

CHAPTER XXXI

MARJORY'S ADVENTURE

As I felt that time, in which I had the passage all to myself, was precious, I turned back to the main way down. The path was very steep and low and the rock underfoot was cut in rude steps; as I held the lantern before me I had to droop it so that I could smell the hot metal where the flame touched the back. It was indeed a steep and difficult way, made for others than men of my own stature. As I went, I felt my first fears passing away. At first I had dreaded a lack of air, and all sorts of horrors which come to those who essay unknown passages. There came back to my recollection passages in Belzoni's explorations in the Pyramids when individuals had got lost, and when whole parties were stopped by the first to advance jamming in a narrow passage as he crawled along on his belly. Here, though the roof came down in places dangerously low, there was still ample room, and the air came up sweet and cool. To any one unused to deep burrows, whether the same be natural or artificial, there is a dread of being underground. One is cut off from light and air; and burial alive in all its potential horrors is always at hand. However, the unexpected clearness and easiness of the way reassured me; and I descended the steep passage with a good heart. All distance underground seems extravagantly long to those unaccustomed to it; and to me the mere depth I had descended seemed almost impossible when the way before me became somewhat level^[252] again. At the same time the roof rose so that I could stand upright. I guessed that I must be now somewhere at the foot of the hillock and not far from the old chapel; so I went forward carefully, keeping my hand ready to cover up the front of the lamp. As the ground was fairly level, I could in a way pace it; and as I knew that there was only about two hundred feet distance from the foot of the hill to the chapel, I was not surprised when after some eighty paces I found the passage end in a sort of rude chamber cut in the rock. At right angles to the place of my entry there was a regular stairway, partly cut in rock and partly built, leading upward. Before I ascended I looked around carefully and could see that sections of the walls of the chamber were built of great blocks of stone. Leaving further investigation for the future I went upward with a beating heart.

The stair was rudely circular, and I had counted thirty steps when I saw the way blocked by a great stone. For a few seconds I was in fear lest I should find this impossible; then I looked carefully for any means of moving the obstacle. I thought it more than likely that something of the same process would be adopted for both ends of the passage.

Luck was certainly on my side to-day! Here were two iron handles, much the same as those with which I had been enabled to move the monument from within. I grasped

them firmly, and began to experiment as to which way the stone moved. It trembled under my first effort; so exerting a very little of my strength in the same direction the great stone began to move. I saw a widening line of open space through which a dim light shone in upon me. Holding the stone in poise with one hand, I covered the front of the lamp with my cap, and then resumed the opening process. Slowly, slowly, the stone rolled back till a clear way lay abreast of me through[253] which, doubled up, I could pass. From where I stood I could see part of the wall of a building, a wall with long low windows in massive stone; and I knew that at last I had reached the old chapel. A joyous feeling rushed over me; after the unknown perils of the cavern passage at last I had reached safety. I bent low and began to step out through the narrow opening. There was fully four feet in the circumference of the stone so that two such steps as were possible to me were necessary to take me out. I had taken one and my foot was lifted for the second when a clear firm voice said in a whisper:

“Hands up! If you move you are a dead man!” I stopped of course, and raising my face, for my head was bent low in the necessary effort of stooping, I found myself opposite the muzzle of a revolver. For an instant I looked at it; it was firm as the rock around me, and I felt that I must obey. Then I looked beyond it, to the hand which held it, and the eyes which directed. These too were inflexible; but a great joy came over me when I recognised that the hand and eyes were those of Marjory. I would have sprung forward to her, but for that ominous ring of steel in front of me. I waited a few seconds, for it seemed strange that she did not lower the revolver on seeing who it was. As, however, the pistol still covered me unpleasantly, I said:

“Marjory!” In an instant her hand dropped to her side. I could not but notice with an admiration for her self-control and the strength of her resolution, that she still held the revolver in her grasp. With a glad cry she leaped towards me with a quick impulsive movement which made my heart bound, for it was all love and spontaneity. She put her left hand on my shoulder; and as she looked into my eyes I could feel the glad tremor that swept through her.

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For several seconds she stood, and then with a sigh said in a voice of self-reproach:

“And *I* did not know *you*!” The way she spoke the words “*I*” “*you*” was luminous! Had I not already known her heart, she would in that moment have stood self-revealed.

We were manifestly two thoroughly practical people, for even in the rapture of our meeting—to me it was no less than rapture to come from so grim an aperture in the secret cavern passage—we had our wits about us. I think she was really the first to

come to a sense of our surroundings; for just as I was opening my mouth to speak she held up a warning finger.

“Hush! Some one may come; though I think there is no one near. Wait dear, whilst I look!” she seemed to flit noiselessly out of the doorway and I saw her vanish amongst the trees. In a few minutes she returned carrying carefully a wicker basket. As she opened it she said:

“Some one might suspect something if they saw you in that state.” She took from the basket a little bowl of water, soap, towel and a clothes-brush. Whilst I washed my face and hands she was brushing me down. A very short time completed a rough toilet. Then she poured the water carefully into a crack in the wall, and putting the things together with my lamp, back in the basket, she said:

“Come now! Let us get to the Castle before any one finds us. They will think that I have met you in the wood.” We went as unobtrusively as we could to the Castle; and entered, I think, unobserved. I had a thorough clean up before I let any one see me; our secret was too precious to risk discovery by suspicion. When I had seen Mrs. Jack, Marjory took me to her boudoir in the top of the castle, and there, whilst she sat^[255] by me holding my hands, I told her every detail of my adventure. I could feel how my story moved her; when there was any passage of especial interest the pressure of her clasp grew tense. She, who had seemingly no fear for herself, was all in fear for me!

Then we talked matters over. We had now a good clue to the comings and goings of the kidnappers; and we felt that by a little thoughtful organisation we might find their hours, and be able to trace them one by one. By lunch time we had decided on our plan of action. We took our idea from one of the old “Tales of the Genii” where the conquered king was brought by his faithful vizier into a cavern and asked to cut a rope which was stretched before him, and which he soon discovered released the great rock which roofed the pavilion specially built by the vizier to be seen and occupied by the conqueror. We would fix a fine thread to the top of the monument and bring it secretly to the castle, where its breaking would apprise Marjory of the opening of the passage; thus she would discover the hour of the coming of the kidnappers to the chapel. We arranged another ingenious device, whereby a second thread, fastened to the stone in the old chapel, would be broken by the opening of the stone, and would cause a book to fall on Marjory’s bed and wake her if she were asleep. The better part of the afternoon was taken up by us carrying out these ideas, for we went slowly and cautiously to work. Then I went home.

I was early at the monument in the morning, and getting behind the stone signalled to the Castle roof in case Marjory should happen to expect me and be there. But there was no answer. So I sat down to wait till it would be decent time to go to the Castle for an early breakfast.

As I sat waiting I thought I heard a sound, either close to me and muffled, or else distant; I could hardly tell^[256] which. Matters might be lively if I were discovered; so I got my revolver ready. With my heart beating so heavily that I mistook it at moments for the foreign sound, I listened and listened, all ears.

It was as I had suspected; the sound came from the tunnel beneath me. I hardly knew whether to stay or go. If I waited I could see who came from the opening; but on the other hand I should at once be known to have discovered the secret. Still as the stone might roll back at any moment, it was necessary that I should make up my mind; I should either go or stay. I decided that I would stay and make discovery at once. In any case should I succeed in capturing a blackmailer, or even in discovering or partially discovering his identity, I should be aiding in Marjory's safety. So I got my revolver ready; and standing back so that I could not be seen at once by any one emerging, waited.

No one came; but I could still hear a slight sound. Filled with a growing unrest, I determined to take the initiative, and began to move close to the stone. As I looked, it began to quiver, and then to move slowly. As it rolled softly back I kept behind it so that I might not be seen; and waited with revolver ready and what patience I could.

There was dead silence; and then a hand holding a revolver rested a moment on the edge of the opening.

I knew the hand, and I knew the revolver, and I knew the quickness of both. I did not say a word or make a sound, till Marjory with an alert movement seemed to sweep up out of the opening and whirled round with ready pistol, as though suspecting an enemy on every side.

Marjory, all covered with dust, her cheeks as white as snow, so that the smears of dust lay on them like soot; and eyes with pupils distended as in coming from the^[257] dark. For a few seconds she seemed hardly to recognise me; but when she did she sprang gladly into my arms.

"Oh! Archie, I am glad to see you. It was so terrible and lonely in the dark. I began to fear I might never find my way out!" In the dark! I began to fear, and asked her:

“But, dear one, how did you come; and why? Hadn’t you got a light with you? Surely you didn’t come unprepared, if you did venture into the cave!” Then in a rush she told me the whole story. How before dawn she had been waked by the dropping of the book and had hurried to the castle roof to watch the stone. With her field glass she had presently seen it move. She was then satisfied that the watchers had gone home; and had determined on a little adventure on her own account.

“I put on a grey tweed dress, and taking my revolver and bicycle lamp, stole out of the castle and reached the old chapel. Having lit my lamp, I rolled back the stone and set out to explore the tunnel. I followed from your description, the passage to its bifurcating, and determined to explore the other arm to the reservoir. I easily found it, a deep, dark tank cut in the rock and seemingly fed by springs which bubbled up from patches of fine sand, the accumulation of years of wasting rock. Whilst I was trying to look into the depth of the reservoir, holding my bicycle lamp so as to throw its light downwards, I saw something white at the bottom. Just then the lamp from its inverted position began to smoke, but as I looked in that last moment through the crystal pure water I recognised that the white object was a skull. In the sudden shock of the discovery, the lamp dropped from my hand and disappeared hissing and bubbling in the last flicker of light.” As she told me this, I took her hand for I feared that the memory of such an appalling moment must have unnerved her; but to my surprise[258] her nerves were as firm as my own. She let her hand remain in mine; but she had evidently understood my thought for she said:

“Oh! it’s all right now, Archie. For a moment or two I do believe I was frightened. You can have the laugh on me there if you like! But then common sense came to my aid. I was in a tight place, and it would need all I knew to get out. I thought the matter over as coolly as I could; and do you know that coolness seemed to grow with the effort! I was in the dark, in a cave, deep underground, the entrance to which was secret; I had no means of getting a light even for an instant, for though I had taken plenty of wax matches they were all in my lamp. The only thing I could do was to try to grope my way out. I had noted the passage as I came along, but I found so soon as I had felt my way out of the reservoir chamber, how little use an abstract recollection is when every second there is a new detail. I found, too, the astonishing difference between sight and touch; what I had remembered had been with my eyes and not with my fingers. I had to guard all round me, my head, my feet, my sides. I am amazed, now when I think of it, how many different kinds of mistakes and calculations I made in a few yards. It seemed a terribly long time till I came to the place where the passage forks. There I weighed up the matter of whether it would be better to go back by the way I had come to the old chapel, or to go up the other passage to the monument of which you told

me. Somehow the latter seemed to me the more feasible. I think it must have been that I trusted you more than myself. You had not shrunk from going into that passage; and I would not shrink from going out.”

I squeezed her hands hard, I had got both by this time. She blushed a little and looked at me fondly and went on:

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“There was something cheering in the mere fact of going up instead of down. It was like coming towards the air and light again; and the time did not seem so long till I came to the end of the passage, for so far as I could feel there was nothing but solid rock all round me. For a little bit my heart sank again; but I soon bucked up. I knew that this must be the way out; and I felt around for the iron handles of which you had told me. And then, Thank God for His goodness! when the stone began to turn I saw the light, and breathed fresh air again. They seemed to give me back all my courage and caution. Up to this I had not troubled about kidnappers; there was quite enough to think of in getting along the passage. But now I was my own woman again, and I determined to take no chances. When I saw it was your gun that was aimed at me I was glad!”

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CHAPTER XXXII THE LOST SCRIPT

After a little consideration of ways and means, we decided that the best thing we could do was to pass through the passage to the old chapel. It was still very early, so early that in all probability none of the household were yet awake; if Marjory could regain her room before being seen, it would avoid curiosity. She was certainly in a shocking condition of dust and dishevelment. Her groping in the dark through that long rugged passage had not been accomplished without many hardships. Her dress was torn in several places, and her hat was simply knocked to pieces; even her hair was tumbled about, and had been put up again and again with dusty fingers. She saw me smiling; I think it pained her a little for she suddenly said:

“Come along quick; it’s simply awful standing here in the light of day in this filthy state. It won’t feel half so bad in the dark passage!” Without more ado I lit my lamp, and having, of course, closed the entrance behind us, we went back into the cavern.

The tramp back through the tunnel did not seem nearly so long or so difficult as at first. It may have been that comparative familiarity made it easier; it certainly eased its terrors. Or it is possible that our companionship, each to the other, made the bearing of fears and difficulties lighter.

Anyhow, it was something of a surprise to both of us to find ourselves so quickly in the rude chamber whence[261] the steps led up to the old chapel. Before we left this, we made a rough examination of it, turning the lantern over walls and floor and ceiling; for I had an idea that the passage from the castle, which I was satisfied must exist, made its exit here. We could not, however, see any external sign of an opening; the walls were built up of massive unmortared stones, and were seemingly as solid as the rock itself.

When we got into the chapel we found the utility of Marjory's foresight. In a corner was her little basket with soap and towel, water and clothes brush; and together we restored her to some semblance of decency. Then she went back to the castle and got in unobserved, as I, watching from the shelter of the trees, could see. I took my way back through the passage; and so to the wood where my bicycle was hidden. I washed my hands in the stream and lay down in the shelter of a thick grove of hazel, where I slept till breakfast time. When I rode up to the castle, I found Marjory with her kodak on the sweep outside, taking views of its various points.

The morning was intensely hot; and here, in the shelter of the little valley and the enclosing wood, the air was sultry, and the sun beat down pitilessly. We had a table set out under the shelter of the trees and breakfasted *al fresco*.

When we were alone in her boudoir I settled with Marjory that we would on that evening attempt to find the treasure, as the tide would be out at midnight. So we went down to the library and got out Don de Escoban's narrative and began to read it afresh, noting as we went every word and sign of the secret writing, in the hope that we might in thus doing stumble on some new secret or hidden meaning.

Whilst we were thus engaged a servant came looking for Mrs. Jack, for whom a stranger had brought a letter.[262] Marjory told where she might be found, and for some time we went on with our work.

Suddenly the door opened, and Mrs. Jack entered, speaking over her shoulder as she came to a high-bred looking, dark man who followed her. As she saw us she stopped and said to Marjory:

"Oh! my dear, I didn't know you were here. I thought you were in the ladies' room." This was what they usually called the big room at the top of the castle. We both rose,

seeing a stranger. For my own part there was something in his face which set me thinking; as to Marjory I could not help noticing that she drew herself up to her full height, and held herself at tension in that haughty way which now and again marked her high spirit and breeding. There seemed so little cause for this attitude that my own thinking of the new-comer was lost in the contemplation of hers. Mrs. Jack noticed that there was some awkwardness, and spoke hurriedly:

“This is the gentleman, my dear, that the agent wrote about; and as he wanted to look over the house I brought him myself.” The stranger probably taking his cue from her apologetic tone spoke:

“I trust I have not disturbed the Senora; if I have, pardon! I have but come to renew my memory of a place, dear to me in my youth, and which through the passing of time and of some who were, is now my own heritage.” Marjory smiled, and swept him a curtsy as she said, but still in her distant arm’s-length manner:

“Then you are the owner of the castle, sir. I hope that we do not disturb you. Should you wish to be anywhere alone we shall gladly withdraw and wait your pleasure.” He raised a hand of eloquent protest, a well-kept, gentleman’s hand, as he said in tones sweet and deferent:

“Oh! I pray you, do not stir. May I say that when my house is graced with the presence of so much loveliness[263] I am all too full of gratitude to wish for any change. I shall but look around me, for I have a certain duty to do. Alas! this my heritage comes not only as a joy, but with grave duties which I must fulfill. Well I know this room. Many a time as a boy I have sat here with my kinsman, then so old and distant from me in my race; and yet I am his next successor. Here has he told me of old times, and of my race of which we who have the name are so proud; and of the solemn duty which might some day come to me. Could I but tell....” Here he stopped suddenly.

His eyes had been wandering all over the room, up and down the bookshelves, and at the few pictures which the walls contained. When they rested on the table, a strange look came into them. Here lay the type-script which we had been reading, and the secret writing of the dotted printing. It was on the latter that his eyes were fixed absorbingly.

“Where did you get that?” he said suddenly, pointing to it. The question in its bald simplicity was in word rude, but his manner of asking it was so sweet and deferential that to me it robbed it of all offence. I was just about to answer when my eye caught that of Marjory, and I paused. There was such meaning in her eyes that my own began roving to find the cause of it. As I looked she put her hands on the table before her, and

her fingers seemed to drum nervously. To me, however, it was no nervous trifling; she was speaking to me in our own cipher.

“Be careful!” she spelled out “there is some mystery! Let me speak.” Then turning to the stranger she said:

“It is curious is it not?”

“Ah, Senora, though curious it be in itself, it is nothing to the strangeness of its being here. If you only knew how it had been searched for; how the whole castle[264] had been ransacked from roof to dungeon to find it, and always without avail. Did you but understand the import of that paper to me and mine—if indeed the surmises of many generations of anxious men availed aught—you would pardon my curiosity. In my own youth I assisted in a search of the whole place; no corner was left untouched, and even the secret places were opened afresh.” As he went on, Marjory’s eyes were resting on his face unflinchingly, but her fingers were spelling out comments to me.

“There are secret places, then; and he knows them. Wait” the stranger went on:

“See, I shall convince you that I speak from no idle curiosity, but from a deep conviction of a duty that was mine and my ancestors’ for ages.” There was a sternness mingled with his grave sweetness now; it was evident that he was somewhat chagrined or put out by our silence. Leaving the table he went over to one of the bookshelves, and after running his eye over it for a moment, put his hand up and from a shelf above his head took down a thick leather-covered volume. This he laid on the table before us. It was a beautiful, old black letter law book, with marginal notes in black letter and headings in roman type. The pagination was, I could see as he turned it over, by folios. He turned to the title-page, which was an important piece of printing in many types, explanatory of the matter of the book. He began to read the paragraphs, placed in the triangular in form in vogue at that day; following the text with his forefinger he read:

“A collection in English of the Statutes now in force, continued from the beginning of Magna Charta made in the 9. yeere of the reigne of King H. 3. until the ende of the Session of Parliament holden in the 28 yeere of the reigne of our gracious Queene Elizabeth under Titles[265] placed by order of Alphabet. Wherein is performed (touching the Statutes wherewith Justices of the Peace have to deale) so much as was promised in the Booke of their office lately published. For which purpose”—&c. &c.,— Then turning over the page he pointed to a piece of faded writing on the back of it which had been left blank of printing. We bent down and read in the ink, faded to pale brown by time:

“My sonnes herein you will find the law which binds the stranger in this land, wherein a stranger is a Vagabond. F. de E.

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Then he turned rapidly over the leaves, till towards the end there was a gap. On the right hand page, where the folio number was all along placed was the number 528.

“See,” he said, turning back and pointing to the bottom of the title page “Anno 1588. Three hundred years, since first my people used it.”

Turning back he looked at the folio before the gap; it was 510. “See” he said, placing his hand on the pinmarked pages. “Folio 511 and the heading of ‘Vagabonds, Beggars, et cetera.’” He folded his arms in a dignified way and stood silent.

All along I had been following my own train of thought, even whilst I had been taking in the stranger’s argument, and at the same time noting Marjory’s warning. If this man who owned the Castle knew of the existence of the secret writing; whose ancestors had owned the book in which was the clue signed F. de E., surely then this could be none other than the descendant of the Don Bernardino who had hidden the treasure. This was his castle; no wonder that he knew its secret ways.

