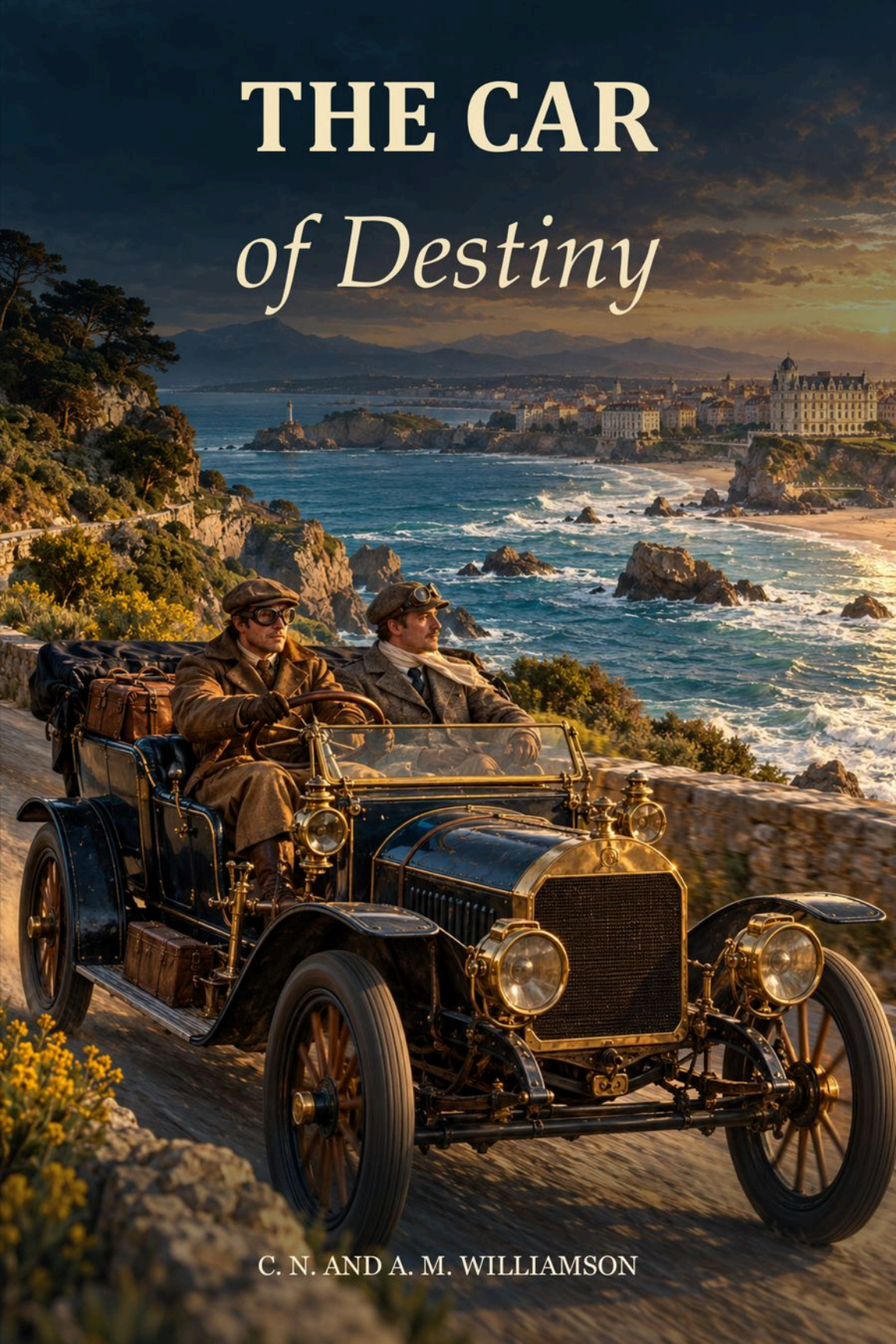
THE CAR *of Destiny*



C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

The Car of Destiny

C. N. and A. M. Williamson

THE AUTHOR



Charles Norris Williamson

1857 - 1920

AI-created interpretation after identified photograph published in The Bookman by 1907.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Norris Williamson

Charles Norris Williamson was a British journalist and editor associated with popular travel fiction. Bath historical research dates his birth in Exeter to 1857, although some library catalogues give 1859. He studied science and engineering before entering journalism, bringing an interest in technology to his later work.

Williamson worked for the *Examiner* and the *Graphic*, and founded the illustrated magazine *Black and White* in 1891. Travel and motoring became important subjects in his journalism. In 1894 he married the American writer Alice Muriel Livingston, known thereafter as Alice Muriel Williamson.

Many books appeared under their combined names, C. N. and A. M. Williamson, including *The Lightning Conductor*. The shared credit should not be taken as a precise account of each partner's contribution: later research has emphasised Alice's authorship. Charles died in Bath in 1920.

Readers can notice how travel creates opportunities for misunderstandings and discoveries. A changing route may bring characters into contact with people outside their usual social circle. Early motoring also gives mechanical difficulties a place in the plot, linking new technology with older forms of romantic adventure. The journey can be read both as movement through a landscape and as a gradual revision of first impressions.

Biographical references: Bath historical research and library bibliographies. Portrait source: identified photograph published in The Bookman by 1907. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

THE AUTHOR



Alice Muriel Williamson

Died 1933

AI-created interpretation after identified photograph published in The Bookman by 1907.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Muriel Williamson

Alice Muriel Williamson was an American-born author who built a successful literary career in Britain. Accounts of her early life and birth year have varied, and later research has revised familiar biographical claims. Her autobiography, *The Inky Way*, begins with her journey to England in 1892.

She married the journalist and editor Charles Norris Williamson in 1894. Many of her books appeared under their combined names, C. N. and A. M. Williamson. Modern biographical research has challenged the assumption that this shared credit meant equal authorship, drawing attention to Alice's work as the storyteller.

She became especially associated with romances involving travel and motor cars, while her wider output also included mysteries and adventures. Her publishing identity could change with the kind of work she produced, making names on title pages an imperfect guide to her career. She died in 1933.

Readers can follow how a journey changes the information available to its travellers. A chance encounter, delayed arrival or unexpected destination can upset a carefully maintained appearance. In a romance, mobility offers freedom but also exposes characters to uncertainty. Attention to who tells the story, and what that speaker chooses to conceal, can reveal a second narrative beneath the apparent course of events.

Biographical references: Richard Rex's biographical research, Bath historical research and library records. Portrait source: identified photograph published in The Bookman by 1907. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

I

The King's Car

“Motor to Biarritz? You must be mad,” said Dick Waring.

“Why?” I asked; though I knew why as well as he. “A nice way to receive an invitation.”

“If you must know, it's because the King of Spain will be there, visiting his English fiancée,” Dick answered.

“I wish him happiness,” said I. “I hear he's a fine young fellow. Why isn't there room in Biarritz for the King and for me?”

“The detectives won't think there is, nor will they give you credit for your generous sentiments,” said Dick.

“They won't know I'm there.”

“They knew when you went to Barcelona, from Marseilles.”

This was a sore subject. It is not my fault that my father was as recklessly brave a general, and as obstinately determined a partisan as Don Carlos ever had. If I had been born in those days, it is possible that I should have done as my father did; but I was not born, and therefore not responsible. Nor was it the King's fault that we lost our estates which my ancestors owned in the days of Charles V; nor that we lost our fortune, we Casa Trianas; nor that my father was banished from Spain. For the King was not born, therefore he was not responsible; so why should I blame him for anything that has happened to me?

It was perhaps ill-judged to visit my father's land, since to him it had been a land forbidden. But a few months after his death, when I was twenty-one, the longing to see Spain had become an obsession. And it must have been my evil star which influenced an anarchist to throw a bomb at a royal personage on the very day I arrived at Barcelona, thinly “disguised” under an English name.

My identity was discovered at once, as the son of the great dead Carlist. I was suspected and clapped into a cell, to wait until my innocence could be proved. This was not easy; but, on the other hand, there was no proof against me; and after an experience which scourged my pride and emptied my purse, I was released, only to be politely but firmly advised never again to show the undesirable face of a Casa Triana in Spain.

It was after this that I flung myself off to Russia, and through friendly influence got a commission in the army. I had some adventures in the Boxer rising; and though Heaven knows I have no grudge against the Japanese, the fight I made later on the Russian side gave me something to do for two years. After the Peace with Idleness, came the motor mania, and I thought of nothing else for a time. But when you have run your car for months, motoring for its own sake ceases to be all in all. You ask yourself what country you would like best to visit with the machine you love.

Pride kept me from answering that question with the name of "Spain"; but it was because Biarritz is at the door of Spain that I had just invited Dick Waring—the best of friends, the most delightful of Americans, who fought side by side with me, for fun, in China—to drive there in my Gloria car.

"Yes, they knew when I went to Barcelona," I admitted; for Dick was familiar with the story. "But that was different. Anyhow, I'm going to Biarritz, whatever happens. You can do as you like."

"If you *will* go, I'll go too," said Dick; "and if anything happens I'll be in it with you. But you may regret your rashness."

"I've never yet regretted rashness," I said. "Things done on impulse always turn out for the best."

So we started from Paris the next day, and had a splendid run, through scenery to set the spirit singing in tune with the thrumming of the motor.

Whatever was to happen in Biarritz, and I was far enough from guessing then, nothing happened by the way; and we arrived on a morning of blue and gold.

We put up at a private hotel out of the way from fashionable thoroughfares; and, as my childhood and early youth were passed in England, I could use an English name without making myself

ridiculous by a foreign accent. As for my brown face and black eyes, many a Cornishman has a face as brown and eyes as black; therefore, I edited the name of Triana into Cornish Trevenna, and changed Cristóbal, my middle name, into Christopher.

We took our first meal in the restaurant, and everyone at the little tables near by, was talking of the King and "Princess Ena"; how pretty she was, how much in love he; how charming their romance. My heart quite warmed to my youthful sovereign, who has had seven fewer years on earth than I. I felt that, if I had had a fair chance, I should have been his loyal subject.

"I'd like to have a look at him," said I to Waring after lunch. "The lady with the nose who sat on our left said to her husband with the chin, that the King and the two Princesses motor every afternoon. We'll motor too; and where they go, there we'll go also."

"Take care," said Dick.

"A cat may look at a king. So may Chris Trevenna."

"No good advising you to be cautious."

"Of course not. You wouldn't care a rap for me if there was."

"Shouldn't I? Anyhow, Chris Trevenna might as well wear goggles."

"There's no dust to-day," said I. "It rained in the night."

"I give you up," said Dick. And if giving me up meant going out with me in my big blue car directly after lunch, then he kept his word. Ropes, my chauffeur, and right-hand man, who sits always in the tonneau, had already heard all about the King's automobile, and was primed with particulars. He leaned across to describe its appearance, as well as mention the make; and when such a car as he was in the act of picturing passed us, going round a bend of the road which leads to Spain, there was no mistaking it.

"Let's follow," said I.

Dick sighed, but naturally I paid no attention to that.

There were five persons in the King's car. The slim young owner, three ladies, two very slender and young, and the chauffeur, all five masked or goggled, so that it was impossible to see their faces.

"I wish something would happen to them," I said.

Waring looked shocked.

“Just enough of a something to stop the car, and tempt the ladies to take off their motor-veils. I may never have another chance to see the future Queen of Spain.”

When I was a small lad in England, I used to lie under a favourite apple-tree in the orchard of the old place where we lived, and wish with all my might for the fall of a certain apple on which eyes and heart were fixed. It was extraordinary how often the apple would fall.

In a flash I remembered those wishes and those apples as we began to gain upon the King's car. Its pace slackened, and then it stopped. The chauffeur jumped out, and two of the ladies were raising their thick veils as we came up.

As we were not supposed to know the King, who was “incog,” the ordinary civilities between motorists were in order. I slowed down, and taking off my hat, inquired in French if there were anything I could do.

The two girls, who had hastily whipped off their veils, turned and glanced at me. Both were more than pretty; blond, violet-eyed, with radiant complexions; but one seemed to me beautiful as the Blessed Damozel looking down from the star-framed window of heaven; and I was suddenly sick with jealousy of the King, because I believed that she was his Princess.

It was he who answered, in French better than mine. He thanked me for my kind offer, and referred me to his chauffeur, who had not yet discovered the cause of the car's sudden loss of power. But even as he spoke, the mystery was solved. There was a leak in the petrol-tank, near the bottom; the last drop of essence had run away, and, as they had come out for a short spin, there was none in reserve.

An odd chance it seemed that brought me, the son of a banished rebel, to the King's aid; but life is odd. I rejoiced because it was odd, and more because of the girl.

I had a spare bidon of petrol which, with conventional expressions of pleasure, I gave to my fellow motorist. We exchanged compliments, and as nobody stared at me askance, I had reason to believe that neither words, actions, nor looks were out of the way. Yet what I said and did was said and done with no more guidance of the mind than the gestures and speech of a mechanical doll.

I was conscious only of the girl's eyes, for I had done that unreasonable, indefinable thing—fallen in love at first sight, and I had fallen very far, and very deep. She did not glance at me often, and after the first I scarcely glanced at her at all, lest my eyes should be indiscreet. It was the most curious thing in the world, and far beyond anything that had ever happened to me; but already I knew that I could not lose her out of my life. Sooner could I lose life itself. If she were the Princess who was to be Queen of Spain, I would follow her to Madrid, come what might, just for the joy of breathing the air she breathed, of seeing her drive past me in her carriage sometimes. I had wondered, knowing the traditions of our family, many of them tragic, when love would come to me. Now it had come quickly, in a moment; but not to go as it had come. It and I would be one, for always. The girl was little more than a child, but I knew she was to be the one woman for me; and that was what I feared my eyes might tell her. So I would not look; yet the air seemed charged with electricity to flash a thousand messages, and my blood tingled with the assurance that she had had my message, that unconsciously she was sending back a message to me.

All this was going on in my inner self, while the outer husk of self delivered itself of conventional things.

A leak was mended, a tank filled, while my life was being remade. Then there were bows, lifting of caps, many politenesses, and the King's car shot away.

“What's the matter?” inquired Waring by and by.

“Nothing,” I answered. “Why do you ask?”

“You act as if you'd had a stroke. Aren't you going to drive on?”

“No. Yes. I'm going back,” I said, and turned the car.

“You don't mean to follow, then?”

“There's something I need to do at once at Biarritz,” I answered. It was true. I needed to find out whether she was the Princess, or—just a girl.

II

The Girl

It was easy to learn that she was not the Princess. I did that by going into a stationer's shop and asking for a photograph of the royal lovers. It was not quite so easy to find out who she was, without pinning my new secret on my sleeve; but luckily everyone in Biarritz boasted knowledge of the King's affairs, and the affairs of the pretty Princess. Christopher Trevenna made himself agreeable after dinner to the lady with the nose, who would probably have shrunk away in fear if she had known that she was talking with the Marqués de Casa Triana.

I, in my character of Trevenna, found out that the Princess had a friend, Lady Monica Vale, daughter of the widowed Countess of Vale-Avon, who, when at home, lived in the Isle of Wight. At present, the two were staying at Biarritz, in a villa; and Lady Monica, a girl of eighteen or nineteen, sometimes had the honour of going out with the Princesses, in the King's motor.

There were other privileged friends as well; but the description of Lady Monica Vale, though painted with a colourless brush, was unmistakable.

Casually I inquired the name of the house where Lady Vale-Avon and her daughter were staying, and having learned it, I made an excuse to escape from the lady with the nose.

It was half-past ten o'clock, and a night flooded with moonlight. I strolled out, smoking a cigarette, and in ten minutes stood before the garden gate of the Villa Esmeralda.

There were lights in three or four of the windows, sparkling among close-growing trees; and I had not finished my second cigarette, when a carriage drove round the corner and stopped.

I moved into the background. A groom jumped down, unfastened the gate, and having opened the brougham door, respectfully aided a middle-aged lady to descend.

The moonlight showed me a clear, proud profile, and fired the diamonds in a tiara which crowned a head of waved grey hair.

There were billows of violet satin and lace to keep off the ground; and as the groom helped the wearer to adjust them under her chinchilla coat, a girl sprang out of the carriage, her white figure and rippling hair of daffodil gold in full moonlight.

I stood as a man might stand who sees a vision, hardly breathing. I made no sound, yet she turned and saw me, sheltered as I was by the dappled trunk of a tall plane-tree. It was as if I had called, and she had answered.

I knew she remembered me, and that she did not misunderstand my presence. There was no anger in her face, only surprise, and a light which was hidden as she dropped her head, and passed on through the gate.

I could have sung the song of the stars. She had not forgotten me since the afternoon. The look in my eyes then, had arrested some thought of hers, and set me apart in her mind from other men.

It was no stupid conceit which made me feel this, but a kind of exalted conviction.

