneself from these *caballeros de Dios*.

"Gentlemen," I addressed them in my best Spanish, "for God's sake, excuse me this time."

Even a few drops of Spanish blood carries with it appreciation of ceremonious courtesy. My words and the bow with which I accompanied them acted like

magic upon the clamoring rabble. All alike bowed in response, with a great flourishing of greasy, tattered sombreros, and all alike stepped politely aside for me to pass.

The delay had given Alisanda and Doña Dolores several yards' start of me, but they were now sauntering so slowly that nearly all the members of the congregation who had turned in the same direction had gone by them. I followed several paces behind the last chattering, giggling group. As they passed Doña Dolores she dropped her rosary. This I judged was intended as a signal for me to join them. I picked up the string of polished beads, and hastened forward beside their owner.

"Pardon me, madame," I said in French, holding out the rosary, "you dropped your necklace."

"*Santisima Virgen!*" she exclaimed in mock surprise. "They are indeed my beads. *Maria purisima!* it is Señor Robinson! How fortunate that you should have chanced to find them for me, señor!"

I gave no heed to this mischievous raillery, for I was gazing across into the tender eyes of Alisanda. I started to go around beside her.

"*Nada!*" forbade Doña Dolores. "Not so fast, señor. I am the duenna, and I have very sharp eyes. So also have others who are walking in the plaza. You have chanced to find my beads, and are escorting me to the house of Señor Vallois, where your friend, my husband, is to join me at breakfast. Please do not forget that you are escorting me. If you choose to pay compliments to my companion, and I am too deaf to hear anything that is said, who can blame me? Besides, you know I do not understand English."

"Señora, you are an angel!" I exclaimed.

"*Santa Maria!* but that is the truth," she mocked. "Yet do not tell it to me when she is in hearing."

"Dolores! Is this a time for jests?" murmured Alisanda. The señora fell to counting her beads, with the most pious of expressions. My lady addressed me in English: "Dolores knows all, Juan. But it will be easier for you to talk in English, and she will not have to strain her conscience when she next goes to confession. Juan, it was rash to force this meeting."

"Forgive me, dearest one! But I could wait no longer. The interruption of our last

meeting—"

"*Santa Virgen!* that terrible aide! I was stricken dumb with terror when he lunged at you—from the rear! The coward!"

"You saw it?"

"All! all! Juan, dear friend, you must guard yourself—you must be careful! That savage Andalusian! I heard all you said—how you spared him, that I might escape the scandal of a duel beneath my window. Has he challenged you?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet! But he will—he will! Do not fight him with swords, Juan. You told me once that you were not a swordsman. He is the most expert fencer in all these provinces."

"If he is a master, I have a better chance against him as it is than if I were an average swordsman. He will at least not know what I am going to do, as he would know with one who fenced according to rules."

"But he will kill you! No, do not fight him with swords, Juan. Let him challenge you, and be sure you name pistols."

"Would you have me murder the man?" I protested.

"You need not shoot to kill."

"That is true. But, dearest, let us speak of more important matters. You have not yet told me—"

"I wrote of your danger from His Excellency, Juan. Be prudent. Make as few enemies as you can. You have many friends."

"Walker has intimated that I shall gain more friends if I tame this Andalusian bull."

"*Nada!* If the swashbuckler challenges, you must fight, Juan. I know that. But do not force the matter yourself. He stands high in the favor of His Excellency."

"Alisanda," I replied, "you, like all others here, are far too much in fear of this tyrant Governor-General. But rest assured Lieutenant Pike and I comprehend the man and the situation. Should we show the slightest sign of weakness, I at least will at once be flung into prison, if not garrotted. The only course which will

avert the blow is for us to show a bold front."

"Yet a little diplomacy—"

"Trust Lieutenant Pike to attend to the diplomacy. In his direct communications with Salcedo, he will flourish the steel blade in a velvet sheath. Aside from that, we have decided that the bolder our talk and bearing the better."

"Yet consider his absolute power—I fear for you, Juan!"

"What odds of the danger, if I have your love—Alisanda?"

A quick blush leaped into her pale cheeks, and she looked down, in sweet confusion.

"No, no, dear friend," she murmured. "Do not speak of that now. It would be too cruel, if later—Juan, you must see Father Rocus!"

"At once!" I assented.

"Go, then, now! You will find him at the *Parroquia*."

"But first, dearest one—"

"No, no! Go at once. We approach my uncle's house, and it is as well he should not see you."

"Then, if you bid me go, *au revoir!*" I said, stopping short.

She gave me a lingering glance which told all that her lips refused to speak. Doña Dolores dropped her beads and looked up at me with one of her bright, mischievous glances.

"*Santa Maria!* but you do not leave us, señor? You have been so entertaining!"

"And you, señora,—I could not have asked for a kinder duenna."

She muffled a peal of girlish laughter beneath the folds of her *rebozo*, and hurried Alisanda away, fearful, I suppose, that we had attracted too much attention. I wheeled in the opposite direction, and returned to the *Parroquia*. Aside from a few women kneeling here and there before the wall shrines, the great church was now empty. But a young acolyte who came in to arrange the altar very courteously directed me to the parsonage, where, he said, I should find Father Rocus.

When I announced my name at the entrance, the gate porter at once admitted me, and rang a little bell. In a moment who should appear but Chita, my lady's Spanish maid. She courtesied and motioned me to follow her, without betraying the slightest sign of recognition. But the moment we were out of sight of the porter, she paused to whisper:

"*Tsst!* Say nothing. They have sent me here that I might not aid her to see you or write to you. They do not know that the padre is a friend. It is as well that he even does not know how greatly I wish to aid you. Señor, you are a *caballero* and a man, and she loves you. It is right that you should have her, though you be twice over a *heretico*. But she will not wed unless the padre gives his blessing. It is true love between you. If you cannot be a Christian, make pretence. For her sake, bow to the holy images and cross yourself. Deceive the padre—for her sake!"

"No, Chita," I replied. "A *caballero* may lie to save a lady's good name, but not to win her."

"*Peste!* Then you will lose her!"

"We shall see. Lead me in."

She took me into a cosy library, where I found Father Rocus seated in a huge easy-chair, one foot cushioned upon a stool, a glass and decanter at his elbow, and a book of philosophy in his jewelled, white hand.

"*Hola*, Don Juan!" he called at sight of me. "You come in good season. Be seated on the saddle-chair. It will save your new coat-tails a creasing. I will not rise. A touch of the gout, as you see,—the first in months."

"Too much port," I suggested, swinging astride the narrow chair of carved mahogany. "Better take to sour claret for a while."

"*Nada!* not while I can bear the pain. I might pass for an English squire—I cannot forego the port."

"I will write you a prescription that will ease the pain. Nothing will cure you but abstinence."

He drew a wry face between his smiles. "Then I fear my case is hopeless. I am far from being a true Spaniard.—Chita, a glass for Señor Robinson."

The woman fetched and filled a glass while I drew my chair up to the marble-topped table-desk and scribbled a prescription. Father Rocus signed her to go out, and turned to me, still smiling, but with a sharpened glance.

"So you have already followed my advice and come to mass," he said.

"Your Reverence has a keen eye," I replied. "It seemed to me I kept close behind my pillar."

"Men are not numerous at early mass. Brawny, six-foot *caballeros* in European dress are not seen every week. Lastly, this one has blonde hair. A glimpse was enough and to spare. You talked with her?"

"She has sent me to you."

"Hum," he considered. "First of all, this Medina affair. Let him do the challenging. She says you do not fence. 'Twould be butchery for you to meet him with swords."

"That is a small matter, padre. What I wish to know—"

"Is whether you can conscientiously become a Christian," he put in.

"No, padre. That is not the question. It is of no use for me to hedge. I know I cannot become what you call a Christian. My religious principles are too near those of our famous President, Thomas Jefferson."

"Jefferson—that atheist!" he exclaimed, frowning.

"Not so, padre," I insisted with much earnestness. "It is an injustice to term Mr. Jefferson an atheist."

"And you?" he demanded.

"Your Reverence, I differ from most men of the age in this: I am content to leave creeds and ceremonies to the theologians; to walk as upright a life as lies within my power; and to trust in the great Author of all to judge my deeds with the clemency of a father for his child."

"You do not acknowledge God's vicar?"

"I have not the faith which enables me to believe your dogmas. It is no use to argue, padre. I am already sufficiently informed to know that a man of my refractory mentality cannot accept many of the fundamentals of your faith,—and

I will not make false pretence by complying with the outward form."

Instead of flushing with anger, as I had expected, he looked grieved. It was apparent that my position was a bitter disappointment to him. For several minutes he sat gazing at the crucifix on the wall across, in sorrowful meditation, forgetful even of his wine.

"Padre," I at last said. "I love her with a love that dwells much upon my own happiness, but more upon hers. I now know she loves me. Do you not think such love God's will?"

He crossed himself. "God give me light! I am not among those who believe that the love of man and woman is of necessity an impure desire. God, not Satan, made Eve to be a companion unto Adam. Therefore true love is sacred in the eyes of God, and marriage a sacrament."

"In effect, if not in form, Your Reverence, that is the belief and practice of my people. With us a wife is the dear life companion who shares our triumphs and our defeats, our joys and sorrows, who brightens our pleasures, purifies and ennobles our impulses, and inspires us with the highest aspirations."

"Such, alas! is not the attitude of my people toward women," he sighed. "Yet to give a daughter of the Church to a heretic! *Santisima Virgen!* It is a knotty problem."

"To me, or to such a man as Medina," I argued—"which would be the greater sin?"

"Her uncle is set upon giving her, not to Medina, but to one as bad—one as bad!" he repeated. "My son—my son! if you could but become a Christian!"

"God gave me my reason, padre. If it is wrong to use my reason as I use it, I trust that He will forgive the error."

"You are a true, clean man, and you love her as no man in New Spain can love her."

"I do, padre."

"Yet it is against the canons of Holy Church—to give a true believer to an outright heretic!"

"She should be free to believe and practise her religion without change," I argued.

"True, but the children?" he demanded. "How as to the children?"

The wine spilled from my upraised glass, and I bent my head quickly aside to hide the strange emotion which overcame me. Children! Never had my thoughts dared roam so far into the future. Children—my children and hers! From the depths of my heart there gushed up such a flood of tenderness and adoration that I could not speak.

Despite his gouty toe, he came around before me, and with a finger beneath my chin, raised my head until he could look down into my eyes. Whether or not he read my thoughts I do not know. But I do know that he raised his hands above me and gave me his benediction.

"Padre," I murmured as he drew back a little way, "believe me, if I could do what you wish—"

"Swear that your children shall be raised in the Church," he demanded.

"I cannot swear that, padre. It would be against my conscience."

"Your word is enough."

"Nor that. But if this will satisfy you, I give you my word that she shall decide upon the rearing of—of our children throughout childhood."

"Good!" he exclaimed, again all smiles. "You have won me over, my son. Let us hope I may aid you to overcome your graver difficulties."

"Her uncle—Don Pedro?" I asked.

"Beyond hope, I fear, Juan. Yet I will try. For the present we must avoid that problem, and bend every effort to mollify one who sits in a high place."

"Outface, not mollify," I returned. "Lieutenant Pike and myself are resolved to show him how fully we rely upon our country to defend, and, if need be, to revenge us. We have already pointed out to those who will bear our words to His Excellency the fact that the Floridas are within easy striking distance of our turbulent frontiersmen."

"*Por Dios!* You dared send such a message to Salcedo?"

"You may call it a message. We spoke in the presence of Lieutenant Walker. Nor is it the only one. Since the first, we have been loading him with similar information."

"Yet Salcedo has not incarcerated you? *Poder de Dios!* It is a miracle!"

"Rather, it is merely that we have outfaced him."

"God gave you the wisdom to be bold! Yet the danger is by no means past. He may free your companions, but detain you for years, as he has detained the men of Captain Nolan."

"I could fancy a harsher fate, padre. To remain a prisoner, yet have Alisanda to comfort my captivity—"

He raised his hand warningly at the sound of sandalled feet scraping along the brick pavement of the corridor.

"Let us hope for the best, my son. Go now, and God be with you!"

I thanked him with a glance, and hastened out past the withered old priest who was shuffling across the threshold.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DEFEAT

That afternoon, immediately after the siesta, Pike and I received the first fruits of our course of action with regard to the Government. Malgares came to us from His Excellency, bearing a most urbane and ceremonious message. The Governor-General expressed himself as more than pleased to supply us with the official loan for which Pike had applied, and offered to render us any and all other service which lay within his power. Pike returned mellifluous thanks, while I looked at Walker and smiled.

In the evening we accompanied Malgares to the south border of the town, where we found a delightful promenade beneath the intertwining boughs of a triple row of fine trees. Here gathered the society of Chihuahua, to loll in the many seats or saunter to and fro, the gentlemen with their *cigarros*, the ladies with their fans, and few of either sex indisposed toward an exchange of ardent glances. All displayed the utmost graciousness toward the *Americano* guests of the Government, and, as usual, we found ourselves highly entertained.

Among the ladies were Señora Vallois and Señora Malgares, and I was pleased that Pike was introduced to them by their husbands. We met many other ladies, but, with one exception, there was none other than Señora Vallois whose husband was sufficiently free from the old Moorish ideas about women to permit his wife to keep a *salon*. Needless to say, this gave me little concern. I was far too disappointed over the absence of Alisanda.

When Don Pedro introduced Pike, I asked Doña Marguerite if my friend might not have the pleasure of meeting her niece. She replied, in a most gracious tone, that he should meet her as soon as we called, but that this evening the señorita was indisposed and would not be present. A little later, when the company assembled in the circular seat at the end of the promenade, Doña Dolores found an opportunity to slip me a note.

With the missive in my pocket I could not enjoy the voluptuous love songs which the company sang in solo and chorus. I slipped away, in the midst, while Medina was airing his really fine tenor. A torch at the first gateway gave me light

to read my lady's note. It was short, but, alas! too much to the point:—

"We were seen in the plaza. They are not angry, but are resolved to keep us apart. To save myself the shame of lock and key, I have promised not to see you for a week. Be patient, for I must keep my word, and our friends are not idle."

That was all, but it was enough to fill me with bitter disappointment. That she would keep her word with scrupulous honor I had not the slightest doubt. Yet how was I to endure a week without so much as a glimpse of her?

Nevertheless we often suffer burdens which at first seem unbearable, and I was strengthened to play a good part by the knowledge that my words and manner would be reported upon in detail to Don Pedro and Doña Marguerite. To mislead them with regard to the depth and resolution of my passion, I managed to go about to our many dinners and calls with a smiling face and merry words.

During the week we again dined with Salcedo, who this time was hardly less urbane to myself than to the Lieutenant. We both, however, received greater enjoyment from our dinner at the house of Colonel Mayron, the father-in-law of Malgares. There was present an officer from the Province of Texas who was able to give us many correct details as to the fiasco of Colonel Burr.

Among other things, we now learned that the Colonel had been arrested at Bayou Pierre in mid January, but had been released because of the failure of the grand jury to bring in a true bill against him. Later he had fled through the Cherokee nation toward the Spanish port of Mobile. But it was rumored that had been captured in Alabama during February, and was to be taken to Richmond, Virginia, for trial. This news from home in part consoled me for the fact that Doña Dolores had no missive for me from Alisanda.

We returned to Walker's quarters, and were still discussing Burr, when, soon after the siesta, Malgares called by for us in his coach. We drove around past several points of interest which we had not before viewed, and then, without a word of warning from Malgares, suddenly cut across the plaza to the mansion of Don Pedro.