Matters were getting complicated. If this man were[266] now the hereditary guardian of the hidden treasure—and from his likeness to the ghostly Spaniard whom I had seen in the procession at Whinnyfold I saw no reason to doubt it—he might be an enemy with whom we should have to cope. I was all in a whirl, and for a few seconds I think quite lost my head. Then rushed over me the conviction that the mere lapse of time passed in these few minutes of agonised silence was betraying our secret. This brought me up with a round turn, and I looked about me. The strange man was standing still as marble; his face was set, and there was no sign of life in him except his eyes which blazed as they wandered around, taking everything in. Mrs. Jack saw that there was something going on which she did not understand, and tried to efface herself. Marjory was standing by the table, still, erect and white. Her fingers began to drum softly as she caught my eye, and spelled out:

“Give him the paper, from Mrs. Jack. Lately found in old oak chest. Say nothing of interpretation.” This seemed such a doubtful move that with my eyes I queried it. She nodded in reply. So I gathered myself together and said:

“I’m afraid, sir, that there is some mystery here which I cannot undertake to understand. I think I may say, however, for my friend Mrs. Jack, that there will be no trouble in your having full possession of your book. I am told that these pages were

lately found in an old oak chest. It is remarkable that they should have been missing so long. We were attracted by the funny marks. We thought that there might be some sort of cryptogram; and I suppose I may take it, from the fact of your looking for them so long, that this is so?"

He grew suspicious in a moment, and stiffened all over. Marjory saw, and appreciated the reason. She smiled at me with her eyes as she drummed on the table:

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"The herring is across his path!" As the awkward pause was this time with the stranger, we waited with comparative ease. I saw with a feeling of wonder that there was, through all her haughtiness, a spice of malice in Marjory's enjoyment of his discomfiture. I looked at Mrs. Jack and said: "May I give these papers to Mr. ——" She answered promptly:

"Why cert'nly! If Mr. Barnard wants them." Marjory turned round suddenly and in a surprised voice said:

"Mr. Barnard?"

"That is the name given in the letter which he brought, my dear!" The stranger at once spoke out:

"I am Mr. Barnard here; but in my own country I am of an older name. I thank you, sir, and Madam" turning to Mrs. Jack "for your courteous offer. But it will be time enough for me to consider the lost pages when through the unhappiness of your departure from my house, I am enabled to come hither to live. In the meantime, all I shall ask is that the pages be replaced in this book and that it be put in its place on the shelf where none shall disturb it." As he spoke in his sweet, deferential way there was something in his look or manner which did not accord with his words; a quick eager shifting of his eyes, and a breathing hard which were at variance with his words of patience. I did not pretend, however, to notice it; I had my own game to play. So without a word I placed the pages carefully in the book and put the latter back on the shelf from which he had taken it. There was an odd look in Marjory's face which I did not quite understand; and as she gave me no clue to her thoughts by our sign language, I waited. Looking at the stranger haughtily, and with a distinctly militant expression she said:

"The agent told us that the Barnard family owned[268] this castle!" He bowed gravely, but a hot, angry flush spread over his face as he replied:

"He spoke what truth he knew." Marjory's reply came quickly:

“But you say you are one of the family, and the very memorandum you pointed out was signed F. de E.” Again the hot flush swept his face; but passed in an instant, leaving him as pale as the dead. After a pause of a few moments he spoke in a tone of icy courtesy:

“I have already said, Senora, that in this country our name—my name, is Barnard. A name taken centuries ago when the freedom of the great land of England was not as now; when tolerance for the stranger was not. In my own land, the land of my birth, the cradle of my race, I am called Don Bernardino Yglesias Paleologue y Santordo y Castelnuova de Escoban, Count of Minurca and Marquis of Salvaterra!” As he rehearsed his titles he drew himself up to his full height; and pride of race seemed actually to shine or emanate from him. Marjory, too, on her side of the table drew herself up proudly as she said in a voice in which scorn struggled for mastery with dignity:

“Then you are a Spaniard!”

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CHAPTER XXXIII

DON BERNARDINO

The stranger held himself with, if possible, greater hauteur as he answered:

“I have that great honour.”

“And I, sir,” said Marjory, with a pride rivalling his own, “am an American!” Issue was joined.

For a period which from its strain seemed very long, though it was probably but a few seconds, they stood facing each other; types of the two races whose deadly contest was then the interest of the world. The time was at any rate sufficiently long for me to consider the situation, and to admire the types. It would have been hard to get a better representative of either, of the Latin as well as of the Anglo-Saxon. Don Bernardino, with his high aquiline nose and black eyes of eagle keenness, his proud bearing and the very swarthy which told of Moorish descent, was, despite his modern clothes, just such a picture as Velasquez would have loved to paint, or as Fortuny might have made to live again.

And Marjory! She looked like the spirit of her free race, incarnate. The boldness of her pose; her free bearing; her manifest courage and self belief; the absence of either

prudery or self-consciousness; her picturesque, noble beauty, as with set white face and flashing eyes she faced the enemy of her country, made a vision never to be forgotten. Even her racial enemy had unconsciously to fall into admiration; and through it the[270] dominance of his masculine nature spoke. His words were gracious, and the easy gracefulness of their delivery was no less marked because the calm was forced:

“Our nations alas! Senora are at war; but surely not even the courtesies of the battlefield need be strained when individuals, even of the most loyal each to their own, meet on neutral soil!” It was evident that even Marjory’s quick wit did not grasp at a suitable reply. The forgiveness of enemies is not the strong point of any woman’s nature, or of her education. The only remark she made was to again repeat:

“I am an American!” The Spaniard felt the strength of his position; again his masculinity came out in his reply:

“And all good women, as well as all men, should be loyal to their Flag. But oh Senora, before even your nationality comes your sex. The Spanish nation does not make war on women!” He seemed really to believe what he said; for the proud light in his face could not have been to either a dastard or a liar. I confess it was with a shock that I heard Marjory’s words:

“In the *reconcentrados* were as many women as men. More, for the men were fighting elsewhere!” The passionate, disdainful sneer on her lips gave emphasis to the insult; and blood followed the stab. A red tide rushed to the Spaniard’s swarthy face, over forehead and ears and neck; till, in a moment of quick passion of hate, he seemed as if bathed in red light.

And then in truth I saw the very man of my vision at Whinnyfold.

Marjory, womanlike, feeling her superiority over the man’s anger, went on mercilessly:

“Women and children herded together like beasts; beaten, starved, tortured, mocked at, shamed, murdered! Oh! it is a proud thought for a Spaniard, that when the[271] men cannot be conquered, even in half a century of furious oppression, their baffled foes can wreak their vengeance on the helpless women and children!”

The Spaniard’s red became white; a deathly pallor which looked grey in the darkened room. With his coldness came the force of coldness, self-command. I had a feeling that in those few moments of change had come to him some grim purpose of revenge. It was borne in upon me by flashes of memory and instinct that the man was of the race and class from which came the rulers and oppressors of the land, the leaders of

the Inquisition. Eyes like his own, burning in faces of deathly white, looked on deeds of torture, whose very memory after centuries can appal the world. But with all his passion of hate and shame he never lost the instinct of his dignity, or his grace of manner. One could not but feel that even when he struck to kill he would strike with easeful grace. Something of the feeling was in his speech, perhaps in the manner rather than the words, when after a pause he said:

“For such foul acts I have nought but indignation and grief; though in the history of a nation such things must be. It is the soldier’s duty to obey; even though his heart revolt. I have memory of hearing that even your own great nation has exercised not so much care as might be”—how he sneered with polished sarcasm as he turned the phrase—“in the dealing with Indians. Nay more, even in your great war, when to kill was fratricidal, there were hardships to the conquered, even to the helpless women and children. Have I not heard that one of your most honoured generals, being asked what was to become of the women in a great march of devastation that he was about to make, replied, “The women? I would leave them nothing but their eyes to weep with!” But, indeed, I grieve that in this our mutual war the[272] Senora grieves. Is it that she has suffered in herself, or through others dear to her?” Marjory’s eyes flashed; pulling herself to full height she said proudly:

“Sir, I am not one who whines for pain of my own. I and mine know how to bear our own troubles, as our ancestors did before us. We do not bend before Spain; no more to-day than when my great ancestors swept the Spaniard from the Western Main, till the seas were lit with blazing masts and the shores were fringed with wreckage! We Americans are not the stuff of which you make *reconcentrados*. We can die! As for me, the three hundred years that have passed without war, are as a dream; I look on Spain and the Spaniard with the eyes, and feel with the heart, of my great uncle Francis Drake.”

Whilst she was speaking Don Bernardino was cooling down. He was still deadly pale, and his eyes had something of the hollow glare of phosphorus in the sockets of a skull. But he was master of himself; and it seemed to me that he was straining every nerve to recover, for some purpose of his own, his lost ground. It may have been that he was ashamed of his burst of passion, with and before a woman; but anyhow he was manifestly set on maintaining calm, or the appearance of it. With the fullness of his grace and courtesy he said, turning to Mrs. Jack:

“I thank you for the permission, so graciously granted to me, to visit again this my house. You will permit me, however, I hope without any intention of offence, to

withdraw from where my presence has brought so much of disturbance; the which I deplore, and for which I crave pardon.”

To me he bowed stiffly with a sort of lofty condescension; and finally, looking towards Marjory, he said:

“The Senora will I trust believe that even a Spaniard[273] may have pity to give pain; and that there are duties which gentlemen must observe because they are gentlemen, and because they reverence the trust that is reposed in them more than do common men. She can appreciate the call of duty I know; for she can be none other than the new patriot who restores in the west our glorious memories of the Maid of Saragossa. I pray that the time may come when she shall understand these things and believe!” Then, with a bow which seemed the embodiment of old-fashioned grace and courtesy, he bent almost to the ground. Marjory instinctively bowed. Her training as to good manners, here stood her in good stead; not even patriotic enthusiasm can at times break the icy barrier of social decorum.

When the Spaniard left the room, which he did with long strides but bearing himself with inconceivable haughtiness, Mrs. Jack, with a glance at us, went with him. Instinctively I started to take her place; in the first instance to relieve her from an awkward duty, and beyond this with a feeling that I was not quite satisfied with him. No one could be in antagonism with Marjory, and acquire or retain my good will. As I moved, Marjory held up her hand and whispered to me to stay. I did so, and waited for her to explain. She listened intently to the retreating footsteps; when we heard the echoing sound of the closing the heavy outer door, she breathed freely and said to me with relief in her voice:

“I know you two would have fought if you had got alone together just now!”

I smiled, for I was just beginning to understand that that was just how I felt. Marjory remained standing at the table, and I could see that she was buried in thought. Presently she said:

“I felt it was cruel to say such things to that gentleman. Oh! but he is a gentleman; the old idea seems[274] embodied in him. Such pride, such haughtiness; such disdain of the commoner kind; such adherence to ideas; such devotion to honour! Indeed, I felt it very cruel and ungenerous; but I had nothing else to do. I had to make him angry; and I knew he couldn’t quarrel with me. Nothing else would have taken us all away from the cipher.” Her words gave me quite a shock. “Do you mean to say Marjory,” I asked, “that you were acting a part all the time?”

“I don’t know” she answered pensively, “I meant every word I said, even when it hurt him most. I suppose that was the American in me. And yet all the time I had a purpose or a motive of my own which prompted me. I suppose that was the woman in me.”

“And what was the motive or purpose?” I asked again, for I wondered.

“I don’t know!” she said naively. I felt that she was concealing something from me; but that it was a something so tender or so deep in her heart that its very concealment was a shy compliment. So I smiled happily as I said:

“And that is the girl in you. The girl that is American, and European, and Asiatic, and African, and Polynesian. The girl straight out of the Garden of Eden, with the fragrance of God’s own breath in her mouth!”

“Darling!” she said, looking at me lovingly. That was all.

During the day, we discussed the visitor of the morning. Mrs. Jack said very little, but now and again implored Marjory to be cautious; when she was asked her reason for the warning her only reply was:

“I don’t like a man who can look like that. I don’t know which is worst, when he is hot or cold!” I gathered that Marjory in the main agreed with her; but did not feel the same concern. Marjory would have been concerned if the danger had been to anyone else; but she was not habituated to be anxious about herself. Besides, she was young; and the antagonist was a man; and haughty and handsome, and interesting.

In the afternoon we completed our arrangements for the visit to the treasure cave. We both felt the necessity for pressing on this matter, since the existence of the secret writing was known to Don Bernardino. He had not hesitated to speak openly, though he did not know of course the extent of our own knowledge of the subject, of a grave duty which he had undertaken from hereditary motives, or of the tragic consequences which might ensue. It was whilst we were speaking of the possibility of his being able to decipher the cryptogram, that Marjory suddenly said:

“Did you understand exactly why I asked you to give him the paper at once?”

“Far be it from me” I answered “to profess to understand *exactly* the motives of any charming woman.”

“Not even when she tells you herself?”

“Ah! then the real mystery only begins!” I said bowing. She smiled as she replied:

“You and I are both fond of mysteries. So I had better tell you at once. That man doesn’t know the secret. I am sure of it. He knows there is a secret; and he knows a part, but only a part. That eager look wouldn’t have been in his eye if he had known already. I daresay there is, somewhere, some duplicate of what the original Don Bernardino put down in his story. And of course there must be some allusion to the treasure in the secret records at Simancas or the Quirinal or the Vatican. Neither the kings of Spain nor the Popes would let such a treasure pass out of mind. Indeed it is possible that there is some key or clue to it which he holds. Did you notice[276] how he referred at once to the secret meaning of the memorandum in the beginning of the law book? If we had not given it up at once, he would have forced on the question and wished to take the paper away; and we could not have refused without letting him know something by our very refusal. Do you understand any more of my meaning now? And can you forgive me any more for my ill-mannered outbreak? That is what I am most sorry for, of all that has been in the interview to-day. Is that also any more light to you on the mystery of a woman’s mind?”

“It is, you dear! it is!” I said as I took her for a moment in my arms. She came easily and lovingly to me, and I could not but be assured that the yielding even momentarily to tenderness helped to ease the strain which had been bearing upon her for so long. For my Marjory, though a strong and brave one, was but a woman after all.

At six o’clock I took my way back to Whinnyfold; for I wanted to have all ready for our enterprise, and take full advantage of the ebb tide. We arranged that on this occasion Marjory should come alone to join me at the house—our house.

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CHAPTER XXXIV
THE ACCOLADE

When Marjory arrived, I had all ready for our exploration. There were several packages waiting for her, and when she emerged from the room where she had gone to change, their purpose was manifest. She appeared in a flannel tennis frock, short enough to show that she had put on her sand shoes on her bare feet. She saw that I noticed and said with a little blush:

“You see I am dressed for the part; you came back so wet the last time that I thought I had better prepare for it too.”

“Quite right, my dear,” I said. “That pretty head of yours is level.” We went to the cellar at once where I had lamps and candles prepared and ready to light. I showed Marjory how to get up and down by herself, in case anything should happen to me. This made the gravity of our enterprise apparent. Her face grew a trifle anxious, though she did not change colour; I could see that all her anxiety was for me and none for herself. We took care to bring a plentiful supply of matches and candles, as well as an extra lamp and an oil can, and some torches and red and white lights. All these were in a tin box to insure their being kept dry. I had a meal of bread and meat packed ready; also a bottle of water and a flask of brandy, for the exploration might take a long time. The tide was not quite out, and there was still in places a[278] couple of feet of water; but we decided to go on at once as it would give us more time if we started on a falling tide.

I took Marjory first up the passage inland, so that she might understand something of the lines of the cave system. There was, however, too much tide just then to show her where I surmised there might be some deep opening, perhaps permanently under water, into some of the other caves. Then we retraced our steps and gained the pile of debris of the explosion at the cave’s mouth. I could not but notice how much Marjory was impressed by the stillness of the place. Here, the tide, filtering in by innumerable crevices and rifts between the vast pile of stones, showed no sign of the force of waves without. There was not time for the rise and fall of waves to be apparent; but the water maintained its level silently, except for that ceaseless gurgle which comes with the piling in of water anywhere, and is so constant that it does not strike one as a sound. It was borne in upon us that the wildest storm without, would make no impress upon us here in this cavern deep; and with it, as an inevitable corollary, came the depressing thought of our helplessness should aught go wrong in the fastnesses of this natural prison.

Marjory bounded over the slippery stones like a young deer, and when we passed through the natural archway into the cave beyond, her delight was manifest. She was hurrying on so quickly that I found it necessary to tell her she must go slow so as to be able to take stock of all around her as she went. It was needful to look back as well as forward, so that she might recognise the places when coming the other way. I reminded her of caution by holding up the great ball of stout cord which I carried, the end of which was attached to the rope of the windlass in the cellar. “Remember, dear,” I said, “that you have to be prepared for all eventualities; if necessary to go back[279] alone and in the dark.” She shuddered a little and drew closer to me; I felt that the movement was one of protection rather than of fear.

When we went along the passage, where on the first occasion I had found the water rise nearly to the roof, we had to wait; a little way ahead of us, where the cave dipped to its lowest, the water was still touching the top. We possessed our souls with what patience we could, and in about half an hour's time we were able to pass. We were quite wet, however, for only our faces and our lamps were above water; with the exception, of course, of the tin box with the candles and matches and our provisions, which I took care to keep dry.

Marjory's delight at the sight of the huge red cave was unspeakable. When I lit one of the red lights the blinding glow filled the place, exposing every nook and corner, and throwing shadows of velvet blackness. The natural red of the granite suited the red light, the effect being intensely rich. Whilst the light lasted it was all like a dream of fairyland; and Marjory hung on to me in an ecstasy of delight. Then, when the light died down and the last sparks fell into the natural darkness, it seemed as if we and all around us were steeped in gloom. The little patches of faint light from our lamps seemed to our dazzled eyes to openly emphasise the surrounding blackness.

Marjory suggested that we should explore the great cavern before we did anything else. I acquiesced, for it was just as well that we should be thoroughly acquainted with the various ramifications of the cave. I was not by any means sure as yet that we should be able to get to the cave of the treasure. Here, all around us, was red; we were entirely within the sienite formation. When I had been first in the cave I had not seen it lit up. Only where the comparatively feeble light of my bicycle lantern[280] had fallen had I seen anything at all. Of course it may have been that the red light which I had burned had misled me by overwhelming everything in its lurid glow. So this time I got a white light out of the box and lit it. The effect was more ghastly and less pleasant. In the revealing glare, the edges of everything stood out hard and cold, and so far repulsive that instinctively Marjory drew closer to me. While the light remained, however, I was able to satisfy myself of one thing; all around was only the red granite. Colour and form and texture all told the same thing; we had passed the stratification of gneiss and entered on that of the sienite. I began to wonder and to think, though I did not at once mention the matter to Marjory. The one guiding light as to locality in the Don's narrative was the description of the cave "the black stone on one hand and the red on the other." Now at Broad Haven the gneiss and the red sienite join, and the strata in places seem as if welded together or fused by fire. Here and there can be found patches in the cliff where it is hard to say where one class of rock ends and the other begins. In the centre bay, however, to the north of my house, there is a sort of dip in the cliff covered deep with clay, and bright with grass and wild flowers. Through this a tiny stream rushes in wet weather, or in dry trickles down the steep incline. This is

the natural or main division between the geological formations; for on either side of it is a different kind of rock—it was here that I expected to find that the treasure cave was situated. It had been of course impossible for me, though I had had a compass with me, to fix exactly the windings of the cave. I knew, however, that the general trend was to the right; we must, therefore, have passed behind the treasure cave and come into the region of red granite. I began to have an idea, or rather the rudiment of one, that later on we should have to go back on our[281] tracks. Inasmuch as my own house stood on the gneiss formation, we should have to find whereabouts in the cave windings the red and the black rocks joined. From this point we might be able to make new and successful progress towards discovery of the treasure itself. In the meantime I was content to linger a few minutes in the great cavern. It was evident that Marjory was in love with it, and was at present in a whirl of delight. And, after all, she was my world, and her happiness my sunshine. I fully realised in the delightful passages of our companionship the truth of the lover's prayer in Herrick's pretty poem.

“Give me but what this Ribbon bound,Take all the rest the sun goes round.”