When the gate was shut, I took off my hat and looked at the lighted windows. I could make her care. I said to myself, “We're meant for each other. And if that's true, though all the mountains in the world were piled up as barriers between us, I'd cross them.”

That was a vow. And through the remaining hours of the night I tried to plan how it would be best to begin its fulfilment.

Men who have gone through a campaign as close friends, have few secrets from one another; and I had none from Dick Waring. Nevertheless, I would now have kept one if it were possible; but it was not. If I had not told him, he would have guessed, and then he might have thought that he had the right to chaff me on losing my head.

It is only a happy lover who can bear to be chaffed, however, and a few words were enough to show my tactful American where to set his feet on the slippery path.

He too had seen the girl; therefore he could not be surprised at my state of mind. But he regretted it, and urged that the best I could do was to go away, before the thought of her had taken too deep a hold upon me.

"You see," he said, "you're in a hopeless position; and it's better to look facts in the face. If you'd fallen in love with almost any other girl, except Princess Ena herself, you might have hoped. But as it is, what have you to look forward to? You oughtn't to have come to Biarritz. In the circumstances, and with the King here, it was bravado. Friends of his, enemies of yours, might even say it was bad taste, which is worse. And then, having come, you proceed to follow the King's motor-car; you fall head over ears in love with a girl in it, a friend of the bride-elect, to whom your real name, if she's not heard it already, could easily be made to seem anathema maranatha. But that's not all. You're here under a name not your own. If you should by luck or ill-luck get a chance to meet Lady Monica, you couldn't be introduced to her as Christopher Trevenna; it would be a false pretence; still less could you throw your real name in her face; for between the King of Spain as a friend, and you as an acquaintance, the girl would be in an uncomfortable position, to say the least. No, my dear fellow, you can't meet this young lady; and the only thing for your peace of mind, if you've really fallen in love, is to go away."

I had no arguments with which to meet Dick's. I listened in silence, but—I made no preparation for departure. If there was nothing to be gained by staying, at least there was as little to be gained by going; for I knew that I should not forget the girl. If I were struck blind, her face would still live for my eyes, white and pure against a background of darkness.

We stayed on at Biarritz, but I behaved with circumspection, and made no further attempts to put myself in the King's Way, though he arrived at the Villa Mouriscot every morning from San Sebastian. Dick approved my conduct and, pitying my depression, perhaps repented his hardness. He found several Parisian friends at Biarritz, and when we had been there for three days, he came back to the hotel from the Casino one night with an important air.

"Strange how one's tempted to do things one knows one oughtn't to do," said he. "Now, it's unwise to tell you I've met a man who knows Lady Monica Vale, yet I'm doing it."

“What did the man say?” I asked.

“A number of things—charming, of course. She's not engaged, if that's any consolation.”

“Oh, I knew that.”

“How?”

“By her eyes.”

“Apparently she observed yours also.”

“What? She's spoken of—she—”

“The sister of my man is a friend of Lady Monica's. She told the sister about the motor-car adventure.”

“For goodness sake don't force me to ask questions.”

“I won't. I've a soft heart, which has often been my undoing. She said she'd seen the most interesting man in the world. Don't faint.”

“Don't be an ass.”

“I'm not chaffing. She did say that—honest Injun. At least, I've Henri de la Mole's word for it. His sister was at school at the convent of the Virgin of Tears with Lady Monica Vale. Lady Monica supposed the other day that we were both French, which is a compliment to your accent. She said she wished she could find out ‘who was the brown man with the eyes.’ I'm a fool to have told you that though, eh? It can't do you any good, and will probably make you worse.”

“But it has done me good.”

“Flattered your vanity. However, I haven't told you all yet. De la Mole says the mother's a dragon, hard as iron, cold as steel, living for ambition. She was left poor, on her husband's death, as the Vale-Avon estates went with the title to a distant relative, and the girl's been brought up to make a brilliant match. She's been given every accomplishment under Heaven, to add to her beauty; and as the family's one of the oldest in Great Britain, connected with royalty in one way or another, in Stuart days, Lady's Monica's expected to pull off something from the top branch, in the way of a marriage. De la Mole's heard that the present Lord Vale-Avon has been first favourite with the mother up till lately, though he's next door to an idiot. Princess Ena's engagement to the King of Spain has changed everything. You see, Lady Vale-Avon and her daughter live not far from the Princess, in the Isle of Wight. When the King came

a-courting to England, came also, though not exactly in his train, another Spaniard, the Duke of Carmona, and—"

"Don't," I cut in; "I won't hear his name in connection with her's. That half Moorish brute!"

"He may have a dash of Moorish blood, but he's not half Moorish; and if he's a brute, he's a good-looking brute, according to de la Mole, also he's one of the richest young men in Spain. Lady Vale-Avon—"

I jumped up and stopped Dick. "I'm in earnest," I said. "I can't bear to listen. I know the sort of things you'd say. But don't. If you do, I think I'll kill the fellow."

"Ever met him?"

"No. The men of my house and of his have been enemies for generations. But I've heard of certain exploits."

"He's coming here to stop with his mother, the old Duchess, who's been spending the winter at Biarritz. Another reason for you to vamose."

"You mean, to stay. At least, he shan't have a clear coast."

"I don't see how you can hope to block it."

"I will—somehow."

"No doubt you're a hundred times the man he is, but—fate's handicapped you for a show place in the matrimonial market. You are—"

"A man countryless and penniless. Don't hesitate to state the case frankly."

"Well, *you've* said it. While the other's rich, and a grandee of Spain. And, though de la Mole says the King doesn't care for him, on account of something or other connected with the Spanish-American War, he's bound to become a persona grata at Court if he marries a friend of the young Queen; and, no doubt, that influences his choice."

"Thank Heaven, Lady Monica isn't Spanish."

"Ah, but Spain's the fashion now. And you haven't heard all my news. Henri de la Mole says Lady Monica is asked to be a maid of honour for the young Queen of Spain, the one Englishwoman she's to have in attendance."

“At least the wedding won't be till June. It's only the end of February now. I've got more than three months.”

“You haven't got one. Soon after the Princesses leave Biarritz, Lady Vale-Avon and Lady Monica are going to visit the old Duchess of Carmona in Spain.”

“What, they're going to Seville?”

“If her house is there. I'm telling you what I've been told.”

“The principal house of the Duke is in Seville, though he has a place near Granada, and a flat in Madrid as a substitute for a fine house that was burned down.”

“Then Seville's where they'll be. Anyhow, they're to see the great show in Holy Week there.”

It was as if Dick had suddenly drenched me with iced water.

For a few seconds I did not speak. Then I said, “Are you trying to break it to me that the match is arranged?”

“I told you Lady Monica wasn't engaged.”

“And I told you I knew she wasn't. But that isn't to say the mother, the woman ‘as hard as iron and cold as steel,’ hasn't planned her daughter's future, a girl so young, and always kept under control.”

“It looks as if the wind was setting in that quarter. A person of Lady Vale-Avon's type would hardly accept such an invitation if she didn't intend something to come of it.”

“You're certain the invitation's been accepted?”

“Certain. Angèle de la Mole has been with her brother in Spain, and Lady Monica's been asking her advice about what to take and what to wear. The Duke himself is in Paris, buying a new automobile; at least, so his mother says; but other people say he's at Monte Carlo. Anyhow, he's expected here in time for the ball.”

“What ball?”

“Didn't I tell you? A masked ball the old Duchess is giving in honour of Princess Ena. A grand affair it will be, says de la Mole. There's been jealousy about the invitations, which have been carefully weeded.”

“You and I'll accept,” said I.

“We're not likely to have the chance.”

“Sometimes a man must make a chance. I shall meet Lady Monica at the Duchess's ball.”

“All right. Suppose you go in the garb of a palmer?”

“Eh?”

“I was thinking of another first meeting, case not dissimilar, you know, Romeo and Juliet. My poor, mad friend, there's more hope for a Montague with a Capulet than for a Casa Triana with a friend of the future Queen of Spain, and the daughter of a Lady Vale-Avon.”

“Romeo won Juliet.”

“It wasn't exactly a fortunate marriage. See here, if you're going in for the part of Romeo, it's no good asking me to play Mercutio.”

I looked at Dick and smiled. “I shall ask nothing,” I said. “Yet—”

“Yet, you know mighty well, if you want a Mercutio, I'll be ready to take up the rôle at a moment's notice all for the sake of your beaux yeux. Well, you're right. There's something queer about you, Ramón, which makes us others glad to do what we can, even if it were to cost our lives. If you'd been a king in exile, you'd have had no trouble in finding followers. From your French valet to your Russian soldiers; from your English chauffeur to your American friend, it's pretty well the same. I expect you'll get to that masked ball.”

“If I don't, it won't be for lack of trying,” said I.

“But—”

“But what—”

“This affair of yours is going to end in tragedy—for someone,” said Dick.

III

The Guest Who Was Not Asked

During the next two or three days I found more to do. I got Dick to introduce me to his friend Henri de la Mole, not as Christopher Trevenna, but under my own name, and when he and his sister had been interested in what they chose to think a romance, I was able to learn through them that, curiously enough, Lady Vale-Avon had arranged for her daughter to appear at the ball as Juliet.

The costume, it seemed, decided itself, because there happened to be among Lady Vale-Avon's inherited and most treasured possessions, an interesting pearl head-dress of the conventional Juliet fashion. This had been sent for from England; and if I could succeed in getting to the ball, as I fully intended to do, I should have little difficulty in identifying the head that I adored.

Had I not taken de la Mole more or less into my confidence, he would have done nothing to further my interests; but, if I really have any such power as Dick Waring hinted, I used it to enlist de la Mole upon my side. Finally he not only agreed, but offered to help me enter the Duchess of Carmona's house as one of her masked guests. He had been asked to stand at the door that night, and request each person, or in any case the man of each party, to raise his mask for an instant. This, in order to keep out reporters and intruders of all sorts; and his promise was to let me pass in unchallenged. I might count on his good offices, not only in that way, but in any other way possible, for “all the world loves a lover,” said he. And he wished me the best of luck, though he looked as if he hardly expected me to have it.

Probably it was foolish and conceited, but I could not resist playing up to the rôle Dick suggested. She was to be Juliet. I would be Romeo.

By this time, no doubt, the Duchess's invited guests had their costumes well under way; I had to get mine, and the only way to have something worthy of the occasion was to go to Paris for it. I did go, and was back in Biarritz in two days.

The rest moved easily, without a hitch. The night of the ball came. I dressed and went alone, rather than drag Dick into an affair which might end disagreeably.

I did not put myself forward, but stood for a while and watched the dancers, waiting for my chance.

Carmona had arrived the day before. I had never met him, but what I had heard I did not like; and having seen him once or twice in London, at a distance, he was recognizable in a costume copied from a famous portrait of that Duke of Alba who loomed great in Philip the Second's day. Because of a slight difference one from the other, in the height of his shoulders, he was difficult to disguise; and though the arrangement of the costume was intended to hide the peculiarity, it was perceptible.

When the “Duke of Alba” had danced twice in succession with Juliet Capulet, I could bear my rôle of watcher no longer. Besides, I knew that I had not much time to waste. For the sake of de la Mole, who had run the risk of admitting a stranger, I must vanish before the hour for the masks to fall. When I took off my cap and bowed before this white Juliet with the pearl-laced plaits of gold, she gazed at me through her velvet mask in the silence of surprise. I could not guess whether she puzzled herself as to what was under my yellow-brown wig and my mask; but at least she must know it was Romeo who begged a dance.

I did not urge my claim on such a plea, however, least it should rouse Carmona's opposition, and cause him to keep the girl from me if he could. I merely said, “The next is our dance,” risking a rebuff; but it did not come.

“Yes,” she said, almost timidly. It was the first time I had heard her speak, and her voice went to my heart.

The Duke stared, as though he would have stripped off my mask by sheer force of curiosity. But he had to let the girl go; and as the music began she was in my arms. I hardly dared believe my own luck. Neither of us spoke. I was lost in the sense of her nearness, the knowledge that it was the music which gave me the right to hold her thus, and that when the music died I must let her go.

But a quick thought came. If we danced the waltz through, Carmona or someone else would claim her for the next. If I could hide the girl before it was over, perhaps I might keep her for a little time. Indeed, I must keep her, if this meeting were not to end in failure; for there were things I had to say.

The conservatory was too obvious; and the shallow staircase with its rose-garlanded balusters, and its fat silk cushion for each step, would soon be invaded by a dozen couples. What to do, then? I would have given much to know the house.

“I must speak with you,” I said at last. “Where can we go?”

She did not say in return, “Do you know me, then?” or any other conventional thing. The hope in me that she had remembered well enough to guess who I was, brightened. She would not have answered a person she regarded as a stranger, as she answered me,

“There's a card-room at the end of the corridor to the left, off the big hall, where we might rest for a moment or two,” she said. “But I mustn't stop long.”

“No,” I promised. “I won't try to keep you. I ask only a few moments. I can't tell how I thank you for giving me those.”

I threw a glance round for Carmona, and saw him dancing with a stately Mary Stuart. I guessed his partner to be Lady Vale-Avon; and if I were right, it was a bad omen. She was not a woman to care for extraneous dancing, therefore she favoured Carmona in particular.

Still, for the moment he was occupied; and when his back was turned I whisked Lady Monica out of the ball-room, past the decorated staircase in the square hall, and to the room at the end of the corridor. There I pushed aside a portière and followed her in.

She had been right; the room was unoccupied, though two or three bridge tables were ready for players. In one corner was a small sofa. The girl sat down, carefully leaving no place for me, even had I

presumed; and, leaning forward, clasped her little hands nervously round her knees.

Then she looked up at me through her mask; and I did not keep her waiting.

“I've no invitation to-night,” I said. “But I had to come. I came to see you. Do you forgive me for saying this?”

“I—think so,” she answered.

“You would be sure, if you knew all.”

“I do know. At least—I mean—but of course, I oughtn't to be here with you.”

“According to convention you oughtn't. Yet—”

“I'm not thinking of conventions. But—oh, I should hate you to misunderstand!”

“I could never misunderstand.”

I snatched off my mask and stood looking down at her, knowing that my face would say what was in my heart, and not now wishing to hide the secret.

“You know,” I said, “that I've worshipped you since the first moment I saw you. It was impossible to meet you in any ordinary way, for you have no friend who would introduce to you the Marqués de Casa Triana. Have you ever heard that name before, Lady Monica?”

“Yes,” she answered frankly. “I heard it yesterday. From Angèle de la Mole.”

“Her brother's a friend of my best friend.”

“I know.”

“If it hadn't been for him, I should have had great trouble in getting here to-night. Yet I would have come. Did Mademoiselle de la Mole tell you that I loved you?”

Lady Monica dropped her head and did not answer, but the little hands were pressed tightly together.

“I've always been proud of my name,” I said, “though it's counted a misfortune to bear it; but when I saw you, then I knew for the first time how great a misfortune it may be.”

“Why?”

“Because my only happiness can come now in having you for my wife; and even if I could win your love, you wouldn't be allowed to marry my father's son.”

“Your father may have been mistaken,” the girl faltered. “I do think he was. But he was a gloriously brave man. Even the enemies against whom he fought must respect his memory. I—I've read of him. I—bought a book yesterday. You see—I've thought about you. I couldn't help it. We saw each other only those few minutes, and we didn't even speak; yet somehow it was different from anything else that ever happened to me.”

“It was fate,” I said. “We were destined to meet, and I was destined to love you. If I thought I could make you care, that would give me a right I couldn't have otherwise; the right to try and win your love, and beat down every obstacle.”

“I could—I *do* care,” she whispered. “Even if I were never to see you again, I shouldn't forget. This—would be the romance of my life.”

“Angel!” I said. And then she took off her mask, with such a divine smile that I could have knelt at her feet as at the shrine of a saint.

“Isn't it wonderful?” she asked. “I didn't find out your name till yesterday, though I tried before; and we don't know each other at all—”

“Why, we've known each other since the world began. My soul had been waiting to find yours again, and found it the other afternoon, on the road to my own land. That's what people who don't understand call ‘love at first sight.’ ”

“I think it must be so; because there was never anything like that first minute when you looked at me.”

“If I could have known, it would have saved me sleepless nights. For now you're mine, my dearest, just as I am yours. Nothing can take you from me now.”

“Ah, I'm afraid! Even if—everything were different in your life, it would be difficult; for—there's someone else in mine already.”

“There can be no one else, since you care for me.”

“Not *truly* in my life. But there's someone my mother wants me to marry.”

“The Duke of Carmona.”

"You knew?"

"You see, I've thought of nothing but you; and I've learned all I could about what concerns you."

"I don't like him, not even as a friend. He's handsome enough, but I'm sure he has a most horrible temper. I could be afraid of him. I believe I *am* afraid. And mother—you don't know her, but—when she makes up her mind that you're to do a certain thing, you find yourself doing it. That's one reason I was so glad when you came to-night, and said, 'The next is our dance,' in such a determined way. Not only did you take me away from *him*, but—I felt you'd try to *keep* me from him, in the end."