When we stopped before the entrance the great gate was flung wide open for Malgares to drive into the court. Instead he left his spirited bays in the charge of a groom, and led us in afoot. When we came to the court he dropped back beside Pike. I followed in the rear, wondering what would be the nature of my reception

by Don Pedro and his señora, and whether I should be permitted to see Alisanda in the presence of her relatives.

These questions were soon answered. The moment we appeared Don Pedro hailed us from the head of the stairway and hastened down to welcome us. His manner to me was quite as cordial as it had ever been, and when he led us up into the *sala*, Señora Vallois was no less pleasant. Alisanda was not present. But immediately after our hostess had invited us to be seated, she pulled what I presume must have been a bell-cord. Within half a minute Chita appeared at one of the inner doorways.

Doña Marguerite signed to her and called quickly: "Go, tell your mistress we should be pleased to have her join us. We have guests of her acquaintance and also Lieutenant Pike, whom I particularly wish to introduce."

Chita gave me a blank stare, and disappeared. Malgares smiled at my heightened color, and Pike looked about, with a twinkle in his blue eyes that belied his solemn face. Yet I managed to force my gaze away from the inner doorway, and even joined in the conversation with some lightness. In the midst of a sentence, I saw Pike's eyes suddenly widen and glow with admiration. By that I knew Alisanda had entered the *sala*, and I could not resist the impulse to turn about.

It was small wonder my friend stared fascinated and that Malgares uttered a quick exclamation of delight. Alisanda stood before us in the costume she had worn at the Blennerhassets'. Her loveliness was overpowering—intoxicating! No Grecian goddess could have exceeded her in grace of movement and exquisite modelling of form, while the beauty of her pale, oval face, with its wondrous eyes and luscious lips and crown of sable tresses, was beyond all compare.

Regardless of Spanish etiquette, I hastened to her side. She rewarded me with a glance of adorable tenderness, and took my arm that I might lead her down the long apartment to where the others were grouped. Don Pedro frowned at my presumption, but the señora could not resist a smile at my ready gallantry as I led up her niece to be presented to Pike. Their first remarks opened a conversation as lively as it was elevated in tone, and I took a seat to one side, eager for my lady and my friend each to discover the wit and fine sentiments and high breeding of the other.

But neither I, nor, I fancy, our host and hostess had bargained on the fervor of the Lieutenant's partisanship for me. Without ceasing to render the most delicate of compliments to my lady, he adroitly turned the conversation upon myself. Such a

panegyric as he bestowed upon me I had not thought it possible even for his fond bias to contrive. A man may deserve some praise for his character, since that is acquired, but why give him credit for the qualities of temperament with which he was born?

Notwithstanding my embarrassment, it was most blissful to watch my dear girl flush and glow, and to see her lovely eyes glisten with love and pride, as Pike went on and on, contriving to cast a glamour over the most commonplace of my qualities and deeds. As may be surmised, my feelings were directly opposite to those which racked Don Pedro and Doña Marguerite. Nothing, I imagine, could have given them greater annoyance than this pouring of the oil of incense upon the flame of my lady's love. Yet Pike swept gallantly on, innocent of all offence, while our host and hostess turned steadily colder beneath their forced smiles, and I flushed hotter with blissful shame, and Malgares lolled back, with a *cigarrito* between his fingers, his fine face impassive, but his eyes drinking all in with utmost amusement.

At last, after one or two vain efforts to divert the conversation, Doña Marguerite asked Malgares if he was not intending to take us around to see our other friends. The hint was unmistakable. As we rose to leave, our hostess deftly interposed the rampart of her plump figure between Alisanda and myself. Our parting was restricted to a single exchange of glances.

That I should leave with this and no more was beyond my endurance. As we bowed to Don Pedro at the head of the stairway, a sudden resolve came to me. I signed to the others to go on, and addressed our host: "Señor, my friends will pardon my desertion of them. I desire the favor of a private talk with you."

The frown which had creased his forehead at my first word vanished at the last. He had thought I intended to ask for a private interview with Alisanda.

"At your service, Don Juan," he at once responded.

I drew aside until he had bowed my friends down the stairway and out of sight. He then turned to me, with a grave smile, and, taking my arm, led me away from the *sala* to his private cabinet, a small but elegantly furnished room in the far corner of the mansion. But I was not interested in the paintings by Titian, Velasquez, and Murillo which decorated the rough-plastered walls, and to which he called my attention with excusable pride.

"Señor," I said, "these pictures are beautiful,—they show the skill of master

artists. But my whole being thrills with the matchless beauty and grace of a living work of art,—the masterpiece of the Master of masters, of God Himself!"

"Juan!" he cried, "forgive me! I know now how you love her. Yet it is impossible. If I dared give way to my personal regard for you, you should have her. Believe me, I speak only the truth. But my country—for the sake of its freedom, its welfare, I am resolved to give all—even her!"

"Even her!" I answered. "Then give her to me! I will fight for your country,—I will pledge my life in the cause of freedom! What more can you ask? Your country shall be my country; your cause my cause!"

"No, Juan, it cannot be!" he replied, and his sigh proved that his regret was real. "You would add strength to our cause, but not what may be gained elsewhere. There are men in New Spain who, if they joined the revolution, could singly bring over whole provinces."

"You would give her to another!—as a bribe to win the support of another!—when you know she loves me?"

"God bear me witness, it is not for myself but for my country. What a small price to pay—the disappointment of two lovers—in turn for the freedom and happiness of millions!"

"It is not your heart you would break," I retorted.

"Do you then believe I can look upon her grief and yours without sorrow?"

"Let another pay the price!"

"There is none other as precious—none other that can win him over. All turns upon her beauty and charm. He whose aid I am resolved to gain by the bestowal of her hand can be won only by the most lovely woman in New Spain. And he is one whose leadership would at once bring us the support of all the land, from across the borders of the Viceroyalty to Santa Fe."

I stood dumb, staring at him in deepening despair.

"Juan, can you not look at the matter through my eyes?" he urged. "The time is ripe. There are rumors that the Corsican is preparing to clutch Old Spain out of the feeble grasp of King Ferdinand. It is well known that the revenues from our mines have already for a long time been flowing through the Spanish treasury

into the coffers of France. Our people are fast losing faith in Old World rulership. They hate and fear the French."

"Then let them rebel and win freedom with their blood, as did my people. A people who would buy liberty by the sale of a helpless girl are worthy only of utter slavery."

He flushed a dull red beneath his swarthy skin, yet kept his temper well in hand.

"You do not understand, Juan. Listen. It is now only ten years since the people of the Viceroyalty rose and proclaimed the Viceroy, Barnardo Count of Galvez, King of Mexico. In his misguided loyalty, Barnardo crushed the insurrection with merciless vigor,—for which he was duly honored and then duly poisoned by his royal master. Had he been wise, he would to-day be ruling over a freed country of devoted subjects. But that revolution came to naught; the vast projects of your discredited statesman Aaron Burr have failed most miserably; and now we lovers of liberty here are left to do the best we can with our unaided strength."

"And the purchasing power of divine and innocent beauty!" I cried.

"So be it!" he replied, with a hardness of determination which I realized all my anger and despair could not move a hair's-breadth. Yet as he went on, his voice quivered with unfeigned commiseration for my suffering. "Juan!—Juan! If I could sell my soul instead, and thereby save her for you, I would do it. The thought of her anguish rends my very heart cords! Yet it cannot be. She alone can win over the second Galvez who shall free my country."

There was nothing more to be said. Death alone can bend the course of a good and strong man turned fanatic. Without a word I left the room, half crazed with rage and black despair. He followed, murmuring words of sorrowful regret; but to me his heart-felt condolences seemed only the bitterest of mockeries.

As I descended the stairway, I looked back, not to return his grave bows, but in search of my lady. It was in vain. Doña Marguerite had taken care to spirit her away. Heavy-footed, I dragged myself out into the street and away from that hateful gateway.

Before I could reach the plaza, I heard a sudden rumble of wheels and thud of hoofs, and there swirled into the street a grand coach and six that all but ran me down. I flung myself clear of the trampling hoofs, but the forewheel of the huge

gilded carriage grazed my leg as I pressed back against the nearest wall.

A few strides of the splendid horses whirled the coach upstreet to the gateway I had just left. There the driver pulled up with a flourish, and the footmen sprang down to stand at the heads of the horses and to open the coach door, from which stepped—Medina!

It flashed upon me that this was the man to whom my lady was to be bartered. I turned on my heel to rush back and challenge him. But from the manner in which he stood to one side, I perceived he had not come alone. A moment later Don Pedro appeared in the gateway and stepped to the side of the coach, bowing profoundly. A hand was reached out to him, and from the coach descended, not the young gallant whom I looked to see, but stern-faced, gray-haired Nimesio Salcedo.

Greatly puzzled, I turned again and walked slowly to our quarters, striving to discern an opening through the meshes of intrigue in which Alisanda and I had become entangled. What could be the meaning of this visit of the Governor-General to one who I knew had reason to detest and fear him? And if, as it seemed to me Don Pedro had intimated, he intended to win over the Viceroy Iturrigaray by the offer of Alisanda's hand, why had he not already taken her to the City of Mexico, or stopped there on his way from Vera Cruz?



CHAPTER XXVII

HEART TO HEART

One result of my pondering of the tangled situation was the resolve to keep from my friend all that concerned myself alone. He had enough and to spare of anxieties and difficulties over the safety of himself and his men, without becoming involved in my private affairs. At the least, his concern for my safety and happiness would have tended to interfere with the observations and notes which we hoped would be of such great value to our country.

The following morning being Sunday, I went early to the *Parroquia*, thinking to visit Father Rocus, should I fail to meet Alisanda again. This last was barely within the bounds of my fondest expectations, and I was accordingly more grieved than surprised when she failed to appear. As I was going out, a few minutes before the close of the service, a rather well-dressed woman in the archway mumbled an appeal for alms.

Struck by her lack of dirt and tatters, I stopped. She repeated her appeal, this time in a clear tone, though without opening the veiling folds of her *rebozo*. It seemed to me I recognized the voice of Chita. At once I held out a coin to her. In reaching for it, she covered my hand with the edge of her *rebozo*, beneath which I felt a note being slipped into my palm.

She turned away, with a shrill blessing upon the generous *Inglese*, while I dropped my half-closed hand to my side, thrust it into my pocket and left the note, to draw out a copper for the foremost of the wretched *leprosos* who came flocking about the rich foreigner. This time I was provided with a quantity of the smallest coins of the realm, and scattered two or three handfuls to right and left. While the beggars swarmed after the coppers like a flock of fowls over their grain, I slipped around the nearest corner of the church to read my precious note. It was short but full of promise:—

"Do not go to the promenade. Feign illness. The *Parroquia* at nine o'clock to-night."

The *Parroquia*?—at nine in the evening? It was an appointment to meet her! Yet

how could she escape the watchful eyes of Doña Marguerite and Don Pedro, even should they, as was most improbable, take her out to the promenade?

However, I concluded that I could safely trust to her wit and courage to bring about the meeting. My problem was how to fill the weary hours and minutes which lay between. I wandered aimlessly about the city, stopping now and then to watch the gambling with dice and cards, which, though prohibited by His Excellency, is too deeply seated in the natures of these people to be eradicated.

Intense as were these games, where men and even women staked their little all with passionate abandon, the excitement was far greater and the betting higher at the numerous cock-fights. I looked on at one,—which was enough and to spare. Man has a right to kill for food, but none other than the cruel and brutal enjoys the torment of his fellow creatures.

A gay dinner at the house of Doña Maria Cabrera helped to pass over the day until the siesta. But throughout the long hours of the afternoon rest I could only lie and swelter and eat up my heart with longing and anxiety. So heated and restless did I become that when Walker waked he inquired whether I had a fever.

This gave me my opening, and I stated my condition at some length, in medical language which impressed him much while telling him nothing. Even Pike was deceived by my statement, but I assured him that I should be quite well by morning if I abstained from the usual round of calls and the evening in the promenade. After condoling with me and explaining my indisposition to the numerous friends who called, they at last heeded my request for quiet, and went off to spread the news of my illness.

Between then and the twilight, the few who called were permitted to peep in and see me dozing on my mattress, with my head swathed about in wet towels. But after *la oracion*, old Cæsar had his orders to stop all on the threshold of the outer room, and explain that I was not to be disturbed.

A full hour before the time set, I borrowed one of Walker's circular cloaks, and shadowed my face in my wide sombrero. After explaining to Cæsar that I needed a breath of fresh air, but that he should say nothing about my absence unless his master or Lieutenant Pike came in before my return, I slipped out, unseen by any one else.

The moon having risen, I had need of care to cross the plaza without attracting attention. Fortunately it was too early for an encounter with the soldiers of the

night patrols, who would have required me to give my countersign. Arriving at the *Parroquia*, I stationed myself in the dense shadow around the corner of the farther tower, and waited with such scant patience as I could command.

Now and then persons passed by in the plaza, singly or in couples or in groups. None caught sight of me, yet I could see them with perfect distinctness, and as I considered this, I was seized with the fear that Alisanda would inevitably be detected before she could reach my side.

From the first I had kept my gaze fixed in the direction of the Vallois mansion, and had watched with eagerness the approach of all the gowned figures that came either alone or in pairs. As the time drew near, I became more restless and could not keep so steady a watch. More than once I had to turn to look about at all quarters of the plaza.

It was during one of these chance glances that I was astonished to see my lady approaching the church from the direction of the promenade. She was accompanied by Father Rocus and Chita.

When they came opposite me, I ventured a slight cough, but they went by without stopping. It was otherwise with a group of young gallants, who paused to stare at the graceful figure of my lady until she and the padre and Chita had disappeared into the yawning entrance of the *Parroquia*. The young beaux had at once guessed the identity of the señorita, notwithstanding her veiling mantilla, and they stood within twenty feet of me, discussing her lovely charms as we would name over the fine points of a pedigreed horse.

Meanwhile I fretted and fumed, in a swelter of impatience. No doubt my lady was waiting for me and wondering at my delay! At last I was on the point of stepping out boldly to follow her, when Chita came scuffling out of the church, bent over like an old crone. She passed the young men, muttering and grumbling, and tottered half sideways around into the shadow. I caught her outstretched hand, and she led me quickly back along the flank of the towering edifice.

We stopped before the dim outline of a little door. Chita tapped upon the panel, and stepped away a few paces, to stand with her back to me. A moment later the door swung open, without a sound, and a dark figure appeared.

"Alisanda!" I whispered.

"Juan!" she replied, stepping nearer.

Ah, the rapture of that moment! Hers was no half love, to shrink with false shame. As I clasped her in my arms, her own arms slipped about my neck in tender embrace, and her lips met mine in a kiss of purest passion. Our hearts throbbed together in ecstasy. She drew back her head to gaze at me through the shadow.

"Juan! Juan! my knight! Oh, the joy of leaning upon your dear breast! I could swoon for joy!"

"Tell me you love me!" I demanded.

"Juan! Can you doubt it? Could you have doubted it from the first—the very first? There in the midst of that miry avenue, when I looked out the coach window into the windows of your soul,—then it was, my knight—"

"Then?" I questioned, my astonishment as great as my delight—"then, dearest heart? You perceived the love, the adoration which filled my whole being at my first view of your lovely face! You knew I would serve you and love you forever after!"

"No, dear. I knew you loved me that moment. But I did not know you. I was very proud—I am still very proud. The blood of kings flows in my veins. I had vowed I should wed none other than one of kingly blood. I shall not break that vow."

"Yet my arms are about you, Alisanda. See, I draw you still closer to my heart; I kiss your adorable lips!"

As I eased my embrace a little, she sighed, and her head sank upon my shoulder.