Every day, every hour, seemed to me to be revealing new beauties of my wife's character and nature. She was herself becoming reconciled to our new relationship; and in the confidence of her own happiness, and in her trust of her husband, the playful and sweet sides of her nature were gaining a new development. I could not help feeling at times that all was going on for the best; that the very restraint of the opening of our married life was formative of influence for good on us both. If all young husbands and wives could but understand the true use of the old-fashioned honeymoon, the minute knowledge of character coming in moments of unconscious self-revelation, there might be more answers in the negative to the all important nineteenth century philosophical query, “Is marriage a failure?” It was evident that Marjory was reluctant to leave the cave. She lingered and lingered; at last in obedience to a command of hers, conveyed—for she said nothing—in some of those subtle feminine ways, which, though I did not understand their methods, I was beginning to learn to obey, I lit a torch. Holding it aloft, and[282] noticing with delight how the light danced in my wife's beautiful eyes as she clapped her hands joyously with the overt pleasure of a child, I said:

“Her Majesty wishes to inspect her new kingdom. Her slave awaits her pleasure!”

“Lead on!” she said. “Her Majesty is pleased with the ready understanding of her Royal Consort, and with his swift obedience to her wishes; and oh! Archie isn't this simply too lovely for anything!” The quick change into the vernacular made us both laugh; and taking hands like two children we walked round the cavern. At the upper

end of it, almost at the furthest point from where we entered, we came across a place where, under an overhanging red wall which spread out overhead like a canopy, a great rock rose from the level floor. It was some nodule of especial hardness which in the general trituration had not been worn away by the wash of the water and the rolling of pebbles which at one time undoubtedly helped to smooth the floor. In the blinking light of the torch, the strength of which was dimmed in the vastness of the cavern, the isolated rock, standing as it did under the rocky canopy whose glistening surface sent down a patchy reflex of the glare, seemed like a throne. The idea occurred simultaneously to both of us; even as I spoke I could see that she was prepared to take her seat:

“Will not Her Majesty graciously take her seat upon the throne which the great Over-Lord, Nature, has himself prepared for her?”

She took the stick which she carried to steady her in the wading, and holding it like a sceptre, said, and oh, but her sweet voice sounded like far music stealing through the vastness of the cavern:

“Her Majesty, now that she has ascended her throne, and so, formally taken possession of her Kingdom, hereby decrees that her first act of power shall be to confer the[283] honour of Knighthood on her first and dearest subject. Kneel therefore at the feet of your Queen. Answer me by your love and loyalty. Do you hereby promise and vow obedience to the wishes of your Queen? Shall you love her faithfully and truly and purely? Shall you hold her in your heart of hearts, yielding obedience to all true wishes of hers, and keeping the same steadfastly to the end? Do—you—love—me?”

Here she paused; the rising emotion was choking her words. The tears welled into her eyes and her mouth quivered. I was all at once in a fire of devotion. I could then, and indeed when I think of it I can now, realise how of old, in the days when loyalty was a passion, a young knight’s heart flowered and blossomed in the moment of his permitted devotion. It was with all the truth of my soul and my nature that I answered:

“I do love you, oh, my gracious Queen. I hereby take all the vows you have meted to me. I shall hold you ever, as I do now, in my very heart of hearts. I shall worship and cherish you till death parts us. I shall reverence and obey your every true wish; even as I have already promised beside the sea and at the altar. And whithersoever my feet may go in obedience to your will, my Queen and my Love, they shall go on steadfast, to the end.” Here I stopped, for I feared to try to say more; I was trembling myself and the words were choked in my throat. Marjory bent over as I knelt, laid her wand on my shoulder and said:

“Rise up, Sir Archibald, my own True Knight and Loyal Lover!” Before I rose I wanted to kiss her hand, but as I bent, her foot was temptingly near. I stooped lower to kiss it. She saw my intention and saying impulsively: “Oh, Archie dear, not that wet, dirty shoe,” kicked it off. I stooped still lower and kissed her bare foot.

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As I looked up at her face adoringly, a blush swept over it and left her pale; but she did not flinch. Then I stood up and she stepped down from her throne, and into my arms. She laid her head against my shoulder, and for a few moments of ecstasy our hearts beat together.

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CHAPTER XXXV

THE POPE’S TREASURE

“Now,” said Marjory, at last disengaging herself from me, “let us get down to business. We’ve got to find the treasure, you know!” So we set ourselves down to a systematic search.

We explored one after another all the caves leading out of the main cavern. Some of them were narrow and tortuous; some were wide and low with roof dropping down, down, until it was impossible for anything in the shape of humanity to pass. All these, however, with one exception, ended in those fissure-like clefts, running somewhere to a point, which characterise cavern formations. The exception was at the north west side of the cavern where a high, fairly wide passage extended, with an even floor as though it too had been levelled by rolling pebbles. It kept on straight for a good length, and then curved round gently to the right, all the while fairly maintaining its proportions. Presently it grew so high that it was like a narrow way between tall houses. I lit a white light, and in the searching glare noticed that far overhead the rocky walls leaned together till they touched. This spot, just above us, was evidently the highest point; the roof thence fell rapidly till at last it was only some ten feet high. A little further on it came to a sudden end.

Here there was a great piled-up mass of huge, sharp-edged rocks, at the base of which were stones of all[286] sizes, some round and some jagged. Scattered near and isolated were many stones rounded by constant friction.

As I looked, the whole circumstances seemed to come to me. “See,” I cried to Marjory, “this was evidently another entrance to the cave. The tides, ebbing or flowing, drove in

through one way and out at the other; and the floor was worn level in process of countless years by rolling pebbles like these. Then came some upheaval or wearing away by water drift of supporting walls of rock; and this mouth of the cave fell in. We must be by now somewhere at the Cruden side of Whinnyfold; we are facing almost due north.”

As there was manifestly nothing to be done here, we took our way back to the main cavern. When we began to look around us for a new place to explore, Marjory said:

“There doesn’t seem to be any treasure cave at all here. We have now tried everywhere.” Then it was that my mind went back again to the Don’s description “Black on the one hand and red on the other.” “Come,” I said, “let us go back till we find the joining of the gneiss and granite.” As we went back the floor was almost dry; only a few pools of water here and there, lying in the depressions, called attention to the fact that we were under tidal influence. As we went we kept a careful look-out for the fusion of the rocks; and found it where the passage with the descending roof debouched into that which led from the blocked up entrance of the cave. There was here, however, no sign of another passage, and the main one outside was like that under my own house, entirely through the gneiss.

I could not help feeling a little disappointed. For many weeks my mind had been set on finding the Pope’s treasure; and though I believe it was not greed which controlled me even to any great extent, I was deeply[287] chagrined. I had a sort of unworthy fear that it might lower me in the eyes of Marjory. This feeling, however, was only momentary; and when it went, it went for good. Drawing in my note-book a rough outline of Whinnyfold, I dotted lines where I took the various branches of the cave to lie and then marked in the line of fusion of the gneiss and the granite as it was manifest on the cliffs and on the shore beyond. Marjory was at once convinced; indeed when I saw my surmise put down in black and white it seemed to me quite apparent that it must be correct. The treasure cave must be within that space which lay between the dismantled entrance on the side of the Skares, and that which had fallen in on the north side. The logical inference was that if there was an entrance to be found at all it would be close to the debris from the Don’s explosion. So we took in silence, our way back to that point and began at once to examine the debris for any sign of an opening in the rock to the north side. Marjory scrambled up to the top of the pile whilst I explored the base. Turning my lantern on the rocky wall I began to examine it foot by foot and inch by inch.

Suddenly Marjory cried out. I raised my head and looked at her. Her face, lit by the rays of my own lamp which, with the habit of searching now familiar to me I had turned as my eyes turned, was radiant with joy and excitement.

“Look! look!” she cried. “Oh, Archie, there is the top of an opening here. The stones fill it up.” As she spoke she pushed at a stone on the top of the pile; under her hand it moved and disappeared with a hollow rattle. By this time I had scrambled up the slippery pile and was beside her. The disappearance of the stone had enlarged the opening, and something like a foot square was discovered.

So we began to work at the heap of stones, only we^[288] pulled and threw them into the cave where we were so as not to block the place we aimed at. The top layer of stones was easy to move, as they were comparatively small, and were not interlocked, but below them we found a much more difficult task. Here the rocks were larger and more irregular in shape, and their points and edges interlocked. We did not mind, however, but toiled on. I could not but notice as we did so, a trait of Marjory’s coolness of head in the midst of all her excitement, when she took from her pocket a pair of heavy gloves and put them on.

In some fifteen or twenty minutes we had unmasked a hole sufficiently large to pass through comfortably. I found that the oil of my lamp was running low; so I refilled it and Marjory’s also. Then holding my own lamp carefully, whilst Marjory turned hers in the direction I was going, I passed over the top of the miniature moraine, and in a few seconds was on the floor of the other cave. Marjory threw me the ball of string and scrambling down joined me at once. We went along carefully, for the roof of the cave dipped very low and we had in more than one place to bend considerably; even then we were walking in a couple of feet of water as the floor dipped as well as the roof. When we had gone some distance, however, the roof rose as the cave turned sharp to the left, round a corner of very broken and jagged rock in which I could see signs of the fusion of the two geological formations. Our hearts beat high and we took hands instinctively; we were now confident that we were in the treasure house at last.

As we went up the cave, here running, so far as I could ascertain by the compass, straight in and from the sea, we could note, as we turned our lamps now and again to either side, that on our left was all black rock whilst on the right was all red. The cave was not a long one;^[289] nothing to compare with those we had left. It was not very many seconds, though we had to go slow as we did not know for certain as to the floor level, before the cave began to expand.

When, however, it widened and became more lofty, the floor rose in all some three feet and we went up a sharp incline though not of very great magnitude. This dipped a

little again forming a pool which spread ahead of us so far as we could see by the dim light of our bicycle lamps. As we did not know the depth I waded in, Marjory enjoining me anxiously to be careful. I found it deepened very slowly; so she joined me and we went on together. By my advice, Marjory kept a few feet in the rear, so that in case I should stumble or meet with a deep hole and so lose my light, hers would still be safe. I was so intent on my feet, for I feared lest Marjory following so close might get into some trouble, that I hardly looked ahead, but kept cautiously on my way. Marjory, who was flashing her lamp all around as she went, suddenly called out:

“Look! look! There to the right, the figure of the San Cristobal with the golden Christ on his shoulder.”

I turned my lantern to the angles of the cave to the right to which we were now close. The two lamps gave us light enough to see well.

There, rising from the water under the shelf of rock, was the figure that Benvenuto had wrought, as Don Bernardino had left it three centuries ago.

As I moved forwards I stumbled; in trying to save myself the lamp was shaken from my hand and fell hissing in the dark water. As it fell I saw by the flash of light the white bones of a skeleton under the San Cristobal. Instinctively I called out to Marjory:

“Stand still and take care of your lamp; I’ve dropped mine!”

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“All right!” came back her answer coolly; she had quite command of herself. She turned the lamp downwards, so that we could see into the water, and I found I had stumbled against an iron box, beside which, in about two feet of water, lay my lamp. I picked this up first and shook the water from it and laid it on the shelf of rock. “Wait here a moment,” I said, “I shall run back and get a torch.” For I had left the tin box on the top of the heap of debris when we had scrambled through the hole. I was starting back at once when she said after me, and in that cave the voice came after me “monotonous and hollow like a ghost’s:”

“Take my lamp with you dear. How can you find the box, or even the way to it, in the dark?”

“But I can’t leave you alone here; all in the dark, too.”

“Oh, I’m all right,” she answered gaily, “I don’t mind a bit! And besides it will be a new sensation to be here alone—with Olgaref and the treasure. You won’t be long, will you, dear?” I felt that her query almost belied her brave words; but I knew that behind the

latter lay her pride which I must not offend; so I took the lamp she was holding out to me and hurried on. In a few minutes I had found the box and brought it back; but I could see that even those minutes had been a trying time to Marjory, who was deathly white. When I came close, she clung to me; after a second or two she said, as she drew herself away, looking at me diffidently as though to excuse herself, or rather to account for her perturbation:

“The moment you had gone and I was alone in the dark with the treasure, all the weird prophecy of Gormala came back to me. The very darkness itself made light patches, and I saw shrouds floating everywhere. But it’s all right now that you are here. Light a torch, and we shall look at the Pope’s treasure.” I took a torch out of the box and lit it; she laid it so that the lighted end^[291] projected well beyond the shelf of rock and gave a fine if fitful, light to all around. We found water about three feet deep at its worst; in the glare of the torch and because of its crystal purity, it did not look even so much. We stooped down to examine the box, which was only one of several lying in front of a great heap of something, all dark with rust and age, which filled up a whole corner of the cave.

The hasp was eaten through with rust, as well it might be after three centuries in the water, and only retained its form. This was doubtless due to the stillness of the water, for even the shock of my striking the box with my boot had broken it across. When I pulled at it, it crumbled to pieces in my fingers. In the same way the iron of the box itself was rusted right through; and as I tried to lift the lid which was annealed by corrosion to the sides of the box, it broke in my hands. I was able to tear it away like matchwood. The contents were not corroded, but were blackened by the sea. It was all money, but whether silver or gold we could not tell, and did not stop to see. Then we opened box after box in the same way, and in all but one found coins. This took a considerable time; but we did not in our excitement note its flying. The heap in the corner was composed of great ingots, to lift any of which took a distinct effort of strength. The one box unfilled with coins contained smaller boxes or caskets which were uncorroded and were, we presumed, of some superior metal, silver or gold. They were all locked; I lifted one of them and laid it on the shelf of rock whilst I searched for a key. It was a difficult matter to find any definite thing whilst stooping in the water, so I took my knife and tried with its point to prise open the casket. The lock must have been of iron and corroded; it gave way instantly under pressure, disclosing a glittering heap of stones which, even through^[292] all the cloudiness of the saline deposit of centuries, flashed red lights everywhere.

“Rubies!” cried Marjory who stood close to me, clapping her hands. “Oh! how lovely. Darling!” she added kissing me, for her expression of delight had to find a vent on something.

“Next!” I said as I bent to the iron chest to lift out another of the caskets.

I drew back with a shudder; Marjory looking anxiously at my face divined the cause and cried in genuine alarm:

“The tide! The tide is rising; and is shutting us in!”

[293]

CHAPTER XXXVI
THE RISING TIDE

I think there must be some provision of nature which in times of real danger keeps men’s minds away from personal fears. I can honestly say that not a thought of danger for myself crossed my mind; though I was harrowed up and appalled by fears for Marjory. My mental excitement, however, took a practical shape, and thought after thought flashed through my brain as to how I could best serve my wife. The situation with its woeful possibilities came first; and afterwards, in quick succession, the efforts which might be made. But first I must see how we really stood. I did not know this cave and the lengths and levels of it well enough to be sure whether the tide could block us completely in. If there were but head-room the actual distance was not far to swim. This I could soon settle; taking Marjory’s lamp which stood on the ledge of rock I ran down the cave calling out as I went:

“Stay here a minute, dear, I want to see how far the tide is in.” The double winding of the cave made it hard for me to judge at a glance; it was only when I came to the piece of straight passage leading up from the sea that I could judge. From the time I left the treasure chamber of the cave the water got deeper and deeper as I went, but the difficulty was not in this way; I knew that so long as there was headway I could swim for it and take Marjory with me. But when I came down the straight, my[294] hopes were altogether dashed. As the floor dipped towards the sea so did the roof in much greater degree. I knew that there was one place where at low water there was only barely headway even when we stooped low; but I was not prepared for what I saw. The water had already risen so far that this place was, from where I stood waist high in water, obliterated; the rocky roof sank into the still, level water. For a moment I considered whether it would not be best to dive through it. I had the cord to guide me,

and I knew that towards its mouth the cave roof rose again. But then there was Marjory. She was not like myself an accomplished diver. It might be possible if the worst should come to the worst to draw her through the water-choked piece of tunnel by the guiding cord. But if the cord should break or anything go wrong.... The thought was too dreadful! I hurried back to Marjory to see how far it might be advisable to make the attempt, however dangerous, rather than be drowned in the deepening water of the cave, or asphyxiated if the space left were too small to allow us breathing till the falling of the tide.

I found Marjory standing on the shelf of rock, to which she had climbed by the aid of the San Cristobal figurehead. She was holding up the torch and examining carefully the walls and roof of the cave. When she heard the splash of my coming through the water, she turned; I could see that though her face was pale she was very calm and self-possessed. She said quietly:

“I have been looking for high-water mark, but I can hardly see any sign of it. I suppose in this dark cave, where neither seaweed nor zoophyte exists, there is no such thing. Unless of course it be that the whole cave is under the water line; in which case we must be ready for the worst.” As she spoke she was raising the torch till its light illuminated, so far as was possible, the extreme[295] angle of the cavern where it ran up to a sort of point. I scrambled up beside her, and making use of my greater height, took the torch and keeping it away at arm’s length put my hand into the narrowing angle. I had a sort of secret hope that there might be some long crack or rift which, though it might be impossible for our bodies, might still give us air. Any such half-formed hope was soon shattered; the angle of the cave was in the solid rock, and there was no fissure or even crack beyond.

As there was no clue to the level reached by the tide, I tried back on the possibility of gauging it by measuring from low water, so far as my memory of the tides might serve. Judging by the depth of the water, so far as I had gone, the fall of the floor level must here have been some three feet. The floor level of the cave was almost that of low water, except where it dipped under the overhanging roof, or where was the ascending grade up to the pool in which the treasure boxes lay. As here on the border of the North Sea, with no estuary to increase tidage, the normal rise of the tide is between eleven and twelve feet, we had to account for another eight or nine feet for the rise of the tide. The ledge was about a foot above the surface of the water. If my calculations were correct there was head room and breathing space, for as I stood on the ledge the top of my head was still about two feet from the highest point of roof over us. I could not, however, be certain of my calculations, within a couple of feet. If, therefore, we could keep our place on the shelf of rock and endure the cold we might yet win

through. The cold was a serious matter. At Cruden where the full sweep of the icy current from the North Sea runs in shore, the water is grievously cold, even in the hottest summer time. Already we were feeling the effects of our wet clothes, even in this silent cavern where the heat seemed to be much more than outside.[296] When we had been looking at the jewels, I had myself felt the chill, and could feel Marjory shiver now and again. Indeed, I had been about to suggest our returning when I made the discovery of the rising tide.

It was no use regretting, however. We were caged in the cavern; and our only chance was to hold on somehow, till the tide should fall again. The practical side of Marjory's mind was all awake. It was she who quietly refilled the two lamps, and, with much spluttering of the wick at first, lighted again the one which I had let fall into the water. When both lamps were ready, she put out the torch and placed it in the tin box which she handed to me, saying:

“We may need all the air we can get for our breathing, and the torches would burn it up. We must have two lamps lest one should fail. Shove the box as far as it will go into the corner of the cave; it will be safe there—as safe as us at any rate, for it will be over our heads.”

As she spoke a new idea occurred to me. I might raise the level of the ledge by piling the ingots on it! I did not lose any time, but jumping down began at once to lift them one by one on the ledge. It was heavy work, and no one but a very strong man could have lifted them from off the ground, much less have placed them on a ledge over where he stood. Moreover I had to bend into the water to reach them, and in the years which they had lain there in juxtaposition some deposit of salt or sea lime of some kind had glued them together. After the separation of the first, however, this difficulty grew less. Marjory aided me in placing the bars in position; when they were once fixed their great weight kept them in place.

It was odd how little in these moments the treasure counted for. The little heap of rubies lay on the shelf of rock unnoticed, and when in the strain of placing the ingots some of them were brushed off into the water,[297] neither Marjory nor I took the trouble even to sweep them with a brush of the hand into a safer place. One of the metal caskets was tumbled bodily into the water without a thought.