"Try!" I echoed. "I will keep you. Trust me my darling. I've been foolish to come to Biarritz under another name. This isn't Spain; and even a Casa Triana has a right to be here. But luckily not much harm's done. Through the de la Moles I'll be presented to Lady Vale-Avon; I'll tell her that, though compared to the days when my people counted for something in the history of Spain, I'm penniless, still my father left me enough to live on and keep a wife who loves me better than she loves society. I'll tell Lady Vale-Avon that there are countries in which my name's well thought of, even in these piping times; that there I'll do something worth doing—"

"You've already done things worth doing," the girl broke in; "splendid things."

"I've done nothing yet, but I'll change that. I'll ask your mother to give me a chance—to wait—"

"No," she insisted. "Mother would refuse, and everything would be worse than ever."

"Darling one, they couldn't be worse. Because now, I'm doing what I oughtn't to do, although it's been forced upon me by my love. To deserve you in the faintest degree, I must be open in my dealings. I must speak to Lady Vale-Avon."

"She'll never consent."

"At least I shall have done the right thing. Now we've had this talk, now you know that you're all the world, and heaven besides, to me, even for your mother's sake you won't throw me over, will you?"

"No, a thousand times no. I didn't dream loving would be like this. It would kill me to give you up."

“Then nothing can part us.”

“It makes me feel brave to hear you say so. But—you don't know mother.”

“I know myself, and I trust you.”

“I'm so young, and—I've never been allowed to have my own way. I've always given up.”

“Because you were alone, with no one to help you. Now you have me.”

“That's true. But—”

“Precious one, there's no 'but.'”

“I wish I could think so! Yet something seems to say that if you speak to mother, we shall be lost. I love you—but—*do* let it be kept secret for a while.”

“With what end?”

“I hardly know. Only, I've the strongest presentiment it would be best.”

“And I've the strongest conviction that not only would it be wrong, but that you wouldn't respect me if I consented.”

“I beg of you, wait at least till the royalties leave Biarritz before you tell mother, or anyone, who you are.”

I could not help smiling, though rather bitterly. “You've heard about my adventure in Barcelona?”

“Yes, from Angèle. I couldn't bear it if you were to have trouble here.”

“There's no danger of that.”

“One can't tell. Circumstances which you don't foresee might seem to involve you in some plot. Oh, if you love me, wait till the royalties have gone.”

How could I refuse those soft eyes, and those little clasped hands?

I caught the hands and crushed them against my lips, the rosy fingers that smelled of orris, and the polished nails like pink jewels. As I bent over my love, the curtain which covered the doorway waved as in a gust of wind.

Quick as light, Monica snatched away her hands, but it was too late. Carmona was holding back the portière for Lady Vale-Avon.

He must have been watching. He must have known that I had brought Lady Monica to this room. He must have fetched the girl's mother on purpose to find us together.

These were the thoughts in my mind as I faced the two, mask in hand.

They had seen me kissing Monica's fingers. It was useless to hope that they had not.

“Leave the room instantly, my daughter,” said Lady Vale-Avon, in a low voice. She too had taken off her mask.

It was a disastrous situation for me, and one all too difficult to carry off with dignity.

“Madame,” I said. “I am the Marqués de Casa Triana. I met Lady Monica some time ago, and have this moment told her that I love her. Now, I ask your consent to—”

“Casa Triana here!” exclaimed Carmona, in a tone which could have expressed no more of horror, had I been a bandit at large.

“Have no fear for your house,” I could not help sneering.

He gave me a look not to be forgiven a man by a man. “I have no such fear,” he said; “but there are those here whose safety is dear to me; and your name is not one which should be spoken under the same roof.”

It was thus that he chose to inform Lady Vale-Avon, if she had been ignorant of it, that I was a notorious character.

“Will you tell me,” he went on, “how you found your way into my mother's house, where no one of your name could be an invited guest?”

“There's a window,” said I, thinking to save de la Mole, “by which the world and his wife might enter.”

“I saw you, masked, in the ball-room half an hour ago.”

Half an hour ago! Perhaps he was not exaggerating. But the thirty minutes, if there had been thirty, had passed like one.

“I was there,” I admitted, “looking for Lady Monica Vale. We danced together, and I brought her here—”

“Who is this man, Duke?” Though she spoke to him, Lady Vale-Avon's eyes, cold as points of steel, pierced mine.

“A person who, whatever his intentions may be, ought not to be in Biarritz while King Alfonso's here.”

“I remember the name now. And he has come to your house, uninvited; he proposes to marry my daughter—a man whom I've never seen! You have your answer, Marqués de Casa Triana, if you need an answer. It is, no. Pray accept it quietly, and cease to persecute us, otherwise I must ask the Duke to act for me, as I have no husband or son. Is that enough?”

“It is not enough,” I echoed. “I love your daughter, and I trust she cares for me. I will not give her up.”

“Monica, I told you to go, and you disobey me,” exclaimed Lady Vale-Avon. “Now, I tell you to send this man away.”

“Mother—I love him,” faltered the girl. “Wait—when you've heard—when you know what he is—”

“You talk like a child, Monica,” her mother said. “You are a child. It's your one excuse; but this man, who must have hypnotized you, has reached years of discretion. If he will not leave the room, we must.”

“I'll go, Lady Vale-Avon,” I said, “but first let me say once more, frankly, I will never give up your daughter.” Then I looked straight at Monica. “Trust me,” I said, “as I trust you; and have courage.”

With that I bowed, and walked out at the window by which I hoped the Duke thought I had come in.

“I'm not sure,” I heard him say to Lady Vale-Avon, “that I oughtn't to inform the police. In Barcelona, six or seven years ago—”

I waited for no more.

IV

“I Don't Threaten—I Warn”

In the garden I stopped, hiding away a scrap of a lace handkerchief I had stolen; wondering if I had been altogether wrong, yet not able to see what other course had been open.

Lingering near the window I saw Lady Vale-Avon go to Monica, and hold the girl by the hand while she talked with Carmona. They spoke only a few words. Then the Duke opened the door, and the two ladies went out, Monica not once looking up.

No sooner had they gone than Carmona walked to the window, and seeing me in the glimmering night joined me.

“This is my mother's house,” he said in Spanish.

“And her garden, you would add,” I answered.

“Yes.”

“But there's something here that is mine.”

“There is nothing here that is yours.” His voice, studiously cold at first, warmed with anger.

“It will be mine some day, in spite of—*everything*.”

“You boast, Marqués de Casa Triana.”

“No. For Lady Monica Vale has promised to marry me.”

Carmona caught his breath on a word by which, if he had not stopped to think, he would have given me the lie. But something restrained him and he laughed instead. “I wouldn't count on the fulfilment of her promise if I were you,” he said. “Lady Monica's a schoolgirl. I would tell you, for your own sake, that the best thing you can do is to forget you ever saw her; but that will be a waste of breath. What I will say is, you'll be wise to leave Biarritz before anything disagreeable happens.”

“I intend to leave Biarritz,” I said quietly.

“I'm glad to hear it.”

“When Lady Monica and her mother leave.”

“You intend to persecute these ladies!”

“Not at all. But when they go to visit the Duchess of Carmona, that will be—the time I shall choose for leaving Biarritz.”

“Who has spoken of such a visit?”

“A person I trust.”

He was silent for a moment, whether in surprise or anger I could not tell. But at last he said, “I'm less well-informed than your friend as to the plans of Lady Vale-Avon and her daughter. They may return to England; they may go to friends in Paris, they may visit my mother. But this doesn't concern strangers like yourself; and my advice to the Marqués de Casa Triana is, *whatever happens, keep out of Spain*.”

“Do you threaten me?” I asked.

“I don't threaten—I warn.”

“Thanks for your kind intentions. They give me food for thought.”

“All the better. You'll be less likely to forget.”

“I shan't forget,” I answered. “Indeed, I shall profit by your advice.” And with that I walked away, putting on my mask.

As Romeo had not known at what hour he might wish to leave the house of Capulet, he had ordered neither his own motor-car nor a carriage; but luckily a cab was lingering in the neighbourhood on the chance of a fare. I was glad not to walk to my hotel in the guise of Romeo; and I gained my quarters without meeting curious eyes in the corridors.

As I expected, Dick was in our private sitting-room, smoking and reading a novel.

“Well, what luck, friend Romeo?” he asked.

“Luck, and ill luck,” said I. Then I told the story of the evening.

“Humph! you've gone and got yourself into a pretty scrape,” was his comment at the end.

“You call it a ‘scrape’ when by a miracle the sweetest girl alive has fallen in love with you?”

“Just that, if the girl isn't old enough to know her own mind, and has a mother who wouldn't let her know it if she could. You've gone so far now, you'll have to go further—”

“As far as the end of the world, if necessary.”

“Oh! you *Latin* men, with your eyes of fire, your boiling passions, and your exaggerated expressions! What do we Yankees and other sensible persons see in you?”

“Heaven knows,” said I, shrugging my shoulders.

“I doubt it. Why, in the name of common sense, as you'd got to the age of twenty-seven without bothering about love, couldn't you wait till the age of twenty-seven and a quarter, go quietly over to my country with me, a long sight better than the ‘end of the world,’ and propose to a charming American girl of rational age and plenty of dollars?”

“A rational age?”

“Over eighteen, anyhow. I believe you Latins have a fancy for these little white ingénues, who don't know which side their bread's buttered, or how to say anything but ‘Yes, please,’ and ‘No, thank you.’ When my time comes, the girl must be twenty-two and a good, patriotic American.”

“American girls are fascinating, but I happen to be in love with an English one, and it's her misfortune and mine, not our fault, that she's eighteen instead of twenty-two.”

“A big misfortune. You mustn't kidnap an infant. That's what makes it awkward. As I said, you can't back out now.”

“Not while I live.”

“Don't be so Spanish. But come to think of it, I suppose you can't help that. What do you mean to do next?”

“Watch. And get word to Monica.”

“Angèle de la Mole will do what she can for you.”

“I hope so. Then everything else must depend on the girl.”

Dick's lean, tanned face was half quizzical, half sad.

“Everything else must depend on the girl,” he repeated. “I wonder what would happen if anybody tried to prop up a hundred pound weight against a lilybud?”

V

A Mystery Concerning a Chauffeur

For many days after this the young King of Spain motored back and forth between San Sebastian and Biarritz to visit the lady of his love; but at last the two Princesses bade good-bye to the Villa Mouriscot, and went to Paris. Lady Vale-Avon and Monica remained; but for the moment the girl was safe from Carmona, for the Duke followed the King to Madrid.

Lovely as Monica was, is, and always will be, and genuinely in love with her as I had no doubt Carmona was, still I began to believe that Dick Waring was right, and that the Duke's desire to win Princess Ena's friend was as much for Court favour as for the girl herself. Several weeks passed, and Monica and her mother continued to be tenants of the Villa Esmeralda. They went out little, except to visit the old Duchess of Carmona, who evidently did all she could to advance her son's interests with invitations to luncheons and dinners; but try as I might I was never able to obtain an interview.

Fortunately for me, Lady Vale-Avon had seen me only in fancy dress; the costume of Romeo, with a ridiculous yellow-brown, wavy wig, upon which the costumier had insisted against my arguments. Now, I blessed him for his obstinacy; for I was able to pass Lady Vale-Avon in the street without being recognized, and once got near enough to slip into Monica's hand a note I had hastily scribbled on the leaf of a note-book.

“Are you willing that I should try my luck again with your mother?” I had written. “If not, will you consent to a runaway marriage with a man who loves you better than his life?”

Next day came an answer through Mademoiselle de la Mole.

Monica begged that I would not speak to her mother. “She fancies that you have gone away,” the girl wrote. “If you came forward I think she would wire the Duke of Carmona, for she writes to him nearly every day as it is; and she would do everything she could to make me marry him at once. Don't hate me for being a coward. I'm not, except with mother. I can't help it with her. She's different from everyone else. I heard the Duchess saying to her yesterday, that if I were to marry a grandee of Spain, I would be made a lady-in-waiting to the Queen instead of maid of honour; so I know what they're thinking of always. But while mother hopes you have given me up, and that I'm quite good, they will perhaps let me alone.

“I wish I dared write to the Princess about you; only, you see, on account of your father and that horrid accident which happened, in Barcelona, she might misunderstand you, and things would be worse than before. But if I find that mother means actually to try and force me, then I *will* go away with you. Otherwise, I would rather wait, for both our sakes.

“When I go back to England, there are some dear cousins of mine who might help us, but it's no use writing. I would have to see and talk to them myself. Anyway, if I were there they'd manage not to let me be married to a foreigner I hate; and you and I could go on being true to each other for a little while, until everything could be arranged.

“The worst is, mother doesn't mean to go back to England yet. That's what I'm afraid of, and that she has some plan about which she doesn't mean to talk till the last minute. But she hasn't said anything lately about visiting the Duchess of Carmona in Spain, and I hope she's giving it up. As soon as I hear anything definite I'll somehow let you know. I think I can promise that, though it may be difficult, as mother will never let Angèle and me be alone together for a minute if she can help it. The day after the ball we are having a talk in my room when my mother came, and perhaps guessed I had been telling Angèle things. Since then I haven't been allowed to go to Angèle's; and though Angèle comes to see me, mother always makes some excuse for being with us.”

After this letter of Monica's I had at least some idea of how matters stood; and in the circumstances there seemed nothing to do but to be near her, and to wait.

It was not until the latter part of March that the Duke of Carmona came back to his mother's villa at Biarritz.

His arrival was not announced in the local paper, nevertheless I heard of it; and the day after, Mademoiselle de la Mole sent me another letter from Monica, only a few lines, evidently written in great haste.

They were to pay the visit to the Duchess of Carmona in Seville, and were to arrive there in time for the famous ceremonies of Holy Week; that was all she knew. The time of starting was either not decided, or else it was not considered best that she should know too long beforehand.

“I'm miserable about going,” wrote the girl; “but what can I do? I used to think it would be glorious to see Spain, but now I'm frightened. I have a horrible feeling that I shall never come back. I know it's too much to ask, and I don't see how you can do it if I do ask, since I can tell you nothing of our plans; but if only, *only*, you could keep near me, within call, I should be safe. I suppose it's useless to hope for that? Anyway, whatever happens, I shall always love you.”

To this I wrote an answer, but Angèle feared she might fail in getting it to her friend. The lease of Lady Vale-Avon's Biarritz villa had just expired, and the mother and daughter were moving to the Duchess of Carmona's for a few days. For some reason, the Duchess had not once invited Angèle to come to her house since the ball. She might not be able to see Monica; and it would be very unsafe to trust to the post.

It was on the evening of the day on which I had this news that my chauffeur knocked at the door of our sitting-room at the hotel.

“I thought,” said he, “I'd better tell your lordship something which has just happened. It may be of importance; it may be of none.”

Now I may as well explain that Peter Ropes is no common chauffeur. He is the son of the old coachman who served my father for many years in England; was groom to my first pony; went abroad with me as handy man; was with me through most of my adventures; when I took up motoring, volunteered to go into a factory and thoroughly learn the gentle art of chauffeuring; and at this time understood an automobile, and loved it, as he understood and loved

a horse; he is of my age almost to the day; and I suppose will be with me in some capacity or other till one of us dies. He has a brown face, which might have been carved from a piece of oak; the eyes of a soldier; and never utters a word more than he must.

"You said I could go to the pelota this afternoon," he continued. "When I came back I went to the garage, and found a strange chauffeur examining your Gloria. I stood at a distance, behind the King of England's car, and watched what he would do. M. Levavasseur, the proprietor of the garage, came in just then, and I inquired in a low voice who the fellow was. He didn't know; but the man had asked for Mr. Trevenna's chauffeur, saying, when he heard I was out, that he was a friend of mine. I gave Levavasseur the hint to keep quiet, and got out of the way myself. Presently the chauffeur walked over to Levavasseur, and said, in French, that he wouldn't wait any longer."

"Well, what then, Ropes?" I asked.

"He went away, and I went after him. He didn't see me, and I don't believe he would have known me from Adam if he had. He stopped at another garage, and I thought best not to go in there. But I waited, and after a while a very dark, tall gentleman, who looked Spanish, walked into the garage. Five minutes later he and the chauffeur came out together. They parted at the entrance, and it was the gentleman I followed this time. He went to a large, handsome villa; and a person I met told me it was the Duchess of Carmona's house. That is the reason I thought the thing important."

"But why, exactly?" I persisted, guessing what Ropes would say.

"Because I think the gentleman was the Duke of Carmona."

"And if he were?"

"I've heard gossip that he's anxious to stand well with the King of Spain. It occurred to me he might have some political interest in trying to learn the real name of Mr. Trevenna, if you pardon my having such a thought. He might have sent his chauffeur to look at your car, and make a report; and if he did, whatever the reason was, it would mean no good to your lordship. I thought you ought to know, and be upon your guard, in case of anything happening."