"Wait, dearest," she murmured. "Such ecstasy goes beyond my strength."

"Alisanda!" I exclaimed, "tell me—you do love me—this is not a dream! I know you are in my arms, yet it is unbelievable—it is not possible that you—!"

"Juan, my king!" she answered.

"That?"

"Yes, that! I believe in nobility of birth, for in that belief I was born and reared. But you have taught me a new belief; you have opened my eyes to see that there are men who are their own ancestors,—men so true and brave and chivalrous

that they are kings among their fellows, whatever their birth."

"Beloved," I said, "do not mistake. I am as other men. It was only the love you inspired that gave me strength to win you. I am but an average man. Yet with your love—with your dear self to glorify life for me, it may be I can rise above the average."

"My king," she repeated, woman-like, unmoved by the plain reason of my statement.

"We have no kings in the Republic," I argued.

"But I have a king in my heart! Ah, Juan, if you but knew the fulness of your conquest! Love was in my heart from the first. Love can creep through keyholes. But pride barred the way against your entrance. Did I not mock you and scorn you and look coldly upon you? Yet Love forced me to give you the fighting chance, to put you to the test."

"That was the mystery—the secret of your eyes!" I exclaimed.

"And you had the courage to guess aright, to persevere against all my scorn and hauteur, to cross the barrier of rock and the barrier of pride and birth, into my heart, Juan!"

"Forever in your heart, as you in mine!"

"Forever!"

"When will you wed me, dearest one?"

At the words she quivered and sought to draw away, but I held her fast. "No, Alisanda! I cannot release you until you have told me. When shall we be married?"

"Ah, Juan!" she sighed. "How can I answer you? I fear that it will be never!"

"Never!"

"My uncle has asked me to sacrifice myself for the sake of the revolution."

"By marrying the Viceroy?"

"No!"

"No?—Then whom?"

"The Governor-General."

"Him—Salcedo?—that old tyrant?"

"It is my uncle's wish. He says it would free millions of people, my countrymen."

"Your countrymen? You come from Old Spain! No! And what if that man should sell himself for your beauty? Could such a man be trusted? Yet suppose he held true to his pledge to lead the revolution, and suppose the revolution should triumph, would it not be the triumph of Salcedo? Would this wretched land be less oppressed under Salcedo the King than under Salcedo the Governor-General? Answer me, Alisanda Vallois. You know the man!"

"*Madre de los Dolores!*—And I would have made the sacrifice for that! Juan, you have given me an answer to my uncle's plea. He may break my heart, but he shall not force me to marry against my wish. Rather than that, I will take the veil."

"Become a nun?" I protested.

"If I may not marry you, Juan."

"But you will marry me, Alisanda—you must!"

"How can I, dear? You have yet to cross the gulf."

"Father Rocus—" I began.

"He has spoken for you on that, yet admits a doubt. Can I wed you while I still think of it as a sin—a marriage against God's will?"

A sudden great fear embittered my rapture and dashed me to the earth.

"Alisanda," I pleaded, "is not our love true love? Can such love be wrong in the sight of God?"

"I have prayed the Virgin for hours without answer to that," she sighed. "And when the holy priest admits a doubt—If I do not come to you with a clear conscience, Juan, I shall be unworthy of your love."

"Leave that to me to judge!"

"No. We must wait, my knight. Rest assured I will not wed another than yourself. Be patient. A few days may see the cutting of the knot. That dangerous man Medina has wormed himself into the council of the revolutionists. It would be like him to turn traitor, and demand me as his price for not betraying the plot."

"Your uncle will give you to him to save his own life!"

"You do my uncle an injustice. He would sooner die. No; I was to be given to Salcedo for the sake of this oppressed land. My uncle would die rather than force misery upon me for other than the sacred cause of liberty."

"I have opened your eyes to the peril of trusting Salcedo. Now what is to be done?"

"Should Medina threaten, my uncle must flee from New Spain."

"Taking you with him! The world is large, dearest one, but wherever he may take you, I will follow."

"If you escape Salcedo!" she whispered, and I felt her tremble.

Before I could answer, the voice of Father Rocus murmured from the little doorway: "My children, you must part now. I brought you away on the plea of faintness, my daughter. I must take you in for a glass of wine, that my servant may bear witness with a clear conscience, and then we must hasten home with you before the return of your kinsfolk."

"But when shall I see her again, padre?" I begged, clinging to my love as she clung to me.

"*Sabe Dios!—Quien sabe?*" he returned. "We will each and all do what we can. Now we must hasten, for if my share in this be discovered, I shall lose all power to help you."

Reason compelled me to bend to this argument. I strained Alisanda to me, and we exchanged a parting kiss. Chita came up beside us, and the moment I released her mistress, hurried her to the envious doorway.



CHAPTER XXVIII

A SPANISH BALL

Fortunately I did not know that before me lay a full week of useless scheming and vain longing. Though we went about visiting and dining as usual, even two evenings at Colonel Mayron's failed to bring me the slightest relief from my suspense. Alisanda was kept in such seclusion that even Doña Dolores could not reach her.

On the other hand, Salcedo called twice at the Vallois mansion and took with him Medina. This caused me the most intense anxiety. I was sure of Alisanda's constancy, and yet did not know what pressure their casuistic minds might bring to bear against her will.

As to this Father Rocus might have enlightened me, had I not feared to compromise him by a second visit. It would need only the slightest shadow of a suspicion to put Don Pedro and his señora on their guard against the padre. Also I relied upon His Reverence to inform me in some secret manner at the first change in the situation.

Another Sunday roused in me the wild hope of a second meeting with my lady. But though I fairly haunted the *Parroquia* throughout the forenoon, I received no notes and saw nothing of my friends. Even Father Rocus was absent. A casually spoken question at dinner brought me the information that he was suffering a slight attack of gout.

Pike, ever eager for the display of my small skill as a physician, immediately urged upon me to offer my services to the padre. This was seconded by Walker and the half-dozen guests present with us at table, for it appeared that Father Rocus was a general favorite in Chihuahua, from the mighty Salcedo down to the lowliest *leproso*. After much insistence on the part of the others, I at last agreed to call upon the padre and prescribe for him.

Our little dinner, though frugal, was a merry one, for our host and the guests were in high spirits over the prospect of a *baile*, or ball, that evening. Though this ball was given at the house of a family we had not previously visited, Walker took Pike and myself as a matter of course.

When we arrived we found most of the *élite* of the city already assembled in the large ballroom. Indeed, the first couple upon whom I set eyes were Doña Dolores Malgares and His Excellency, Don Nimesio Salcedo, Commandant-General of the Internal Provinces of the Kingdom of New Spain, whirling about in a Spanish dance that displayed far more liveliness than dignity.

We were duly presented to our hostess, and made our compliments; after which Pike plunged into the whirl with all the zest of his gallant nature. I drew apart, to overlook the gay scene in search of my lady. Not that I had much hope of seeing her, but I had learned that almost anything seemed possible in this land of intrigue.

At once I was challenged from all sides by brilliant-eyed señoras and señoritas. But even had I wished to take one as partner, I was unacquainted with the now spirited, now voluptuous measures of this peculiar Spanish dance. Pike, daring at all times and in all places, was attempting the step with the aid of a plump and kindly señorita.

I was more than content to keep back and look on, while my ears drank in the seductive melody of mingled guitar and violin and singing voices which floated down the ballroom from the stand of the musicians. Both the oddness and the agreeableness of this music was enhanced when at certain intervals the guests joined in the singing.

Confusing as was the whirl of the dance, I soon identified all present who were known to me, the first turn of the dancers bringing me a smile from my stately friend Malgares and a hostile stare from Lieutenant Medina. The dread to which the latter had reduced many of his fellow-officers was evident from the manner in which the young subaltern who had pressed up beside me shrank away at the first glance of the aide's baleful little eyes.

Wondering how soon Medina would force a duel upon me, I drifted idly up the room and back toward the entrance. No more guests had arrived since ourselves, and I had given over all hope of seeing Alisanda. But as I approached the Moorish arch of the ballroom doorway I caught a glimpse of Don Pedro in the anteroom. It took me only a few moments to gain the doorway. The close group of young officers about Don Pedro convinced me that my lady was with him. I thrust myself unceremoniously into their midst. Doña Marguerite sought to interpose, but, with a bow, I slipped around her, and bent to salute the hand which Alisanda held out to me. I was relieved to see that, like the rest of the

ladies present, she was dressed in the Spanish national mode, and also that she seemed in good health and spirits.

"God keep you, *amigo!*" she said in a clear voice.

"*Muchas gracias*, señorita! May I beg the honor of your first dance?"

"It is yours, señor," she responded.

The other men fell away as she took my arm. Don Pedro stepped forward as though to interpose, but desisted at a sign from Doña Marguerite. I entered the ballroom with colors flying and the loveliest girl in all the world upon my arm. For the moment Fortune was with me. The Spanish dance had reached an end, and the musicians were striking up a waltz. Nothing could have suited me better. Dancing was one of my few accomplishments, and it was the very poetry of love and life to circle about the long room with my darling in my arms, in rhythm to the pulsing throb of the sweetest and softest of music.

It was no more than human that my bliss should key yet higher with a tang of triumph as I glided with my lovely partner under the nose of the scowling Salcedo and past the lowering visage of his Andalusian aide. It might be that I was to meet my death from one or the other of them, but for the time at least I was the happiest man beneath heaven. I was in Paradise.

Before I was forced to relinquish her to Doña Marguerite at the stopping of the music, I received my dear girl's pledge to give me all the waltzes of the evening. More she dared not promise for fear of the interference of her aunt. As may be imagined, it was a severe trial to see her led out by another partner, even though she accepted Pike instead of Medina for the voluptuous *fandango* and though Doña Dolores contrived to pilot me into the set in which my lady danced the minuet as partner to His Excellency, Don Nimesio.

Before the close of the *baile*, Medina's persistence and his open warning off of the other officers won him two dances, strive as my lady would to avoid him. But even he lacked the assurance to interfere with Salcedo's marked attentions, and, for the rest, Pike, Malgares, and myself contrived to foil him in every attempt, with the two exceptions mentioned. For myself, I had the divine joy of dancing every waltz with my lady, and it did not lessen my rapture that Medina followed us each time with a gaze which would have struck me dead had it possessed the power.

Such bliss could not last. All too soon the ball began to draw to a close, and when I came to lead out Alisanda for the last waltz, Doña Marguerite interposed with the statement that they were about to leave. Making the best of the situation, I claimed and was granted the privilege of escorting my darling to the coach. Such complaisance on the part of her duenna astonished me. I could account for it only on the supposition that Señora Vallois thought to spur on Salcedo's ardor and jealousy by the sight of a favored suitor.

However that may have been, the last of my successes of the evening still farther infuriated the truculent Medina. It is not improbable he would have challenged me that night had not my failure to obtain a word apart with Alisanda induced me to follow the Vallois coach all the way across the city.

Watching from the corner of the plaza, I saw the coach roll in between the wide-flung gates of the Vallois mansion. I waited perhaps half an hour, then stole silently up the street to my black doorway, across from her balcony, and began to murmur the song which had twice brought me a response from her. Almost immediately a light appeared behind the drawn hangings. I started forward eagerly, only to check myself and step back into the denser darkness of my lurking place. A hand had parted the curtains, and between them appeared the frowning face of Don Pedro.

I went home, if not in as black a mood as Medina, at least not disposed to kindly thoughts toward my enemies.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE INSULT

As chance would have it, Medina and I did not again meet for four or five days. In the meantime the Lieutenant and I were astonished to receive the report that an American officer had arrived in Vera Cruz some weeks since, and had been permitted to start for the City of Mexico. What could be his mission and why the Viceroy should allow him to travel through the midst of his territories was a puzzle we tried in vain to solve.

The same day I called upon Father Rocus, as I had promised, but saw him only for a few minutes and in the presence of two other priests. This, as I took it, was intended on his part as a precaution against suspicion of his friendliness. That he had no news for me was evident from his not passing me a note, though three or four opportunities offered for him to do so without detection.

A few days later I had a still greater surprise than the mystery of the envoy to Mexico. It came in the form of an invitation for the Lieutenant and myself to dine at Don Pedro's. Hope, ever unquenchable in the heart of a lover, told me that the don had repented of his harsh patriotism and was thinking to save his niece from a fate worse than death. Never was a lover more bitterly disappointed! Don Pedro and Doña Marguerite received us with the most suave and cordial hospitality—but Alisanda did not appear.

In answer to the Lieutenant's inquiries, Doña Marguerite explained, with affected regret, that Señorita Alisanda was indisposed, and so could not join us. I needed no more to assure me that the dear girl was under restraint. What I could not understand was why I should have been invited to dine.

The nearest I could come to an explanation was a repeated assurance from Don Pedro that he and his friends were doing their utmost to persuade Salcedo that it would be advisable to hurry me out of the country with my fellow members of the expedition. This I took as an intimation that our host still regarded me as a friend, but that the sooner I was sent away from Chihuahua the more pleased he would be. When we left, shortly before the beginning of the siesta, I had not been favored with so much as a glimpse of my lady, nor even of Chita.

That evening we went to bid farewell to Colonel Mayron, who had been ordered to a command in Soñora. Doña Dolores had no word for me other than her assurance that I might rely upon the constancy of Alisanda. Of that I was already certain, yet it pleased me to receive the confirmation of the fact from her true friend.

On the other hand, I experienced a kind of savage joy when Malgares took occasion to draw me aside and warn me that Medina was looking for the first opportunity to force a duel. I made no other reply than to request that every effort be made to keep Pike in ignorance of my private troubles, and to ask Malgares to act as my second.

Being at such a disadvantage with the Government, I thought it as well to refrain from explaining that Medina would not need to force me very hard to reach an issue. Also I feared that a display of eagerness on my part might cause even so noted a duellist as the aide to hesitate, and I had become desperately desirous to break the blockade of events.

Medina did not keep me waiting long. The following afternoon he found his opportunity in a message to us from Salcedo. As an officer, he was careful to attend first to his official business, which proved to be of a character well suited to his temper. I happened to be in one of the rear rooms when Walker ushered him in to where Pike was thumbing over his beloved Pope's "Essay on Man."

Recognizing Medina's carefully modulated voice, I lingered to adjust my cravat with an extra touch. When I entered, the Lieutenant was in the midst of a reply to some remark by the aide: "—Therefore, Mr. Robinson and I have considered ourselves at liberty to discuss what we pleased, and as we pleased."

Medina met my half bow with a scowl.

"May I inquire the purpose of our distinguished guest's presence with us?" I asked.

"He brings word from the Governor-General that it is high time we put on muzzles," replied Pike, with one of his rare flashes of anger.

"*Por Dios!*" I mocked. "Can it be Don Nimesio Salcedo does not admire our teeth?"

"Were I His Excellency," growled Medina, "certain teeth would be gnawing crusts in the *calabozo*."

"But as it is, Lieutenant de Gonzales y Medina comes as an aide in the service of His Excellency," suggested Walker.

The hint was sufficient to smooth Medina's ruffled front. He fixed his gaze upon Pike, and addressed him with the most formal politeness: "Then you admit, señor, that yourself and Señor Robinson have persistently and deliberately inculcated and disseminated republican principles throughout the period of your presence in New Spain?"

"It is true," replied Pike. "We came to Chihuahua at the insistence of His Excellency, yet have been assured that we are not to regard ourselves as prisoners. Why, then, should we not discuss topics of world-wide interest with the same freedom we should enjoy in our own country?"

"Lieutenant Pike overlooks the delicacy of his situation."