When the ingots were all in place, and shaken into steady position, we got on the ledge together and began to test the security of our platform; it would be too late to find out any flaw of construction when the tide should have risen. We had made a foothold nearly two feet above the surface of the ledge, and this might give us at the last an additional chance. At any rate, even if we should not be so hard pressed as to

have to raise our heads so high, it would give us a longer period of comparative dryness. We were already beginning to feel the chill of the tide. In those caves the air is all right, and we had not felt chilled, although we were more or less wet through; but I dreaded lest it might numb either of us so much as to prevent our taking every chance. When we stood together on the pile of gold and silver, our heads were so close to the roof that I felt safe so far as actually drowning or asphyxiation were concerned if the tide did not rise higher than I had computed. If we could only hold out till the tide had fallen sufficiently, we might get back.

And then we began the long, dreary wait for the rising tide. The time seemed endless, for our apprehension and suspense multiplied the real danger whatever it might be. We stood on the cave floor till the water had reached our waists, and all this time tried to keep moving, to dance up and down, to throw about arms and legs so as to maintain the circulation of the blood. Then we climbed up and sat on the platform of bullion till the water rose round our knees again. Then we stood on the ledge and took what exercise we could till the water climbed up over our feet and knees. It was a terrible trial to feel the[298] icy, still water creep up, and up, and up. There was not a sound, no drip or ripple of water anywhere; only silence as deadly as death itself. Then came the time when we had to stand together on the pile of bullion which we had built up. We stood close, for there was merely foothold; I held Marjory up as well as I could, so as to lessen for her the strain of standing still. Our hearts beat together. We felt it, and we knew it; it was only the expression of both our thoughts when Marjory said:

“Thank God! dear, at the worst we can die together.” In turn we held the lamp well over the water, and as we looked in aching suspense we saw the dark flood rise up to the sloping roof of the cave and steal towards us with such slow, relentless precision that for my own part I felt I must scream. I felt Marjory tremble; the little morsel of hysterics which goes to make up the sum total of every woman was beginning to assert itself. Indeed there was something hypnotic in that silent line of death creeping slowly towards us. At this time, too, the air began to feel less fresh. Our own breaths and the exhalations of the lamp was vitiating our breathing space. I whispered to Marjory:

“We must put out the light!” She shuddered, but said with as brave a voice as she could:

“All right! I suppose it is necessary. But, darling, hold me tight and do not let me away from you, or I shall die!”

I let the lantern fall into the water; its hissing for a moment drowned my own murmur of grief and Marjory’s suppressed groan.

And now, in the darkness, the terror of the rising flood grew worse and worse. The chill water crept up, and up, and up; till at last it was only by raising her head that Marjory could breathe. I leaned back against the rock and bending my legs outward lifted her so that she rested[299] her feet upon my knees. Up and up rose the chill water till it reached my chin, and I feared that the last moments had come.

There was one chance more for Marjory: and though it cut me to the soul to speak it, for I knew it would tear at her very heartstrings, I had to try it:

“Marjory, my wife, the end is close! I fear we may not both live. In a few minutes more, at most, the water will be over my mouth. When that time comes I shall sink over the pile of treasure on which we rest. You must then stand on me; it will raise you sufficiently to let you hold out longer.” A dreadful groan broke from her.

“Oh, my God!” was all she said, but every nerve in her body seemed to quiver. Then without a word she seemed to become limp and was sliding out of my arms. I held her up strongly, for I feared she had swooned: she groaned out:

“Let me go, let me go! Either of us can rest on the other’s body. I shall never leave this if you die.”

“Dear one” I said “do as I wish, and I shall feel that even death will be a happy thing, since it can help you.” She said nothing but clung to me and our mouths met. I knew what she meant; if die we must, we should die together in a kiss.

In that lover’s kiss our very souls seemed to meet. We felt that the Gates of the Unknown World were being unbarred to us, and all its glorious mysteries were about to be unveiled. In the impassive stillness of that rising tide, where never a wave or ripple broke the dreadful, silent, calm, there was no accidental fall or rise which might give added uneasiness or sudden hope. We had by this time become so far accustomed to its deadly perfection as to accept its conditions. This recognition of inevitable force made for resignation; and I think that in[300] those moments both Marjory and I realised the last limitations of humanity. When one has accepted the inevitable, the mere act of dying is easy of accomplishment.

But there is a contra to everything in the great ledgers of the Books of Life and Death, and it is only a final balance which counts for gain or loss. The very resignation which makes the thought of death easy to bear, is but a balance of power which may not be gainsayed. In the struggle of hope and despair the Winged One submits, and that is all. His wings are immortal; out of fire or water, or pestilence, or famine, or the red mist of battle they ever rise again, when once there is light of any kind to animate them.

Even when Marjory's mouth was bent to mine in a fond kiss of love and death, the wings of Hope fluttered around her head. For an instant or two she paused, as if listening or waiting, and then with a glad cry, which in that narrow space seemed to ring exultingly, she said:

"You are saved! You are saved! The water is falling; it has sunk below your lips." Even in that dread moment of life and death, I could not but be touched by her way of rejoicing in the possibility of our common safety. Her only thought was for me.

But her words were true. The tide had reached its full; the waters were falling. Minute by minute we waited, waited in breathless suspense; clinging to each other in an ecstasy of hope and love. The chill which had been upon us for so long, numbing every sense and seeming to make any idea of effort impossible, seemed to have lost its power. In the new quickening of hope, our hearts seemed to beat more warmly, till the blood tingled in our veins. Oh! but the time was long, there in the dark, with the silent waters receding inch by inch with a slowness which was inconceivable. The strain of waiting became after a while almost unbearable; I felt that I must speak[301] to Marjory, and make her speak and keep speaking, lest we should both break down, even at the very last. In the time of our waiting for death we had held on to our determination, blindly resolute to struggle to the last; even though we had accepted the inevitable. But now there was impatience added to our apprehension. We did not know the measure of our own endurance; and Terror seemed to brood over us with flapping wings.

Truly, the moments of coming Life are longer than hours of coming Death.

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CHAPTER XXXVII
ROUND THE CLOCK

When the water had fallen so far that we could sit on the ledge, we rested for a few minutes to relieve the long and terrible strain of standing, cramped and chilled as we were. But we soon felt the chill of the water and stood again till the rocky ledge was quite free. Then we enjoyed a rest, if the word "enjoyment" could be applied to our wearied, teeth-chattering, exhausted condition. I made Marjory sit on my lap, so that we could get some warmth together, and that she might be saved from the benumbing coldness of the rock. We wrung out our clothes as well as we could, and with braver hearts set ourselves down to the second spell of our dark captivity. Well we knew that the tide had risen higher than the tin box in the corner of the cave, and tacitly put off

the moment of assured knowledge. Presently when the chill had somewhat passed from her and she shivered less, she stood up and tried to get down the box. She could not reach it, so I rose and took it down. Then we resumed our places on the ledge, and, with the box beside us, began to investigate.

It was a sadly helpless performance. In the dark everything seemed strange, with regard to size as well as to shape. Our wet hands could not of themselves discriminate as to whether anything was wet or dry. It was only when we found that the box was quite full of water that we realised that there was no hope of light[303] in this quarter, and that we must have patience through the darkness as well as we could. I think that Marjory cried a little. She covered it up for me in some womanly way. But there are eyes in the soul that can see even through cimmerian gloom; and I knew that she cried, though my senses could detect no sign. When I touched her face, my wet hands and my own wet face could tell me nothing. Still we were happy in a way. The fear of death had passed, and we were only waiting for light and warmth. We knew that every minute, every breath we drew, the tide was falling; and we knew too that we could grope our way through the cavern. We rejoiced now that there was no labyrinth of offshoots of the cave; and we were additionally glad that our clue, the cord which we had taken with us, remained. We could easily pick it up when we should begin to move, for there was no stir of water to shift it and draw it away.

When we thought that a sufficient time must have elapsed, even at the deadly slow pace at which it crawled, we kissed each other and began our first effort to escape.

We easily found the cord, and keeping hold of it, felt our way slowly along the rugged wall. I made Marjory keep close behind me, a little to the right, for I was feeling way by the left hand alone. I feared lest she should get bruised by the jagged rock which protruded here and there. It was well I did so, for in the first dozen yards I got some severe knocks that might have permanently scarred her tender skin. The experience made me careful, however, and after it I took care to feel my way all round before advancing a step. I found by experience that it was the cord which had misled me by straining where there was a curve or an angle, and so taking me close to the rock instead of in the middle of the passage where we had originally dropped it as we went along.

When we had passed the first two bends, the anxious[304] time came; it was here that the roof dropped, and we did not know if the tide had fallen low enough to let us through. We pushed on however into the deepening water, Marjory still keeping close behind me, though I wished to go on alone and explore. We found that the rock dipped below the water level when we had gone some way into the tunnel. So we came back

and waited a good while—it seemed a long, long time. Then we essayed again, and found that though the water was still high there were some inches of space between rock and water.

Joyfully we pushed on slowly; our hearts beat gladly when we could raise our heads from the stooping position and raise them freely in the air. It only took us a few minutes to reach the pile of rocks; then holding the cord as a clue to the narrow opening we scrambled up as well as we could. I helped Marjory as much as possible, but in this matter she was as good as I was; nay better, for all her woman's instinct came to aid, and it was she who first got through the narrow hole. Then very carefully we climbed down the other side, and, still holding our guiding cord, came at last to the tackle by which we had lowered ourselves into the cave. It was rather a surprise to us when we reached it, for we expected to see the welcome light through the opening before we had come under it.

At first, in the whirl of thoughts, I imagined that something had gone wrong, a rock fallen in, or some sort of general collapse. Then I fancied that we had been tracked down, and that some one had tried to bury us in the cave. It is wonderful what strange thoughts come to one in a prolonged spell of absolute darkness; no wonder that even low-grade, violent, unimaginative criminals break down in the black hole! Marjory said nothing; but when she spoke, it was evident from her words^[305] that she had some of the same ideas herself. There was a tone of relief in her voice which was unmistakable, and which must have followed some disconcerting thought:

“Of course not! It is only that the lamps and candles have burned out. We have forgotten the long time which has passed; but the lights haven't!” It was evident enough now. We had been so many hours in the cave that the lights were exhausted; and at no time was there a gleam of natural light in the cellar.

I found it a little difficult to work the tackle in the dark with my numbed hands. Hope, however, is a paramount force, and very soon Marjory was swinging up through the hole in the rock. I called to her to get light as soon as she could; but she refused point blank to do anything until I was beside her. When I got the rope round me, we both pulled; and in a very few seconds I too was up through the hole and in the cellar. I found the matches easily enough and oh! the glorious sight of the light even in this spluttering form. We did not linger an instant but moved to the door, which I unlocked, and we stepped out and ran up the steps. The lantern on the roof which lit the staircase was all ablaze with sunshine, and we felt bathed in light. For a second or two we could not realise it, and blinked under the too magnificent glare.

And then, with inconceivable rapidity, we came back to the serenity and confidence which comes with daylight. In less than a second we were again in the realities of life; and the whole long night of darkness and fear was behind us like a dream.

I hurried Marjory into the room where she had dressed, and where were a store of her clothes; and then I proceeded to make up a fire. The chimney place in the dining room was made after the old fashion, wide and deep, and had in the back a beautiful old steel rack with^[306] brackets on which to hang pots and kettles. I thought this would be the best place for a fire, as it was the biggest in the house. So I got from the fuel house off the kitchen an armful of dry furze and another of cut billets of pine which I dumped on top of it. A single match was sufficient, and in an instant, there was a large fire roaring up the chimney. I filled a great copper kettle with water and slung it in the blaze, and then, when I found myself in a cloud of steam from my wet clothes, ran into my own room. After a hard rub down which made my skin glow, and a wash which was exquisite, I put myself into dry clothes. When I came back to the dining room I found Marjory busy getting ready a meal—supper, breakfast, dinner, we did not know what to call it. One glad moment in each other's arms, and then kneeling together we thanked God for the great mercy which He had shown us. Then we resumed preparations to eat, for we were ravenous. The kettle was beginning to sing, and we soon had hot delicious tea, which sent a glow through us. There were plenty of cooked provisions, and we did not wait to warm them: such luxuries as hot food would come into our lives later. It was only when we had satisfied our appetites that we thought of looking at the time. My own watch had stopped when I had first tried the entrance to the great cave and had been waist high in water, but Marjory had left hers in her room when she had changed her dress for the expedition. It was now one o'clock and as the sun was high in the heavens it was—P. M. Allowing for the time of dressing and eating, we must have been in all in the caves some twelve hours. I looked amongst my books and found Whittaker's Almanach, from which I gathered that as the tide was full at half past six o'clock we must as the normal rise of the tide was between eleven and twelve feet have been immersed in the water some four hours. The very^[307] thought of it made us shudder; with an instinctive remembrance of our danger and misery we drew close together.

Then a heavy sleepiness seemed all at once to settle on us. Marjory would not leave me, and I did not wish her to. I felt, as she did, that we could not sleep easily if separated. So I got great armloads of rugs and cushions and made up two nests close to the fire which I built up with solid logs. I wrapped her in a great, warm plaid and myself in another, and we sank down on our couches, holding hands and with her head upon my shoulder.

When I woke it was almost pitch dark; only for a slight glow which came from the mass of red embers on the hearth the darkness would have been as complete as that of the cave. It is true that the sunblinds were down and the curtains drawn; but even so, when there was light outside some gleams of it even, if only reflected, found their way in. Marjory was still sleeping as I stole softly to the window and looked out.

All was dark. The moon was hidden behind a bank of cloud, only the edges of which tinged with light showed its place in the heavens. I looked at Marjory's watch which she had laid upon the table, having wound it up instinctively before the sleepiness had come upon her. It was now a few minutes past one.

We had slept right round the clock.

I began to make up the fire as softly as I could, for I did not wish to wake Marjory. I felt that sleep and plenty of it was the best thing for her after the prolonged strain and trial which she had undergone. I got ready clean plates and knives and forks, and put on the kettle again. Whilst I was moving about, she woke. For an instant or two she looked round in a dazed uncomprehending way; and then all at once the whole remembrance^[308] of the night swept across her. In a single bound, with the agility of a young panther, she sprang to her feet, and in an instant her arms were round me, half protectingly and whole lovingly.

We had another hearty meal. It was pic-nic-ing *in excelsis*, and I doubt if the whole world held two happier beings. Presently we began to talk of the cave and of the treasure, and I was rejoiced to find that all the trial and anxiety had left no trace on Marjory's courage. It was she herself who suggested that we should go back to the cave and take out what she called those dear little boxes. We put on once more our cave clothes, which were dry again but which had shrunk lamentably, and laughing at each other's grotesque appearance we went down into the cellar again. Having renewed the lamps and made all safe for our return, we took lamps and torches and matches and set out on our quest. I think we both felt a little awed—we were certainly silent—as we crept through the hole over the moraine and took our way up the treasure cave. I confess that my own heart sank within me when we saw the ledge, with the San Cristobal and the infant Christ seeming to keep guard upon it; and I felt a pity, which I had not felt before, for the would-be thief, Olgaref. Marjory I think felt the same way as I did, for she kept very close to me and now and again held on to me; but she said nothing. We lit a torch and renewed our search. Whilst I stooped over the box and took out other caskets containing gems, Marjory held the light with one hand whilst she gathered the little heap of rubies from the first box and put them in the pocket of my jacket. Her feminine care was shown in her searching for the box and the

rubies which had fallen into the water so that none might be lost. There were not many of the little caskets—it is astounding what a small space will contain a many precious gems. They[309] easily fitted into the bag which I had brought for the purpose. Then we took our way back to the house.

When we had ascended, we put out the lights and locked the cellar. We changed our clothes again, Marjory putting on her livery; it was now nearly four o'clock in the morning, and it was time to be getting back to Crom.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII
THE DUTY OF A WIFE

Just as we were about to start Marjory said to me, half in jest but wholly in earnest:

“I wonder what has become of Gormala these times. If she knew of the last two nights, she would simply become desperate; and there is no knowing what she might prophecy!”

Strangely enough, I had been myself thinking of the Witch-woman. I suppose it was that the memory of the finding of the treasure, and of the hovering near us of death, had recalled her weirds. With the thought of her, came once more that strange feeling which I had before experienced, a feeling as if she were present. Motioning to Marjory to put out the light, I stole to the window. The heavy curtains, when I had passed through them, shut out the glimmer of the firelight. Marjory came and joined me, and we looked out together. There were drifting clouds, and thus, moments of light and shadow. In one of the former I saw a dark mass on the edge of the deep grass that crowns the rock just over the entrance of Witsennan Point. If it was a woman it was probably Gormala; and if it was Gormala she was probably watching me, for of course she could not know that Marjory was with me. I determined to find out if I could; so I told Marjory to slip out by the back door whilst I went to the point. We arranged to join at the upper village of old Whinnyfold.

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Having placed my bicycle ready to start, and shut the door behind me softly, I stole over to the cliff. Lying just below the edge, but so that her head was at the top lay Gormala, asleep. At first I thought it was pretence, for I knew the wily nature of the old woman; but on examining closely I found her sleep was real. She looked worn and tired out, and I concluded that it was the second night of watching on end which had

finished her. It was well she slept, for had she been awake she must have seen us. The place she had chosen commanded both paths away from the house left and right; only by stealing back over the hill and keeping the house all the time between us and herself could we have avoided her prying eyes. Even then, were there light enough, she might have seen us debouching on the roadway had we gone inland by Whinnyfold. I could not but be sorry for her; she looked so old and feeble, and yet with such purpose in her strong, stern face. I could afford to be pitiful now; my life was running on happy lines. I had won Marjory, and we had found the treasure!

I left her undisturbed; I would have put some rug or covering over her; but I was afraid lest I should awake her, and so make discovery of our plans. Besides it would be hard to account for my being awake myself and about at that hour of the night—or morning, I hardly knew which it was. Almost as hard as it would have been for Gormala to explain why she was in similar case.

When I joined Marjory, we took our way as quickly as possible to Crom; we were both anxious that she should get into the castle before daylight. It was with a certain dread, for the experiences of the night were not yet hardened in memory, that I saw Marjory descend into the cave when we rolled away the stone. She too was not free from misgiving; I knew it from the emphasis with which she impressed on me that I was not to fear for[312] her. She was to wave a white handkerchief from the roof when she had got in safely.

Looking over the stone towards the castle whence must come her signal I waited with an anxiety which I could not conceal from myself. The grey dawn grew paler and paler as I looked, and the sky began to quicken. Here and there around me came every now and again the solitary pipe of an awakening bird. I could just see the top of the castle, looking bare and cold through the vista between the treetops. In a short time, almost shorter than I could have anticipated, I saw on the roof the flutter of a white handkerchief. My heart leaped; Marjory was safe. I waved my own handkerchief; she answered again, and there was no more sign. I came away satisfied, and wheeled back to Cruden with what speed I could. It was still very early morning, when I reached Whinnyfold. Not a soul was up as I passed on my way, and I crept in secretly by the back of the house.

When I looked carefully out of a window in front, I could see in the growing light of morning that Gormala still lay on the edge of the cliff, motionless and manifestly asleep.

I lay down for a while and dozed till the morning was sufficiently advanced. Then after a cold bath and a cup of hot tea, took my way to Crom, timing myself so as to arrive for an early breakfast.

Mrs. Jack met me, beaming. She was so hearty, and so manifestly glad to see me, that I bent over and kissed her. She was not a bit displeased; she seemed a little touched by the act, and smiled at me. Then Marjory came in, looking radiant. She greeted me with a smile, and went over to and kissed Mrs. Jack affectionately. Then she kissed me too, and there was a glad look in her eyes which made my heart thrill.