"Thank you," I said. "You're right to speak, and it may be you've done me an invaluable service."

Ropes beamed; but having said all he had to say, another word would have been a waste of good material, which he was not the man to squander.

VI

Puzzle: Find the Car

“What do you think it means?” asked Dick, when the chauffeur had gone.

“It's just struck me, it may mean that Carmona intends to slip away with his guests in his new automobile, and that he wanted to find out something about my car, what it was like, and so on, in case I got wind of the idea, and followed.”

“The identical thing struck me. He wouldn't go spying himself, but sent his chauffeur, a new importation, probably, to have a look at the Gloria and describe it. I wonder how he heard you had one.”

“Easy enough to do that. Of course he's found out somehow, perhaps through employing a detective, that Chris Trevenna and Casa Triana are one man. He can't make much use of the knowledge to bother me on this side the frontier, but—”

“Yes; a big but.”

“It seems pretty certain that his own car must have come, or be coming here, and that he means to use it going into Spain, or he wouldn't have developed this sudden interest in mine.”

“It looks like it. Now he knows, if a dark blue Gloria crosses his path, it's the car of the pursuing lover, and—”

“I was just thinking that a dark blue Gloria will not cross his path.”

“You don't mean—”

“I mean that it won't be prudent for either Casa Triana's or Chris Trevenna's car to follow his, wherever he means to go.”

“What, you'll give up—”

“Is it likely?”

“You're getting beyond me.”

“What I want is to stay with you, in your car.”

“Wish I had one!” said Dick.

“You're going to have the loan of one. Would a grey or a red car suit you best?”

“I see. Red, please. They say red paint dries quickest.”

We both laughed.

“Your red car must have new lamps,” I went on, “and a new number, and any other little things that can be put on in a hurry. And you'd better get a passport if you haven't one. Gentlemen touring in foreign lands are sometimes subjected to cross-questionings which might be inconvenient unless they've plenty of red tape up their sleeves.”

“I'll lay in a stock. How would you like me to be the accredited correspondent, for the Spanish wedding festivities, of a newspaper or two?”

“Rattling good idea. Could you work it?”

“Easy as falling off a log, or puncturing a tyre. I'll arrange by telegraph, London and New York.”

“Grand old chap.”

“Thanks. Better wait till I've done something. What about your part in the show?”

“A humble friend, accompanying the important newspaper correspondent in his travels.”

“That's all right. But the Trevenna business is played out.”

“A new travelling name's as easy to fit as a travelling-coat.”

“Not quite, unless you can match it with a new travelling face.”

“Luckily Carmona knows Romeo's face better than mine. And, anyhow, a motoring get-up can be next door to a disguise.”

“That's true. Behind goggles Apollo hasn't much advantage over Apollyon, and you can develop a moustache. Yes. I think we can work it as far as that goes. But one's always heard that Spanish roads are impossible.”

“They'll be no worse for us than for Carmona,” I argued. “Besides, most of the best known books about Spain are out of date. The King has made motoring fashionable lately, and there must have been some attempts to get the roads into passable condition.”

“I happened to hear an American who's here with a sixty horse-power Panhard, wanting to go to Seville, say to another fellow that he'd been warned he couldn't get beyond Madrid.”

“I've never bothered much about warnings in my life. I've generally gone ahead, and found out things for myself.”

“We'll continue on the same lines. And, anyhow, wherever we go, we're sure of a leader; our friend the enemy.”

It was next in order to find out whether the Duke really had brought an automobile to Biarritz; but try as we might, we could learn nothing. Inquiries were made at the railway stations, both at Bayonne and Biarritz, as to whether an automobile had lately been shipped through; but as it happened, no car of any description had arrived by rail in either direction during the last fortnight.

All the principal garages of Bayonne and Biarritz were visited also, in the hope of finding a mysterious car which might be the Duke of Carmona's; but there was not one of which we could not trace the ownership. We then sent to Bordeaux, and even to St. Jean de Luz; but in both cases our errand was vain. If Carmona had an automobile in the South of France, it was well hidden.

As for the chauffeur who had inspected my car, and afterwards met Carmona at another garage, he had disappeared, apparently, into thin air.

Nevertheless, Dick and I formed a theory that the new automobile, of which we had heard so many rumours, was actually in Biarritz; that it had been driven into the town after dark, and was now being kept by some friend of Carmona's in a private garage. And if we were right in our conjectures, we felt we might take it as a sure sign that the Duke was not only planning an important tour, but was not forgetting a detail of precaution which could prevent my learning his intentions.

As we could not set a watch upon the chauffeur, we set a watch upon the Duke; and it was Ropes who, with considerable relish, undertook the task. I did not wish to bring a stranger into the affair; and Ropes I could trust as I trusted myself. Therefore Ropes it was who unobtrusively dogged Carmona's footsteps from the time the Duke went out in the morning, up to the time he went in again at night.

Meanwhile, Dick took steps to become correspondent for The Daily Despatch of London, and The New York Recorder, the editors of which papers he knew personally. He spent a great deal of money in wiring long messages, but his reward was success, and, as he said, he was "proud of his job," which he intended to carry out as faithfully as if writing impressions for newspapers were the business of his life.

Also, we got the car repainted; bought lamps of a different sort; ordered side baskets to be attached, of a red to match the new colour; had Dick Waring's monogram, in execrable taste, put on the doors; while last and most important change of all, from being number A12,901, the automobile became, illegally but convincingly, M14,317. Cunningest device of all, Ropes changed the wheel-caps of my Gloria for those of a Frenzel, as like a Gloria as a Fiat is like a Mercédès; so that only an expert of much experience would know that the car was not a Frenzel.

A quick dryer was used, and in two days we were ready for anything. I still hoped for a letter from Monica, with some hints as to her mother's plans, but nothing came; and when we had had a blank day, with no news of activity in the enemy's camp, it was a relief to have Ropes arrive at the hotel in the morning just as I was dressed.

I knew the moment I saw his face that something exciting had happened.

"The Duke's gone, my lord," he reported; "gone in a dark grey, covered car; I couldn't get near enough to make sure what it was, but it looks like a Lecomte. He's this moment got off."

"Not alone?"

"No, my lord. I'll tell you exactly what took place. I was at the window in the little room I hired over a shop three days ago, in sight of the entrance gates of the Villa Isabella. It was just seven o'clock this morning when a smart, big grey car drove in, might be a forty horse, and of the Lecomte type. The chauffeur wore goggles, but his figure was like the fellow's who came the other day to our garage. About half an hour later, out slipped the car again, the Duke driving, a lady sitting beside him, two other ladies in the tonneau, the chauffeur at the Duke's feet, and a good deal of luggage on the roof. At the gate they turned as if to go to San Sebastian; and I came to let you know."

“That's right. Get ready at once for a start, and have the car here as soon as you can.”

“Car's ready now, my lord, and so am I.”

“Good. But don't ‘my lord’ me. Now that I'm Mr. George Smith that's even more important to remember than in Trevenna days. And don't forget that the car's Mr. Waring's car.”

“I won't forget, sir.”

He was off to the garage, and I was knocking at Dick's door.

Dick was tying his necktie. “Ready to start in five minutes,” said he.

“How did you guess what was up?”

“Your face, d'Artagnan.”

“Why d'Artagnan? Haven't I a large enough variety of names already?”

“I've selected one suitable for the situation. D'Artagnan took upon himself a mission. So have you; and you'll have as many difficulties to overcome before you fulfil it, if you do, as he had.”

“Nonsense. We're starting out to keep in touch with another party of motorists.”

“In a country forbidden to one of us.”

“That one can look out for himself. If a lady in another motor should need someone to stand by her, we're to be on the spot to stand by, that's all.”

“Yes; that's all,” said Dick, laughing. “And all that d'Artagnan had to do was to get hold of a few diamond studs which a lady wanted to wear at a ball. Sounds simple, eh? But d'Artagnan had some fun on the way, and I'd bet the last dollar in my pile we will. Hang this necktie! There; I'm ready. Have we time for coffee and a crust?”

VII

The Impudence of Showing a Handkerchief

Fifteen minutes later we were off.

I love driving my car, as I love the breath of life, and I'm conceited enough to fancy that no one else, not even Ropes, can get out of her what I can. Still, this was not destined to be precisely a pleasure trip, and prudence bade me give the helm to Dick. He is a good enough driver; and the car was his car now; I was but an insignificant passenger, with a case of visiting cards in his pocket, newly engraved with the name of Mr. George Smith. I sat on the front seat beside Dick, however, silently criticising his every move; Ropes was in the tonneau; such luggage as we had, on top.

It was scarcely eight o'clock, and there was so little traffic in the town that we did not need to trouble about a legal limit. We slipped swiftly along the rough white road to the railway station, past large villas and green lawns, and took the sharp turn to the right that leads out from the pleasant land of France straight to romantic Spain, the country of my dreams. We sped past houses that looked from their deep sheltering woods upon a silver lake, and away in the distance we caught glimpses of the sea. Before us were graceful, piled mountains, the crenelated mass of Les Trois Couronnes glittering with wintry diamonds. Against the morning sky, stood up, clear and cold, the cone of far La Rune.

Looking ahead, in my ears sang the song of my blood, sweet with hope, as the name of the girl I love and the land I love, mingled together in music.

Gaining the first outskirts of straggling St. Jean de Luz my eyes and Dick's fell at the same time upon something before us; a big grey

automobile, its roof piled with luggage, stationary by the roadside, a chauffeur busy jacking up the driving wheels, a tall man standing to watch the work, his hands in the pockets of his fur coat. Instantly Dick slowed down our car, to lean out as we came within speaking distance, while I sat still, secure from recognition behind elaborately hideous goggles.

"Is there anything we can do?" asked Dick with the generosity of an automobilist in full tide of fortune to another in ill fortune. I noticed as he spoke, that he made his American accent as marked as possible; so marked, that it was almost like hoisting the stars and stripes over the transformed and repainted Gloria.

"No, thank you," said Carmona; for it was he who stood in the road looking on while his chauffeur worked. He had glanced up with anxiety and vexation on his ungoggled, dark face, at the first sound of an approaching car, and I knew well what thought sprang into his head. But a red car, with an American driving, was not what he had half expected to see. He was visibly relieved; nevertheless, he was slow enough in answering to bring us to a standstill, while he peered at our wheel-caps.

The deceitful name, glittering up to his eyes, so evidently reassured him that a temptation seized me, and I yielded without a struggle.

I had come prepared for a quick signal to Monica whenever an opportunity should arise, and, as I was anxious to let her know that she was not unprotected, it seemed to me that the first chance of doing so was better than the second.

In an inner breast pocket of my coat I had the lace handkerchief which I had stolen on the night of the ball. As Dick questioned Carmona, and Carmona answered, I flashed out the wisp of lace and passed it across my lips, not turning to look full at the slim, grey-coated figure on the front seat, yet conscious by a side glance that a veiled face regarded us.

What I did was done so quickly, that I think it would have passed unnoticed by the Duke; but Monica, taken completely by surprise, bent suddenly forward; then, remembering the need for caution, hurriedly leaned back against the cushions.

Carmona caught her nervous movement, saw how self-consciously, almost rigidly, she sat when she had recovered herself, and, suspicion instantly alert, turned a searchlight gaze on us.

The lace handkerchief had vanished. I was sitting indifferently, with arms folded, my interest concentrated upon the busy chauffeur. Still I felt there was no detail of my figure and motoring clothes that Carmona was not noting as he explained to Dick the nature of his mishap.

"A simple puncture," he said. "And we have all necessary means to mend it, thank you."

Dick and I lifted our caps to the ladies and went our way; but it was not until we had passed the charming Renaissance house where Louis Quatorze was born, that Waring made any comment on the incident.

"If that Moor-faced chap isn't on to the game, he's getting mighty 'warm,' as the children say," he remarked dryly.

"He can't possibly be certain," said I. "Even if he saw my face, he couldn't swear to identifying it, as the only sight he ever had of me was in that asinine, yellow Romeo wig. Besides, Romeo had no moustache, and, thanks to your advice, I have. It's the one thing that's conspicuous under the goggles."

"A sort of 'coming event casting its shadow before.' I didn't say he *knew*. I said he guessed. See here, while he's waiting for his tyre, could we wire from this town to the frontier in time to have you stopped?"

"We ought to get there before any telegram he could send," said I, hopefully. "However, there'll be a lot of formalities at the custom-house. They might catch us before we finished. But, uncertain as he must be, it would hardly be worth his while—"

"I wouldn't bet much on that," said Dick.

"Let's rush it," said I.

"Too risky. You'd feel such a limp ass to be detained by a fat policeman at the door of Spain, while Carmona and Lady Monica went through, and disappeared."

"I'd shoot the fat policeman first."

“There you are, being Spanish again, just when you ought to develop a little horse-sense.”

This put me on my mettle, and in two minutes I had thought out a plan, while Dick whistled and reflected.

It was rather an odd plan, and could only be carried out by the aid of another. But that other had never failed me yet, when loyalty or devotion were needed; and I had not got out half the suggestion when he understood all, and begged to do what I had hardly liked to ask.

We took exactly eight minutes, by Dick's watch, in making arrangements to meet an emergency which I hoped might not arise if our speed were good and our luck held.

Already Hendaye, the last French town, was but just beyond our sight. We ran through it at high speed, passed on through little Béhobie; and next moment our tyres were rolling through a brown mixture of French and Spanish mud on the international bridge that crosses the swirling Bidasoa. We had passed from Gaul to Iberia. At the central iron lamp-post, carrying on one side the “R.F.” of France, on the other the Royal Arms of Spain, I lifted my cap in salutation to my native land, just where, had I been an Englishman, I should have lifted it to memories of grand old Wellington.

The broad river was rushing, green and swift, down to Fuenterrabia and the sea, eddying past the little Ile des Faisans, where so much history has been made; where Cardinals treated for royal marriages; where Francis the First, a prisoner, was exchanged for his two sons. We were across the dividing water now, in Irun, and on Spanish soil. High-collared Spanish soldiers lounging by their sentry boxes, looked keenly at us, but made no move, little guessing that the accused bomb-thrower of Barcelona was driving past them through this romantic gate to Spain. We turned abruptly to the right, and, hoping still to escape trouble, pulled up at the custom-house.

To hurry a Spanish official, I had often heard my father say, in old days, is a thing impossible, and we avoided an air of anxiety. The three men in the big red car appeared to desire nothing better than to linger in the society of the douaniers. Nevertheless, the chauffeur was as brisk in his movements as he dared to be.

He it was who jumped from the tonneau, and in passable Spanish asked our inquisitor which, if any, of our suit-cases he wished to open. At the same instant a propitiatory cigarette was offered and accepted.

Carefully the overcoated man selected with his eye a piece of luggage on the car roof. Luck was with us. It was the one easiest to unlock.

In the twinkling of an eye (an American, not a Spanish eye), the thing was down and in the office. The douanier was about to inspect, in his leisured way, when a peasant entered with some bags to be weighed.

Naturally the official fell into chat with the new-comer, and it was necessary to remind him that we had the right of precedence. Every moment was of importance, for already there was time for a telegram to have arrived. Presently there would be time for its instructions to be acted on as well. And at this moment I realized, as I had not fully realized before, all that it would mean to me of humiliation and defeat to fail ignominiously on the threshold of my adventure.

It was hard to show no impatience as the douanier's lazy, cigarette-stained hand wandered among the contents of the suit-case. When any article puzzled him, he paused; another precious minute gone. But eventually, having had a safety-razor explained, he was satisfied with the inspection of the luggage, and indicated that it might be replaced. Then came the question of the deposit of money for the car, on entering Spain.

Very carefully did the imperturbable official examine each Spanish bank-note we tendered; laboriously did he make out the receipt. Had he meant to detain us, his movements, his words, could not have been more deliberate. How I had longed to hear again the Spanish language spoken by Spaniards in Spain, yet how little was I able to appreciate the fulfilment of my long-cherished wish! At last, however, every formality was complied with, and we were free to go.

With all speed we took our man at his word. The leather-coated, leather-legginged chauffeur set the engine's heart going in time with his own, flung himself into the tonneau, and had not shut the door when Waring slipped in the clutch, muttering “Hooray!”

Another second and we should have been beyond recall; but hardly was the brake off than it had to go crashing on again to avoid running over a sergeant and two soldiers who rushed up and sprang in front of us, puffing with unwonted haste.

In his hand the sergeant held an open telegram.

“You speak Spanish?” he panted.

“A little,” said Dick. “French better.”

“I have no French, señor,” replied the sergeant, “But my business is not so much with you as with this gentleman,” he glanced at the telegram, “in the grey coat with the fur collar, the grey cap, the goggles in a grey felt mask, the small dark moustache, the grey buckskin gloves.” (Carmona had noticed everything.) “Our instructions are to prevent the Marqués de Casa Triana from going into Spain.”