"My compliments to His Excellency," retorted Pike. "My country is yet young and poor. It may as yet lack strength to resent the outrages of Britain and France. But present to His Excellency the assurance of my confidence that the Republic can exact reprisals for injuries to its citizens and officers inflicted by a secondary power."

"*Satanas!*" swore the aide. "You dare name the great Kingdom of Spain as not among the first of the powers?"

"The sun of Spain is fast setting. Your statesmen sneer at the mistakes and seeming weakness of the United States. I predict that unless Spain elects for freedom, within a century she will be shorn of the last of her glory, while free America shall grow in might beyond the grandest dreams of her citizens!"

"It is with the present we have now to deal, señor," sneered Medina. "His Excellency sends you fair warning. Those who have permitted you to indulge in your Jacobinical and atheistic discourse in their company, and in particular those who have themselves indulged in the treasonous discussions, are all noted, and their cases will be attended to in due time."

"That, señor, is doubtless one of the prerogatives arrogated to itself by tyranny," said Pike. "As for Señor Robinson and myself, we are citizens of the United States, and not subjects of His Most Catholic Majesty. We propose to continue to express our opinions freely on all subjects."

"I shall report your reply to His Excellency," said Medina, rising. "Rest assured

your conduct will be represented in no very favorable view to your Government."

"As an officer of the army of the Republic, I am responsible to my Government, and to none other," replied Pike, now fairly boiling with rage. Fearful of his dignity, he gave Medina a curt bow, and withdrew to our bedchamber.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" gasped Walker, astonished that any one could have so dared the power of the Governor-General.

Medina looked aside at me, and saw me smiling.

"Señor Robinson is pleased to be amused," he said with a feline suavity which told me the time had come.

"It is most amusing, señor," I replied. "That any one could be foolish enough to imagine the possibility of intimidating Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike is little short of ridiculous."

"*Por Dios!* Say rather it is an absurdity to expect courteous compliance from the bearer of so barbarous a name."

"How of my name?" I asked, with mock concern. "Is it also displeasing to you?"

He stepped close to me, with a menacing look. "Your name, Señor Spy, is one to be linked in infamy with that of your double-dyed traitor, General Wilkinson, who for twenty years and more has been in the regular pay of His Most Catholic Majesty."

My palm struck full across his mouth with a force that sent him reeling. For a moment he stood in speechless fury, plucking at his sword-hilt. I grasped the back of the chair in which I had been sitting, for my pistols were in the bedchamber, and I had no mind to be run through. But Walker stepped between us, and muttered a hasty word to Medina. The latter made a sign for him to follow, and strode out into the court. Walker was out and back in two minutes.

"*Sacre!*" he protested, in great concern. "What am I to do? He insists that I shall serve as his second. Yet with you as my guest—"

"Accept, by all means. It would give me great pleasure. My one desire is to keep this from my friend. The fewer who know of it the better."

"But a second for yourself?" he questioned. "*Entre nous*, I should far prefer to

serve you than your opponent."

"My thanks. But doubtless Lieutenant Don Faciendo will second me. I will call upon him at once, and you can follow with such communications as Lieutenant Medina desires to transmit."

"At your bidding, doctor. *Nom de Dieu!* what a blow you gave him! and with the open hand! My lips are now sealed—yet it is a fact that you have choice of weapons. You will of course advise with Lieutenant Malgares."

I waved him off, and as he went out again to tell Medina he would serve, I hastened in to Pike. He was pacing up and down the bedchamber like a caged panther.

"Has he gone?" he demanded. I nodded. "It's well—it's well! I could not answer for the consequences should I have to face his sneer again before I've had time to cool. By the Almighty, had he spoken in his own name and not as a messenger, I'd have challenged him, John!"

"Doubtless. But this menace by the Governor-General?"

"It cannot be he will go to extremes."

"Yet would it not be as well to consult with our friends? They may have knowledge of Salcedo's temper."

"We can rely upon Zuloaga and, I believe, your Don Pedro."

"Go to them, then, and I will look for Malgares."

"Very well. I will call upon Señor Vallois, and will meet you later at Zuloaga's, if Malgares can come."

With this, we threw on hat and coat and started off in the gathering twilight, on diverging paths. A few minutes of sharp walking brought me to the Mayron mansion, where I was so fortunate as to find Malgares at home and alone. Having first told of Salcedo's implied threat, I stated my own personal affair briefly, and recalled his promise to act as my second.

"*Poder de Dios!*" he exclaimed. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure. You will choose pistols?"

"Can he shoot?"

"Not at all."

"Then let it be swords," I decided.

"*Santisima Virgen!* you are no swordsman. He will spit you with the first thrust of his rapier."

"I said swords, Don Faciendo. My thought was the straight cutlass of your Texas cavalry. I have hefted a sabre, and your cutlasses must swing much the same."

"It is true, *amigo*, that the regulation cutlass would put you to a slightly less disadvantage compared to the rapier. There would be more play for your strength. Yet Medina is an expert—a master swordsman. You would have no chance. He means to kill you."

"I have quickness and strength. The odds are not so great as you fear. But with pistols, he would be absolutely at my mercy."

"Then you insist?"

A lackey announced Walker.

"I insist," I replied, as Walker bowed himself in.

"What time?" asked Malgares.

"The sooner the better."

At this he excused himself, and conducted Walker into another room. I spent the brief interval of waiting admiring a glorious painting by Velasquez for which Malgares had paid a fabulous sum in gold ingots. My enjoyment was not forced or feigned. With the assurance of action in the immediate future, I really felt lighter and easier in mind than at any time since the ball.

Malgares returned, with a clouded brow. "He was astonished. I do not wonder. Men nowadays are not usually so chivalrous as to give the game into the hands of their opponents."

"It is a case of two sets of loaded dice," I replied. "Mine are loaded beyond all question of fair play."

"And his the same!"

"That is to be seen. You accepted the challenge? All is arranged?"

Malgares nodded, still troubled. "I could do none else. We meet them at sunrise to-morrow, at the east end of the aqueduct. It is possible we may have use for your pistols. Have them ready. I shall call for you in good time, with my coach."

"You think there may be need of it to bring me home," I rallied him.

"God forbid!" he protested, crossing himself. "My only thought was that you might pass unobserved."

"True," I replied, and I hastened to explain my reasons for not wishing Pike to become involved in the affair.

I was barely in time, for I had no more than finished when the Lieutenant was announced. Not finding Don Pedro at home, he had called upon two or three other friends, who had expressed great concern for our safety, and advised him to consult with Malgares. Don Faciendo looked grave, but expressed a belief that all would be well if we held on as before with a bold front. This was also the opinion of the friends with whom we spent the evening at Señor Zuloaga's.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DUEL

Upon our return to Walker's quarters, the Lieutenant, who had been working hard all day, at once retired. I remained up long enough to load my pistols, and write, first, a farewell letter to my lady, and second, a note to my friend explaining that I was to start early on a coach ride with Malgares. This I left with old Cæsar, whom Walker had already instructed to rouse us before dawn.

Faithful to orders, the old black had us out a good hour before sunrise, and a biscuit and pot of chocolate ready for our refreshment. We dressed and ate and made off, leaving Pike still fast asleep. Walker fetched his horse from the stables in the rear of the courtyard, and conducted me as far as the street. The expected coach was just wheeling into sight, preceded by a pair of outriders with torches, for the night was as black as Egypt.

At once Walker sprang into the saddle and rode off through the gloom to join his principal, while I ran up to the coach and slipped in beside Malgares. With that the gilded carriage swung about and rumbled off along the first street which led northward. Having taken possession of my pistols and loading outfit, Malgares asked if I had any word to be given to Señorita Vallois, in the event of any misfortune. I handed him the letter, with the request that it be returned to me if all went well.

"For her sake, you must see that it does go well!" he urged.

"It is for her I fight. In any event, I must have struck him for what he said. For whether or not it is true General Wilkinson is or has been a traitor, in the pay of your Government, Lieutenant Medina intended his remark as a deliberate insult. But we are alike fully aware that it is because of the señorita we now meet."

"God grant that for her sake you may win!—You will win, *amigo!*" exclaimed my friend; and with that, to divert my thoughts, he fell to chatting about various light subjects.

Presently the coach turned eastward, and, after a time, southward. The gray dawn now broke the darkness, and the outriders, at an order from our coach-

man, flung down their torches and rode back into the city. The ruddy gleams of the full dawn shot swiftly up the sky. Our driver put the lash to his horses, and we spun along through a dense cloud of dust, in a race with the sun.

Just as the upper rim of the blazing orb of day peered over the low mountains to the eastward, the coach drew up beneath one of the immense arches of the aqueduct. Malgares caught up the two cutlasses, which had lain beside him in a wrapping of buckskin, and sprang out to meet Walker, who was advancing from around the corner of the massive aqueduct pier. They bowed and exchanged a few words, and Malgares, having handed the swords to Walker, came back to the coach.

"Permit me to assist you in removing your hat, cravat, coat, and waistcoat," he said.

I stripped to my shirt, delighted to be freed of the encumbering garments.

"We meet on the east side of the pier," he explained; and taking my arm, he led me beneath the colossal arch to the corner.

A step around brought us face to face with Walker and Medina. Their horses, with the bridle reins thrown over head upon the ground after the custom of the country, stood at a little distance, cropping the dry grass. The ground for several paces alongside and out from the pier was smooth and of a firm, dry, gritty earth. Medina, who had stripped in the same fashion as myself, was looking at the cutlasses, which Walker was holding up to his view.

When we turned the corner, Medina immediately stepped back half a dozen paces, with a readiness that showed his experience in the formalities of the *code duello*. Malgares left me and stepped forward beside Walker. They first measured and examined the cutlasses, then exchanged a few words in a low tone. Medina cast an impatient glance at the sun, which was now clearing the horizon.

Malgares raised his hand, and stated, first to Medina, then to me: "The principals will take position, at sword's-length, facing as at present. At the word, 'On guard!' given by Lieutenant Walker, they will begin action. At the word 'Arreste!' by either second, the principals will instantly cease action. Señor, do you comprehend?"

"Si, señor," replied Medina.

"*Si, señor,*" I answered, in turn.

We were each handed a cutlass, and led up within striking distance. Malgares and Walker drew back three paces.

"On guard!" cried Walker, in a thin, high voice.

Instantly I dropped almost to the ground and made a long-armed sweep at my opponent's knee. He leaped back barely in time to save himself from being hamstrung.

"*Arreste!*" shrilled Walker, springing between us.

I rose and stood back, staring from him to Malgares.

"What now?" I demanded.

"That is not fencing," protested Walker.

"No. It is fighting," I retorted.

Walker wheeled about and exchanged whispers with his principal. He turned again, to address Malgares: "My principal demands that the duel shall be according to the rules of swordsmanship."

"Enough!" I exclaimed. "If he wishes me to stand erect, I will stand erect. Only do not again interrupt."

"Very well," replied Walker, and stepping aside, he for the second time gave the signal: "On guard!"

I whirled up my cutlass. Medina stabbed at my heart. For all the quickness with which I bent to the right, his point gashed full through my left arm. But already my sword was descending in a sweeping stroke, and the fierce sting of my wound gave all the more force to the blow. Medina tore free his blade and whirled it up between my descending cutlass and his head. But for his quickness, I believe I should have split his skull to the chin.

Given a fraction of a second more time, he, being so skilled a swordsman, might even have glanced my stroke, despite its weight. As it was, the edge of my blade caught the flat of his at a square angle, and drove it down upon his head close above the temple. He fell like a steer beneath the poleaxe, while my sword blade broke clean off, a span beyond the hilt, and whirled down upon the dry soil.

**"He fell like a steer: my swordblade broke clean off, a span
beyond the hilt"**

"*Dios!*" cried Malgares.

"*Arreste!*" shrilled Walker, springing to stoop over the fallen man. "*Sacre!* I thought him dead. He is only stunned."

In confirmation of this, Medina stirred, opened his eyes, and, assisted by Walker, staggered to his feet.

"Señor Walker," demanded Malgares, "as your principal is the challenger, I now ask if he is satisfied."

Medina muttered something in the ear of Walker, who replied to the inquiry: "Señor, we contend that, so far, the honors are even. My principal has been stunned, yours wounded. By the time Señor Robinson's injury is bound up, Lieutenant Medina will have recovered a clear head."

"The sword of my principal is broken," objected Malgares, as he spoke producing the bandage I had provided. No artery having been severed, there was no need of a tourniquet, and he bound up the wound during the discussion.

Walker consulted Medina, and replied: "We hold that each principal was given a sword of equal quality, and that the duel must continue until the matter is settled."

"Good!" I exclaimed to Malgares, before he could remonstrate. "We continue to fight each with his weapon. I shall use my broken blade as a dart and the hilt as a tomahawk. I am far better armed than before."

At this Medina drew away for a consultation with his second. Walker came back alone.

"We protest against the use of our opponent's sword as a missile," he stated.

"We refuse to consider the protest," rejoined Malgares.

"We then suggest that the fight be continued with rapiers. My principal has a pair at hand."

"The naming of the weapons lies with my principal," replied Malgares. "If you insist upon a second choice, we name duelling pistols, with which we have come provided."

Walker returned to Medina, and after a brief consultation, brought us his assent to the use of pistols. Malgares immediately conducted me around to the coach. As we turned the corner, we were astonished to see Father Rocus racing toward us on a large white mule. He waved his hand to us, and urged his mule to yet greater speed as Malgares drew out the pistols and turned to go back.

"Wait!" I said. "The padre wishes to speak to me. Insist upon Medina firing both pistols as a test. That will give me time. Walker knows my manner of loading."

Malgares nodded and disappeared as Father Rocus galloped up and drew rein beside the coach, purple-faced and gasping for breath. I gave him my right shoulder, else he would have fallen in his descent.

"*Virgen!*" he panted. "It is over already! You have killed him!"

"No. We have tried swords without success. Now it will be the pistols. I will shatter his right shoulder in the joint. He shall boast no more of his swordsmanship."

"*Nada*, my son! That is not enough. *Carrajo!* He must die! Listen! This scoundrel has wormed himself into all the secrets of the revolution. He has demanded Alisanda as his price—"

"My God!" I cried. "But Salcedo—?"

"If she could put her heart into luring him, Salcedo might be won over. But now this scoundrel calls checkmate. He pledges faith to the revolution in return for her hand. *Carrajo!* I now know the utmost of his baseness. He pledges faith, yet, once he has her, thinks to betray all and gain the estate of her uncle as reward for his treachery."

"God!" I cried.

A shot rang out on the far side of the pier.

"What is that?" exclaimed the padre.

I explained, and my statement was punctuated with the report of the second pistol.

"So—he has tried them," said the padre. "Now they will be reloaded. You will kill him, my son! It is God's will!... Malgares is not yet of the revolution, but he is a true friend of Don Pedro. At dawn I went to appeal to him to challenge Medina—His wife confessed that he had come here as your second. I have ridden at breakneck speed—God be praised, I am in time! You will kill the traitor!"

"You are in time," I said. "I will place my ball so exactly between his eyes that you cannot measure a hair's-breadth farther on the one side than on the other."

"God bless you, my son! You will save Alisanda and the revolution with the same shot!"

"I did not suspect that you were one of the revolutionists," I muttered.

"For years,—like Padre Hidalgo in the South. But come. Malgares signs to us."

We hastened forward to the corner of the pier, where Malgares stood ready to hand me my pistol. Medina already was in waiting, ten paces from the spot to which Malgares led me. At sight of Father Rocus, the aide and Walker started. But the padre at once reassured them: "It is well, gentlemen. I come only to act as witness."