After breakfast she sat in the window with Mrs. Jack,[313] and I went to the fireplace to light a cigarette. I stood with my back to the fire and looked over at Marjory; it was always a joy to me when she was in my sight. Presently she said to Mrs. Jack:

“Weren’t you frightened when I didn’t come back the night before last?” The elderly lady smiled complacently as she answered:

“Not a bit, my dear!” Marjory was astonished into an exclamation:

“Why not?” The affectionate old woman looked at her gravely and tenderly:

“Because I knew you were with your husband; the safest place where a young woman can be. And oh! my dear, I was rejoiced that it was so; for I was beginning to be anxious, and almost unhappy about you. It didn’t seem right or natural for two young people like you and your husband to be living, one in one place and one in another.” As she spoke she took Marjory’s hand in hers and stroked it lovingly. Marjory turned her head away from her, and, after one swift glance at me from under her eyelashes, from me also. Mrs. Jack went on in a grave, sweet way, lecturing the girl she loved and that she had mothered; not as a woman lectures a child but as an old woman advises her junior:

“For oh! Marjory, my dear one, when a woman takes a husband she gives up herself. It is right that she should; and it is better too, for us women. How can we look after our mankind, if we’re thinking of ourselves all the time! And they want a lot of looking after too, let me tell you. They’re only men after all—the dears! Your bringing-up, my child, has not made you need them. But you would well understand it, if when you was a child, you was out on the plains and among the mountains, like I was; if you didn’t know when you saw your daddy, or your brother, or your husband go out in the[314] morning whether you’d ever see him come back at night, or would see him brought back. And then, when the work was over, or the fight or whatever it might be, to see them come home all dirty and ragged and hungry, and may be sick or wounded—for the Indians made a lot of harm in my time with their good old bows and

their bad new guns—where would we women and girls have been. Or what sort of women at all at all, if we didn't have things ready for them! My dear, as I suppose you know now, a man is a mighty good sort of a thing after all. He may be cross, or masterful, or ugly to deal with when he has got his shirt out; but after all he's a man, and that's what we love them for. I was beginning to wonder if you was a girl at all, when I see you let your husband go away from you day after day and you not either holdin' him back, or goin' off with him, way the girls did in my time. I tell you it would have been a queer kind of girl in Arizony that'd have let her man go like that, when once they had said the word together. Why, my dear, I lay awake half the night sayin' my prayers for the both of you, and blessin' God that He had sent you such a happiness as true love; when there might have been them that would have ben runnin' after your fortun' and gettin' on your weak side enough to throw dust in your eyes. And when in the grey of the dawn I looked into your room and found you hadn't come, why I just tip-toed back to my bed and went to sleep happy. And I was happy all day, knowin' you were happy too. And last night I just went to sleep at once and didn't bother my head about listenin' for your comin'; for well I knew you wouldn't be home then. Ah! my dear, you've done the right thing. At the least, your husband's wishes is as much as your own, seein' as how there's two of you. But a woman only learns her true happiness when she gives up all her own wishes, and thinks only for her[315] husband. And, mind you, child, it isn't givin' up much after all—at least we didn't think so in my time—when she pleases her husband that she loves, by goin' off to share his home.”

I listened full of deep emotion as the old lady spoke. I felt that every word she said was crystallised truth; and there was no questioning the deep, earnest, loving-kindness of her intent. I was half afraid to look at Marjory lest I should disconcert her; so I turned round quietly till I faced the fireplace, and leaning on the plinth of it stole a glance in the old oval mirror above. Marjory sat there with her hand in Mrs. Jack's. Her head was bent, and there was a flush on her neck and arms which told its own story. I felt that she was silently crying, or very near it; and a lump rose in my own throat. This was one of the crises in her life. It was so borne in upon me; and I knew its truth. We have all, as the Scotch say, to “dree our own weird,” this was a battle with her own soul which Marjory must fight alone. The old woman's wise words sounded a trumpet note of duty. She was face to face with it, and must judge for herself. Even with all my love, I could not help her. I stood silent, scarcely daring to breathe lest I should disturb or distract her. I tried to efface myself, and for a few minutes did not even look in the mirror. The old woman too, knew the value of silence, for she sat still; there was not even the rustle of her dress. At last I could hear Marjory's in-drawn breath, and looked

in the mirror. Her attitude had not changed, except that she had raised her head; I could tell by its proud poise that she was her own woman again. She still kept her face away; and there was the veil of recent tears over her sweet voice as she spoke tenderly:

“Thank you, dear. I am so glad you have spoken to me so freely and so lovingly.” I could see from the[316] motion of the two hands and her own whitening knuckles that she was squeezing her companion’s fingers. Then, after a few moments she rose quietly, and, still keeping her head averted, sailed quietly out of the room in her own graceful manner. I did not stir; I felt that I could please her best by keeping quiet.

But oh! how my heart went with her in her course.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

I chatted with Mrs. Jack for a few minutes with what nonchalance I could muster, for I wanted to cover up Marjory’s retreat. I have not the faintest idea what we talked about; I only know that the dear old lady sat and beamed on me, with her lips pursed up in thought, and went on with her knitting. She agreed with everything I said, whatever it was. I longed to follow Marjory and comfort her. I could see that she was distressed, though I did not know the measure of it. I waited patiently, however, for I knew that she would either come to me, or send me word to join her when she wanted me.

She must have come back very quietly, almost tip-toe, for I had not heard a sound when I saw her in the doorway. She was beckoning to me, but in such a manner that Mrs. Jack could not see her. I was about to go quietly, but she held up a warning hand with five fingers outspread; from which I took it that I was to follow in five minutes.

I stole away quietly, priding myself on the fact that Mrs. Jack did not notice my departure; but on thinking the matter over later, I came to the conclusion that the quiet old lady knew a good deal more of what was going on round her than appeared on the surface. Her little homily to Marjory on a wife’s duty has set me thinking many a time since.

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I found Marjory, as I expected, in the Ladies’ Room. She was looking out of the window when I came in. I took her in my arms for an instant, and she laid her head on my

shoulder. Then she drew herself away, and pointed to a great chair close by for me to sit down. When I was seated she took a little stool, and placing it beside me, sat at my feet. From our position I had to look down at her, and she had to look up at me. Often and often since then have I recalled the picture she made, sitting there in her sweet graceful simplicity. Well may I remember it, for through many and many an aching hour has every incident of that day, however trivial, been burned into my brain. Marjory leant one elbow on the arm of my chair, and put the other hand in mine with a sweet confiding gesture which touched me to the heart. Since our peril of two nights before, she was very, very dear to me. All the selfishness seemed to have disappeared from my affection for her, and I was her true lover as purely as it is given to a man to be. She wanted to speak; I could see that it was an effort to do so, for her breast heaved a few times, as a diver breathes before making his downward leap. Then she mastered herself, and with infinite grace and tenderness spoke:

“I’m afraid I have been very selfish and inconsiderate. Oh! yes I have” for I was commencing a protest. “I know it now. Mrs. Jack was quite right. It never occurred to me what a brute I have been; and you so good to me, and so patient. Well, dear, that’s all over now! I want to tell you, right here, that if you like I’ll go away with you to-morrow—to-day if you wish; and we’ll let every one know that we are married, and go and live together.” She stopped, and we sat hand in hand with our fingers clasping. I remained quite still with a calm that amazed me, for my brain was in a whirl. But somehow there came to me, even as it had come to her, a sense^[319] of duty. How could I accept such a sweet sacrifice. The very gravity of her preparation for thought and speech showed me that she was loth to leave the course on which she had entered. That she loved me I had no doubt; was it not for me that she was willing to give it all up. And then my course of action rose clear before me. Instinctively I stood up as I spoke to her, and I felt that big stalwart man as I was, the pretty self-denying girl at my feet ruled me, for she was more to me than my own wishes, my own hopes, my own soul.

“Marjory, do you remember when you sat on the throne in the cave, and gave me the accolade?” She bowed her head in acquiescence; her eyes fell, and her face and ears grew rosy pink. “Well, when you dubbed me your knight, and I took the vow, I meant all I said! Your touch on my shoulder was more to me than if it had come from the Queen on her throne, with all the glory of a thousand years behind her. Oh, my dear, I was in earnest—in earnest then, as I am in earnest now. I was, and am, your true knight! You are my lady; to serve, and make her feet walk in easy ways! It is a terrible temptation to me to take what you have offered as done, and walk straightway into Paradise in our new life. But, my dear! my dear! I too can be selfish if I am tempted too far; and I must

not think of my own wishes alone. Since I first saw your face I have dreamt a dream. That a time would come when you, with all the world to choose from, would come to me of your own free will. When you wouldn't want to look back with regret at anything, done or undone. I want you to be happy; to look forward only—unless the backward thought is of happiness. Now, if you give up your purpose and come to me with the feeling that you have only made a choice, the regret that you did not have the opportunity you longed for, may grow and grow, till—till it may become an unhappiness.[320] Let me be sententious for a moment. 'Remember Lot's wife' was not merely the warning of a fact; it touched a great allegory. You and I are young; we are both happy; we have all the world before us, and numberless good things to thank God for. I want you to enjoy them to the full; and, my dear one, I will not stand in your way in anything which you may wish. Be free, Marjory, be quite free! The girl I want beside my hearth is one who would rather be there than anywhere else in the wide world. Isn't that worth wishing for; isn't it worth waiting for? It may be selfish in the highest plane of selfishness; I suppose it is. But anyhow, it is my dream; and I love you so truly and so steadfastly that I am not afraid to wait!"

As I spoke, Marjory looked at me lovingly, more and more. Then all at once she broke down, and began to sob and cry as if her heart would break. That swept away in a moment all my self-command; I took her in my arms and tried to comfort her. Kisses and sweet words fairly rained upon her. Presently she grew calm, and said as she gently disengaged herself:

"You don't know how well you argue. I'm nearer at this moment to giving up all my plans, than I ever thought I should be in my life. Wait a little longer, dear. Only a little; the time may be shorter than you think. But this you may take for your comfort now, and your remembrance later; that in all my life, whatever may come, I shall never forget your goodness to me, your generosity, your love, your sympathy—your—! But there, you are indeed my Knight; and I love you with all my heart and soul!" and she threw herself into my arms.

When I left Crom after lunch the weather seemed to have changed. There was a coldness in the air which emphasised the rustling of the dry leaves as they were[321] swept by intermittent puffs of wind. Altogether there was a sense of some presage of gloom—or disaster—of discontent, I knew not what. I was loth to part with Marjory, but we both felt it was necessary I should go. I had not had my letters for three days; and besides there were a thousand things to be attended to about the house at Whinnyfold. Moreover, we began to think of the treasure, the portable part of which—the jewels—was left almost open in the dining room. I did not want to alarm Marjory by any dim fears of my own; I knew that, in any case, there might be a reaction

from her present high spirits. The remembrance of the trials and anxieties of the past few days would come back to her in the silence of the night. She saw, however, with the new eyes of her wifely love, that I was anxious about something; justly inferring that it was about her, she said to me quietly:

“You need not be alarmed about me, darling. I promise you I shall not stir out of the house till you come. But you will come as early as you can to-morrow; won’t you. Somehow, I don’t like your leaving me now. I used not to mind it; but to-day it all seems different. We don’t seem to be the same to each other, do we, since we felt that water creep up us in the dark. However, I shall be very good. I have a lot of work to do, and letters to write; and the time may not go so very slowly, or seem so very long, till I see my husband again.”

Oh! it was sweet to look in her eyes, and see the love that shone from them; to hear the delicate cooing music of her voice. My heart seemed to fly back to her as I moved away; and every step I took, its strings seemed nearer and nearer to the breaking point. When I looked back at the turn of the winding avenue between the fir trees, the last I saw through my dimming eyes was the[322] wave of her hand and the shining of her eyes blending into one mass of white light.

In my rooms at the hotel I found a lot of letters about business, and a few from friends. There was one however which made me think. It was in the writing of Adams, and was as follows, no place or date being given:

“The people at Crom had better be careful of their servants! There is a footman who often goes out after dark and returns just before morning. He may be in league with enemies. Anyhow, where he gets out and in, and how, others may do the same. Verb. sap, suff. A.”

We had been watched then, and by the Secret Service detectives. I was glad that Marjory had promised not to go out till I came. If “Mac’s men” had seen her, others might also; and the eyes of the others might have been more penetrating, or their reasoning powers more keen. However, I thought it well to send her a word of warning. I copied Adams’s letter into mine, with just a word or two of love added. I was amazed to find that altogether it ran to several pages! The gillie of the hotel took it over in a pony cart, with instructions to bring me back an answer to Whinnyfold. For safety I enclosed it in an envelope to Mrs. Jack. Then, when I had written a few notes and telegrams, I biked over to my house on the cliff.

It was a bleak afternoon and everything seemed grey, sky and sea alike; even the rocks, with their crowning of black seaweed swept with the foam of lapping waves.

Inside the house nothing had of course been stirred; but it seemed so bleak without a fire and with the curtains wide, that I made up a fire of billets and drew the heavy curtains close. As I stood in the great bay window and looked out on the fretting sea, and listened to the[323] sougling of the rising wind, a great melancholy seemed to steal over me, so that I became in a way lost in a mist of gloom. So far as I remember, my thoughts were back with the time when I had seen the procession of the dead coming up out of the sea from the Skares beyond, and of the fierce looking Spaniard who walked alone in their ranks and looked at me with living eyes. I must have been in a sort of day-dream and unconscious of all around me; for, though I had not noticed any one approaching, I was startled by a knocking at the door. The house was not quite finished; there were electric bells in position, but they had not yet been charged, and there was no knocker on the door. The knocking was that of bare knuckles on a panel. I thought of course that it was the gillie back from Crom, for I did not expect any one else; so I went at once and opened the door. I recoiled with pure wonder. There, looking grave and dignified, an incarnation of the word 'gentleman' stood Don Bernardino. His eyes, though now serene, and even kindly, were the eyes of the dead man from the sea. Behind him, a few yards off, stood Gormala MacNiel with an eager look on her face, half concealed by such a grin as made me feel as though I had been trapped, or in some way brought to book. The Spaniard at once spoke:

"Sir, your pardon! I wish much that I may speak with you in private, and soon. Forgive me if that I trouble you, but it is on a matter of such moment, to me at the least, that I have ventured an intrusion. I learned at the hotel that you had hither come; so with the guidance of this good lady, who did me much inform, I have found." As he spoke of Gormala, he half turned and made a gesture towards her. She had been watching our every movement with cat-like eagerness; but when she saw that we were speaking of her, a dark look[324] swept her face, and she moved away scowling. The Spaniard went on:

"What I have to say is secret, and I would be alone with you. May it be that I enter your house; or will you come to mine? I do not mean my castle of Crom, but the house at Ellon which I have taken, until such time as the Senora Jack and that so fair patriot of hers shall wish to leave it." His manner was so gravely courteous and his bearing so noble, that I found it almost impossible to mistrust him, even when there flashed across my memory that dark red-eyed look of his at Crom, which recalled so vividly the dead Spaniard with the living eyes of hate in the procession of ghosts from the Skares. I felt that, in any case, it could not do any harm to hear what he had to say: 'Forewarned is forearmed' is a good apothegm in dealing with an enemy. I motioned him into the house; he bowed gravely and entered. As I shut the door behind us, I

caught sight of Gormala with an eager look on her face stealing swiftly towards the house. She evidently wanted to be near enough to watch, and to hear if she could.

As I was opening the door of the drawing-room for Don Bernardino to enter, a sudden glimpse of its interior, seen in the dim light through the chinks of the shutters, changed my plans. This was the room improvised as a dressing room for Marjory, and the clothes which she had worn in the cave were scattered about the room, hung over the backs of chairs to dry. Her toilet matters also were on the table. Altogether I felt that to bring the stranger into the room would not only be an indelicacy towards my wife, but might in some way give a clue to our enemy to guess our secret. With a hasty excuse I closed the door and motioned my guest into the dining room across the hall. I asked him to be seated, and then went over to the window and pulled aside the[325] curtains to give us light. I felt that somehow I was safer in the light, and that it might enable me to learn more than I could have done in the dim twilight of the curtained room.

When I turned round, the Spaniard was still standing, facing me. He appeared to be studiously keeping himself still; but I could see that under his long black lashes his eyes were roaming round the room. Unconsciously to myself, as I know now, my eyes followed his and took in the frightful untidiness of the place. The great hearth was piled with extinct ashes; the table was littered with unwashed cups and plates and dishes, for we had not cleared up anything after our night in the cave. Rugs and pillows were massed untidily on the floor, and the stale provisions on the table made themselves manifest in the close atmosphere of the room. I was moving over to throw up the window so as to let in a little fresh air, when I remembered that Gormala was probably outside with her ears strained close to the wall to hear anything that we might say. So, instead, I apologised for the disorder, saying that I had camped me there for some days whilst working at my book—the excuse I had given at the hotel for my spells of solitary life.

The Spaniard bowed low with grave courtesy, and implored that I would make no apology. If there were anything not perfect, and for himself he did not see it, such deficiencies were swept away and lost in the tide of honour with which I had overwhelmed him in the permission to enter my house; and much more to the same effect.

Then he came to the serious side of things and began to speak to the point.

[326]

CHAPTER XL

THE REDEMPTION OF A TRUST

“Senor, you may wonder why I am here, and why I would speak with you alone and in secret. You have seen me only in a place, which though my own by birthright, was dominated by the presence of ladies, who alas! by their nationality and the stress of war were mine enemies. From you is not such. Our nations are at peace, and there is no personal reason why we should not be of the most friendly. I come to you, Senor, because it is borne to me that you are cavalier. You can be secret if you will, and you will recognise the claims of honour and duty, of the highest. The common people know it not; and for the dear ladies who have their own honour, our duties in such are not a part of their lives—nay! they are beyond and above the life as it is to us. I need not tell you of a secret duty of my family, for it is known to me that all of such is already with you. The secret of the Pope’s treasure and of the duty of my House to guard and restore it has been in your mind. Oh yes, this I know” for he saw I was about to speak. “Have I not seen in your hands that portion of the book, so long lost!” Here he stopped and his eyes narrowed; some thought of danger, necessitating caution, had come to him. I, too, was silent; I wanted to think. Unless I had utterly misconceived him, he had made an extraordinary admission; one which had given him away completely. The only occasion on which I [327] had seen him was when he had pointed out to us that the pages which I had found belonged to the book in the library. It is true that we had suggested to him that there was a cipher in the marking of the letters, but he had not acknowledged it. At the time he certainly did not convey the idea to us that he believed we had grasped the secret. How then did he know; or on what assumption did he venture to state that I knew his secret. Here was a difficult point to pass. If I were silent he would take all for granted; in such case I might not learn anything of his purpose. So I spoke:

“Your pardon, Sir, but you presume a knowledge on my part of some secret history of your family and of a treasure of the Pope; and then account for it that you have seen in my hand the book, a part of which was long lost. Am I to take it that because there is, or may be, a secret, any one who suspects that there is one must know it?” The steady eyes of the Spaniard closed, narrower and narrower still, till the pupils looked like those of a cat in the dark; a narrow slit with a cavern of fire within. For fully half a minute he continued to look at me steadily, and I own that I felt disconcerted. In this matter he had the advantage of me. I knew that what he said was true; I did know the secret of the buried treasure. He had some way of knowing the extent of my knowledge of the matter. He was, so far, all truth; I was prevaricating—and we both

knew it! All at once he spoke; as though his mind were made up, and he would speak openly and frankly. The frankness of a Latin was a fell and strange affair:

“Why shall we beat about the bush. I know; you know; and we both know that the other knows. I have read what you have written of the secret which you have drawn from those marked pages of the law book.”

As he spoke the whole detail of his visit to Crom rose[328] before me. At that time he had only seen the printed pages of the cipher; he had not seen my transcript which had lain, face down, upon the table. We had turned it, on hearing some one coming in.

“Then you have been to the castle again!” I said suddenly. My object was to disconcert him, but it did not succeed. In his saturnine frankness had been a complete intention, which was now his protection against surprise.

“Yes!” he said slowly, and with a smile which showed his teeth, like the wolf’s to Red Ridinghood.

“Strange, they did not tell me at Crom,” I said as though to myself.

“They did not know!” he answered. “When next I visited my own house, it was at night, and by a way not known, save to myself.” As he spoke, the canine teeth began to show. He knew that what he had to tell was wrong; and being determined to brazen it out, the cruelty which lay behind his strength became manifest at once. Somehow at that moment the racial instinct manifested itself. Spain was once the possession of the Moors, and the noblest of the old families had some black blood in them. In Spain, such is not, as in the West, a taint. The old diabolism whence sprung fantee and hoo-doo seemed to gleam out in the grim smile of incarnate, rebellious purpose. It was my cue to throw my antagonist off his guard; to attack the composite character in such way that one part would betray the other.