“Casa Triana? What do you mean?” cried Dick. Then he laughed. “Is the person you're talking about a Spaniard?”

“He is, señor.”

Dick laughed a great deal more. “Well, I guess you'll have to look somewhere else. There's a mistake. The gentleman in the grey coat and all the other grey things has hardly enough Spanish to know what you're driving at.”

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders and looked determined. “There is no mistake in my instructions, señor. I am sorry, but it is my duty to detain that gentleman. If there is an error there will be apologies.”

“I should say there jolly well was an error,” sputtered Dick, in his wild combination of Spanish and English and American. “George, show your card. He thinks you're a Spaniard, who's ‘wanted.’ ”

The gentleman in the grey coat showed the visiting cards of Mr. George Smith, and the Spanish soldier examined them gloomily. “Anybody might have these,” said he, half to us, half to a group of his countrymen. “Señor, I must reluctantly ask you to descend and to come with me. It will be much better to do so quietly.”

“Of all the monstrous indignities,” shouted Dick. “I'm a newspaper correspondent on a special detail. I'll wire the American minister in Madrid, and the English Ambassador too. I'll—”

But the gentleman in the grey coat had obeyed the sergeant. He had also taken off his goggles.

“It will be all right in a few hours, or a few days,” said he in English. “You must go on. Don't worry about me.”

“Go on without you?” echoed Dick, breaking again into astonishing Spanish for the benefit of the official. “Well, if you really don't mind, as I'm in the dickens of a hurry. You can follow by train, you know, as soon as you've proved to these blunderers that you're George Smith.”

“If you are Señor George Smith, you will be free as soon as the photograph of the Marqués de Casa Triana has been sent on by the police at Madrid,” said the sergeant. “If not—” he did not finish his sentence; but the break was significant. And the soldiers closed in to separate the alleged George Smith from his companions of the car, lest at the last moment they should attempt a rescue.

“We'll make them sorry for this, George,” said Dick. “But as we really can't do much for you here, we'll get on somewhere else, where we can.”

“I must ask also for the name of the owner of this automobile, and for that of his chauffeur,” insisted the sergeant, “before I can let you go.”

“Oh, all right,” said Dick, crossly, producing his passport, and cards with the names of the papers for which he had engaged to correspond. “Ropes, fork out your credentials.”

The chauffeur brought forth his French papers, and pointed to the name of Peter Ropes. The sergeant industriously wrote down everything in his note-book, a greasy and forbidding one.

“It is satisfactory,” he said with dignity; “you can proceed, señores.”

The engine had not been stopped during the scene; and as the gentleman in the grey coat was marched off to the guard-house with a jostling Spanish crowd at his heels, the red car in which he had lately been a passenger slipped away and left him behind.

Through the streets of Irun it passed at funeral pace, as if in respect and regret for a friend who was lost; but once out in the green, undulating country beyond, it put on a great spurt of speed, after the chauffeur had scrambled into the front seat.

“Great Scott, but I'm as hot as if I'd come out of a Turkish bath,” growled Dick.

“It was a warm ten minutes,” said I. “Poor old Ropes—bless him!” And I sent back a sigh of gratitude to the staunch friend in my grey overcoat, cap, goggles, and gloves, to whose loyalty I owed freedom.

VIII

Over the Border

Here I was in Spain, my Spain—thanks to Ropes; and, again thanks to him, probably out of danger from Carmona's suspicions for some time to come, barring accidents.

He would make inquiries at Irun when he arrived there, and learning that the obnoxious person had been detained according to information received from him, would pass on triumphantly. Even when fate brought his car and ours together, as I hoped it often would, a sight of the two remaining travellers, the American automobilist and his hideously-goggled chauffeur, would cause him amusement rather than uneasiness.

He would say to himself that, so far as he was concerned, no harm had been done, even if no good had been accomplished; for if the banished passenger were indeed Casa Triana, he had done well to get rid of him. If, after all, his quick suspicion had been too far-fetched, and he had caused the arrest of an innocent tourist, that tourist would never know to whom he owed his adventure, and would be powerless to trouble the Duke of Carmona. As for Ropes, when the photograph taken of me years ago by the police in Barcelona should reach the police in Irun, it would be seen that two young men who are twenty-seven, tall, slim, and have dark moustaches, do not necessarily resemble each other in other details. Mr. George Smith would be generously pardoned for having occupied the attention of the police in place of the Marqués de Casa Triana, and he would be free to rejoin his fellow-travellers.

During the three or four minutes of discussion we had had before making the “quick change” which transformed master into man, we had arranged to communicate with Ropes by means of advertisements in La Independencia. We would forward money in advance to that journal, enough to pay for several advertisements,

and could then telegraph our whereabouts at the last minute, whenever the movements of Carmona's car gave us our cue.

This was the best arrangement we could make in a hurry, and when we had time to reflect, it did not seem to us that, in the circumstances, we could have done better.

And so, come what might, the outlaw had crossed the border, and was in the forbidden country of his hopes and heart.

In spite of compunction on Ropes' account, I was happy, desperately happy. I was free to watch over the girl I loved and who loved me; and I was drinking in the air of the fatherland. It did actually seem sweeter and more life-giving than in any other part of the world.

Dick laughed when I mentioned this impression, and said I ought to try the climate of America before I judged; but he admitted the extraordinary, yet almost indefinable individuality of the landscape as well as the architecture, which struck the eye instantly on crossing the frontier.

It was easy to classify as peculiarly Spanish the old Basque churches, the long, dark lines of sombre houses bristling with little balconies, and sparkling with projecting windows, whose intricate glass panes gave upward currents of air in hot weather. All this, and much more was obvious in town or village; but Dick and I argued over the distinctive features of the landscape without fathoming the mystery which set it apart from other landscapes.

What was so peculiar? There were hedges, and poplars, and other trees which we had seen a thousand times elsewhere. There was a pretty, though not extravagantly pretty, switchback road of fair surface stretching before us, roughly parallel with the sea, giving glimpses here and there of landlocked harbours with colliers and trampships at anchor. There was a far background of snow mountains and a changing foreground of spring grass and spring blossoms; interlacing branches embroidered with new leaves of that pinky yellow which comes before the summer green.

There ought to have been nothing remarkable, save for the moving figures which here and there rendered it pictorial; dark, upstanding men in red waistcoats, driving donkeys; velvet-eyed girls, with no covering for their heads but their shining crowns of jet-black hair,

and none at all for their tanned feet and ankles, though they carried shoes in their hands; black-robed priests; brown-robed monks; smart officers; soldiers with stiff, glittering shakos, and green gloves; oxen with pads of wool on their classic, biscuit-coloured heads. Nevertheless, Dick agreed with me in finding the landscape remarkable.

At last we began to wonder if the difference did not lie in colouring and atmosphere. The sky effects were radiant enough to set the soul of an artist singing, because of the opal lights, the violet banks of cloud with ragged, crystal fringes of rain, the diamond gleams struck out from snow peaks; and yet, despite this ethereal radiance, there was a strange solemnity about the wide reaches of Spanish country, a rich gloom that brooded over the landscape with its thoughtful colouring, never for a moment brilliant, never gay.

"It's painted glass-window country," I said. "Old glass, painted by some famous artist who died in the fourteenth century, and a little faded—no, subdued by time."

"You've hit it," said Dick. "There *is* an old-glass-window-in-a-dim-cathedral look about the sky. It gives one a religious kind of feeling, or anyway, as if you'd be thrown out of the picture if you were too frivolous."

"I feel far from frivolous," said I. "But I'm excited. Look here; we'll be in San Sebastian and out of San Sebastian soon, if we keep on. But we mustn't keep on; for if we do we may miss the other car, and then I should be as badly off as if I were in Ropes' place at Irun."

"We know they're going to Seville," said Dick.

"It's a long cry to Seville. And Carmona may mean to travel by way of Madrid, through Vitoria and Burgos, or he may mean to take a road which Levavasseur in Biarritz told me was better, steering for Seville via Santander and Salamanca. It depends on whether he wants to stop at the capital, I suppose. Anyhow, as he's unconsciously making our arrangements as well as his own, there's nothing for it but we must halt until he passes and gives us our lead."

"It's all the same to me whether we halt or scorch," said Dick. "I've got more time than anything else. This is your circus; I'm only the 'prisoner's best friend,' as they say in a court-martial. But if we should go to Burgos, I've got an errand to do, if you don't mind."

“Why should I mind?” I asked.

“It's to call on a young lady.”

“You never mentioned having friends there.”

“She's Angèle de la Mole's friend. All I know is that she's Irish, name O'Donnel; that she's got a harmless, necessary father, and a brother in whom my prophetic soul tells me Angèle is interested; that Papa and Daughter are visiting Brother, who's in the Spanish army for some weird unexplained reason, and stationed in Burgos. I promised to take a package with a present from Angèle to Miss O'Donnel if we stopped long enough at Burgos, or, if we didn't go there, to post it. I've also a letter introducing us to Papa. Angèle said it was possible he might have known your father, so probably he's lived a good deal in Spain at one time or another, or the idea wouldn't have occurred to her. She thought, if we went to see the O'Donnels, Papa might be useful in case you told him who you really were; but I wasn't to bother you about going out of your way for their sakes; which is the reason I didn't mention them until now, when you spoke of Burgos.”

“If Carmona goes in that direction, he's almost certain to spend the night there,” said I, on the strength of such knowledge as much study of Spanish road-maps had given me. “In that case, we shall spend the night too, and there'll be time for you to call on your O'Donnels; but as for me, I don't know that it would be wise to take extraneous people into my confidence. And, if it won't disappoint you, I hope we won't have to go by Burgos, although they say the cathedral's one of the finest in the world, for if the road's as bad as rumour paints it, it must be abominable.”

“Well, you've got your springs bound up with a million yards of stout cord, on purpose; and those extra buffers of India rubber Ropes put on to keep the tyres from grinding against the mud guards; so we ought to get off pretty well at worst,” remarked Dick. “As for me, I shall feel defrauded if the car doesn't soon begin to bound like a chamois from one frightful obstacle to another, along the surface of the road, such ghastly things have been dinned into my ears about Castile and La Mancha. So far, we've nothing to complain of, and have been on velvet, compared to some of the pavé atrocities one remembers in Belgium and northern France.”

“I daresay we shall come to the chamois act yet,” said I. “But, so far, we're still in the heart of civilization. Here's San Sebastian, and here's a café close to where Carmona must pass, so let's stop and lie in wait.”

IX

A Stern Chase

We were on the outskirts of San Sebastian, and to reach the café we turned off the main road and ran the car into a side street. There, without being ourselves conspicuous, we could see all that passed along the road beyond. We had some vermouth, sitting at a little iron table outside the café door, to excuse our presence. Every moment we expected to see the Duke's car shoot by, but time went on, and it did not come. We finished our first edition of vermouth and had a second, with which we toyed and did not drink, by way of keeping our place.

Had they punctured another tyre? Had Carmona stopped in Irun, and had any mischance occurred there which might, after all, put the police on my track?

Dick and I were beginning to get restive, and question each other with raised eyebrows, when the big grey automobile charged past the end of our street. Not a head in the car turned in our direction; and laying a couple of pesetas on the table we sprang to the manning of our own road-ship. So quick was our start that, when we spun out into the road, there was our leader still within sight.

I had heard my father speak often of San Sebastian, which, situated in the heart of the Basque country, had been the great Carlist centre, and even when Carlist hopes died, retained most stoutly the Carlist traditions. But, Carlist as he was at heart till the day of his death, he could not fail to appreciate the tact of Queen Cristina, by whose wish a royal summer villa had risen over the waters of the bay. Owing to this stroke of clever policy, a poor and discontented town was transformed into the most fashionable watering place of Spain, and surely if slowly disaffection merged into prosperous self-satisfaction.

Because of stories I had heard my father tell, I should have liked to explore the place; but the one thing of importance now was to keep the grey car in sight until we could be certain which road it would take; so there was time only for brief glances to right and left as we flashed on.

Through streets with high modern houses, more Parisian than Spanish, we came at last upon a broad boulevard that led us by the sea. There had been a picture at home of the deep, shell-like bay, guarded by the imposing headlands of Monte Urgull and Monte Igueldo, the scene of much fighting in the Carlist war. The royal palace, Villa Miramar, was new to me save for the many photographs I had seen of it in Biarritz; but we had no more than a glimpse of the unpretending red brick house on the hill, before we swept through a tunnel that pierced a rocky headland, and came out into open country.

Now our progress developed into a stern chase. By a wrong turn in a San Sebastian street we lost the car ahead for a few moments, but beyond the town, where mud, fresh after a recent shower, lay inch thick on the road, we came upon the track of the flying foe.

There was the trail of the “pneus” as clear to read as a written message, and we followed, relieved of doubt.

On, on we went towards the south, and the mountains of Navarre, and my mind was free enough from strain at last to exult in each new glimpse of the land for which I longed.

Ever since I was old enough to read, I had steeped myself in the history and legend of my own country. I knew all its wars, and where they were fought; I knew the names of the towns and villages, insignificant in themselves, perhaps, made famous by great victories or defeats; and there was time to think of them now, as we passed along the way the heroes of the Peninsular War had taken; but there was no time to linger over landmarks, not even at Hernani, where De Lacy Evans' British legion was shattered by the Carlist army in 1836, and where, in the church, we might have seen the tomb of that Spanish soldier who, at Pavia, took prisoner Francis I.

Rain fell in swift, fierce downpourings, but left us dry under the cover of our car; and as we sped on, sudden gleams of sunlight shining on the wet stone pavements of small brown villages, turned

the streets to glittering silver; while beyond, the trees sprayed gold like magic fountains against the white sheen of far snow-peaks.

Thus we ran up the winding road by the river Urumea, worming our way deep into the heart of the mountains; climbing ever higher with a wider view unfolding to our eyes—a view as new, as strange to me as to Dick Waring. And yet I felt at home with it, as if I had known it always.

As we ascended, the roads did what they could to deserve their evil reputation. The rain of a few days ago had been snow in the mountains. The surface of the road became like glue, and despite non-skidding bands, and Waring's careful steering, the car declared a sporting tendency to waltz. Presently the glue liquefied. We were speeding through sheets of yellow soup, which spouted from our pneus in two great curving waves, spattering from head to foot the few wayfarers we met. Down the front glass coursed a cataract of mud, and Waring could steer only by looking out sideways. Thrown up by the steering-wheels, the yellow torrent thudded on the roof, so that we were driving under a flying arch of liquid Spanish earth.

With the approach to a town, however, the way improved. The place was Tolosa, and at the sound of our motor in the distance, a cry of “Automovile, automovile,” came shrilly from a score of childish throats. Even the grown-ups rushed out, and were far more excited than we should have expected in this motor-frequented part of Spain between Biarritz and Madrid. In a French town of the same size scarcely a head would be turned if an automobile passed; here people were as pleased as if we had been a circus, though only a few moments before they must have had the joy of seeing Carmona's car go by.

“If it's like this in the north, what must it be south of Madrid?” said I. “Here they're all wonderfully good-natured; delighted with us in towns and villages—I believe they'd pay to see us if they had to!—the road-menders give military salutes, and even the men whose mules and donkeys are frightened grin as they cover up the silly beasts' faces with their shawls.”

“That's because we behave like decent human beings instead of marble-hearted scorpions,” said Dick, with an originality of simile which he cultivates. “When we see that we're frightening anything we slow down, slip out the clutch, and glide so stealthily by that the

creature gets no excuse for hysterics. I used to think before you taught me to drive, and I had the experience and the responsibility myself, that you wasted time grovelling to animal prejudices; but I've changed my mind. I've learned there's no fun to be got out of pig-selfishness on the road, and leaving a trail of distress behind."

"If you hadn't come to feel that, I couldn't have made over my car to you," said I. "Road brutality would be peculiarly brutal in Spain, where motoring's a new sport, and peasants must be made accustomed to it. Every motorist who slows down for frightened animals, or gets out to help, is paving the way for future motorists."

"Somehow I don't believe Carmona'll lay much pavement for us," said Dick, chuckling.

"Monica won't stand it if he doesn't," said I. "He's got her sitting beside him, the beggar; and it's his métier to please her."

We had lost the trail of the pneus, but as the country changed we picked it up again. We were among trees now, and the mountain sides were green with oak and poplar, though as we dropped the landscape darkened into desolation. The bleak corner of the world towards which we were speeding had that formless, featureless look which one sees on common faces, as if it had been shaken together carelessly by the great Creator in an absent-minded moment.

No scenery can be unattractive to a motorist while his car goes well, and the sweet wind flutters against his face; but even I had to admit that this country—illumined only by snow mountains walling the horizon—would be irredeemable in dead summer heats.