Walker bowed. "Your Reverence is welcome. Señor Robinson, the terms have been stated to my principal. I now repeat them. You will each stand in the present position, with pistol pointed upward. Lieutenant Malgares will say, 'One, two, three. Fire! One, two, three.' At the word 'Fire!' you can aim and fire, during the time of the second count of three. If either fires before the word, or after the count, you know the penalty. Gentlemen, are you ready?"

Medina and I bowed, and Walker took his station with Father Rocus and Malgares against the face of the pier, out of the line of fire.

"Ready!" called Malgares. We raised our pistols as directed. "One!" he counted. "Two!—"

Down came Medina's pistol! I saw the black dot of the muzzle only to lose it instantly in a puff of smoke. The ball grazed the side of my head. So unexpected and sudden was the dastardly deed, I stood motionless, the report of the pistol

ringing in my ears, but listening for Malgares to continue the count. Instead he uttered a sharp cry and rushed upon Medina. Before the aide could so much as turn, Malgares's Toledo lunged through his heart.

Whipping his sword from the body as it fell prone, Malgares faced Walker, with his head high and his eyes flashing.

"Witness!" he demanded.

Walker bowed. "He fired before the word. You have done right to strike him dead."

"You have done right! *Satanas* has claimed his own!" confirmed Father Rocus. Suddenly he thought of me and hastened to my side. "We forget Juan! My son, did the ball strike you?"

I put up my hand and reached out to him one of my locks, which had been clipped by the ball.

"So close as that!" exclaimed Walker.

"You know the saying, 'A miss is as good as a mile,'" I replied, as Malgares took my loaded pistol and carefully lowered the trigger. "The question now is to agree on an account for His Excellency that will clear my noble friend and second, and place all the blame upon me, where it belongs."

"*Nada!*" rejoined Malgares. "He shall know the exact truth."

"Leave the matter to me," said Father Rocus. "You know my standing with the Governor-General. I engage to prevent any unpleasant consequences."

"But—the—body?" murmured Walker, glancing askance at Medina's huddled corpse.

"I will take it in my coach," said Malgares, without hesitation. "You will ride his horse, and lend your own to Señor Robinson."

We each offered to take his place in the grewsome part he had chosen. But all that he would accept of us was our assistance in stanching the wound and carrying the body to the coach. Walker then set off ahead to notify Medina's servants, while Father Rocus and I returned to the city by a roundabout road.

The moment we were alone I asked my companion a dozen and one questions

about Alisanda.

He shook his head to them all. "There is nothing to tell, Juan, other than she is holding out bravely against their persuasions and commands. The point now is to convince Salcedo that the death of Medina has rid him of one rival, and that he can free himself of another by sending you away with your indomitable friend."

"But if it is to leave her behind—!" I cried.

"We shall see about that in due course," he replied. "One thing at a time. Rome was not built in a day. Now ride on, and leave me, my son. We approach streets where we are both known. *Adios!*"

There was nothing for me to do but to obey.



CHAPTER XXXI

MY CROSS

Upon my return I found the Lieutenant so preoccupied over an intended visit to Salcedo that one or two vague answers satisfied his curiosity about my early morning excursion. He started out at last, an hour or so before noon, when I contrived with the help of old Cæsar to wash my wound and dress it in proper manner. Lest the Lieutenant or any one else should notice something amiss and make inquiries, I told Cæsar he might say I had been bitten by a scorpion, of which, truth to tell, there were enough and to spare in and about Chihuahua.

The Lieutenant returned much sooner than I had expected. He had been informed that His Excellency was closeted with Father Rocus, and could see no callers. This he took as an unfavorable indication of Salcedo's temper, until I assured him I had reason to believe that the padre was a friend and had called on the Governor-General in our behalf. The confirmation came during the afternoon in the form of a polite message, brought by Walker, requesting Pike to call at the *palacio* that evening without ceremony.

When he returned, it was with the news that all was settled except as to myself. The papers of the expedition were to be held, but Pike and the six men with him were to march for Natchitoches in three or four days, to be followed shortly by the detachment under Sergeant Meek, which all this time had been carefully held back somewhere on the El Paso road. The Lieutenant was inclined to be anxious over my fate, but I could not but trust to the good offices of Father Rocus.

He met the padre at Salcedo's table the following noon, and answered in his usual fearless manner the adroit questions put to him by His Reverence. This, I believe, must have proved the last straw to the Governor-General, for that evening, while we were visiting Malgares, Walker brought word that I was free to accompany Pike. In his excitement, he spoke of the padre's cleverness in mollifying His Excellency over the death of Medina, but Malgares averted a disclosure of my share in the affair by the laconic statement to Pike that he had killed the aide during a duel.

Such a happy termination of the affair would have given me great satisfaction

had I not been distressed over my failure to hear a word either of or from Alisanda. Even Doña Dolores was still refused admittance to her.

This was on a Sunday. Monday we spent in our preparations for marching. I had need of all the diversion I could find, to keep down the maddening thought that I should have to go without seeing my lady. In my despair I called upon Father Rocus, who counselled patience, and promised to do what he could to obtain for me a last meeting. But he warned me that even should he succeed, I could expect to see her only in the presence of the family. I begged him to give me some hope for the future. But he shook his head.

"*Sabe Dios!—Quien sabe?*" he said. "All that I can now say is that, if she cannot follow you to your free republic, she will take the veil."

"No!" I cried. "I cannot give her up!"

"You can if you must, my son. There are few mortals who at some time during their lives do not have to bear a heavy cross. If this one is laid upon your shoulders, you will bear it with manly strength. But there is still a hope for you. I shall advise with her before you pay your farewell call at Señor Vallois's. If there seems a way of escape, you will receive a message either from her or from myself."

I thanked the good padre, and left him, my heart in a tumult between fondest hope and blackest despair.

In the morning, which was that of the twenty-eighth of April, the day set for us to march, we visited about the city to say farewell to all our friends. But when we came to Don Pedro's I informed the Lieutenant that I wished him to make only a brief call and then go without me. Malgares, who was to march in charge of our escort, and with whom we had called upon the weeping Doña Dolores, assented to my request no less heartily than did Pike.

As I had expected, Don Pedro and Doña Marguerite received us with the utmost cordiality—but alone. In the midst of our call Father Rocus entered in a casual manner, but, unlike the Vallois, he greeted us with a marked coolness. I was seized with the dreadful suspicion that he had all along been playing double with me. Yet there was the memory of that meeting at the *Parroquia* to shame my doubt.

Before I could calm my thoughts, Pike and Malgares rose to leave. I followed

them slowly to the door, then suddenly turned back and bent upon one knee to take the hand of Doña Marguerite.

"Señora," I begged, "for the love of God, give me a last word with her! I am going away all those thousands of miles—I fear I shall never again see her—have pity upon me! One word, señora!"

"*Ave Maria purisima!*" she murmured, bowing her head and sighing.

I had touched her heart. Another plea might have persuaded her. But Don Pedro came hastening back, his face as cold and hard as a stone.

"Your friends will be delayed, Señor Robinson," he said.

"Señor," I replied, rising to face him, "at the least have the justice to hear me out. You know that I love your niece with my whole heart and body and soul. You know that she loves me with a love that will last as long as life itself. Our love was born the first time we looked into each other's eyes; since then our love has never wavered. It drew me to her over deserts and mountains, through wildernesses before known only to the red savages; it forced me to face singly the soldiers and prisons and garrottes of your tyrannical rulers. I know now that I cannot hope for you to turn from your cruel purpose. Yet for the sake of the friendship you once professed to bear me and for the sake of her love, give me at least a moment's farewell—a word of parting!"

Despite the desperate earnestness of my plea, he stood throughout without a trace of relentment in his cold face. But Doña Marguerite was a woman, and I had spoken from the depths of my heart.

"*Santisima Virgen!*" she cried. "It is only for a last moment's adieu!—Padre! padre, advise us!"

My heart gave a leap of wild hope as I saw Don Pedro look about at the padre with respectful attention.

"It is a hard question to decide, my children," deliberated Father Rocus. "It may well cause her more sorrow than relief. And yet—and yet—"

He paused and seemed to sink into prayerful meditation. Don Pedro and Doña Marguerite bowed their heads and murmured "*Ave!*" I stood waiting, in a tremendous stress of doubt and joy, of hope and despair. At last the padre raised his head, and pronounced his opinion: "As her guardian, Don Pedro, yours is the

decision. Yet as her confessor, I advise, for the good of her soul, that you do not deprive her of this last consolation. Even the meekest will rebel if pressed too hard, and she has a high spirit."

"Since you advise it, padre," acquiesced Don Pedro, though with evident reluctance. "For the good of her soul, they may say adieu. But it must be here, in our presence."

Doña Marguerite hastened to pull the bell-cord. Chita appeared.

"Prepare your mistress to say adieu to Señor Robinson."

Chita darted away. We waited, I burning with impatience, the others murmuring prayers. At last my sweet lady appeared in the curtained doorway. Though she sought to smile, her face was wan and sad, and her beautiful eyes heavy as if she had wept much and slept little. Had not Doña Marguerite taken the precaution to lay a restraining hand on my wrist, I should have rushed forward and clasped the poor oppressed darling in my arms.

We were permitted to approach each other. I bent on one knee and pressed my lips to the little white hand she gave me. The others watched our every movement and listened for every word. Yet I could not restrain myself from speaking out the love with which my heart overflowed.

"Dearest one!" I murmured, "it seems that we must now part—it may be forever! I do not see how I can bear to lose you, my darling. But, as the good padre says, we all have our crosses, and it may be that strength will be given to me to endure. Yet most of all my heart aches for your grief, Alisanda. God grant you surcease of sorrow!"

My voice failed me. I heard Doña Marguerite sob. But Alisanda neither wept nor sobbed. She gazed upward, with a spiritual glow in her dark eyes.

"God will do unto us according to His holy will!" she said.

"*Ave Maria de los Dolores!*" sobbed Doña Marguerite.

Alisanda looked down at me with the gaze which opened to me those fathomless wells of mystery.

"Juan," she said, "they tell me we can never wed. If such be the will of God, we must submit. But—" She held up the gold crucifix of the rosary which hung

about her neck—"by *la vera cruz* I vow to you, beloved, I will wed none other mortal than yourself. If I may not be your bride, I will become the bride of Christ!"

"*Caramba!*" swore Don Pedro. "Recall that vow! I command you!"

"God has heard it!" she answered.

"The vow is registered in heaven," confirmed Father Rocus.

"Absolve her!" demanded the don, fairly beside himself with chagrin at this sudden turn that threatened to frustrate all his designs.

"Peace, peace," soothed the padre. "I will consider the matter with prayer and meditation."

"*Satanas!*" cried Don Pedro, turning upon me in a rage. "But for you, she would not have vowed! Go!—"

"*Nada!*" I rejoined. "You said I could bid her farewell. I hold you to your word as a gentleman."

He turned on his heel, and strode over to stand beside Father Rocus, doubtless fearful that he could not otherwise restrain himself from attacking me.

"Be quick!" urged Doña Marguerite.

Alisanda took the rosary from about her white throat and held it out to me. Her voice kept to the same clear, brave note: "Adieu, my Juan! We part. You are not a Christian, I know, yet as a sign for the guidance of your faith, I give you this golden symbol—*la vera cruz!*"

As her dear hand placed the cross in my palm, my love and despair burst all bounds. Forgetful of all else, I caught her to me and pressed my lips to hers in passionate grief. But in a moment she was torn from me by Don Pedro, who carried her off, half fainting, from the room. I would have followed had not Doña Marguerite and Father Rocus clung to me on either side and implored me to leave before the return of Don Pedro.

Half stupefied with despair, I permitted them to lead me to the stairway, where Doña Marguerite sobbed out an "*Adios!*" and turned back. The padre hurried me down the stairway and out into the street, where, after a hasty benediction, he hastened back to pacify the violence of Don Pedro.



CHAPTER XXXII

THE MESSAGE

He left me none too soon. I could hear Don Pedro cursing furiously in the courtyard. Fearful that if matters came to blows, I might do an injury to the kinsman of my lady, I dragged myself away, heavy with despair. Not until I was half across the plaza did I notice that I still held her rosary in my hand. I stared at the little gold cross with bitter hatred. It seemed so harsh a mockery that she should have given me as parting gift that symbol of the gulf that now yawned between us, wider and deeper than ever. Yet the gift was from her, and—I must bear my cross!

For a moment I was tempted to put a pistol to my head and end all. But the life within me was sane and strong, and the memory of my lost lady too sweet for me to hurl myself into the unknown. In reflex from that last black thought of self-destruction there came to me even a feeble consciousness of resignation—a feeling that for her sake I must endeavor to live my life in a manner worthy of her memory. And this feeling did not leave me, but increased in strength throughout the weary weeks of our long homeward journey.

We started that afternoon, immediately after the siesta, and proceeded in a southerly direction on the road toward Durango. But I do not propose to give here the tedious details of our trip. Greatly to our disappointment, a few days brought us a parting from our noble friend Malgares, who turned over his instructions and despatch-pouch to a Captain Barelo. The latter took us so far south before rounding the lower end of the terrible Bolson de Mapimi Desert that we at one time thought he had secret orders to march us to the City of Mexico.

Whatever the object of this long detour, it served the purpose of enabling Pike and myself to take many more observations of the mines, towns, and other features of the country than if we had followed a shorter route. By the time we had swung around, north by east, up through the Province of Coahuila, and crossed over the Rio del Norte, which here is more often called the Rio Grande, we had all but one of the musket barrels closely packed with notes.

From the Rio Grande we proceeded northeastward, and crossing the border of the Province of Texas, arrived at San Antonio on the seventh of June. Here we were received with the utmost hospitality by the gallant and beloved General Herrera and by Governor Cordero, who took us into his own quarters, offered us every favor within his power, and had a house especially prepared for the men.

Many other prominent persons of the town were no less cordial and hospitable. Among them was a Captain Ugarte, to whom we brought letters of introduction from Malgares. His charming wife Doña Anita was a sister of Doña Dolores. Hardly had we been introduced to her when the kindly señora led me aside and showed me a letter which she had received from Señora Malgares a week before our arrival.

"My sister has roused my deepest interest, Señor Robinson, by the story of your doleful separation from your Dulcinea," she explained. "This letter begs me to do what little I can to console you."

"You are most kind, señora," I replied. "But I know of nothing—unless I might ask you to send a message by Doña Dolores to Señorita Alisanda."

"Gladly! Have you received no message from her?"

I shook my head sadly. She thought a moment, and then pressed me to tell her of my last meeting with Alisanda. The moment I mentioned the cross her face brightened.

"Permit me to see the rosary," she said.

I drew the bitter-sweet gift from my bosom and handed it over to her. To my surprise, she began to examine the beads with a minute scrutiny, feeling and shaking each in turn as she passed it along the cord. Whatever she had thought to discover, she found nothing. At the last she took up the little crucifix and turned it over in her slender hand.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, holding it closer to her sparkling eyes. "Her name is Alisanda Vallois."

"Alisanda Vallois," I repeated, wondering at the remark.

"A. V.—Alisanda Vallois. You have planned for a meeting in August?"

"No, señora. We did not plan. I have heard of no such plan."

"*Santa Maria!* Men are so stupid!" she rejoined. "Look, there is your message: 'A V—AUG!' What ever else can that mean than Alisanda Vallois, in August?"

"What?" I cried, half mad with delight. "But where?—what place, señora? Tell me where!"

She laughed at my blindness. "Where, señor? You ask that? What did she call this gift—the exact words?"

"*La vera cruz!*" Even as the words passed my lips, the truth flashed upon me. I had indeed been stupid—blind!—blind not to have seen those faintly scratched letters on the gold; stupid not to have joined the symbolism of the gift to her words, "*La Vera Cruz*"!