“Strange!” I said, as though to myself again. “To come in secret into a house occupied by another is amongst civilised people regarded as an offence!”

“The house is my own!” he retorted quickly, with a swarthy flush.

“Strange, again!” I said. “When Mrs. Jack rented the castle, there was no clause in her agreement of a right[329] to the owner to enter by a secret way! On the contrary such rights as the owner reserved were exactly specified.”

“A man has a right to enter his own house, when and how he will; and to protect the property which is being filched from him by strangers!” He said the last words with such manifest intention of offence that I stood on guard. Evidently he wanted to anger

me, as I had angered him. I determined that thenceforward I should not let anything which he might say ruffle me. I replied with deliberate exasperation:

“The law provides remedies for any wrongs done. It does not, that I know of, allow a man to enter secretly into a house that he has let to another. There is an implied contract of peaceful possession, unless entry be specified in the agreement.” He answered disdainfully:

“My agent had no right to let, without protecting such a right.”

“Ah, but he did; and in law we are bound by the acts of our agents. ‘*Facit per alium*’ is a maxim of law. And as to filching, let me tell you that all your property at Crom is intact. The pieces of paper that you claimed were left in the book; and the book has remained as you yourself placed it on the shelf. I have Mrs. Jack’s word that it would be so.” He was silent; so, as it was necessary that the facts as they existed should be spoken of between us, I went on:

“Am I to take it that you read the private papers on the table of the library during your nocturnal visit? By the way, I suppose it was nocturnal.”

“It was.”

“Then sir,” I spoke sharply now, “who has done the filching? We—Miss Drake and I—by chance discovered those papers. As a matter of fact they were in an oaken chest which I bought at an auction in the streets of Peterhead. We suspected a cipher and worked at it till we^[330] laid bare the mystery. This is what we have done; we who were even ignorant of your name! Now, what have you done? You come as an admitted guest, by permission, into a house taken in all good faith by strangers. When there you recognised some papers which had been lost. We restored them to you. Honour demanded that you should have been open with us after this. Did you ask if we had discovered the secret of the trust? No! You went away openly; and came back like a thief in the night and filched our secret. Yes sir, you did!” He had raised his hand in indignant protest. “It was our secret then, not yours. Had you interpreted the secret cipher for yourself, you would have been within your rights; and I should have had nothing to say. We offered to let you take the book with you; but you refused. It is evident that you did not know the whole secret of the treasure. That you knew there was a treasure and a secret I admit; but the key of it, which we had won through toil, you stole from us!”

“Senor!” the voice was peremptory and full of all that was best and noblest in the man. “A de Escoban is not wont to hear such an allegation; and he who makes such shall in the end have his own death to answer for!” He stopped suddenly, and at his

stopping I exulted secretly; though I wished to punish him for his insinuation that Marjory had filched from him, I had no desire to become entangled in a duel. I was determined to go on, however; for I would not, at any hazard, pass a slight upon my peerless wife. I think that his sudden pause meant thought; and thought meant a peaceful solution of things on my own lines. Nevertheless, I went on forcing the issue:

“I rejoice, sir, that you are not accustomed to hear such allegations; I trust that you are also not accustomed to deserve them!” By this time he was calm again, icily[331] calm. It was wonderful with what rapidity, and how widely, the pendulum of his nature swung between pride and passion. All at once he smiled again, the same deadly, dreadful smile which he imagined to be the expression of frankness.

“I see I am punished! ’Twas I that first spoke of stealing. Senor, you have shown me that I was wrong. My pardon to that so good lady who is guest of my house; and also to that other patriotic one who so adorns it. Now let me say, since to defend myself is thrust upon me, that you, who have, with so much skill made clear the hidden mystery of that law book which I have only lately read, know best of all men how I am bound to do all things to protect my trust. I am bound, despite myself, even if it were not a duty gladly undertaken for the sake of the dead. It was not I who so undertook; but still I am bound even more than he who did. I stand between law and honour, between life and death, helpless. Senor, were you in my place, would you not, too, have acted as I did? Would you not do so, knowing that there was a secret which you could not even try to unravel, since long ago that in which it was hidden had been stolen or lost. Would you not do so, knowing, too, that some other—in all good faith and innocence let us say—had already made discovery which might mock your hopes and nullify the force of that long vigil, to which ten generations of men, giving up all else, had sacrificed themselves? Would not you, too, have come in secret and made what discovery you could. Discovery of your own, mark you! Would not also that lady so patriotic, to whom all things come after that devotion to her country, which so great she holds?”

Whilst he was speaking I had been thinking. The pretence of ignorance was all over to both of us; he knew our knowledge of the secret trust, and we knew that he[332] knew. The only thing of which he was yet ignorant, was that we had discovered the treasure itself. There was nothing to be gained by disputing points of conjectural morals. Of course he was right; had either Marjory or myself considered ourselves bound by such a duty as lay so heavy on him we should have done the same. I bowed as I answered;

“Sir, you are right! Any man who held to such a duty would have done the same.”

“Senor,” he answered quickly, “I thank you with all my heart!” Poor fellow, at that moment I pitied him. The sudden flash of joy that leaped to his face showed by

reaction in what a hell he must have of late been living. This momentary episode seemed to have wiped away all his bitterness; it was in quite a different way that he spoke again:

“And now, Senor, since your engaging frankness has made my heart so glad, may I ask further of your kindness. Believe me that it is not of my own will, but from an unbending sense of duty that I do and may have to do such things; my life till lately has been otherwise, oh! so much so! You have the feelings of honour yourself; like me you are also man of the world, and as such we can sacrifice all things save honour. Is there no way in which you can aid me to fulfill my trust; and let there be peace between us?” He looked at me anxiously; I said:

“I fear I hardly understand?” With manifest embarrassment he went on;

“You will forgive me if I err again; but this time I must make myself clear. It is manifest to me that in these days of science nothing can long remain hidden, when once a clue has been found. You already know so much that I am placed almost as though the treasure has already been found. Thereafter where am I; what am I? One who has failed in his trust. Who has allowed[333] another to step in; and so dishonour him! A moment, Senor, and I am done,” for he saw that I was about to speak. “It is not the treasure itself that I value, but the trust. If I could make it safe by the sacrifice of all my possessions I would gladly do so. Senor, you are still free. You have but to abandon your quest. It is not to you a duty; and therefore you sacrifice naught of honour should you abandon it. Here I pledge to you—and, oh Senor, I pray have patience that you take no affront that I do so—that in such case I shall give to you all that I have. Give it gladly! So, I may redeem the trust of my House; and go out into the wide world, though it may be as a beggar, yet free—free! Oh! pause, Senor, and think. I am rich in the world’s goods. My ancestors were of vast wealth; even at that time when the great Bernardino did give his ship to his king. And for three centuries all have been prudent; and all their possessions have grown. There are vast lands of corn, great forests, many castles, whole ranges of mountains as yet untouched for their varied treasures which are vast. There are seaports and villages; and in all, the dwellers are happy and content. I am the last of my race. There is none to inherit; so I am free to pledge myself.” He did not bow or bend; there was no persistence of request in his voice, or tone, or manner. In all there was no feeling of a bargain. It was an offer, based on the fulfillment of his own desires; given in such a lordly way that there could be no offence in it. He recognised so thoroughly the strength of my own position, that the base side of barter became obliterated; it was an exchange of goods between gentlemen. Such, at least, I recognised was his intellectual position; my own remained the same. How

could I, or any man, take advantage of such an offer. After thinking a few seconds I said to him:

“Sir, you have honoured me by grouping us as men^[334] of honour. What would you do in my place?” His eye brightened, and his breath came more quickly as he replied:

“Were it my case, I should say: ‘Senor, your duty is one of honour; mine is one of gain. There can be no comparisons. Fulfill your debt to your forefathers! Redeem the pledge that they have made in your name! Discover your treasure; and be free!’” There was infinite pride in his voice and manner; I think he really meant what he said. I went on with my questioning:

“And what about the taking of your estate as a reward of forbearance?”

He shrugged his shoulders: “For that,” he said, “it matters not.”

“Ah, for you to give you mean?” He nodded.

“But what for me to take? Would you do so in my place?” He was manifestly in a dilemma. I could see something of the working of his mind in his face. If he said he would himself take it, he would manifestly lower himself in his own eyes; and to such pride as his, his own self-respect was more than the respect of others, in proportion to his self-value. If he said he would not, then he might peril his chance of getting what he desired. The temptation was a cruel one; with all my heart I honoured him for his answer, given with the fullness of his mighty pride:

“Senor, I can die; I cannot stoop! But what avails my own idea? The answer is not for me! I have offered all I have. I will in addition pledge myself to hold my life at your service when this great trust is relieved. To this my honour is guardian; you need not fear it shall be redeemed! Now Senor, you have my answer! To redeem the trust of my sires I give all I have in the world, except my honour! The answer rests with you!”

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CHAPTER XLI TREASURE TROVE

There was no doubt that the Spaniard’s devotion to his cause placed me in a considerable difficulty. I could not disguise from myself that he put forward a very strong claim for the consideration of one gentleman by another. It was only on hurriedly thinking the matter over that the weakness of his cause was apparent. Had the whole affair been a private or personal one; had the treasure belonged to his

ancestors, I should have found it in my own heart a very difficult matter to gainsay him, and be subsequently at ease with myself. I remembered, however, that the matter was a public one. The treasure was collected by enemies of England for the purpose of destroying England's liberty, and so the liberty of the whole human race for which it made. It was sent in charge of a personal enemy of the country in a ship of war, one of many built for the purpose of invading and conquering England. In time of national stress, when the guns were actually thundering along our coast from the Thames to the Tyne, the treasure had been hidden so as to preserve it for future use in its destined way. Though centuries had passed, it was still held in mind; and the very men who had guarded it were, whilst professing to be Britons, secret enemies of the country, and devoted to her ultimate undoing. Beyond this again, there was another reason for not giving it up which appealed to me more strongly than the[336] claim of my own natural duty, because it came to me through Marjory. Though Spain was at peace with my country, it was at war with hers; the treasure collected to harm England might—nay, would—be used to harm America. Spain was impoverished to the last degree. Her treasuries were empty, her unpaid soldiers clamorous for their arrears. Owing to want at home, there was in places something like anarchy; abroad there was such lack of all things, ships, men, stores, cannon, ammunition, that the evil of want came across the seas to the statesmen of the Quirinal with heart-breaking persistence. America, unprepared for war at first, was day by day becoming better equipped. The panic had abated which had set in on the seaboard towns from Maine to California, when each found itself at the mercy of a Spanish fleet sweeping the seas, no man knew where. Now if ever, money would be of value to impoverished Spain. This great treasure, piled up by the Latin for the conquering of the Anglo-Saxon, and rescued from its burial of three centuries, would come in the nick of time to fulfill its racial mission; though that mission might be against a new branch of the ancient foe of Spain, whose roots only had been laid when the great Armada swept out in all its pride and glory on its conquering essay. I needed no angel to tell me what would be Marjory's answer, were such a proposition made to her. I could see in my mind's eye the uprearing of her tall figure in all its pride and beauty, the flashing of her eyes with that light of patriotic fire which I knew so well, the set of her mouth, the widening of her nostril, the wrinkling of her ivory forehead as the brows were raised in scorn—

“Sir,” said I with what dignity I had, “the matter is not for you or me to decide. Not for us both! This is an affair of two nations, or rather of three: The Papacy,[337] the Spaniard, the Briton. Nay, it touches another also, for the lady who shares the secret with me represents the country with which your nation is at war!” The Spaniard was

manifestly baffled; the red, hellish light shone in his eyes again. His anger found expression in a sneer:

“Ah! so I suppose you do not propose to deal with the treasure, when found, as a private matter; but shall hand it over to your government to deal with!” The best answer to his scorn was complacency; so I said quietly:

“There again we are in a difficulty. You see, my dear fellow, no one exactly knows how we stand in this matter. The law of Treasure Trove, as we call it in this country, is in a most chaotic state. I have been looking it up since I undertook this quest; and I am rather surprised that in all the years that have elapsed since our practical law-making began, nothing has been done to put such matters on an exact basis. The law, such as it is, seems to rest on Royal Prerogative; but what the base of that prerogative is, no one seems exactly to know. And besides, in the various constitutional changes, and the customs of different dynasties, there are, or certainly there may be, barriers to the assertion of any Crown right—certainly to the fulfillment of such!” He seemed staggered. He had manifestly never regarded the matter as other than the recovery of property entrusted to him through his ancestors. I took advantage of his mental disturbance; and as I myself wanted time to think, so that I might fix on some course of action which would suit Marjory’s wishes as well as my own, I began to tell him the impression left on my mind by such study of the subject of Treasure Trove as I had been able to achieve. I quoted now and again from notes made in my pocket book.

“The Scotch law is much the same as the English;[338] and as we are in Scotland, we are of course governed by the former. The great point of difference, seen with the eyes of a finder, is that in Scotland the fraudulent concealment of Treasure Trove is not a criminal offence, as it is in England. Thus, from my point of view, I have nothing to fear as to results; for though by the General Police Act the finder is bound to report the find to the Chief Constable, the statute only applies to things found on roads or in public places. So far as this treasure is concerned, it may turn out that it can, in a sense, be no treasure trove at all.”—

“According to Blackstone, treasure trove is where any money or coin, gold, silver, plate or bullion is found hidden *in* the earth or other private place, the owner thereof being unknown. If found *upon* the earth, or in the sea, it belongs, not to the Crown, but to the finder, if no owner appears. It is the hiding, not the abandoning, which gives the Crown the property.”—

“Coin or bullion found at the bottom of a lake or in the bed of a river is not treasure trove. It is not hidden in the earth.”—

“The right of the Crown is ... limited to gold or silver, bullion or coin. It extends to nothing else.”...

When I had got thus far the Spaniard interrupted me:

“But sir, in all these that you say, the rights of the owner seem to be recognised even in your law.”

“Ah, but there comes in again a fresh difficulty; or rather a fresh series of difficulties, beginning with what is, in the eye of the law, the ‘owner.’ Let us for a moment take your case. You claim this treasure—if it can be found—as held by you for the original possessor. The original possessor was, I take it, the Pope, who sent it with the Armada, to be used for the conversion or subduing of England. We will take the purpose later, but[339] in the meantime we are agreed that the original owner was Pope Sixtus V. Now, the Popedom is an office, and on the death of one incumbent his successor takes over all his rights and powers and privileges whatever they may be. Thus, the Pope of to-day stands in exactly the same position as did Pope Sixtus V, when he sent through King Philip, and in trust of Bernardino de Escoban the aforesaid treasure.” I felt that the words ‘aforesaid treasure’ sounded very legal; it helped to consolidate even my own ideas as I went along. “So, too, you as the representative of your own family, are in the same position of original trustee as was your great ancestor of which this record takes cognisance.” This too was convincingly legal in sound. “I do not think that British law would recognise your position, or that of your predecessors in the trust, in the same way as it would the continuation of the ownership, if any, on the part of the succession of the Popes. However, for the sake of the argument, let us take it they would be of equal force. If this be so, the claim of ownership and guardianship would be complete.” As I paused, the Spaniard who had been listening to me with pent up breath, breathed more freely. With a graceful movement, which was almost a bow, he said:

“If so that you recognise the continued ownership, and if you speak as the exponent of the British law, wherein then is the difficulty of ownership at all; should it be that the treasure may be found?” Here was the real difficulty of both my own argument and Don Bernardino’s. For my own part, I had not the faintest idea of what the law might be; but I could see easily enough that great issues might be raised for the British side against the Spanish. As I had to ‘bluff’ my opponent to a certain extent, I added the impressions of personal conviction to my manner as I answered:

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“Have you considered what you, or rather your predecessors in title and trust, have done to forfeit any rights which you may have had?” He paled and was visibly staggered; it was evident that this view of the question had not entered his mind. The mere suggestion of the matter now opened up for him grave possibilities. His lips grew dry, and it was with a voice hoarser than hitherto that, after a pause, he said:

“Go on!”

“This treasure was sent, in time of war, by the enemies of England, for the purpose of her undoing—that is her undoing from the point of view of the established government of the time. It was in itself an act of war. The very documents that could, or can, prove the original ownership, would serve to prove the hostile intent of such owners in sending it. Remember, that it came in a warship, one of the great Armada built and brought together to attack this country. The owner of the treasure, the Pope, gave it in trust for the *cestui que trust*, the King of Spain to your ancestor Bernardino de Escoban, as hereditary trustee. Your ancestor himself had the battleship *San Cristobal* built at his own cost for the King’s service in the war against England. You see, they were all—the individual as well as the nation—hostile to England; and the intention of evil towards that country, what British law calls ‘malice prepense’ or the ‘*mens rea*’ was manifest in all!” The Spaniard watched me intently; I could see by the darkening of his swarthy face and the agonised contraction of his brows that the argument was striking home to his very heart. The man was so distressed that, enemy as I felt him to be, it was with a pang that I went on:

“It remains to be seen what view the British law would take of your action, or what is the same, that of[341] your predecessor in the trust, in hiding the treasure in the domains of Britain. As a foreigner you would not have, I take it, a right in any case. And certainly, as a foreigner in arms against this country, you would have—could have—no right in either domestic or international law. The right was forfeit on landing from your warship in time of war on British shores!”

There was a long pause. Now that I came to piece out into an argument the scattered fragments of such legal matters as I had been able to learn, and my own ideas on the subject, the resulting argument was stronger than I had at first imagined. A whole host of collateral matters also cropped up. As I was expounding the law, as I saw it, the subject took me away with it:

“This question would then naturally arise: if the forfeiture of the rights of the original owner would confer a right upon the Crown of Britain, standing as it does in such a matter as the ‘remainder man.’ Also whether the forfeited treasure having been hidden, being what the law calls ‘*bona vacantia*,’ can be acquired by the finder,

subject to the law relating to the Royal prerogative. In both the above cases there would arise points of law. In either, for instance, the nature of the treasure might limit the Crown claim as over against an individual claiming rights as finder.”

“How so?” asked Don Bernardino. He was recovering his *sang froid*, and manifestly was wishful to reassert himself.

“According to the statement of Don Bernardino, which would assuredly be adduced in evidence on either side, the treasure was, or is, of various classes; coined money, bullion, gems and jewel work. By one of the extracts which I have read you, the Crown prerogative only applies to precious metals or bullion. Gems or [342] jewellery are therefore necessarily excluded; for it could not, I think, be claimed that such baubles were contraband of war.”

“Again, the place of hiding may make a bar to Crown claim as treasure trove. According to the cipher narrative the place of hiding was a sea cave. This could not be either ‘on’ the ground, which would give title to the finder; or ‘in’ the ground which would give Crown claim. But beyond this again, there might arise the question as to whether the treasure should in any way come into the purview of the law at all. You will remember, in one of my excerpts Blackstone excepts the sea from the conditions of treasure trove. It might have to be fought out in the Law Courts, right up to the House of Lords which is our final Court of Appeal, whether the definition of ‘sea’ would include a cave into which the tide ran.” Here I stopped; my argument was exhausted of present possibilities. The Spaniard’s thought now found a voice:

“But still ownership might be proved. Our nations have been at peace ever since that unhappy time of the Invincible Armada. Nay more, have not the nations fought side by side in the Peninsula! Besides, at no time has there been war between England and the Pope, even when his priests were proscribed and hunted, and imprisoned when captured. The friendship of these countries would surely give a base for the favourable consideration of an international claim. Even if there may have been a constructive forfeiture, such was never actually exacted; England might, in her wisdom, yield the point to a friendly nation, when three hundred years had elapsed.” Here another idea struck me.