My map, which I consulted as Dick drove, said that we had passed out of Navarre into Alava; and suddenly I noticed that we had crossed the watershed, for the bright streams, instead of running down to the Bay of Biscay, were spinning silver threads towards the Ebro, on the way to tumble into the Mediterranean by Tarragona.

Here and there my longing for the strange and picturesque was gratified by the tragic grace of a tall, ruined watch-tower crowning a desolate hill, a vivid reminder of days when red fire-signals flashed from hill to hill to call good Christian men to arms against the Moors. Sometimes creamy billows of Pyrenean sheep surged round our car, graceful and beautiful creatures with streaming banners of wool, and faces only less intelligent than those of the grey dog that

rallied them to order, and the brown shepherd in fluttering garments of red and blue.

The farther south we came, the darker grew the mild-eyed oxen our automobile frightened. At Biarritz and beyond they were pale biscuit-coloured; here, the sun seemed to have baked them to a richer brown.

Nevertheless, that sun had no warm welcome for us to-day. We were nipped by the bitter wind, which struck us the more coldly as we were hungry; and about two o'clock we were not sorry to see in the middle of a wide-stretching plain, the Concha de Alava—a large town which we knew to be Vitoria.

Luncheon there might be counted upon. It was too chilly for a picnic meal to be feasible with ladies, therefore Carmona's car must stop for an hour or two, and it was clear now that he would go by way of Burgos; consequently, it was on the cards that Angèle de la Mole's letter would be delivered by hand.

We sneaked stealthily into Vitoria, glancing furtively about for a large grey Lecomte; but it was not long before we caught sight of it in the distance, in the main street, and drawn up before the principal hotel.

I would have given a good deal if I could have got word to Monica; for, even if she had happened to see the red car following since Irun, she was probably miserable in the thought that I had been turned back at the door of Spain.

Of course, in the fear of disgusting her, Carmona might have kept the curtain down on the little drama which he had stage-managed. Concealment would have been difficult, however, as he must have signed his telegram to the police; and on arriving at the custom-house, some of the facts would have been liable to leak out in Monica's hearing.

It was hard that she should be distressed for my sake as well as her own; but my first fencing bout with the Duke had warned me against rashness, and I decided that nothing could be done till we reached Burgos. There, somehow, I would find a way to let her know that it was I, and not the Duke, who had come out best.

Before joining Dick at lunch I engaged a small boy who sold newspapers in the street to let us know when the other car started.

This was to prevent our being given the slip by any chance; but it proved a needless precaution, as we scrambled through a Spanish menu, and still the grey car slept in its coat of greyer mud before its chosen hotel; therefore Dick and I bolted a hasty impression of Vitoria, as we had bolted our lunch.

He read aloud as we walked, bits out of a guide-book about Wellington, and King Joseph, and the battle of Vitoria that had decided the fate of the Peninsular War; but as it happened, I was more interested in a strange effect of light and darkness in the sky which for a moment made an unforgetable picture.

Another wild, April storm was boiling up, and where we stood in the square, below the long flight of stone steps, the high cathedral above seemed built against a cloud-wall of ebony. A long sabre of sunlight struck upon the tower and threw a ray of reflected gold on the white Virgin in her niche. Over all the town there was no other gleam of light, and so had the afternoon darkened that it was as if a mourning veil hung between our eyes and the solemn sky.

Suddenly the deep-toned bells of the cathedral boomed; and the doors opening, hundreds of women clad in black, with close-folded black mantillas poured out, down the double stairway to the square.

As they came nearer, and each figure took individual significance with the breaking of the cloud, the rich browns and blue-shadowed greys of the buildings—deep and soft as velvet—attained fine value as a background for lace-framed faces, and the vivid colours of little children's cloaks.

For a single instant I forgot even Monica, in the tingling sensation that the life of Spain was throbbing round me, but a touch on my arm brought me back to her with a bound.

“The grey car is getting ready to start, señor,” murmured a Spanish voice, as two Spanish eyes looked up—hopeful of pesetas—into mine.

X

The Unexpectedness of Miss O'Donnel

I think that not once did Carmona or anyone else in the Lecomte spy the car which, with the unflagging obstinacy of a bloodhound, kept on the fresh trail of the pneus that began again outside Vitoria; for while we had the trail we were satisfied to hover always beyond eyeshot of those in front.

We had a crowd to see us leave the town, a laughing crowd who seemed to wonder why people in their senses should rush about the world when they could stop at home and take siestas. And the peasants by the roadside were amazingly good-natured too, though we disturbed their avocations and upset the calculations of their animals.

Stately Spanish señores, whose long brown or indigo capas trailed over their mules' backs, smiled thoughtfully and envied us not, rather pitied us, perhaps. Barefooted women in yellow shawls gave kind smiles, and flashed looks from eyes like stars, as often blue as black, but always singularly Celtic. Scarcely a face but was furnished with grave Celtic features; for Celts these people were long before they were Spaniards; and there is no type so persistent, except the Jewish.

One handsome old man on a donkey so lost control of his beast when we swept into view, that he was dislodged, and would have fallen on his face had he not enmeshed his knees in some intricate tracery of rope. Round and round spun the frightened animal in the midst of the road, like a cat chasing its own tail, the rider toppling over, his well-cut nose all but scraping the ground.

Our car was stopped and I was out in a moment, though it must have been a long and giddy moment to that human spinning-jenny. A few tangled seconds, and I had him unwound and reseated, expecting no gratitude. But to my surprise, when I got the old fellow right side up, I found him wreathed in smiles, pouring out thanks and wishes for my good speed. Remembering experiences in other lands which call themselves enlightened, I glowed with pride of my country folk, especially when the victim of progress politely refused five pesetas.

As we came nearer to Old Castile, the ancient land of many castles, I felt as a man must when at last he comes to a house which is his, though never until now has he held the key and been free to enter.

The northern provinces, peopled by mysterious Basques alien to us in blood and language, I could scarcely look upon as Spain. But in Castile I saw the heart and citadel of my native country. My father was Andaluz; my mother Castiliana, and she used to say that in my nature were united the qualities of the two provinces—Castilian pride and stubbornness; the gaiety and recklessness of the true Andaluz.

I hoped that some change of scenery, some sign given by Nature, might mark the passage into Castilla la Vieja; therefore I was grateful when the car ran upon a stately bridge, hung above a broad river that was a flood of tarnished gold. Thence we looked across to the old buttressed and balconied town of Miranda del Ebro, strange and even startling in its wild setting of white mountains; and as we slowed down in admiration, from a dark secretive tunnel which was the principal street of the place, there seemed to blow out, like wind-driven petals of flowers, a flock of girls in golden yellow, tulip red, and iris blue. Then, as we looked, followed a string of black mules with crimson harness, pressed forward by a dozen young men in short blue trousers, capped like Basques with the red birret.

It was like coming into a picture which our arrival had, in some magic way, endowed with life; and the effect did not wear off as we ran into the shadow-tunnel, where the brown dust lit up with flames of colour. Under the balconies bristling over narrow calles, little shops and booths blazed with red and green peppers, glowed with

oranges and the paler gold of lemons, glimmered with giant pearls which were Spanish onions.

Miranda, I thought, was worthy of Old Castile; and when but a short distance further on, the way seemed blocked by a high ridge of mountains flung across our path, I began to hope that my mother's country—that home of highest Spanish pride and honour—had some real magnificence of scenery to give us. We wound into the splendid gloom of the gorge of Pancorbo, cut like a sword-cleft in the rock; and I said that this scene alone was worth a journey into Spain.

There was room only for the road, and the foaming Oroncillo tearing its way through the mountain. High over our heads, where fingers of sunlight groped, the railway from Paris to Madrid looped its spider's web along the precipice, winding through tunnel above tunnel in miniature rivalry with the sublimities of the St. Gothard. Below, deep in the shadow of the gorge, crouched the sad village of Pancorbo itself, stricken, desolate, articulate only in its two ruined castles on the height, Santa Engracia and Santa Marta, imploring Heaven with silent appeal. Still higher, towered a guardian mountain of astonishing majesty, seeming to bear aloft on a petrified cushion a royal crown of iron. It was a place to call up in memory with eyes shut. This was the majestic entrance into Castile; but it raised my hopes only to dash them down. Once past the serrated needles and fingers of Dolomite rock which made the grandeur of the gorge, we came again to monotony of outline, and began to realize Castile as it is; a vast and lonely steppe, wind swept, bounded by an infinite horizon.

Treeless, silent, unbroken by hedge or boundary, guarded by a ruined watch-tower on each swelling hill, the illimitable plain lay sombre and impressive.

No labourers were to be seen; no villages were in sight, whence men could come to till the land; nevertheless, everywhere were signs of cultivation by invisible hands, harvests to be reaped by men who would spring from one knew not where.

Yet the monotony of these tremendous spaces was redeemed by such changeful splendour of colour as I had never seen. Swelling undulations, worthy to be named mountains, were warm with the purple of heather, though no heather grew upon them. Sometimes you could have fancied, from a sudden outburst of radiance on a

distant hilltop, that a rainbow had lain down to rest. And through all there was never absent that impression that this was painted-glass-window country with its rich tones of crimson and violet, its palely luminous skies, and the solemnity of its blended hues. Always there was a haunting effect of sadness, even in the spring purity of those white blossom-arches which decorated the brown monotony of our roads.

The sky still burned dusky red when in the midst of a wide plain, the soaring twin-spires of Burgos stood up for our eyes against a rose veil of sunset pinned with the diamond heads of stars. Away to our left, as we ran towards the town, was a dark building like Eton College chapel standing on a wind-swept hill; and this I knew to be the convent of Miraflores, where Isabel la Católica employed Gil de Siloe to make for her father and mother the "most beautiful tomb in the world."

I felt a sense of possession in the grand old town, coming upon it thus at its best; and I was glad that fate had driven me into my own land en automobile. Even though, in following Carmona to watch over the girl we both loved, I might have to keep often to the beaten track made commonplace by tourists, the way would never be really commonplace, as to sightseers who take the ordinary round by train.

Each new hour of life on the road would build up knowledge for me of my people and my country. I should not be studying it in any obvious, guide-book way, and I should learn more of real Spain in a few weeks than in months of conscientious railway plodding from one point to another.

There was no question which hotel Carmona might choose. He would go to the best; consequently unobtrusive persons whose hopes lay in keeping to the background, must select one less good.

We halted outside the town, while I consulted a guide-book for the most Spanish fonda in Burgos. When, straining my eyes in the twilight, I read out a name, Dick exclaimed, "That's where Angèle's friends the O'Donnels are staying."

"All the better," said I. "You can carry out your commission without trouble. Perhaps you'll see them at dinner. They're sure to be the only foreigners there, so it will be easy to pick out their Irish faces in a dining-room full of Spaniards."

There was little room in my mind for the O'Donnel family, however. We were near Monica now, and my one desire was to let her know that I had not failed.

We drove through a fine old gateway, up a broad street, and past big barracks, opposite to which was the hotel where Carmona would stop. But his Lecomte had already disappeared; and though Dick clamoured for dinner, I waited only long enough to secure rooms at our own fonda and put up the car, before going out in search of information.

By this time the Duke and his friends would be dining, and I could venture as far as the lower offices of their hotel without much fear of being seen by Carmona's sharp eyes. In any case, I decided to risk it, and on the way mapped out a plan of action.

A couple of porters were in the bare hall of the ground floor as I entered. Walking in with a businesslike air, I said in Spanish, “Have you some people here who came in a red automobile? They ought to have arrived this evening.”

“No, señor,” replied one of the men. “We have a party staying for the night who came in a grey automobile.”

Good fellow, how well he played into my hands! Hiding delight under a look of disappointment, I said that my friends were in a red automobile. “They may have been belated,” I went on. “They'll probably turn up before midnight. I hope you'll have good rooms to give them, at the front of the house. They're very particular.”

“I'm afraid all our best rooms are occupied,” said the man. “The señor who came in the grey automobile has taken five rooms along the front, on the first floor, with a private sitting-room. Unfortunately, your friends will have to put up with something at the back.”

I expressed regret, and went away joyful, having astonished the porter by pressing upon him two pesetas. I now knew all I wanted to learn, even—roughly speaking—the position of Monica's room; and I saw a way of sending her a message.

Dick was ready for dinner when I got back, but I did not try his patience long. He had inquired if the O'Donnels were still in the hotel, and had been told that they were, though they were leaving in a day or two. This was all we knew when we entered the

dining-room, but, as a good many people were still seated at the long table and the numerous small ones, we glanced about in search of Mademoiselle de la Mole's friends.

There was not a face to be seen which you would not confidently have pronounced to be Spanish, if you had met it at the North Pole.

Dick and I sat down at a little table and began to talk in English, while round us on every side the Spanish language—pure Castilian, and slipshod, mellifluous Andaluz—gushed forth like a golden fountain.

Hunger, long unappeased, at first inclined Dick to a cynical view of life in general, and Spanish hotel life in particular, but his temper improved as the meal went on, and he even forgave me for deserting a starving man.

"No sign of the O'Donnels," said he. "Perhaps they've a private dining-room."

"I doubt there's one in the house," said I.

"Well, I'll inquire later," Dick went on. "I've looked at every face here, and—"

"At one in particular," I cut in.

Dick reddened. "I hope I haven't been staring," said he; "but she *is* the ideal Spanish girl, isn't she? If I were an artist, I'd want to paint her." As he spoke, his eyes wandered towards the table next ours, which, since a dish of Spanish peppers, rice, and chicken made a man of him, had monopolized all the attention he could spare from dinner.

I had noticed this; hence my gibe. But Dick was not far wrong about the girl.

Her place at the table put her opposite him; and her companion was a rotund, brown man, with the beaming face of a middle-aged cherub, and the habit of murmuring his contributions to the conversation in an Andalucían voice, with an Andalucían accent mellifluous as Andalucían honey.

The girl herself was true Andaluza, too, though of a very different type from the cherubic person who (Dick hoped) was her father. No such brown stars of eyes ever opened to the world outside Andalucía; nor did any save an Andaluza know, without being taught, how to give such liquid, yet innocent, glances as those, which occasionally

sparkled from under her long lashes for Dick, when the Cherub was not looking.

She was a slim young thing, with a heart-shaped face of an engaging olive pallour; a pretty, self-conscious mouth, which changed bewitchingly from moment to moment; and heavy masses of dark hair piled high after the Spanish fashion, as if to suit a mantilla—hair so smooth and glossy that, from a little distance, it had the effect of being carved from a block of ebony.

“She's perfect of her kind,” said I; “but I thought you preferred American types.”

“Rot!” said Dick. “Comparisons are odious. I say, thank Heaven for a pretty girl, whatever she may be. But there's something particularly fascinating about this one.”

“I see a serious objection to her from your point of view,” I went on. “She's too young. You draw the line at them under twenty-two. I'll bet you she won't see twenty-two for a couple of years yet.”

“She might be worth waiting for,” said Dick.

“No good. She'll be married long before twenty-two. All self-respecting Spanish girls are. You'd better not think of her any more. Forget her, and look up Miss O'Donnel.”

“Angèle de la Mole says Miss O'Donnel's pretty,” said Dick. As he spoke, he beckoned a waiter; and I noticed that the girl with the eyes no longer made any pretence of hiding her interest in Dick. She even whispered to her companion, who, after listening to what she had to say, turned to look at us with benign curiosity.

“Ask whether he knows Colonel O'Donnel and Miss O'Donnel by sight,” Dick commanded when the waiter appeared, to breathe benevolence and garlic upon us in equal quantities. He was shy of airing his own Spanish before a roomful of Spanish people.

I asked; the waiter looked surprised, and to Dick's confusion and my astonishment, indicated the occupants of the next table.

“The colonel and the señorita,” said he. It was so startlingly like an introduction that the cherubic brown man sprang up and bowed; and the girl, bending over the mazapan in her plate, let us see the very top coil on her crown of black hair.

Dick, overwhelmed, and recalling every word we had said, as a drowning man recalls each wicked deed of his life from childhood up, got to his feet, and began stammering explanations.

"Well, that shows what an idiot a man can make of himself," said he. "Miss—Mademoiselle de la Mole gave me a letter of introduction, and a parcel with some little present, and I was looking around for you. My name's Richard Waring; I don't know whether mademoiselle's written about me. Anyhow—"

"Señor," announced Colonel O'Donnel, grieved at Dick's distress; "no entiendo."

"Habla usted español?" asked the girl. "No Inglees, we, much." And she smiled a dimpled smile, straight at Dick, with one side glint for me.

Dick was, to use against him a favourite word of his own, flabbergasted. "Then you're not Colonel and Miss O'Donnel?" said he. "I though you couldn't be, but—"

"Si, si," the Cherub reassured him, nodding. "O'Donnel. Aw—right." He laughed so contagiously that we laughed too; and I found my heart warming to these unexpected, surprising friends of Angèle de la Mole's.