I kissed the señora's hand with a fervor which, I trust, did not disturb the peace of mind of Captain Ugarte. Later she undertook to send to the care of Doña Dolores a message which, for the sake of precaution, I restricted to the one line:
—

"*La vera cruz* is my guide and comforter."

Despite so joyful a revelation to glorify our stay at San Antonio, I felt no regrets when another week saw us started on to the north and east for Nacogdoches, the most eastward of the Spanish *presidios* in Texas.

The second day beyond that place we crossed the Sabine, and were left by our Spanish escort, being in the neutral zone.

On the afternoon of July the first we at last arrived at Natchitoches, only fifteen days short of a full year since we had departed on our long and eventful journey from Belle Fontaine.

Such greeting as we received from our officers at the fort may be better imagined than expressed. And not the least of my joys upon this happy occasion was that of hearing my brave and resolute friend hailed by his fellows, not as Lieutenant, but as Captain! We were alike astonished and gratified to learn that he had been entitled to that advanced rank since the twelfth of the preceding August. What was more, his services had been most handsomely noticed to Congress by President Jefferson.

As the Captain had arrived at the journey's end outworn and in miserable health, I restrained myself to remain with him long enough to assist in arranging the

great mass of notes which, to the exultant delight of our countrymen, we brought to view by filing off the barrels of the six muskets.

There would have been no end to the questions of the officers of the fort had not Pike intimated that discretion required silence with regard to all the important details until after he had made his report to General Wilkinson and the Secretary of War. The doughty General, we were informed, had hurried east to Richmond some weeks past, to take part in the trial of Colonel Burr and Harmon Blennerhasset for treason.

But as to the facts of the great case, I observed that our countrymen were decidedly circumspect in their statements; for it seems that the General himself was accused by his numerous enemies of complicity in the alleged treasonous conspiracy. Captain—I write the word with pride—Captain Pike was highly indignant at this attempt to implicate the friend and patron who had so helped him in his career. But I, remembering what I had learned from Burr and from the General himself, and above all considering that hideous charge by the aide Medina, had the greatest difficulty in giving the passive assent of silence when my friend said that he would include my respects in his letter to the General.

Truth to tell, having now the possibility of again meeting and of winning my lady, I was extremely desirous for a commission in the Army. It was an ambition which the Captain and I had frequently discussed since our departure from Chihuahua, and which he told me he intended to call to the attention not only of General Wilkinson but of the Secretary of War, General Dearborn.

I need hardly say that we had also discussed, in confidence, my plans for a voyage to Vera Cruz. But as he knew even less about the sea than myself, he could only commend my intention of applying for assistance to Mr. Daniel Clark, and insist upon my leaving him as soon as his health was a little improved and the notes partly arranged.

At last my growing impatience and anxiety forced me to bend to his urging. We parted, with more than brotherly regard and affection, in the fond expectation of rejoining each other within a few months as brothers in arms. His last words were an assurance that he could obtain me a captaincy, and a heart-felt wish that I might succeed in my venture.



CHAPTER XXXIII

IMPRESSED

It was a wearisome journey by river and forest and swamp to New Orleans in the swelter of the July heat, but I pushed on by horse and boat to the mosquito-and-fever-plagued city of the delta. Having long since become hardened to the torments of the Southern insect pests and to the dangers of ague, dengue, and yellow jack, I endured the first with resignation and braved the last without a qualm.

The sight of the creole city, with our glorious flag afloat above the bold little forts, St. Louis and St. Charles, filled me with joy and a sense of accomplishment. This marked my point of departure in the crossing of the Gulf, which alone, I hoped, now separated me from my lady. Though, even with the influx of our native-born Americans since the annexation, the city could claim only nine thousand inhabitants, the amount of its trade and shipping was enormous. Among the scores and hundreds of sea-going craft which lay moored along the wharfs and the levees or swung at anchor in the stream, I felt certain I should find one to bear me to Vera Cruz.

Of all the merchants of the city, I knew that few if any stood so well with the Spanish authorities in the New World or carried on so extensive a trade with the Spanish colonies as my acquaintance, Mr. Daniel Clark. Accordingly I waited upon him the evening of my arrival, and stated my keen desire to obtain passage to Vera Cruz.

He took occasion to congratulate me on my share in the expedition, a general account of which had come to him, I suspect through secret sources of communication with the Spaniards. He, however, shook his head over my request for advice and assistance, until, in desperation, I confessed that the object of my intended voyage was to meet the lady to whom I was betrothed.

"Why did you not tell me that at the first, sir?" he snapped. "I set you down for an agent of that double-dealing scoundrel and traitor James Wilkinson."

"Mr. Clark," I replied, "General Wilkinson will, I presume, be subjected to the searching cross-examination of the counsel for Colonel Burr. Personally I have

little liking for the General, and have so expressed myself in the past. But for the present I think it only just to him, as to Colonel Burr, to await the publication of the facts of this deplorable scandal and the verdict of the trial."

"Ay, ay! You can take a dispassionate view, doctor. You have not shared in all the heat and tumult of this last year. Very well. Be as nonpartisan as you wish, just so you do not join in the hounding of honorable men who chanced to show courtesies to that misguided dreamer, Burr."

"Sir, I have no other thought, no other object in life that I can consider until I have returned this to my lady," I said, showing him the rosary.

He turned to his portfolio, and at once wrote a letter in a neat, clerky hand. Having folded and addressed it, he handed it to me unsealed.

"Present that to Monsieur Lafitte. You will find his sloop, the *Siren*, somewhere along the water front. Wait. Are you in funds?"

"Enough for the present, sir. But this Monsieur Lafitte—he sails for Vera Cruz?"

"I have written him that you wish to land in that port. He bears papers from me which will enable you to effect a landing and a stay of a few weeks. Should you need funds to carry you through with your venture in that city, this letter will enable you to draw upon Captain Lafitte for a hundred doubloons."

I sought to express my gratitude, but he cut me short, and rang for his mulatto boy to show me out. As it was by now past nine o'clock and a dark, cloudy evening, I returned to my hotel for the night.

But sunrise found me down in the midst of the hurly-burly and confusion of the water front. Such a scene was never known elsewhere than here in the port of the Father of Waters. Rowdy rivermen from the Ohio and Mississippi settlements, and no less rowdy seamen from the four quarters of the globe, lewd women and dock workmen, black and white, swarthy creole merchants and weather-beaten ship's officers,—all jostling and hurrying about wharf and levee in the cool of the early morning.

Upon starting to inquire, I discovered that it was not so simple a matter to find the sloop *Siren* as I had imagined. The slaves and creoles were polite in their replies, the sailors and rivermen gruff, but all alike expressed their inability to enlighten me.

At last I accosted at a venture a splendidly built gentleman of about my own age and breadth but a full two inches taller.

"Monsieur," I said, noting his black hair and French features, "your pardon, but I am in search of the schooner *Siren*, Captain Lafitte."

"Ah," he replied, eying me with a polite yet penetrating gaze. "May I request you to name your business with Captain Lafitte?"

"Sir," I answered, bowing, "my business with Monsieur Lafitte is private. If you cannot favor me with the location of the *Siren*—"

"If I cannot favor you with that, I can at least with the location of Jean Lafitte," he said, bowing in turn. "Monsieur, permit me to introduce myself as Jean Lafitte, at your service."

"Monsieur, your servant, Dr. John H. Robinson, with a letter from Monsieur Daniel Clark," I responded.

His fine hazel eyes glowed. "A friend of Monsieur Clark!"

I handed him the letter. He bowed with the polished ease of a courtier, and after a polite apology, opened and read the letter. At the end he slipped the letter into his wallet, and smilingly held out to me a shapely, bronzed hand.

"Monsieur Clark has explained your reason for sailing, doctor," he said, with a manner that won him my regard on the spot. "I shall be more than pleased to do all in my power to aid you. We shall first send for your chests."

I explained my lack of wardrobe.

"*Sacre!*" he exclaimed. "But I sail at once. Come! I have it. I lost my third mate in a brush with an English privateer last month. He was a cleanly man of much your build. You shall ship in his berth."

I pointed to the nearest flatboat. "That is the extent of my seamanship, Monsieur Captain."

He shrugged. "The clothes will fit, if the berth does not. You can save your present costume for your landing."

I bowed assent, and we at once swung along side by side to a wharf where his boat was in waiting for him. With a courtesy which I did not then appreciate,

though I noted how it impressed the half-dozen swarthy, red-capped oarsmen, he sprang first into the stern-sheets. The moment I stepped in after him, the men pushed off. They rowed with a skill and regularity of stroke that speedily brought us out around the brig which blocked our view, when we approached the most graceful sloop upon which I had ever set eyes.

Not being a seaman, I can only say that the *Siren's* masts and yards seemed to me to be unusually long, and the former strongly inclined to the stern—raked, I believe is the marine term. Her hull, which was painted a dull gray, with a narrow stripe of red, was sharp in the bow, broad and overhanging at the stern, and low-set in the water.

When we came aboard, I noticed that the sloop's decks were cleaner and more orderly than those of any other merchant vessel I had seen at close quarters, and that besides a number of carronades, she carried abaft the mainmast a great pivot-gun that could have found few mates afloat elsewhere than aboard a man-of-war. It was a long French twenty-four-pounder, which is really a twenty-six-and-a-half-pounder by English weight. As is well known, many frigates carry no heavier longs than eighteen-pounders.

Observing my interested glance, Captain Lafitte said, with a smile: "As you see, doctor, Monsieur Clark is disinclined to deliver his sloop and cargo to the Spanish privateers without a protest."

"Is the *Siren*, then, his vessel?" I asked in surprise.

"For this voyage, at least," he answered; and leaving me to guess what this might mean, he turned and called out a series of nautical orders in a voice like a trumpet.

Instantly such a swarm of sailors poured up from the forecastle and hatchways and rushed here and there about the decks that I wondered they did not run one another down. Between times the Captain beckoned to a grinning imp of a cabin-boy and told him to show me below.

It was three days before I again saw the deck. Once the sloop was under way, Captain Lafitte came down long enough to start me overhauling the chests of the dead third mate. This kept me occupied until the mid-afternoon, aside from the time it took me to eat the savory meal brought to me by the cabin-boy. Captain Lafitte remained all the time on deck with the pilot who conned us down to the Gulf. When at last he did come below, the sloop was pitching in a rough cross-

sea and I was most disgracefully nauseated.

The gale freshening to a downright storm, we were, as I was afterwards told, compelled to run before it under a storm jib. At the time I knew only that I was too seasick to care whether the ship floated or foundered.

But on the fourth day the storm abated to a half gale, and the sloop, being brought about and put under more sail, became so much steadier that I made shift to eat a scant meal and crawl on deck. Such of the weary-eyed crew as took heed of me grinned at the pale-faced landsman, but they took on another look when at noon I helped the captain to take his observations and work out the result. I had not spent all those months with Pike for nothing.

Lafitte appeared highly amused at this discomfiture of his tars, and promptly declared in their hearing that I should be rated as third mate. The following day, when I really found my sea-legs, he proposed in all seriousness that I should accept the berth. Having candidly declared his bitter hatred of the British, he sought to sting me to a like hatred by relating in full detail the account of the shameful, brutal outrage of the *Leopard* upon the *Chesapeake*, off Hampton Roads, hardly more than a month past.

Despite my anger and humiliation at this unavenged insult to my flag, I felt no longing for a seafaring life other than such as was necessary to win me my lady. Lafitte acknowledged that, in my situation, my decision was probably a wise one. But he went on with the statement that he, for one, would live and die in the contest against tyranny on the high seas, and repeated a terrible vow which he had taken against all Britons and Spaniards. His hatred of the first I could well understand, since he was a Frenchman. But his enmity to the latter, now the allies of his country, I could explain only as the result of private injuries. On this point he was as reserved as he was free in expressing his determination to wreak vengeance upon the ships of both nations.

Not two days later we were roused at dawn by the muffled cry of "Ship, ho!" and slipping up on deck, found the *Siren* within a cable's-length of a British frigate. The surprise was complete, for the British sighted us within a few moments after they were themselves seen. Detecting Lafitte's attempt to set more sail, they fired a solid shot across our bows. Our captain could do no other than obey this grim signal to heave-to, since disobedience would have meant the blowing of the sloop to matchwood by the frigate's broadside of long eighteen-pounders.

According to a prearranged plan, the half-dozen British seamen in our crew and

a dozen of the more English-appearing Americans at once slipped down into the hold, where they were hidden by their shipmates in a stow-hole prepared for the purpose in the midst of the cargo. Meantime, cursing beneath his breath, Captain Lafitte paced his little quarterdeck, if so it may be called, and stared at the frigate's cutter, which came racing toward us over the dancing waves in the refulgent glow of the low, red sunrays. It was a pretty sight, but one which not a man aboard looked upon with other than a sour face.

Very shortly the cutter came alongside, and we were boarded by a pert young cockerel of a midshipman, with a following of six or eight heavy-jawed British tars. Meeting Captain Lafitte's punctilious bow with a curt nod, the young fellow demanded to see his papers, and added with the lordliness of an admiral: "Pipe all hands on deck, and let there be no stowaways, for I warn you I shall exercise the rights of search and impressment."

Captain Lafitte made a formal protest against these so-called rights of search and impressment aboard an American sloop sailing from the neutral port of New Orleans to the unblockaded port of Vera Cruz. Without waiting for the insolent reply which this elicited, he sent for the ship's papers and ordered all hands on deck. While the midshipman glanced through the papers and log, all the crew, other than those concealed, assembled in the bows for inspection.

Unable to find a flaw in the papers, for Lafitte and the *Siren* were alike certified to as belonging to the port of New Orleans, our unwelcome visitor ordered the crew to file before him. In all the lot there was not one British subject nor one who looked like a Briton, yet the young tyrant picked out, without hesitancy, ten of the likeliest looking men, seven of them lean, lantern-jawed Yankees and three French creoles. In answer to the protests of the first that they were New Englanders, he snapped out the one word "Hull"—to the creoles, "Guernsey."

"Good God!" I cried to Captain Lafitte, who stood by, gnawing his mustache in silent fury. "You know these are native-born citizens of the United States. Can you submit to such an outrage?"

Far better had I held my peace! Instantly the middy demanded of the nearest of our men who I was. The fellow, a stupid mulatto, mumbled something about my being the third mate.

"So!" snapped the Englishman. "Third mate? It is well known that all Yankee ships are officered by British deserters. I'll take this loud-mouthed sea-lawyer."

"Not alive!" I rejoined. "I'm a free-born citizen of the Republic. I'll not submit, you lying young scoundrel!—Captain Lafitte!—shipmates! Show these bullies we can die like men!"

My appeal was in vain. Lafitte still stood silent, and the men turned to stare shamefaced at the guns of the frigate. I stepped back to catch up a marlin-spike, but the British crimps were too well trained in their despicable business. They sprang at and about me in a body. I struck out right and left; then a belaying-pin crashed upon my head with stunning force.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself swinging in a sailor's hammock that was suspended from the beams of a low wooden ceiling. I felt strangely weak and faint, but made shift to turn my head enough to see that I was in a long, wide space between decks. The rows of cannon resting each before its open port roused in me a sort of dull, vague wonderment. A puff of salt sea air through the nearest port tempered the suffocating heat of the place and revived me to a clearer self-consciousness, though all my memory seemed, as it were, wrapped in a gray mist.