“Of course” I said “such might be so. England is rich and need not enforce her right to a treasure, however acquired. But let me remind you that lawyers are [343] very tenacious of points of law, and this would have to be decided by lawyers who are the servants of the state and the advisers of the governments. Such would, no doubt, be guided by existing principles of law, even if the specific case were not on all fours with precedents. I learn that in India, which is governed by laws made by Britons and

consonant with the scheme of British law, there is actually an act in existence which governs Treasure Trove. By this, the magisterial decision can be held over to allow the making of a claim of previous ownership within a hundred years. So you see that by analogy your claim of three hundred years of peace would put you clean out of court.” We both remained silent. Then the Spaniard, with a long sigh, rose up and said courteously:

“I thank you Senor, for the audience which you have given to me. As there is to be no *rapprochement* to us, what I can say may not avail. I must now take my own course. I am sad; for what that course may have to be, I know not. I would have given my fortune and my life to have acquitted me honourably of the trust imposed on me. But such happiness may not alas! be mine. Senor” this he said very sternly “I trust that you will always remember that I tried all ways that I know of, of peace and honour, to fulfill my duty. Should I have to take means other to discharge my duty, even to the point of life and death, you will understand that I have no alternative.”

“Would you take life?” I said impulsively, half incredulous.

“I would not scruple regarding my own life; why should I, regarding that of another?” he said simply, then he went on:

“But oh! Senor, it is not the taking of life, my own or another’s, which I dread. It is that I may have to[344] walk in devious ways, where honour is not; have I not already tasted of its bitterness! Understand me that this duty of guardianship of the trust is not of my choosing. It was set to me and mine by other and greater powers than ourselves, by the Vicegerent of God Himself; and what is ordained by him I shall do in all ways that are demanded of me.”

I was sorry for him, very sorry; but his words made a new fear. Hitherto I had been dealing with a gentleman, and there is much protection in this thought to any opponent. Now, however, he calmly announced that he would act without scruple. I was in future to dread, not fair fighting alone, but crooked ways and base acts. So I spoke out:

“Am I not then to look on you as a man of honour?” His face darkened dangerously; but all its haughty pride was obliterated by a look of despair and grief as he said sadly:

“Alas I know not. I am in the hands of God! He may deal mercifully with me, and allow me to pass to my grave not dishonoured; but for myself my path has been set in ways that may lead I know not whither.”

Somehow his words made me feel like a cad. I didn't mind fighting a man fair; or indeed fighting him anyway, so long as we understood the matter from the first. But this was against the grain. The man had shown himself willing to give up everything he had, so as to fulfill his trust and be free; and for me now to have a part in forcing him into ways of dishonour seemed too bad. It didn't seem altogether fair to me either. I had always tried to act honourably and mercifully, so that to have my own hand forced to acquiesce in the downfall of another man was in its way hard lines on me too. Truly, the ways of wealth are full of thorns; and when war and politics and intrigue are joined in the[345] chase for gold, there is much suffering for all who are so unhappy as to be drawn within the spell. I was weakening in my resolve regarding the treasure, and would, I am sure, in a moment of impulse have made some rash proffer to the Spaniard; when once more there came back to me the purpose of the treasure, and what Marjory might think if I allowed it to go back where it might be used against her country. Whatever I might do, there was no hope of compromise on the part of Don Bernardino. His one purpose, blind and set, was to fulfill the obligation set by his forefather and to restore the treasure to Spain, by whom it might or might not be restored to the Pope. The intensity of my thought had concentrated my interests to such an extent that I did not consciously notice what was going on around me. Only in a sort of dim way did I know that the Spaniard's eyes were roving round the room; seeking, in the blind agony of the despair which was upon his soul for a clue or opening somewhere.

All at once I became broad awake to the situation of things which had happened in those few seconds. He was gazing with eyes of amazement on the heap of metal caskets, dimmed with three centuries of sea water, which were piled on the side table amongst the scattered heaps of odds and ends of various kinds, made manifest by some trick of light. Then there came a light into his eyes as he raised his hand and pointed saying:

“So the treasure has been found!”

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CHAPTER XLII
A STRUGGLE

I think that at first sheer amazement had controlled the Spaniard's thoughts. But whatever the cause of the control was, it soon passed away; then the whole fiery nature of the man seemed to sweep from him like a torrent:

“And so all the learned arguments with which you have overwhelmed me, were but a cloak to cover your possession of the treasure which it was given to me and mine to guard. I might have guessed, that without the certainty of possession you would not have been so obdurate to my offer, given in all sincerity as it was. From other things, too, I might have known! That woman, so old, who watches you with eyes that see more than is to see, and who have reason of her own to mistrust you, she telled to me that nightly she has heard you dig in the rock as though you make grave. Take care it is not so! I am guardian of that treasure; and I am desperate! Already have I told you that all things are to me, all ways to fulfill the trust of my fathers. We are here alone! I am armed; and already my life is forfeit to this course. Yield yourself, then, to me!”

Like a flash of light he had drawn a dagger from his breast; and with an upward sweep of his hand held it poised, either to strike or throw. But already I had taken warning from his eyes. Ever since danger had threatened Marjory, I had carried my revolver with me; even[347] at night it rested under my pillow. The practice which Marjory and I had often had, till she had taught me the old trick which her father had taught her of getting “the drop” on an adversary, stood me now in good stead. Whilst he had been drawing his dagger, I had already covered him; he finished the words of his command straight into the muzzle of my six-shooter. I said as quietly as I could, for it was with a mighty effort I kept approximately calm under stress of such a sudden attack:

“Drop that dagger! Quick; or I shall shoot it from your hands!” He recognised his helplessness in the matter. With a despairing sigh he opened his fingers; the dagger fell jingling to the floor. I went on:

“Now hold up your hands, well above your head! Move back to the wall!” He did so, and stood facing me with a disdainful smile. I stooped, and with my right hand picked up the dagger, still keeping him covered with my left. I put the weapon on the far side of the table, and approached him. He did not move, but I could see that he was sizing me up. This gave me no anxiety, for I knew my own strength; and I had also a shrewd idea that if he had any other arm about him he would not be calculating his chances for a physical struggle. Cautioning him that his life depended on his stillness, for I still held my revolver to his breast, I passed my hand lightly over him; he had manifestly no other weapon. The only sign of one was the sheath of his dagger; this I took from him. I placed the dagger in it and put it in my own pocket; then I drew a chair to the middle of the room and motioned him to sit down. He obeyed sullenly. Having by this time regained something of my serenity of mind, I spoke:

“Your pardon, Sir, for the indignity to which I have been obliged to submit you; but I am sure you will remember[348] that it was not I who began the question of force. When

you thought it right to draw arms upon me in my own house, you made it necessary that I should protect myself. Now, let me say something in answer to your charge against me. The finding of the treasure has nothing whatever to do with my theory of action; I should hold my present view just as strongly had we not made the discovery. Indeed, I may say that since we have had actual possession of the treasure, it seems not nearly so desirable as it had been. So far as I am concerned, I don't care a straw whether I have ultimate possession of it or not; but I am so fixed up that if I waive my rights—that is if I have any to waive—that I may aid in doing a repugnant thing to a very dear friend. That I shall not do. I shall oppose its doing by any means in my power!"

The Spaniard saw a chance, and spoke:

"But if I undertake——" I cut him short:

"Sir, in this matter you are not in a position to undertake. By your own showing, you are simply bound to fulfill your trust and to restore the treasure to the King, who will restore it to the Pope; or to restore it to the Pope direct." He answered quickly:

"But I can stipulate——" again I interrupted him for this was a useless road to travel;

"How can you stipulate? You would, or might, be told to simply fulfill the duty that had been undertaken for you. Did you refuse, from whatever motive, no matter how justly founded, on ground of right or honour, you would not be holding to the simple terms of your trust. No! sir. This is no private affair to be settled by you or me, or by us both together. It belongs to politics! and international politics at that. The Government of Spain is desperately in want of money. How do you know to what shift, or to what specious argument it will[349] condescend in its straits. I have no doubt that, should anything be done contrary to your idea of fair play, you would be grievously pained; but that is not to the point. Your Government would not take thought for any wish of yours, any more than for aught of mine. Your King is a minor; his regent is a woman, and his councillors and governors are all men chosen to do what they can to save their country. Sir, but a few minutes ago you professed it your duty to take any step, even to crime and dishonour, to carry out your duty. Indeed, you drew a weapon upon me, a presumably unarmed man, in my own house in which you are a self-invited guest. Suppose some of the Government of Spain hold ideas of their duty, equally strong and equally unscrupulous; who then is to answer for what they do. Why, in such case, they would undertake anything, until they had got possession of the treasure; and would then act entirely upon what they would call their 'better judgment.'" His native pride awoke in an instant for he said hotly:

“I would have you know, Senor, and remember always when you talk with a Spaniard, that our statesmen are not criminals, but men of honour.” I bowed instinctively as I answered him:

“Sir, I have no doubt whatever, and I speak in all sincerity, that you yourself are, under normal circumstances, a man of the highest honour. Your self-sacrificing offer has shewn me that; and I have added to that knowledge by seeing the pain you have suffered at even the thought of dishonour.” Here he bowed low, and there was a look of gratitude in his eyes which touched me to the quick. “And yet even you have openly told me that all your belief in honour, all your life-long adherence to its behests, will not keep you from fulfilling a duty should these things clash. Nay more, you have already^[350] done things which I take it are at variance with your principles. How then can you, or I, believe that other men, of less lofty lineage and less delicate sense of honour, will forego an advantage for their country in distress, yielding to a theoretical point of right or wrong. No sir” I went on pitilessly, for I felt that it would be a kindness to him to shut absolutely this door of hope, “We must take no step which will place in the hands of others the guardianship of that treasure, of which you have hitherto conceived yourself trustee, and of which I now believe myself to be the owner.” For fully several minutes we faced each other in silence. His face grew more and more fixed and stern; at last he stood up with such a look of resolution that instinctively my fingers tightened round the butt of my revolver. I thought that he might be about to throw himself upon me, and attempt even at such odds as were against him, a struggle for present mastery. Then, without moving from his place, he spoke:

“When I have done all I can to fulfill my trust in its completeness, and have failed, I shall ask the government of my country to make representation to her friend England of a friendly claim, so that we may get even a part of the treasure; and then I will devote myself to the avenging of my honour on those who have foiled me in my duty!” This was a sort of speech which braced me up again. It was a promise of war, man to man, and I could understand it better than the subtleties which now enmeshed us. I put my pistol back in my pocket, and bowed to my opponent as I answered:

“And when that time comes, Sir, you will find me at your service; how you will; where you will; and when you will. In the meantime, when first you place the matter on the international plane, I shall take care that the American government, in which dear friends^[351] of mine are interested, shall make friendly demand of her friend, England, that she shall take no step with regard to this particular treasure—if indeed it be then in her possession—which may be used to the detriment of the trans-Atlantic power. Thus you see, sir, that time must in any case elapse before a final settlement. Nothing can be done till the close of the present war, when I take it that immediate need of the

sinews of war shall have ceased to exist. Be very careful, then, how you take any steps to bring upon the scene other powers than ourselves; powers vastly more strong, and vastly less scrupulous—perhaps.” He answered nothing, but looked at me a long time in silent cold disdain. Then he said quietly:

“Have I your permission, Senor, to depart?” I bowed, and brought him to the door. When outside he turned, and, lifting his hat high in an old-fashioned, stately way, bowed. He passed up the laneway towards Whinnyfold, without once glancing back.

As I stood looking at him, I saw in the dusk Gormala’s head now and again showing above the low green bank which guarded the edge of the cliff. She was bent double, and was in secret following the Spaniard.

I went back to the house to think over matters. Altogether, we were getting so complicated that there did not seem any straight road to take. In the back of my mind I had a firm idea that the best thing I could do would be to hand over the treasure to the custody of the police; inform the Sheriff; and get my solicitor to enter a formal claim of ownership, wherever the claim should be made. Then I should get Marjory to come upon our honeymoon. I could see that her mind was almost, if not quite, made up to accept this step; and for a while I lost myself in a day dream.

I came back to the reality of things by dimly and[352] gradually realising that it had grown dark. So I made preparation for the night, bearing in mind that I had a vast treasure in my possession, and that a desperate man who claimed to represent its ownership was aware that I had it in the house. It was not till I had seen to the fastenings of every window and door, that I began to prepare a meal.

By this time I was exceedingly hungry; when I had eaten I seated myself before a rousing fire of pine logs, lit my pipe, and began to think. Without, the wind was rising. I could hear it whistle along the roof, and now and again it roared and boomed down the chimney; the leaping fire seemed to answer its call. I could not think definitely; my thoughts kept whirling in a circle from the Spaniard to the treasure, from the treasure to Gormala, from Gormala to Marjory, and from Marjory back to the Spaniard again. Every time the cycle became complete and my thoughts came back to Marjory, my rapture as I thought of her and of our future, became clouded by a vague uneasiness. It was out of this that the thought of Don Bernardino came to commence the next round of thought. In all my mental wanderings he became a dominant character; his pride, his sense of duty which subordinated even honour, his desperation, his grief, all seemed to be with me and around me. Now and again I trembled, when I thought that such self-sacrificing forces might be turned against Marjory.

Little by little, despite all my anxiety, stole over me the disposition of sleep. I was indeed almost worn out. The events of the past few days had crowded together so quickly that I had had no time for pause. Even the long sleep which had crowned the vigil in the water cave had not enabled me to lay in, so to speak, a provision of sleep; it had been the payment of a debt to nature rather than the putting by of capital. I had the[353] consoling thought that Marjory had promised me she would not leave Crom Castle till I came. Safe in this thought I rolled myself in rugs—choosing those that she had used—and fell asleep.

I think that even in sleep I did not lose the sense of my surroundings, for in dreams my thoughts ran in their waking channel. Here again, all the disturbing elements of my life of late became jumbled together; and a sort of anxiety regarding something unknown seemed to brood over me. So far as I remember, I slept fitfully; waking often in a sort of agony of indefinite apprehension. A couple of times I made up the fire which was falling low, for there was a sort of companionship in it. Without, the wind howled more loudly, and each time as I sank back to rest I pulled the rugs more closely around me.

Once, I started broad awake. I thought I heard a cry, and naturally, in my present frame of mind, my thoughts flew to Marjory in some danger; she was calling me. Whatever the cause was, it reached my brain through a thick veil of sleep; my body answered, and before I had time to think of why or wherefore, I was standing on the floor broad awake, alert and panting. Again there came a sharp cry outside, which threw me in an instant into a cold sweat. Marjory was in danger and was calling me! Instinctively I ran to the window, and pulling open the shutters, threw up the sash. All was dark outside, with just that cold line on the far Eastern horizon which told of coming dawn. The wind had risen high, and swept past me into the room, rustling papers and making the flames dance. Every now and again a bird swept by me on the wings of the wind, screaming as it flew; for the house was so close to the sea that the birds took no note of it as they would ordinarily do of a human habitation. One of them came so[354] close that its scream seemed to sound loudly in my ears; it was doubtless just such a cry as this which had torn me from my sleep. For a while I hesitated whether I should go right away to Crom; but second thoughts prevailed. I could not get into the house at such an hour, without creating alarm and causing comment. So I went back to the chimney corner, and, piling on fresh logs and snuggling into my nest of rugs, soon found sleep again descending on me. The serenity of thought which comes with the day was using its force....

This time I woke more slowly. The knocking was continuous and imperative; but it was not a terrifying sound. We are all more or less used to such sounds. I listened; and

gradually consciousness of my surroundings came back to me. The knocking was certainly persistent.... I put on my shoes and went to the door.

Outside was Mrs. Jack, looking troubled and hot in spite of the cold of the wind which seemed to sing around the house. As I opened the door, she slipped past me and closed it behind her. Her first words made my heart sink, and my blood run cold with vague terror:

“Is Marjory here?”

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CHAPTER XLIII

THE HONOUR OF A SPANIARD

Mrs. Jack saw the answer in my eyes before speech came, and staggered back against the wall.

“No,” I said “Why do you ask?”

“She is not here! Then there is something wrong; she was not in her room this morning!”

This morning! The words set my thoughts working. I looked at my watch; it was past ten o'clock. In a dazed kind of way I heard Mrs. Jack go on.

“I did not say a word to any of the servants at first, for I didn't want to set them talking. I went all over the house myself. Her bed had not been slept in; I pulled the clothes off it and threw them on again roughly so that the maid might not suspect. Then I asked quietly if any of the maids had seen her; but none had. So I said as quietly as I could that she must have gone out for an early walk; and I took my breakfast. Then I had the cart got ready, and drove over here myself. What can it be? She told me last night that she was not going out until you came; and she is always so exact when she says a thing, that there must be something wrong. Come back with me at once! I am so anxious that I don't know what to do.”

Two minutes sufficed for my toilet; then shutting the door behind us, we got into the cart and drove to Crom. At the first and at the last we went quietly, so as not to arouse attention by our speed; but in the middle space[356] we flew. During the journey Mrs. Jack had told me that last night she had gone to bed as usual, leaving in the drawing room Marjory, who had told her that she was going presently into the library to write as she had a lot of letters to get through, and that no one was to wait up for her. This was

her usual habit when she sat late; it therefore excited no extra attention. Mrs. Jack who was an early riser, had been dressed for an hour before she went to Marjory's room. In the course of her enquiries amongst the servants, one of them, whose business it was to open the hall door, told her that she had found it locked and chained as usual.

Within the house at Crom we found all quiet. I went at once into the library, as that was presumably the last place where Marjory had been. As we went, I asked Mrs. Jack if any letters had been left out to post. She said no! that the usual habit was to put such in the box on the hall table, but she had herself, looked, when she came down to put in a letter for America. I went over at once to the table near the fire where Marjory usually sat at night. There were plenty of writing materials and blank paper and envelopes; but not a sign of a letter or anything written. I looked all round the room but could see nothing to attract my attention. Once more I asked Mrs. Jack what Marjory had said to her about her intention of not leaving the castle till I had come. With some hesitation at first, as though she were fearful of breaking confidence, but afterwards more freely as if glad to be able to speak, she told me all:

“The dear child took to heart what I said yesterday about her living with her husband. After you had gone she came to me and laid her head on my breast, as she used to do as a little child, and began to cry; and told me that I had been very good to her. The darling! And that her mind was made up. She realised now her duty^[357] to her husband; and that as he wished her to stay in the house, nothing in the world would induce her to leave it till he came. That was the first act of her new duty! And, oh my dear! that is why I was so concerned when I found that after all she was not in the house. I don't understand it; there must be something on foot that I don't know; and I am full of fear!” Here the old lady quite broke down. I felt that any self control now was precious. It would not do to leave Mrs. Jack in ignorance of the danger, so I told her in as few words as I could of the blackmailing going on and of the watch set by the United States Secret Service. At first she was overwhelmed; but her early apprenticeship to dangers of all kinds stood her in good stead. Very soon her agitation took practical shape. I told her I was off to seek for help, and that she must keep the house till I returned. I would have tried the secret tunnel, but from what Mrs. Jack had said I was convinced that Marjory had never left the house of her own accord. If she had been captured she was doubtless far away by this time. It was possible that the blackmailers had found the secret passage into the Castle by which Don Bernardino had come. Here the thought came to me in full force; that was how they had discovered it. They had seen and watched the Don!... I felt that another debt for our day of reckoning had been piled up against him.

I got in the cart again and went to Cruden as hard as the mare could go. As I went, I formed my plans, and had my telegrams made up in my mind ready to write them out at once. For a while I doubted whether I should go to another telegraph office, lest the Cruden people might come to know too much. But there was no need of concealment now. I was not afraid of any one knowing, though I determined to be discreet and secret[358] if possible. The circuit was occupied, so I found the use of the priority telegraph forms Adams had sent me. There was not a moment lost; one was being despatched whilst I was writing the next. To Adams I said:

“They have succeeded: Wire men see me at Crom right away. Come if you can. Want all help can get. Time vital...”

To Cathcart I wired at his house in Invernesshire:

“Come to me without moment’s delay. Vital. Want every kind of help.” I knew he would understand, and would come armed.