"Me María del Pilar Inés O'Donnel y Alvarez," the girl introduced herself. "Angèle de la Mole, mi—mi *fren*." Having wavered so far, between Spanish and English, she flung herself headlong into her native tongue. This was the signal for the Cherub also to begin fluent explanations, both fluting Andaluz together, and so fast, that Dick (painstakingly taught a little Castilian by me in leisure moments) found himself at sea, and drowning.

I had to translate for him such facts in the O'Donnel family history as I could unravel from the tangled web. The mystery of Angèle de la Mole's Spanish-speaking Irish friends (which she must have refrained from explaining in order to play a joke upon Dick) was solved in a sentence. An O'Donnel grandfather had fought in Spain under Wellington in the Peninsular War, and stayed in Spain because he loved a Spanish girl who had many acres. The Cherub's father was born in Spain, and spoke little English. The Cherub himself spoke none, or but a word or two. He was a colonel in the Spanish army, now retired. That was all; except that his son and

daughter had once studied an English grammar, until they came to the verbs; then they had stopped, because life was short and full of other things. “But,” said Miss O'Donnel proudly, “me know, two, three, word. Lo-vely. Varry nice. Aw raight. Yes.”

When she thus displayed the store of her accomplishments, punctuated with dimples, any man not head over ears in love with another girl, would have given his eyes to kiss her. I was sorry for Dick. As for me—I found myself longing to tell Doña María del Pilar Inés O'Donnel y Alvarez all about Lady Monica Vale, with the conviction that her help would be of inestimable value.

Such is the power of a girl's eyes upon weak man, even when he adores a very different pair of eyes; and already it was strange to remember my stiff disclaimer of a wish to know the O'Donnels. I had called them “extraneous.” What a dull ass!

XI

María del Pilar to the Rescue

At last, when the general confusion had subsided, I was able to impress upon the delightful pair that, if they would but speak very slowly, and kindly trouble themselves to give a word of three syllables, say, two of them (a punctilious habit disapproved in Andalucía) Señor Waring would be able to join the conversation. With true Spanish goodheartedness they did their best, though Heaven knows what it must have cost them. Dick also did his best, with a conscientious American pronunciation; but where tongues halted, eyes spoke a universal language, and we all got on so well that in ten minutes we might have known each other for ten years.

By the end of those minutes we were asked to the O'Donnel's sitting-room, which had been furbished up out of a bedroom; and there Dick brought the famous letter of introduction and the white paper parcel tied with pink ribbon.

My name had not been mentioned by Angèle. I was merely a "friend of Mr. Waring's"; and, it seemed, I had been designated vaguely thus in a previous letter in which our arrival had been prophesied. This had been Angèle's way of leaving it open for me to introduce myself as I pleased; but now there was no secret with which I would not have felt safe in trusting our old friends the O'Donnels, so I gave them my real name.

The Cherub's face lit up. "I knew your father well," said he. "We learned soldiering together as boys, though he was four or five years my senior, and the hero of my youth. Our ideas"—--he coughed in an instant's embarrassment—"were different. This separated us. But I never forgot him. He was a great man; and it's an event to meet his son. When I saw you downstairs in the dining-room, it was like going back thirty years. Such a young man as you are now, was your father when I had my last sight of him. You are his living portrait."

We shook hands; and I believe, with the slightest encouragement, the dear old fellow would have planted a kiss on each of my cheeks. That he did not, was a tribute to my English education.

The next thing was, that at Dick's request I was telling them everything; and as Pilar listened to the story which prefaced my errand in Spain, her eyes, which had been stars, became suns. When I spoke Carmona's name, she and her father uttered an exclamation.

“El Duque de Carmona!” echoed the Cherub.

“He!” cried Pilar. And they looked at each other.

For a single second, I asked myself if my frankness had been a mistake.

“You know the Duke?” I asked.

“Santa María, but do we know him!” breathed the girl. “I wish we could tell you no.”

“You don't like him?”

“Do we like the Duke, Papa?”

The good Cherub shook his head portentously. “The Duke of Carmona is a bad man,” he said. “He has not done *us* any harm—”.

“Oh—oh!” Pilar cut him short. “He has not driven into a convent one of my best-loved friends?”

“My daughter refers to a sad story,” explained her father. “In Madrid it made a stir at the time. He jilted a school friend of Pilarcita's. That is almost an unheard-of thing in Spain; but he did it. The young girl's family got into trouble at Court—an insignificant affair; but the Duke is ambitious of favour. He had something to retrieve, after the scandal during the Spanish-American War, when he was quite a young man—not more than twenty-four—and—”

“You mean, the story that he speculated in horses—bought wretched crocks cheap and sold them to the army for the cavalry, with the connivance of the vets he's supposed to have bribed?”

“Yes. He managed to clear himself; but the royalties looked at him coldly, and he is not a man to bear that. The father of the girl—Pilarcita's friend—was at one time much liked by the young King, and people thought it was Carmona's motive for engaging himself. With the first breath of the storm the Duke was off; and the discarded fiancée entered as a novice the convent where she and my

daughter went to school. That is why Pilarcita so much dislikes him—"

"But it's not all!" cried the girl. "What about the grey bull, poor Corcito."

Colonel O'Donnel laughed his gentle, chuckling laugh.

"Our home is close to a ganadería—a bull-farm of the Duke's near Seville," he explained indulgently. "The places adjoin; and as I've allowed this Pilarcita to grow up a wild girl, very different from the young ladies of Seville she should emulate, she has made friends of the Duke's cattle. There were, some years ago, a grey bull that was as tame with her as a pet dog; but it took a dislike to the Duke, who came to have a look at his bulls once, and attacked him. The saying is that the Moorish blood in the Carmonas gives them a cruel temper. At all events, Carmona could not forgive the bull its disrespect, and promptly had it sent off to the slaughter-house, though it was a toro bravo."

"That's like him," said I.

"There's nothing he wouldn't do against an enemy, or to gain a thing he wanted," said Pilar, turning to me. "Take care, now he wants something you want."

"It's been so between our families for generations," I said. "My grandfather ran away with the girl his grandfather wanted to marry, and my father and his in their youth had a furious lawsuit."

"Which won?" asked the girl.

"My father."

"Be sure he will remember," said she. "Oh, how I wish we could help you! It would be such a revenge upon him for poor Eulalia and for Corcito. Papa, *can't* we do something?"

"If we could," echoed the Cherub, "*for his father's son!*"

Suddenly the girl jumped up and clapped her hands. "Oh, I have thought of the thing!" she cried "It would be like a play." But her face fell. "I don't know how to propose it," said she. "Perhaps you and Mr. Waring would disapprove. And how could we invite ourselves—"

She stopped; but I made her go on. "Please tell us," I said. "It's sure to be a splendid plan. And anything associated with you would bring luck."

“This would be very much associated with us,” said she, laughing; “for the idea is that, instead of going home by rail as we meant to do, day after to-morrow, we go on in your car with you, pretending to be Mr. Waring's guests, and you supposed to be my brother Cristóbal.”

“Pilarcita, some wild bird has built its nest in your brain,” said the Cherub.

“Wait till I finish!” the girl commanded. And it was easy to see that, though her father shook his head, she was a spoilt darling who could do nothing wrong.

“I only wish Cristóbal were here,” she went on, breathlessly; “but there was a regimental dinner, and he had to leave us. He'll come in later, and you shall meet him, and hear what he says to the plan. Oh, there's not much fear that he'll object, when you are Angèle's friend, and she's doing all she can for you. He'd walk through fire to please Angèle. And this would be but to give up his leave—or at least the going home with us—and lending you his uniform, which I'm sure would fit you sweetly.”

I could not help laughing at the way she disposed of her brother and his plans, to say nothing of those she was making for me; but she rushed on, anxious to justify her counsel.

“You don't understand yet,” she insisted. “It's a *wonderful* idea. You see, papa and I have met the Duke in Madrid, at friends' houses. I've scarcely spoken to him, for Spanish girls don't have much chance to talk with men, but he'll remember me, and papa too. The lucky thing is, he's never seen my brother since Cristóbal was a little boy, and then no more than once or twice, when he came out to his ganadería. He must know, if he stops to think, that papa has a son; that's all. And you say the Duke only saw you at the fancy dress ball, in a Romeo costume, with a fair wig. When Lady Monica Vale gave that start forward, and looked at you in the automobile, although you'd made your car different he fancied you might be in it, and telegraphed to have the man he suspected kept back at Iran. Well, it was clever of you to change with your chauffeur; but all the same, if you go on, dressed as a chauffeur, you can never have a chance to get near Lady Monica. And if you appear as yourself, even though the Duke isn't sure it's *you*, he'll keep Lady Monica out of your way. And her mother will help him, as she wants them to marry. But think how different for my brother! We all happen to meet—suppose it's in the

cathedral—and papa says: 'How do you do? You don't remember Cristóbal?' He'd simply have to accept you as Cristóbal, although he might find Cristóbal rather like that troublesome Marqués de Casa Triana."

"Casa Triana is also Cristóbal," I laughed. "Ramón Cristóbal."

"All the better. We shouldn't any of us have to fib. I always said Cristóbal is the luckiest saint to have for a patron. See how he's *offering* his help to you. And oh, *did* you know he's the patron saint of automobilists? To-morrow I'll give you a Cristóbal medal to nail on your car. They're made on purpose; such ducks! But now do you begin to understand what I'm driving at, and that it wasn't just *impudence* to suggest our going in your automobile, papa and I? What with us, and San Cristóbal, you ought to get your foot on the Duke's head."

"But what about your brother Cristóbal?"

"Oh, he! We must all thank San Cristóbal that he has this leave, otherwise the Duke could easily find out; but instead of going home he can go—why, he can go to Biarritz, where he will see Angèle, so it will be nice all round. And imagine yourself in his uniform, walking with us in the cathedral, where the Duke is sure to take Lady Monica and her mother,—otherwise, why stop at Burgos? One comes for that, and nothing else, unless one has a little brother in the garrison. *Now* what do you say, Don Ramón?"

"I say you're an angel," I replied with promptness. "But I also say that Colonel O'Donnel won't allow such an arrangement."

"Oh, won't he?" exclaimed Pilar. "Do you think I'm an ordinary girl of southern Spain, who says 'yes, yes,' and 'no, no,' as her parents wish, and looks down on the ground while life passes? Only to think of being like that is enough to make a woman grow a moustache and have an embonpoint out of sheer ennui. It's my Irish heart which keeps my father and brother alive; and when I want to do a thing they hurry to let me do it lest I have a fit—of which I would be capable."

"As you are a Cristóbal," said the Cherub mildly, "it might be managed, if you liked, without our having to go more than an extra time to confession. I could wear the sin upon my conscience, if you could; and if you could wear also the uniform of my son."

“I'd like to see Carmona's face when you're introduced,” remarked Dick, in his slow Spanish.

“You will see it,” exclaimed Pilar; and with this, the door opened and the other Cristóbal came in.

XII

Under a Balcony

I liked the brother because he had his sister's eyes, and—being the ordinary, selfish, human man—I liked him still better for his enthusiastic desire to help the last of the Casa Trianas. Whether his enthusiasm was for the sake of Casa Triana, or Angèle de la Mole, was a detail. It had the same effect upon my affairs; and having taken very little time for reflection. I let myself be hurried away on the tide.

Pilar—as unlike a Spanish girl in mind as she was like one in face—stage-managed us all. We merely accepted our parts in the play, I thankfully, the others calmly.

Brother Cristóbal was, perhaps, not sorry to make an unexpected flight to Biarritz, with news of Dick and me as an excuse, instead of spending his leave tamely at home. There was, at all events, a suspicious alacrity about the way in which he agreed to disappear as early as possible the following day. As he was wearing the uniform which was to be made over to me, it was decided that he should bring it to my room next morning before hearing mass at the cathedral. It was Pilar's idea that I should go there with him, getting off before the fonda was fully astir, and seek sanctuary in dusky corners of remote chapels until my friends arrived.

“We'll find out when the Duke and his mother take Lady Monica to look at the cathedral,” said the girl, delighting in her own ingenuity; “and then we'll start too. Though we can't bear the Duke, we've always been civil to him and his mother whenever we've met in Madrid, praise the saints, so they can't be rude to us now. If we go up and speak, they'll have to introduce us to Lady Vale-Avon and Lady Monica. I shall take a *great* fancy at first sight to Lady Monica, of course; and I shouldn't wonder if I can make her like *me*. The rest will be easy for the whole trip. Oh, we shall have fun!”

I began to think we should, and that, thanks to a girl's counter-plotting, I should have pretty plain sailing in spite of Carmona. But because I began to see land ahead, I was the more anxious to give Monica peace of mind; and when we said good-night to the O'Donnels about half-past ten, I set out to carry through the plan I had thought of before dinner.

On the wall of the landlord's office, off the main hall, I had seen a guitar hanging. It belonged to his son, a romantic-looking young fellow, whose sympathetic soul delighted in lending the national aid to courtship, without asking a single question.

I would be no true Spaniard if I could not play the guitar; and in fact my mother had given me some dexterity with the instrument, before I was ten years old. I had neglected it for years; nevertheless, my fingers had but to touch the strings to be on friendly terms with them.

Madrid and Seville would probably be waking up to fullest life at this hour; but in provincial towns one goes to bed early because there is nothing more amusing to do.

At eleven the windows of the principal hotel were dark; and without being stared at curiously by any passer-by, I stationed myself under the first floor balconies, with my guitar.

I did not know which room was Monica's, but I did know that it could not be far away; and I counted on the chance that anxious thoughts might keep her from sleeping soundly.

Softly, and then more boldly, I began to thrum the air of the Hungarian waltz which they had played that night at the Duchess of Carmona's, while I told Monica I loved her. Often its passionate refrain had echoed in my ears since, and brought the scene before me. I hoped that Monica also might remember.

Five minutes passed, and still I played on, yet nothing happened. Then, when I had begun to fear failure, I heard a faint sound overhead. A window was opening. There was no gleam of light, no whisper; but something soft and small fell close to my feet. I stooped and picked it up. It was a rose, weighted by a grey suède glove, tied round the stem; and the glove was scented with orris, the same delicate fragrance which had come to me when I kissed Monica's hand, and her letters.

She had had my message, and answered it.

XIII

What Happened in the Cathedral

Before six next morning, Cristóbal O'Donnel was tapping at my door, with the promised uniform and accoutrements concealed under the military overcoat which was also to be put at my disposal.

Hearing our voices, Waring appeared, yawning, at the door of the adjoining room, and there was a good deal of stifled laughter among the three of us, as I got into my borrowed red and blue. The things fitted well enough, as I have only an inch or two the advantage of the other Cristóbal, and even the cap accommodated itself to my head almost as if it had been made for me. When I was ready for the part assigned by Pilar, Dick said that I had never looked so well before, and probably never would again.

My suit-cases were packed, and the programme which Dick had to carry out when O'Donnel and I had gone, was to settle our account at the hotel, get the luggage bestowed on the roof of the car, and finally to drive round to the cathedral door, in order to start from there in the end, without going back to the fonda or garage. We were grumbling at the absence of poor Ropes, when there was a discreet knock at the door, and Ropes himself appeared as we opened it, like a jack-in-the-box.

His happy smile was changed to a stare of surprise at sight of me in the uniform of a Spanish officer, but true to his training he ironed all expression out of his features in an instant, and allowed himself to look only decorously pleased when Dick and I welcomed him with enthusiasm.

“Well done!” said I. “Did you break out of gaol?” But to tell the truth I was faintly uneasy; because, if he had, it would mean trouble

for us all presently, when we had been traced by the police. But I need not have doubted the faithful Ropes.

“No, sir, I didn't break out,” he replied. “I wouldn't have done that in any case, though I didn't like to think of my work on your hands. But I'll tell you how it was, if I won't be disturbing you.”

O'Donnel, who could not understand a word, thought that he must be off, as he wanted to hear mass and catch the train for Biarritz. I let him go without me, therefore; and after our good-byes, Dick and I clamoured for Ropes' story.

“It was a rum go altogether, sir,” said he. “They took me off to the head police office at Irun, and the chief asked me all manner of questions; but I kept on repeating ‘no comprendo,’ and showing the cards of Mr. George Smith. I couldn't understand all their jabber, but they mentioned your name, and from the way they looked when I put on my stupid airs, I thought they began to have their doubts. The chief policeman motioned me to stop where I was, and ordered two of the men to go somewhere. From my place, I could see the bridge, and the two policemen who seemed to be looking for something.

“By and by came the thrum of an automobile, and I could tell it was a Lecomte. A minute later the chaps outside were talking to the Duke of Carmona, who stopped his car where they were. They talked a bit; then he gave the wheel to his chauffeur and came into the police office. The chief treated him very deferential; they laid their heads together in a corner, but I could see them reading a telegram, and once and again they had a squint at me.