The first clear idea was that there was about my neck something precious which must not be lost. I fumbled about with a feeble hand, and drew out the rosary and cross from the open bosom of my shirt. I was gazing at this, still bewildered, when there came to my side a dried-up, kindly faced, bespectacled little gentleman who, at sight of my open eyes, nodded and chirruped almost gayly: "Ahoy, Jack! Pleased to see your wits out of limbo! You've had a narrow squeak of it, my man."

"Who are you? Where am I?" I murmured.

He took a pinch of snuff, sneezed with hearty enjoyment, and then answered me with genial condescension: "In due order, Jack, I reply that I am Dr. Cuthbert, surgeon to His Majesty's frigate *Belligerent*, of whose crew you are a member."

I stared at him, my memory still in that gray mist. Seeing my bewilderment, he was thoughtful enough to explain: "You were so foolish as to resist, my man, when Midshipman Hepburn impressed you. Either the blow which stunned you, or the close air of the forecabin, or the seeds of disease in your system, brought on a fever and delirium in which you have lain for the past fortnight."

"Fortnight!" I gasped. "But—I remember now—I must get to Vera Cruz—Vera Cruz! Fortnight! What is the date?"

"August the ninth."

I groaned.

"Vera Cruz?" he cackled. "Why should you wish to go to Vera Cruz?"

I put my hand to my head, and tried to think—to penetrate that gray mist. "I cannot remember—I cannot remember—only I know I must go—at once—and it has to do with this cross."

"Eh! eh!" he cackled. "I thought there was something in that rosary. Third mates of merchantmen do not usually go about with Romish crucifixes and beads about their necks. Your name?"

I opened my lips, but not a syllable came from them. I racked my brains, groping in that terrible mist of oblivion. It was in vain. I could not remember my own name!

"Eh! eh!" he murmured, when I told him the dreadful truth. "You are in a pretty pickle. I have known before of such cases, resulting from a crack on the head. The famous John Hunter agrees with Jean Louis Petit that it is due to a bloodclot on the brain, which, in favorable cases, dissolves, and the patient becomes fully restored."

I stared, uncomprehending. I had forgotten Hunter and Petit; I had forgotten all my learning—everything of my past life. I did not even realize that I was a physician.

He went on cheerily: "So you have some little hope for a full return of memory, Jack. In the meantime you will soon regain strength enough to leave the sick bay. For your own good, let me advise you to obey orders and do your duty, with no further attempts at vain and foolish resistance to your superiors. Whether or not you are a British subject,—which personally I strongly doubt,—you are entered in the crew of the 'Belligerent,' and the iron rules of the Royal Navy deal severely with the slightest infractions of discipline."

CHAPTER XXXIV

SHAME

It was another week before I recovered a fair share of my usual strength, and I believe the kindly little surgeon kept me under his charge two or three days longer than was strictly necessary. Meantime the mist still shrouded my memory, and though otherwise my wits were as clear as they had ever been, so far as knowledge of anything other than the commonest matters of daily life was concerned I was in a dense night of ignorance.

Dr. Cuthbert took care to explain this to the officer of the watch in which I was put, and the lieutenant was sufficiently humane to set me at tasks which required no skill of seamanship. As it chanced, I saw nothing of the midshipman who had impressed me. He was, as I afterwards learned, in another watch.

The day I was ordered on deck we sighted a palm-fringed coast, which my fellow seamen spoke of as Yucatan. The word meant nothing to me, for my memory was still in the mist, and the only name left me out of the past was Vera Cruz.

From Yucatan the *Belligerent* cruised off in an easterly direction toward Cuba. But the second day we fell in with a west-bound frigate, which signalled the *Belligerent* to patrol the mouths of the Mississippi, on the lookout for a noted French privateer sloop *La Belle Silène*, whose master, Jean Laffat or Lafayette, was rumored to have turned pirate.

Had I been in full possession of my mental faculties, I must surely have noted the similarity of names. Jean Lafitte was not so far from Jean Laffat, and the *Siren* from *La Belle Silène*. As it was, I doubt whether at this time the shouting of Lafitte's name in my ear would have stirred the faintest echo of memory.

The following morning, just at the change of the dog watch, the frigate was suddenly roused from its dull, precise routine by the sound of a heavy gun booming down the wind from the westward. Instantly the ship was brought about, to tack to windward, and the order was given to clear for action. The call to quarters was sounded, the marines paraded, and the cannon run out ready for firing, all before we sighted the supposed enemy.

Meantime the boom of the heavy cannon had come rolling down the wind to us at such regular intervals that the men about me swore there could be only one big gun. Before many minutes we distinguished the hoarse, barking roar of many carronades. At the same time we sighted the square topsails of a Spanish merchantman, and, a little later, the gaff-topsail of a sloop.

Soon the word was shouted down from our lookout at the masthead that the ship was running from the sloop, which carried the big gun and was evidently having far the better of the engagement. The flag of the ship now confirmed the opinion that she was a Spanish merchantman. But the strongest of spyglasses were unable to make clear the small flag of the sloop. It was enough, however, for the British captain, that, upon sighting us, the Spaniard flew a signal for help, and veered so as to run down to us. That her crew should thus seek to put their ship in the way of certain capture was considered by the men about me clear proof that the sloop was a pirate.

As I had been left to pull and haul on deck, I was able to witness all the fierce contest of the fight, and the race of the frigate to rescue the assailed Spaniard. Sail after sail was set, and the bellying sheets tautened as flat as the nimble seamen could draw them.

But swiftly as we tacked to windward, and swiftly as the Spaniard slanted down the wind to obtain shelter of us, the unfortunate vessel was already in terrible distress from the relentless attack of her little enemy. With an audacity which amazed the Britons, the sloop stood on, undaunted by our approach, hanging close upon the quarter of her victim.

The fire of the ship was already silenced, while from half a cable's-length the carronades of the sloop belched their missiles into the rigging of the Spaniard with ever-increasing rapidity, and the great gun on the mid-deck sent shot after shot crashing into the bulging hull at the waterline.

Suddenly we saw the mizzenmast of the Spaniard totter. It fell forward and sideways, dragging after it the splintered mainmast. As the ship broached-to, we could see that she was settling down by the stern. Even I, despite the night of ignorance which lay upon me, realized that she was beginning to founder.

Certain of the fate of her victim, the sloop now sheered off. The *Belligerent* opened fire with the long eighteen-pounder bow-chasers, but the shots fell short of the sloop by fifty yards or more. Within half a minute the sloop had the stupendous audacity to fire her great gun at us. By a rare chance, the ponderous

ball struck the starboard shrouds, snapping them like packthread, and hurled on aslant the after deck, to chip a splinter from the mizzenmast and smash a great hole through the roof of the cabin.

Only the quickness with which the frigate was brought up into the wind and the main and mizzen sails blanketed by the foresails saved the main and mizzenmasts from being sprung, if not carried overboard. Never, I fancy, did the crew of a man-of-war have to suffer such a maddening checkmate. They dared not even come about to give the saucy sloop a broadside, but could only bark away with the ineffective bow-chasers. The sloop packed on what was a tremendous spread of canvas for so small a craft, and fled away aslant the wind at a speed that the frigate could not have hoped to equal on the same course, even had the rigging been in perfect trim.

By the time the British had stoppered the broken shrouds, reeved preventer braces, and strengthened the splintered mizzenmast, the Spanish ship had drifted down within hailing distance. She now sat very low astern, and such of her people as had not been slain or helplessly wounded had crowded up into her high-flung bows and were shrieking to us for rescue. There was not one of their boats which had escaped the fierce fire of the sloop's carronades. Seeing this, and that pursuit of the sloop was now hopeless, the British captain ordered out all the frigate's boats to take off the imperilled Spaniards.

This was a simple matter, as there was little sea running and the wind no more than a fair breeze. Soon the first boatload of Spaniards was brought over from the sinking ship and rowed along our starboard side toward the stern. As the boat passed, I looked down from the lofty deck in the idle curiosity of my empty head. Seated in the stern-sheets I saw a portly man in robes, and beside him a slender woman in the white veil of a novice. The woman looked up—It was Alisanda!

A cry burst from my lips, and I staggered back with a hand to my forehead. In a twinkling everything had come back to me—full consciousness and memory of myself, my life, my love! But in the same instant all memory of my days aboard the *Belligerent* became a blank.

I stared about me in amazement. Then I remembered that my lady was being rowed alongside this strange ship. I glanced over, and saw that the boat had made fast alongside the ship's quarter,—that preparations were under way to lift Alisanda to the deck.

Heedless of all else in the strange unknown scene about me, I ran aft, half mad with the mystery and joy of such a meeting. But suddenly a marine sprang before me with lowered bayonet.

"Halt!" he ordered.

I stopped short, with the point against my breast.

"Let me past—let me past!" I panted. "I must go to my lady! I am Dr. Robinson! I must see her—at once!"

"What's this?" demanded an insolent young voice, and the midshipman who had impressed me swung around beside the marine. I recognized him on the instant.

"You!" I cried.

"The dunce!" he rejoined. "Back before the mast, you damned Yankee!"

"You!" I repeated. "Get out of my way. I'm going to my lady!"

"Your lady!" he sneered, and he added a term which stung me to madness. As he spoke, he struck me a heavy blow with his fist upon my jaw. Catching him by the wrist, I jerked him forward and struck him a blow between the eyes that would have felled him had I not held to his wrist. The marine cried out, and sprang around for an opening to lunge at me without striking his officer. I caught the staggering young scoundrel by the shoulders and hurled him against the man. Both rolled to the deck.

At the same moment some one sprang upon me from behind and bore me down. As I fell, others flung themselves upon my legs. My arms were wrenched around behind my back and lashed together, my ankles bound fast, despite my desperate struggles. Then a stern voice gave the order for me to be taken below and placed in irons. I sought to cry out an appeal—to attempt an explanation. But one of the men thrust a balled kerchief into my mouth and tied in the gag with another kerchief which covered my eyes as well. Dumb, blind, and bound, I was carried below, still struggling.

The moment they had replaced my bonds with handcuffs and bilboes and relieved me of the gag, down in the foul, cell-like prison, I so implored and raved to see the captain that they thought I was beside myself,—as, indeed, it may well be said I was. Instead of the captain, they sent for Dr. Cuthbert, who was a perfect stranger to my restored memory. He listened to my now incoherent

statements that I was Dr. John Robinson and must go to my lady, and sought to soothe me. My constant repetitions convinced him that I was quite out of my head, and to quiet me, he cunningly administered an opiate in wine and water.

Discipline is swift-handed aboard a man-of-war. Before I had fully slept off the effects of the drug, I was roused and taken before the court-martial convened to try me. The judge-advocate was the officer of my watch, though at the time I had no memory of him. For the first time I saw the captain near at hand. He was a granite-faced Cornishman, and looked upon me with a cold, blue-gray eye which condemned me before a word had been spoken.

My ankles had been freed from the bilboes before I was brought up, but when I was ordered to stand, I could not readily obey because of the continued numbness of my limbs. At this two of my guards jerked me up with brutal roughness, and the charge against me was read. To my amazement and horror, I learned that I was upon trial, under the name Jack Numskull, for the crime of striking my superior officer, the penalty for which was death.

Ignorant of the procedure of the court, I sought to protest, but was ordered to keep silent. In quick succession, the witnesses were called and questioned,—first the midshipman I had struck, then the marine, and after that four or five seamen. All testified without contradiction to the damnable fact that I had struck Midshipman Hepburn.

"Enough," said Captain Powers. "Has the prisoner anything to say?"

The question was repeated to me. I bowed to the court as best I could with my wrists locked together behind my back.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I wish first to explain—"

"Speak to the point," commanded the judge-advocate. "The law does not require you to confess. Yet if you wish to meet death with a free conscience, the court will receive your statement. Do you admit that you struck your superior officer?"

"No. I deny it."

"You deny it—in the face of this positive testimony?"

"I admit that I struck Midshipman Hepburn,—if that is his name. I deny that I struck my superior officer."

"Explain!" demanded Captain Powers, irascibly.

"I deny that Midshipman Hepburn is my superior officer,—that any man on this ship or in the Navy of George the Third is my superior officer. I deny the jurisdiction of this court. I am a native-born citizen of the United States of America. I was aboard a neutral vessel sailing from one free port to another when this same Midshipman Hepburn boarded the craft and unlawfully impressed me. In resisting, I was struck senseless. Of whatever has happened since I have barely a vague consciousness. Only I know that immediately before the affray for which I am now being tried, I saw a lady being brought alongside in a boat, and at once full memory came back to me. I am John H. Robinson, a physician of the Louisiana Territory, born in the State of Pennsylvania, reared at Cincinnati on the Ohio River, and educated at Columbia College, in the city of New York."

During my recital, all present except the captain regarded me with lively curiosity, mingled with varying degrees of incredulity. Powers did not betray the slightest interest or emotion.

"We have heard the statement of the prisoner," he said. "Whether it is or is not true is irrelevant. The fact remains that the prisoner, while serving as a seaman in the service of His Majesty King George, did strike a midshipman in said service, the same being his superior officer."

"Sir, may I suggest the doubt of the prisoner's sanity, in mitigation of his crime?" interposed the judge-advocate.

"Remove the prisoner," commanded the captain.

I was led out and kept waiting for half an hour, while my life hung in the balance. At last they led me back to receive the decree of the court. By now I was in a half stupor of agonized despair, my thoughts fixed upon Alisanda and all I was to lose. The terrible word "Death!" roused me to consciousness of my surroundings.

The judge-advocate paused, drew a deep breath, and continued the reading of the sentence: "But, it being testified to by Surgeon Wilbur Cuthbert that said prisoner was not at the time of the committance of his crime rational or sane, said sentence of death is hereby commuted to the sentence of one hundred lashes —"

"Hold! hold!" I cried. "Not that! Shoot me!—murder me! But spare me that shame!"

This time when they dragged me out and down to the foul prison black-hole they had no need of a gag. After that one wild protest, I fell dumb. I had seen two floggings of twenty strokes of the cat since coming aboard. With the words of my sentence the memory had come back to me, and with the memory of those shameful floggings had returned the remembrance of all my life aboard the *Belligerent*.

When, an hour or so after my sentence, Dr. Cuthbert came to condole with me, I recognized him and his kindness, but sat in sullen misery when he sought to question me. The trial was over—sentence imposed. Why should I accept the sympathy of these brutes?

He may have divined my frame of mind, for presently he fell to deploring the rigors of the times, brought about by the boundless ambition of Bonaparte. England, he argued, alone interposed by means of her navy a barrier against the world-wide domination of the Corsican adventurer. That navy was the hope of the world. Yet, thanks to the French privateers and Bonaparte's strength upon the Continent, Britain had lost much of her commerce to the United States, to whose ships the British seamen were constantly deserting to escape the harsh yet necessary discipline of the Royal Navy. What, then, if occasionally a native American was impressed? The struggle between Britain and the Corsican was a struggle of life and death. Britain must man her ships, or submit to destruction, and with Britain crushed, what nation or alliance of nations could hope to withstand the infernal genius of Bonaparte?

I waited for a pause, and inquired in a casual tone as to the welfare of the Spanish lady rescued from the sinking ship. He started up, retreated a pace or two, with his eyes fixed upon me, and then hurried off, tapping his head significantly. I bowed my head with a sigh of relief. The temptation had been taken from me. My weakness should not have another opportunity to betray me. My lady should not know of my shame.

CHAPTER XXXV

UNDER THE LASH

In the early morning they led me out beside the foremast. There were present the petty officer told off to wield the cat-o'-nine-tails, an officer to tally the strokes, Dr. Cuthbert, and my guard. This was at the first. Before the punishment had begun, half a hundred of the crew had assembled to witness it, drawn I suppose by varying motives of curiosity, pity, or craving for the exhibition of brutality.