As it would be some little time before anything could be done, I determined to find Don Bernardino if possible; and induce him to show me the secret exit. Without knowledge of this we would be powerless; with it we might find some clue. I did not make up my mind as to what I would do if he refused; but to myself the instinctive grinding of my teeth, and clenching of my fingers, seemed to answer my question. Of one thing I was glad, he was a gentleman. In such a matter as that in which I was engaged, there were possibilities, if even there were not definite hope.

I drove to Ellon; and from the agent there got his address. I soon found it; an old-fashioned house near the town, in a tiny park surrounded with great trees. I left the cart on the road, with the mare tethered to the gate post, there being no lodgekeeper or no lodge. Before I rang the hall-door bell I saw that my revolver was ready to my hand. The instant the door was opened I stepped in, and said to the old woman who opened it:

“Mr. Barnard is in the study I suppose? I have pressing business with him!” She was so taken aback by the suddenness of my entry and speech that she pointed to a door saying: “He is in there.”

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As I entered the room, closing the door behind me, the Don, who had been seated in a large chair with his back to the door turned unconcernedly. He had evidently not expected any disturbing visitor. The instant he saw me, however, he leaped to his feet, all his hostility awake. As he scanned my face his concern grew; and he glanced

around, as though seeking for some weapon. I put my hand on my revolver, and said as quietly as I could, remembering his own precision of manner:

“Forgive my intrusion, Sir; but I have urgent need of speech with you.” I suppose there was something in my tone which bore home to his brain the idea that I had changed in some way since we had met. Do what I would, I could not conceal the anxiety of my voice. After a pause he said:

“Regarding the treasure?”

“No!” said I: “Since last night I have not even given it a thought.” A strange, new look came over his face, a look in which hope and concern seemed to have equal parts. He paused again; I could see he was thinking. Mechanically I tapped my foot on the floor with impatience; the golden moments were flying by. He realised my gravity of purpose, and, manifestly turning his attention to me, said:

“Speak on Señor!” By this time I had well in my mind what I intended to say. It was not my purpose to further antagonise the Spaniard; at the outset at any rate. Later on, that might be necessary; but I should exhaust other means first.

“I have come, Sir, to ask your aid, the help of a gentleman; and I feel at a loss how to ask it.” Through the high-bred courtesy of the Spaniard’s manner came a note of bitterness, as he answered:

“Alas! Señor, I know the feeling. Have not I myself^[360] asked on such a plea; and stooped in vain!” I had nothing to say in reply to this, so went on:

“Sir, I am aware that you can make much sacrifice: I ask, not for myself, but for a lady in peril!” He answered quickly:

“A lady! in peril! Say on Señor!” There was such hope and purpose in his quick tone that my heart instinctively leaped as I went on:

“In peril, sir; of life; of honour. To you I appeal to lay aside your feelings of hate towards me, however just they may be; and come like a true gentleman to her aid. I am emboldened to ask this because it was, I think, by your act that the peril—the immediate peril, has come to her.” He flushed at once:

“Through me! Peril to a lady’s honour through me! Have a care, sir! Have a care!” With a rush I went on:

“By your going into the castle through a secret passage, other enemies of the lady, low, base and unscrupulous who have been plotting to carry her off for ransom, have doubtless made an entry otherwise impossible to them. Now we must find a clue, and

at once. Tell me, I implore you, of the secret way; that thus we may at once begin our search." For a few seconds he looked me through and through; I think he suspected some plot or trap, for he said slowly:

"And the treasure; can you leave it?" I answered hotly:

"The treasure! I have not even thought of it since the news came of Marjory's disappearance!" Here I took it that he was beginning his unscrupulous purpose, and was playing my loss against his own; and a thought came to me that had not even crossed my mind before—had he been the abductor for the purpose of just such a bargain? I took from my pocket the key of the house in[361] Whinnyfold and held it out to him. "Here Sir" I said "is the key of my house. Take it with all it contains, and all it leads to! The treasure is as you left it last night; only help me in my need."

He waved my hand aside with an impatient gesture as he said simply:

"I do not bargain with a woman's honour. Such comes before all the treasures of Popes or Kings; before the oath and duty of a de Escoban. Come! Senor, there is no time to lose. Let us settle this affair first; later we can arrange matters that rest between thee and me!"

"Your hand, Sir" was all I could say. "In such trouble as mine, there is no help like that of a gentleman. But will you not honour me by keeping the key? This other is a trust which you have won by honour; as your great ancestor won his glorious duty long ago." He did not hesitate; all he said as he took the key was:

"It is a part of my duty which I must not forego."

As we left the house he looked like a new man—a man born again; there was such joyous gladness in his face and voice and movements that I wondered. I could not help saying when we had got into the cart and were on our way:

"You seem happy, Sir. I would that I could feel the same."

"Ah, Senor, I am happy beyond belief. I am happy as one raised from Hell to Heaven. For now my honour is no more perilled. God has been good to me to show a way, even to death, without dishonour."

As we flew along to Crom I told him what I knew of the secret passage between the chapel and the monument. He wondered at my having discovered the secret; but when I told him of how the blackmailing gang had used the way to evade the Secret Service men, he suddenly cried out:

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“There was but one who ever knew the secret of that passage; my kinsman, with whom I stayed in Crom when young, told me of him. He tried much to find the entrance to the Castle, and finally under threat he went away to America. He was a base-born and a thief. It must be he who has come back after these years and has told of the secret way. Alas! they must have watched me when I went, all unsuspecting; and so discovered the other secret.” Then he tried to explain where the entrance was. It was not in the chamber where we had expected it would be, but in a narrow corner of the stair, the whole corner being one stone and forming the entrance.

When we arrived at Crom we found that the Secret Service men were waiting for me, having been instructed from London. There were also telegrams from Adams and Cathcart saying that they were on the way to join me. Adams wired from Aberdeen, and Cathcart from Kingussie. Mrs. Jack was with the detectives and had taken them through the rooms which Marjory had used. They had had up the servants one by one and examined them as to what they knew. The chief man had insisted on this; he said matters were now too serious to play the fool any longer. The servants were not told anything, even that Marjory was missing; but of course they had their suspicions. A peremptory order was given that no one should leave the house without permission. The chief confided to me that Mrs. Jack had quite broken down when she was telling him that Marjory knew all along about the blackmailers and had never told her. “But she’s all right now, Sir,” he concluded. “That old lady is just full of sand; and I tell you her head is level. She’s been thinking of everything which could possibly be of use to us. I guess I have heard[363] more of this racket within the last half hour than I have done in the last two weeks.”

By the instructions of Don Bernardino we went into the library. I asked Mrs. Jack to send for lamps and candles, and these were brought shortly. In the meantime I asked that one of the detectives should be sent into the old chapel and another to the monument on the hill. Both were warned to have their guns ready, and to allow no one to pass at any hazard. To each before going I explained the secret mode of entry.

The Don went over to one of the book-cases—the very section containing the shelf in which I had replaced the old law book. Taking out that particular volume, he put his hand in and pressed a spring. There was a faint click. He replaced the book and pressed against the bookcase with slow level pressure. Very slowly it seemed to give way before him; and then turning on a hinge at one side, left an open cavity through which a man could easily pass. I was about to rush in, and was quite ready, with a lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other, when the chief of the detectives laid a restraining hand on my arm as he said:

“Wait a moment. If you go too fast you may obliterate some sign which would give us a clue!” The wisdom of his speech was not to be gainsaid. Instinctively I fell back; two of the trained observers drew close to the doorway, and holding their lamp in such wise as to throw light all round the opening, began an exact scrutiny. One of them knelt down and examined the flooring; the other confined his attention to roof and walls. After a silence, lasting perhaps a minute, the man kneeling stood up and said:

“Not a doubt about it! There has been a violent struggle here at the doorway!”

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CHAPTER XLIV

THE VOICE IN THE DUST

One of the men produced his note book and began taking down in shorthand the rapid utterances of the chief, repeating it so as to check the accuracy as he went on:

“Easy to see the marks; the floor is deep in dust, and the walls are thick with it. On floor, mark of several feet—confused in struggle, may articulate separately later on—one woman’s—also trailing of long skirt. On walls marks of hands, fingers outspread, as if trying to grasp. Some of the long marks down the wall others across.” The speaker here raised his lamp and held it in the opening as far as his arm would go; then he went on:

“Steps wind downwards to right. Struggle seems to have stopped. Footmarks more clear.”... Then the chief turned to us:

“I think gentlemen, we may follow in now. The footmarks may be discriminated and identified later. We must chance destroying them, or we cannot pass in this narrow passage.” Here I spoke; a thought had been surging up in my brain ever since the detective had pointed out the finger marks on the wall “down and across”:

“Stop a moment please! Let me see the marks on the wall before any one enters; the passage is narrow and they may be rubbed off.” A glance was enough, just time enough to formulate which was the symbol of [365] “a” and which of “b.” The perpendicular strokes were “a” and the horizontal “b.” Marjory had kept her head, even at this trying time, and was leaving a message for me as she was forced along. I understood why the struggle had ceased. Seized and forced through the narrow doorway, she had at first struggled hard. Then, when she realised that she could leave a clue behind her, she had evidently agreed to go quietly; for so she might have her hands free. It would be a hard job to carry or force along an unwilling captive through

that narrow uneven passage; doubtless the captors were as willing as she was that she should go quietly. I said to the detectives:

“These marks on the wall are in a cipher which I can read. Give me the best lamp we have, and let me go first.”

So, in an orderly procession, leaving two men in the library with Mrs. Jack to guard the entrance, we passed into the secret passage. As I read off the words written on the wall, the man with the note-book took them down, his companion holding a candle so as to enable him to do so. How my heart beat as I read my dear girl’s message, marked on the wall on the inner side whichever way the curves ran. Obviously it would create less attention by guiding herself in this wise as she passed. She had kept her hand well down so that her signs should not be confused with the marks made by the men who, guiding themselves likewise, had held their hands at a natural height. Her sign marks ran continuously, even after we had passed into the passage between the chapel and the monument; the writing ran as follows:

“Four men came in—two waiting in passage through bookcase—late—striking one—struggled—then quiet—hands free—same voice we heard in Chapel. Feathers thin voice, small man, dark—all masked—Whisky Tommy[366] hoarse voice, big man, sandy, large hands—Dago, deep voice, swarthy, little finger missing left hand—Max, silent, nods for speech, think dumb—two others on ahead too far see, hear.”

In a pause I heard the chief detective murmur:

“That girl’s a peach. We’ll get her yet!” The spot at which we were pausing was where the way to the reservoir branched off. Here Marjory probably stood with her back to the wall and used her hands behind her back, for the strokes were smaller and more uneven. There were faults which put me out and I could only read a few words—“whispering”—“only word can hear ‘manse.’” There was evidently some conversation going on between her captors, and she was making use of her opportunities. Then we went on and found the signs renewed. It cut me to the heart when I saw a smear of blood on one of the marks; the rough uncertain movement and the sharp edges of the rock had told on her delicate skin. But later on, the blood marks were continued, and I could not but think that she had cut her fingers on purpose to make a more apparent clue. When I mentioned my surmise to the detective, his instinct having been trained in such matters, showed a keener insight than my own:

“More likely she is preparing to leave a mark which we can see when they get her out of the tunnel. They may not suspect intention if her fingers are bleeding already!” The words following the stop where I had read “manse” were:

“Boat ready—Seagull—Coffin—Hearse—bury is!” Here the next mark instead of being horizontal took a sudden angle down, and the blood was roughly rubbed off. It was as though her hand had been struck in the act of making the mark. Her captors had suspected her. There were no more marks on the wall. I could^[367] not imagine, however, that Marjory would be entirely baffled. She had infinite resource, and would doubtless find some other means of leaving a clue. Telling the others therefore to keep back I threw the rays of the lamp over roof and walls and floor as we proceeded.

It was a strange scene. The candles and lamp showing up but patches of light in the inky black darkness; the moving figures projected against the lights as I looked back; the silence broken by the shuffling tread of stumbling feet on the rock floor; the eager intense faces, when a change in the light flashed them into view. It all moved me at moments, for there was a gleam of hope in its earnestness.

I tried to put myself in Marjory’s position. If her hands were useless, as they would be if she could not use them without suspicion—even were they not tied now as was probable—her next effort would be with her feet; I therefore looked out carefully for any sign made this way. Presently I came across a mark which I suspected. It was only a few steps beyond the last mark on the wall. It was a sort of drag of the foot, where there was any slight accumulation of dust, or rubbish, or sand. There were more such traces ahead. So motioning to the others to keep back, I followed them up, taking care not to disturb any of them. They were but the rough marks made during a stumbling progress; and for a time I was baffled; though I could distinguish the traces of Marjory’s little feet amongst the great ones. Then I went back and looked at them afresh from the beginning, and a light burst upon me. They were made with the right or left foot as required; thus she could reproduce the bi-literal symbol. Interpretation was now easy enough, and hence on, to the exit from the tunnel, I could tell almost every word written. There being only^[368] a few cases where the sign was not sufficiently marked for me to read it.

“Suspicious. Hands tied—gagged—find Seagull—find Manse.”

It was sadly slow work, and my heart at times sank within me at the exasperating delay in our progress. However, it was progress after all; and that sustained us. All along, as we worked our way towards the monument, I had been thinking of the word “manse;” and now its repetition showed its importance. It would be necessary that the abductors have some place in which to conceal their captive, before they should be able to get her out of the country. That this latter would be a necessary step towards their object was manifest; but the word *Seagull* settled it.

When we got to the entrance of the tunnel we examined every inch of the way; this was the wish of the detective rather than my own. Marjory would, it seemed to me, go quietly through the entrance. She would know that she was being watched here with extra carefulness; and would reserve herself for a less suspicious opportunity. She would also know that if I were on her track at all, I would be able to follow through the secret entrance.

Outside, on the ground beside the monument, were no unusual signs of passage. The patch of bare earth and gravel, which we had before noticed, left no trace of footsteps. Those who had used it had evidently taken care that there should be no sign. We went slowly along the route, which, by my former experiments with the thread, I had found was habitually used. Presently one of the Americans asked me to stop, as he had seen a trace of feet. For my life I could distinguish nothing in the seemingly undisturbed mass of pine needles. But the man, who in his youth had been in Indian country,[369] had learned something of tracking; he could interpret signs unseen to others with less highly developed instincts. He went down on his knees and examined the ground, inch by inch, using a microscope. For some ten yards he crawled along on hands and knees engaged in this way. Then he stood up and said:

“There’s no error about it now. There are six men and a woman. They have been carrying her, and have let her down here!” We did not challenge his report, or even ask how he had arrived at it; we were all well content to accept it.

We then moved on in the manifest direction in which the ground trended; we were working towards the high road which ran past the gates of Crom. I asked the others to let me go first now, for I knew this would be Marjory’s chance to continue her warning. Surely enough, I saw presently a slight disturbance in the pine needles, and then another and another. I spelled out the word “Manse” and again “Manse” and later on “try all Manses near.” Then the sign writing ceased; we had come out of the wood on to a grass field which ran down to the high road. Here, outside a gap at the bottom of the field, were the marks in the dust of several feet, the treading of horses, and the ruts of wheels. A little further on, the wheel marks—some four-wheeled vehicle—were heavy; and from the backward propulsion of the dust and gravel in the hoof-tracks we could easily see that the horses were galloping.

We stopped and held a council of war. It was, of course understood by us all that some one should follow on the track of the carriage, and try to reach the quarry this way. For my own part, I felt that to depend on a wheel mark, in such a country of cross roads, was only the off chance. In any case, this stern chase must be a long one; whereas time was vital, every moment being precious.[370] I determined to try to

follow out Marjory's clue. "Try every Manse near." To do this we should get to some centre where we could obtain a list of all the churches in the neighbourhood. Ellon was naturally the place, as it was in the centre of the district. They all acquiesced in my view; so we hurried back to Crom, leaving two men, the tracker and another, to follow the fugitives. Hitherto Don Bernardino had hardly said a word. He was alert, and the eager light of his eye was helpful; but after he had shown us the secret way, and found that already I knew the outer passage as well as he did, or better, he had contented himself with watchfulness. Now he suggested:

"There is also the boat! May it not be well that some one should follow up that side of the matter? Thus we shall be doubly armed."

His advice commended itself to the chief of the detectives; though I could see that he took it suspiciously from the Spaniard. It was with manifest purpose of caution that he answered:

"Quite right! But that we shall see to ourselves; when Mr. Adams comes he will work that racket!" The Spaniard bowed, and the American returned the courtesy with a stiff back. Even in such a time of stress, racial matters were not to be altogether forgotten.

In the hall at Crom, we found, when we came back through the old chapel, Sam Adams. He had arrived just after we had set out on our search, but was afraid to follow over-ground lest he should miss us; wisely he did not attempt the underground way as he had no proper light. His coming had been a great comfort to Mrs. Jack, who, always glad to see a countryman of her own, now almost clung to him. He had brought with him two young men, the very sight of whom made my heart warmer. One of them he introduced as "Lootenant[371] Jackson of West Point" and the other as "Lootenant Montgomery of Annapolis." "These boys are all right!" he added, laying a hand affectionately on the shoulder of each.

"I am sure they are! Gentlemen, I thank you with all my heart for coming!" I said as I wrung their hands. They were both fine specimens of the two war Academies of the United States. Clean-built from top to toe; bright-eyed, resolute and alert; the very type of highly bred and trained gentlemen. The young soldier Jackson answered me:

"I was too delighted to come, when Adams was good enough to get leave for me."

"Me too!" echoed the sailor "When I heard that Miss Drake was in trouble, and I was told I might come, I think I danced. Why, Sir, if you want them, we've only to pass the word, and we can get you a man of war's crew—if every man of them has to desert!"

Whilst we were speaking there was a sound of rapid wheels, and a carriage from Ellon drew up at the door. Out jumped Cathcart, followed by a tall, resolute looking young man who moved with the freedom of an athlete.

“Am I in time?” was Cathcart’s greeting as he rushed towards me. I told him exactly how we stood. “Thank God!” he said fervently “we may be in time yet.” Then he introduced his friend MacRae of Strathspiel. This was the host with whom he had been staying; and who had volunteered to come, on hearing of his summons:

“You may trust Donald!” was his simple evidence of the worth of his friend.

This addition to our forces gave us great hope. We had now a sufficiency of intelligent, resolute men to follow up several clues at once; and in a brief council we marked out the various duties of each. Cathcart was to^[372] go to Ellon and get a list of all the manses in the region of Buchan, and try to find out if any of them had been let to strangers. We took it for granted that none of the clergy of the place were themselves concerned in the plot. MacRae was to go with Cathcart and to get all the saddle horses he could without attracting public attention, and bring them, or have them brought, to Crom as soon as possible. Secrecy of movement was insisted on with almost agonised fervour by Adams and the Secret Service men. “You don’t know these wretches,” said the chief of the latter “They are the most remorseless and cruel villains in the world; and if they are driven to bay will do anything however cruel or base. They are well plucked too, and don’t know what fear means. They will take any chances, and do anything to get their way and protect themselves. If we don’t go right in this matter, we may regret it to the last of our days.”

The silence in the room was only broken by the grinding of teeth, and by Mrs. Jack’s suppressed sobs.

Adams was to go to Aberdeen as a working centre, and was to look after the nautical side of the adventure; he was to have Montgomery in this work with him. Before he left Crom, he wrote some cipher telegrams to the Embassy. He explained to me that one of his suggestions was that an American war-ship which was cruising in the North Sea should, if possible, be allowed to lie off the coast of Aberdeen ready for any emergency. When Montgomery heard it, he asked that if possible a message should be sent from him to the first officer of the *Keystone*: “Tell the men privately that they are helping Marjory Drake!—There will be a thousand pair of eyes on the watch then!” he added by way of explanation.

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I was to wait with the detectives till we should get word from any of our sources as to what could be done.

For there were several possibilities. The trackers might mark down the locality where the prisoner was hidden. Cathcart might, before this, come with the list of manses and their occupants. Adams or Montgomery might get wind of the *Seagull*; for Montgomery had already orders to go to Petershead and Fraserburgh, where the smacks for the summer fishing were gathered.

Don Bernardino remained with me at Crom.

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