My guard was about to strip off my shirt, when Dr. Cuthbert interposed. "One moment." They stepped back, and he addressed me: "Dr. Robinson, I have never known a man possessed of a finer physique than yours. On the other hand, none can say beforetime what any man can endure unless he has been tested. You may succumb to this punishment."

I looked at him a long moment, and for my lady's sake, found power to beg a favor of this most insistently kind enemy.

"Dr. Cuthbert," I replied, "may I ask you to remove the rosary from about my neck?" He did so. "Sir, I now request you to guard my treasure. If I survive this shame, restore it to me. If I succumb, I trust you as a gentleman and a brother physician to give the cross into the hands of Señorita Alisanda Vallois, with the simple statement that I died in your care."

"Señorita Vallois?—You know her?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; but in God's name, doctor, do not tell her of my shame!"

"Dr. Cuthbert!" interposed the officer in charge.

The doctor stepped away, and my guard and executioner seized me fast. With the deftness of sailors, they removed my handcuffs, stripped me to the waist, and triced me up by the wrists to the foremast.

"Ready!" called the officer. "One!"

Down came the lash upon my bare back. But the sting of its thongs was as nothing to the sting of shame which pierced my heart. Death would have been

far less bitter than this disgrace!

The count went on. Stroke after stroke slashed across my back and shoulders as heavily as my imbruted executioner could strike. Soon the blood began to ooze, then trickle, then stream down. By the fiftieth stroke I should judge that my back was a mass of raw flesh. Yet the count continued, the strokes fell without ceasing, mercilessly.

Coming as I did from a people bred to endure the utmost torture of the Indian savage, I found no difficulty in restraining any outcry under this equally fiendish torture of so-called Christians. But as the little surgeon had said, no man can foresee the limits of endurance. At the seventy-third stroke I swooned. They did not cut me down, but let me hang by the wrists, and drenched me with buckets of sea-water, until I revived.

I gasped, stiffened, and writhed in the hell of agony which beset me with returning consciousness.

"Seventy-four!" called the officer.

The lash descended, all the more forcefully for the rest enjoyed by the wielder.

"Seventy-five!—seventy-six!—seventy-seven!" went on the merciless tally.

I gritted my teeth, and vowed to endure and live, that I might overturn heaven and earth to accomplish the shame and destruction of Britain. My glaring eyes looked out past the mast upon the sailors before me with such murderous rage that one by one they edged back and around beyond reach of my vision.

The count had now passed the eighties—it was at ninety. Only ten more strokes! But despite my rage, a deathly sickness was fast creeping upon me. I could no longer hold up my head. Try as I might, it sank lower and lower, until my chin was upon my quivering breast.

"Ninety-five!" The words came faint, from an immeasurable distance. I was again about to swoon.

Suddenly I heard a cry of anguish such as I trust never to hear again. It was the voice of my lady! I looked up. She was darting toward me, her beautiful hair flying wildly in the breeze, the rosary in her outstretched hand.

"Ninety-six!" Again the lash fell.

"Ninety-seven!" But now she was beside me—she had flung herself between me and the descending lash. I heard the sailors cry out. The executioner whisked his lash aside by so narrow a margin that the tip of one of the thongs left a crimson weal across her white forehead.

"God!" cried the officer. There was a moment's breathless pause. Then he called harshly, "Mademoiselle, stand aside. There are yet three strokes."

"Strike if you dare!" she cried. "I am here to defend him! Strike me!"

"Mademoiselle, I would not force you away. But if I send for Captain Powers—"

"Send!" she cried. "*Poder de Dios!* This gentleman is my betrothed husband!"

There was a gleam above my head, and the blade of a little dagger slashed through the lashings which bound my wrists to the mast. I attempted to turn, but tottered, and my knees bent and doubled beneath me. I should have fallen headlong had she not eased me to the deck with her arm across my naked, sweaty, blood-streaked breast.

She knelt beside me, and drew my head against her knee. Then all again became black.



CHAPTER XXXVI

ACROSS THE GULF

This time, lacking the flood of sea-water, my swoon lasted much longer. I recovered to find myself in the great cabin, lying upon a luxurious berth, close to a stern window. Already my back had been covered with a soothing, cooling balm and wrapped about with bandages. I sought to turn upon my side, that I might look around. At once gentle hands lent their aid to my support.

"He revives!" exclaimed my lady.

"'T was best to dress the wound before applying restoratives," chirruped Dr. Cuthbert.

But now I was fairly on my side, and could see the dear form of my lady.

"Alisanda!" I murmured.

"Juan!" she responded, kneeling and pressing her lips to mine regardless of the doctor's presence. "My Juan! I am here, my beloved. I am with you!"

I caught sight of the weal of the lash across her forehead, and I quivered with fury.

"That!" I muttered—"that mark upon your forehead! They struck you?"

"No, no!" she soothed. "Lie still, beloved. It was only an accident. It does not hurt me—nothing can hurt me, Juan, now that we have found each other!"

"Dearest one!" I whispered.

She bent close above me, with her soft round arm about my neck,—and quickly all my pain and rage died away and were forgotten under the glory of the golden love-light in her tender eyes.

Dr. Cuthbert coughed, then took snuff. At that moment we would not have heeded a cannon roaring in our ears.

At last, however, Father Rocus entered, followed closely by Captain Powers.

Alisanda quietly rose to face them, but held to my hand as a mother would clasp the hand of the child she sought to defend. The captain stared at her between anger and admiration.

"Mademoiselle Vallois!" he rumbled. "What does all this mean? How dare you interfere with the discipline of my ship?"

"How dare you, who call yourself an officer and a Christian, torture so hideously this gentleman?" she returned.

"Gentleman?—Torture?" he echoed, taken aback.

"The gentleman I am betrothed to marry."

"Marry!—Him?"

"*Santisima Virgen!* yes!" she cried. "And you!—you have lashed him like a slave!—the truest, most gallant gentleman in Christendom!"

He muttered something about the mad third mate of a sloop. To this Dr. Cuthbert made hasty reply: "All a mistake, sir,—a most egregious error. Mr. Robinson is, I am certain, precisely what he claimed."

"Nevertheless," broke in the captain, his voice as hard as iron, "the man has been tried, found guilty, and sentenced to one hundred lashes. He has received ninety-seven. There are still three strokes."

"I will bear them for him!" said Alisanda.

"Mademoiselle, do not make yourself ridiculous," he reproved.

"Better that than your cowardly cruelty in seeking to lash to death a citizen of the Republic which revolted from your brutal rule!" she thrust back at him.

He stood for some moments gazing into her scornful eyes. Despite all his harshness and arrogance, I believe he was alike pleased with her spirit and softened by her beauty.

"This man is entered in my crew as a subject of His Majesty," he at last stated, in a tone which invited argument.

"He is not a Briton," she replied. "I know he is an American. I met and travelled with him in his own land. I saw, on the bank of the Ohio, the tomb of his mother, who was slain by the red savages in the pay of your Government. He was a

volunteer with an expedition under Lieutenant Pike of the Army of the United States. They crossed the western deserts of Louisiana and the lofty sierras of the West, and came far south into New Spain."

"Hold!" exclaimed the captain. "That is incredible."

"It is the truth," confirmed Father Rocus.

"You support her statement, sir?" demanded Powers.

"I am ready to swear to it, on my sacred word," replied the padre. "This gentleman upon the couch is Dr. John H. Robinson, a physician of the Louisiana Territory, who was the *compagnon du voyage* of Lieutenant Pike in the amazing journey of which Señorita Vallois has spoken. It is as I told you before we entered."

Father Rocus spoke with no less force than suavity.

"It begins to look as though a mistake had been made," admitted the captain with obstinate reluctance.

"A mistake, sir, which has come near to costing Dr. Robinson his life," ventured Dr. Cuthbert, snuff-box in hand.

"A mistake which can never be rectified," added Father Rocus.

The stubborn Briton was at last convinced. "I will make such reparation as lies within my power. Dr. Robinson, I offer you my apology for this unfortunate mistake."

I closed my eyes and clung tightly to Alisanda's hand, that I might not fling his apology back in his teeth. I heard the murmur of the padre's voice, followed by the tread of feet and the opening and closing of the door. Then once more Alisanda's arm was about my neck and her fragrant lips were pressed upon my mouth.

"Dearest," she whispered, "they have gone. I alone am here now, to comfort you."

"You are here!" I repeated. "Tell me. How did you come? I sailed for Vera Cruz, but they took me by force from the sloop."

I paused, as suddenly my two memories brought together the sloop *Siren* and the

sloop which had sunk my lady's ship.

"Lafitte!" I exclaimed.

"Lafitte?" she asked, bewildered.

"All's well that ends well!" I cried. "After all, he brought us together."

"Who, Juan?"

"Jean Lafitte, the man who was to have landed me in Vera Cruz."

"Ah, Vera Cruz—*Santa Maria!* that terrible city! People were dying by scores of the yellow fever. We lingered as long as we dared. But you did not come. The padre said you could not have read my message aright. We at last took ship for Western Florida. There was none sailing for New Orleans."

"You were coming to me! But the veil—the nun's veil?"

"It is gone—see!" She put her free hand to the silky mass of her dusky hair. "God forgive me, Juan! It was for your sake, and with the assent of the padre, that I took the novitiate vows."

"For my sake, Alisanda?"

"That I might come to you, my knight! When you left me, my uncle became all the more insistent that I should marry the Governor-General. The padre had already planned for me this way of escape. I took the vows of a novice. After that neither my uncle nor Doña Marguerite dared oppose the counsel of the padre when he told them I must go to the Convent of my Order in Vera Cruz. You see how selfish a love is mine. I could not give you up, Juan. I was not a heroine, to give myself for the saving of an oppressed people."

"No!" I rejoined. "You could not have helped the people of New Spain. They must fight their own battles. No people are worthy of freedom who are not ready to give their lives for the ending of tyranny. Had you sacrificed yourself to Salcedo, he would either have betrayed the revolution, or he would have made himself a dictator, more tyrannous than before."

"You told me that in Chihuahua, dear. I repeated your words to the padre, and he confirmed the statement. It was well, for had he shared my uncle's faith in Don Nimesio, he also might have sought to persuade me to give myself to the cause of liberty."

"As it was," I murmured, "you attempted to come to me—alone!"

"Not alone, Juan. There were the padre and my faithful Chita."

"Ah, Chita—I did not see her in the boat."

My lady began to weep. "Poor Chita! She was killed by a cannon-ball, when standing beside me, during that fearful destruction of our ship by the pirate sloop."

"Pirate!" I repeated. "They flew the black flag?"

"No; but it was a flag unknown to our captain, and he said they must be pirates. They attacked us without warning and signalled that they would give us no quarter—and they killed my poor Chita!"

I remembered the dreadful vow of Captain Lafitte, but forgot it again in my efforts to comfort my darling. I drew her lovely head down upon my shoulder and stroked her silky hair.

In the midst Father Rocus entered and came over to us, rubbing his plump, white hands together with satisfaction.

"My dear children," he said, "after all your trials, you have at last won the happiness you deserve. Though you, my son, remain a heretic, I believe that such love as yours is sacred in the sight of God. My daughter, come now, that I may prepare you for the sacrament of holy wedlock."

"Now?—so soon?" she cried, drawing free from me, and standing, scarlet-cheeked, her eyes fixed upon the deck, and her sweet bosom rising and falling tremulously.

"He is bruised and torn in spirit and body. You alone can soothe him," said the padre.

She cast at me a glance of unutterable tenderness, and withdrew into the adjoining stateroom. Father Rocus paused for a last word to me: "My son, this moment should be as solemn to you as it is joyful. Consider the great goodness of God in giving to you a wife more precious than rubies. In that thought, remember the words of our Blessed Lord Christ, 'Forgive your enemies.'"

With that he left me, and I lay alone in my burning pain, wondering if it were possible for any man to forgive so bitter a shame and wrong as had been done to

me. But quickly a sort of ecstatic awe crept over me as the consciousness of my marvellous—my splendid good fortune took possession of my mind. It seemed unbelievable, and yet he had said it. My dear lady was about to become my bride! She had crossed the gulf to me!

In the bliss of that thought, all my pain and anguish of body and mind vanished, and the bitterness of shame, the fury of hate dissolved away. I could not forgive my enemies, but the memory of their deeds was blunted and smoothed over by the magic of love.

When at last Captain Powers came in with a few others to witness the ceremony, I was able to bring myself to the point of accepting the apology he had tendered. This was well, for otherwise it would have been difficult to endure the service which, as captain of the ship, it was necessary for him to render us to assure the legality of our marriage.

Soon Father Rocus led in my dear lady. She was no longer blushing, but calm and pale. In the presence of the men who had condemned me to death and to a disgrace worse than death, she raised her head and passed by them with the hauteur of a queen. Yet once at my side, she knelt and clasped my hand with a tender devotion that fetched more than one envious sigh from the breasts of the younger officers. Never had she seemed more lovely, more adorable, than as she waited beside me, her dark eyes upraised and glowing with solemn ecstasy.

The sonorous voice of Father Rocus rang in my ears like the sweet harmonies of some heavenly choir. I had insisted upon lifting myself upon my elbow, and when the padre handed me the ring, I made shift to slip it upon the finger of my bride. A little more, and the good padre raised his hands above us and blessed us as man and wife.

With that the officers came forward and expressed their congratulations, forgetting their British stiffness and reserve in their heartiness. At such a moment I could have thanked Satan himself for a word of good-will. Yet I was not ill-pleased when, having received my responses, they bowed themselves out. As the last of their number closed the door behind him, Father Rocus drew from his robe a rounded pouch of worn leather, and held it out to me.

"What is this, padre?" I asked, taking the heavy little bag.

He nodded gayly to Alisanda. "According to the Spanish, and, I believe, the American law, you are entitled to the charge of this property. When we left

Chihuahua, Señorita Vallois intrusted her jewels to my care. I now deliver them into the hands of her husband."

He smiled at my bewildered look, blessed us the second time, and left us alone.

"Sweetheart," I muttered, "I did not know—"

She smiled in tender mischief. "Was it not a happy surprise? Before my father died, there in the fogs of England, he sold all his Spanish estates and bought jewels, that I might keep possession of my property. Such being his will, not even his brother, my uncle, would take the jewels from me."

"Nor will I, Alisanda," I said.

"You will share them equally with me, dear husband; for we are now one. If it is your desire, we will purchase an estate at New Orleans. I dread your cold, wet North."

"Whatever your heart desires, dearest one, it shall ever be the object of my life to obtain it for you. Your wish shall ever be my law, my bride!"

"Juan, my husband!" she murmured, and our lips met in that first rapturous kiss of man and wife.

Two days later, having in the meantime stood off toward the Spanish port of Mobile, the *Belligerent* fell in with a Philadelphia brig, bound for New Orleans. The master of the Quaker vessel readily bargained to take us as passengers, and we were accordingly put aboard the *Mary Penn* by Captain Powers, after we had taken a most affectionate farewell of Father Rocus. He was going on to Mobile to care for the rescued Spaniards, of whom, all being persons of no political or military consequence, the British were eager to rid themselves.

Except between ourselves and the padre, the parting afforded a welcome relief to all. There had not alone been the matter of personal shame. In these years of national humiliation, it would be difficult for any true American to act the part of a gracious guest aboard a British man-of-war.

But once aboard the *Mary Penn*, there was nothing to mar the perfect joy of our love. After a short and smooth voyage, the brig put into one of the many mouths of the Mississippi, and, ascending in charge of a pilot, landed us at New Orleans, the happiest couple in all the wide world.

THE END



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