“I knew too much to let on I suspected the Duke of a hand in the business, but having heard him answer Mr. Waring about the tyre in English as good as my own, I jumped up and asked if he'd interpret for me with the police. I explained what had happened, showed my card, and said there'd been a silly mistake which was causing me no end of annoyance. Then I said I'd write to The Times, about the sort of thing that happened to Englishmen travelling in Spain, and talked of the Embassy at Madrid.

“All the time I was speaking the Duke pulled his moustache and stared so hard, if I'd had on a false moustache or wig, or any of that kind of business, he'd have been sure to find it out. He looked cross and puzzled too; but finally he said, as I was English, and he believed

they were wanting a Spaniard, there must be a mistake, and he would do the best he could to help me. I suppose he must have told them they were on the wrong job after all, for after he'd gone, and they'd buzzed awhile and made out a lot of papers, they said that as a very important person certified to my being Mr. George Smith, I could go.

"By this time it was afternoon, and I wanted to get on as soon as possible, so I took the next train for San Sebastian, and hunted up a place to hire a motor bike. I didn't know where you'd have gone after that, so I couldn't book by train; but I counted on picking up your trail if I kept the road."

"How could you expect to do that, since there must be a lot of automobiles going back and forth between Biarritz and San Sebastian, even at this time of year?" said I.

"Why, from the non-skids, sir. I'd know ours anywhere. There's three of the steel studs worn close down on the off driving wheel, which makes a queer little mark in dust or mud. I could even see, once I got on to the tracks, that you'd followed the Duke's car, for your tracks came sometimes on his, almost obliterating his trail for a bit. I can tell you, sir, it cheered me up to be coming on your tracks like that. Made me feel at home in a strange country. The bike took me along pretty well, too; but do the best I could, night came on without my overtaking you. For fear of losing the tracks, I put up at a posada, got under way the minute there was a streak of dawn, and found you here by inquiring."

"You're a regular Sherlock Holmes as well as a thorough brick, Ropes," said I. "Now, have something to eat; get the motor bicycle back to San Sebastian by rail, and be ready for another start."

With this I was off, leaving him to Dick. I turned the collar of Cristóbal's big coat up to my eyes, pulled the cap down far enough almost to meet it, and went out, praying to meet none of Cristóbal's fellow-officers.

The wild wind for which Burgos is famed wailed through the long, arcaded streets with their tall yellow buildings, and tried to hurl me back from the great honey-coloured gateway with its towers and pinnacles, where I would have paused to pick out the statue of the Cid from other battered statues in weather-beaten niches.

The few men who passed, wrapped in black capas turned over with blue or crimson, had the fine-cut, melancholy features of those who live in northern cold, and their glances were as chill as the weather. But that was better than if they had taken too much interest in a strange face in a familiar uniform; and it would have needed more than a freezing stare to blight the spring in my heart, for I was going to Monica.

I was ready to love Burgos for the sake of my childhood's hero, the brave old Cid, with whom every stone seemed to be associated. This was the city of the Cid as well as the country of the Cid; and if I had come into my fatherland as a sightseer, and not as a lover, I should have gone on a pilgrimage to his tomb at the convent of San Pedro de Cárdeña, only a few kilometres out of Burgos—that City of Battles.

As it was, I should have to be content with reading about it in some book, for Carmona would not desert his car to go; and where Carmona went, there must I go also.

At least I had a cup of coffee at "The Café of the Cid" on my way to the cathedral; and the first landmark I sought in that triumph of Gothic grandeur was the coffer of the Cid. I might have hours to wait, I knew, before the others would come, though in order to reach Valladolid at a decent hour, they must not delay too long. But sooner or later they would certainly arrive, for Carmona could not, for shame's sake, rush Monica out of Burgos without showing her the glory of Burgos. And meanwhile, for none save a paltry soul could Time have halted, heavy-footed, as a companion in that realm of shadowed splendour.

It was the first of the famous cathedrals of Spain on which I, an outcast son, had set my eyes; and a glimpse of the twin-spires from afar had given me some inkling of its beauty. Wrapped in sunset flames, I had seen the towers as if cut in precious stones, chiselled, according to legend by angels, like a queen's bracelet, adorned like an old reliquary. I had said to myself that the vast building was a wild festival in a stone, a bravura song in architecture. And if I remembered, as I looked, other twin towers which are the glory of the Rhine, I tried to put the reminiscence away, because I wanted the cathedrals of Spain to be different from those of any other country. I wanted them to speak to me with their own national inspiration. And this morning, as I flitted with the other shadows into the solemn

dusk of the great nave, I was satisfied. I found no German inspiration here. Each detail struck the same curiously national note, from the rare iron-work to the octagonal lantern, a miracle of Plateresque design, which lifted itself, clear and bright, above the centre of the great church. Perhaps the effect lay partly in the gorgeous colour, colour never tawdry, never vulgar, as I had seen it sometimes in Italy; or else in the wonderful reliefs; statues in niches of gold, flowering stones, arabesques, alabaster columns, richly-toned pictures; but no matter whence it came, it was there, and could have been nowhere except in Spain.

I wandered from chapel to chapel, saw the strange mummy-like figure of the Christ of Burgos, supposed to shed blood every Friday; admired the treasures of the sacristy; and, I am half-ashamed to say, had just dedicated a candle to propitiate San Cristóbal, when my heart gave a leap at sight of four persons who appeared from behind the grand coro which fills the nave.

The old Duchess of Carmona, brown, stout, yet somehow stately, and the tall figure of Lady Vale-Avon advanced towards me, side by side. Behind came Monica, fresh and sweet in her white-winged grey hat and travelling dress, and the Duke of Carmona, dark as a Moor in contrast with her young fairness.

I dared not break upon her unexpectedly, after my experience of yesterday, so I turned away, and entering a chapel interested myself in a tomb which is the cherished jewel of the cathedral.

How long I could have kept my patience under provocation I can't tell; but my strength of mind had not been tested for five minutes when I heard the voice of my adopted sister Pilarcita. She and the excellent Cherub were claiming acquaintance with the Duke.

They were close to the chapel in which I stood. Half turning I saw the group, which consisted of six persons. Dick was not among them, and I wondered whether he were absent by design or accident.

Now the Duchess and the Cherub were talking together. Now the O'Donnel's were being introduced to Lady Vale-Avon and Monica. The two girls began chatting together. Dear Pilar, what a jewel of a sister she was!

“Do you remember Cristóbal?” I heard her suddenly ask Carmona, in a voice raised to such clear distinctness that I guessed she had

seen a uniform behind the iron-work of the half-open chapel door. “You saw my brother, I think, when he was a little boy. He's stationed here now; we've been visiting him.”

I took this as my cue, and turning from the sleeping figure of Bishop Alonso de Cartagena, I walked out of the chapel to join my adopted family.

“Why, here's Cristóbal now!” exclaimed Pilar.

Then, in a flash, she had me introduced to all, leaving Monica till the last, so that the girl might have time to get her breath after the first shock of surprise.

Whether it was that yesterday had given her a lesson in self-control, or whether Pilar had contrived to whisper some word concerning her brother, I could not tell; but if Monica changed colour I could not see it, perhaps because a darkening of the sky outside had begun to deepen the rich dusk of the cathedral.

For her own sake I scarcely dared look at her; and my silence must have passed with the others for the shyness of a young soldier among strangers. But I did look at Carmona, feeling his eyes upon me, and met a stare as searching as Röntgen rays.

His face is not one easy to read; but for once the windows of his mind were wide open. If he had recognized me, and guessed the trick which had been played on him he would have worn a very different expression; but he was bewildered, uneasy, as he had been yesterday when he saw Monica lean forward, blushing, to gaze at a masked man in a motor-car.

He realized the likeness between Cristóbal O'Donnel y Alvarez and his own dangerous, though ineligible rival, Casa Triana. I could see the thought dart into his mind and rankle; I could see him push it into a dark corner kept for the rubbish of imagination. I knew how he was telling himself that there could be no connection or collusion between the O'Donnel family and Casa Triana. I hoped he also soothed his anxiety by reminding himself that in all probability Casa Triana, in the blue Gloria car once seen by his chauffeur, was busily forgetting Monica Vale in some distant part of Europe. Carmona had admitted one mistake yesterday: he would not be ready to fall into another to-day.

Lady Vale-Avon was also gazing somewhat sharply at the young Spanish officer, a brother of those old acquaintances of the Duke's. But now she coaxed her eyesight by lifting a lorgnette which, as Mary Stuart, she had not been able to carry on the night of our former meeting; and when a questioning glance at Carmona met with no alarming answer, the suspicious frown faded from her forehead.

After a few words we all, as if with one accord, began to move on upon the tour of inspection; and still there was no sign of Dick.

I would defy anyone to hold out for more than five minutes against the charm of the Cherub. Without raising his voice above a honeyed murmur, and with nothing particular to say, by sheer force of cherubic, Andaluz charm of manner he fascinated the Duchess of Carmona, and even Lady Vale-Avon, to whom he was a new type. She had been studying Spanish with an eye to the future, for she understood and answered Colonel O'Donnel; but with apparent innocence and real subtlety he contrived to keep the Duke busy explaining him, and murmured so many funny things that even Carmona was obliged occasionally to burst out laughing.

Meanwhile, Monica, Pilar, and I were left to follow behind, greatly against the will of the Duke, as I guessed by the sulky set of his shoulders.

“Quick, quick, into this chapel,” whispered Pilar, “before they look round. Then they won't know where we've disappeared, and you'll have five minutes grace.” As she spoke, she caught Monica by the arm, and whisked her into the Capilla del Condestable. Once behind the iron lattice, she darted away as if moved by a sudden passion to gaze at the carved altar piece.

“How wonderful!” said Monica. I caught her hands, which she held out to me, and then we laughed into each other's eyes, in sheer happiness and triumph over fate. “To think that you're here, after all.”

“Wherever you are, I'm going to be, while you want me,” said I, “and until we know whether I shall have to take you away.”

“I might have known you wouldn't fail me,” she said. “But I was so unhappy yesterday. When I saw that handkerchief I knew at once who you were, though I should never have guessed, with those awful goggles, and I couldn't help giving a jump, and getting red. But I

shall never be so stupid again. I'll be prepared for anything. Just a whisper from Señorita O'Donnel was enough this time. While we shook hands she said, 'Something's going to happen.' So I was ready. Only it does seem too good to be true."

"Here's the glove and the rose you threw me," I said, showing them inside my coat.

"Here's the music you played to me," she answered, touching her heart; and I would have given a year of my life to kiss her. "Oh, tell me, is Miss O'Donnel any relation to you, really?"

"Only a very good and clever friend," said I, for there was not much time to waste in explaining things more or less irrelevant. "All this was her idea, to give me a chance of getting near you. And, as Cristóbal's my name too, as well as her brother's, the thing has been managed without a fib. Brother Cristóbal has leave. Friend Cristóbal will spend it with the family; that is, they're all going in that red car you saw yesterday—wherever you go. It would save a lot of anxiety if you could tell where that will be."

"I can't," said Monica. "I fancy mother's afraid I might find some way of letting you know; anyway, the Duke is always talking about how pleasant it is not to make plans beforehand, but to let each day arrange itself. I don't know how or where we're to spend the time before we get to Seville; but for Holy Week we're to be at the Duke's house. I'm not afraid of anything, though, now you're near; and I think I shall let myself be happy, in spite of the Duke, for your Spain is glorious, and I love it. I wish it weren't the Duke's Spain too!"

"He thinks it's all his," said I. "Is he bothering you much?"

"No. He's being nice to me. You know, I refused him in Biarritz; but mother came in while I was doing it, and told him that I was too young to know my own mind; that he must be patient, and she could almost promise I'd change it. I said I wouldn't, but that made no difference. And as mother wanted to come on this trip, I had to come too. I have an idea they've made up a plan between them that I shall be left in peace till Seville, if I behave myself. If they suspect who you really are, though, it will be dreadful. I don't know what will happen."

"They can't make you marry Carmona," I said.

“No. How could they? such things can't be done nowadays; at least, I suppose they can't; and yet, when people are strong and determined, and unscrupulous too, one never knows what they may be planning, what they may be capable of doing. Often, in the night, I try to think what they *could* do, and tell myself they could do *nothing*, unless I consented, which, of course, I never would. Oh, I shall be very happy and safe now. It will even be amusing, or it would be if I were sure the Duke couldn't harm *you*.”

“He tried yesterday and failed,” said I. “If he tries again, he'll fail again. But for the present, he thinks it was a false alarm, and perhaps believes I've stopped in Biarritz, sulking.”

“It was dangerous for you to come,” said Monica.

I laughed. “Don't I look like the sort of fellow who can take care of himself—and maybe the girl he loves, too?”

“Yes, yes,” she answered. “How I love you, and how proud I am of you. If you should stop caring—if you should find it wasn't worth while—”

“We've too few moments together to discuss impossibilities.”

“Ah, but you have known me such a short time. Suppose you should see someone else—” and she glanced at Pilar's pretty, heart-shaped face, and the velvet eyes raised in contemplation of a carved Madonna.

“There's nobody else but you in the world,” I had begun, when Pilar beckoned. “They're coming,” she said. “You must be looking at this sweet little panel, Lady Monica. Cristóbal, go instantly and stare as hard as you can at San Gerónimo on the other side. See, that pet who is twisting his dear feet.”

It was thus they found us; the two girls chatting over the perfection of the tombs of the constable and his wife; the soldier blind to the charms of his sister's companion, and wrapped in reverent contemplation of a wooden masterpiece.

“We were so stupid to lose you,” said Pilar. “But we thought you'd be sure to come back this way by and by.”

XIV

Some Little Ideas of Dick's

We said good-bye presently, still in the cathedral, all very polite and conventionally interested in each other's affairs. Pilar ingenuously hoped that we might meet again in Madrid. The Duke said he hoped so too, but did not know, as they were motoring, and stopped each day where fancy prompted. Pilar thought this charming, and said that we were going to have a little trip with an automobile, too. An American friend had invited us.

At that very moment the American friend was visible in the dim distance, standing with his back to us, gazing at an alabaster tomb. One would have thought he had some reason for avoiding us, or else escaping an introduction to the others, for he let them leave the cathedral before he tore himself away from his study of the sleeping cardinal. When they had vanished, however, he came towards us with a briskness which showed that he had taken more interest in our movements than he appeared to do.

“It's gone off beautifully!” Pilar informed him. “And you did exactly right, Señor Waring. You see,” she said to me, “on second thoughts one saw he'd better keep out of the way, for fear the Duke might begin to put two and two together, just as he was noticing that Cristóbal looked rather like someone else. He caught a glimpse of Señor Waring's face yesterday, in the car, and it will be safer for him not to see *us* in that car until we have gone on a little further. Then, he will have had time to get used to my brother's face, as my brother's. Wasn't that a clever idea of mine?”

We all praised her; and praised her again when she explained her policy in having dropped a hint about our American motoring friend, so that she need not be suspected of having tried to conceal anything when the car appeared on the scene.

“The Duke's auto was at the door when I came in,” said Dick. “He must have seen ours.”

“Yes. But he saw you, too, prowling round the cathedral by yourself. I suppose you have as much right to be motoring in Spain as he has, seeing the sights?”

This was true. And as the grey car had now probably gone off, it was time that ours persued.

Ropes was in his seat, coated and legginged once more in leather, and so well goggled that there was no reason why he should be associated in any mind with that Mr. George Smith who had threatened to air his wrongs in The Times. He had seen the other car go, so we must follow. We crossed the Arlanzon and I looked back regretfully at the citadel of Burgos, rising in the middle of the town. We had had no time to visit that castle in which so much history has been made. There the Cid was married; there he held prisoner Alfonso of Leon; there was Edward the First of England married to Eleanor of Castile; and there Pedro the Cruel first saw the light. But if there was one regret more pressing than another, it was that I could not go to the Town Hall and pay my respects to those bones of the Cid, and Ximena his wife, so strangely restored to Burgos, after their extraordinary wanderings to far Sigmaringen.

“Who is this Thith you all keep talking about?” demanded Dick, as the car spun along the river bank.

“Heavens, don't tell me that you've been brought up in ignorance of our national hero!” I exclaimed. “If I'd dreamed of such a thing, I couldn't have made a friend of you. Why, this was his town. He was married in the citadel. He—”

“How do you spell him?” asked Dick, cautiously.

“C-i-d, of course.”

“Great Scott! you don't mean to say my old friend the Cid was the Thith all the time, and I never knew it? What a blow! I don't see why C-i-d shouldn't spell Cid, even in Spanish; as a Thith I can't respect him.”

“Then let him go to the grave with you as the Cid,” said I. “But you know, or ought to know, that ‘C,’ and ‘Z,’ and sometimes ‘D’ are ‘th’ with us.”

“I never bothered much with trying to pronounce foreign languages,” said Dick. “I just wrestle with the words the best I can in plain American. But now—I always thought it rude to mention it before—I understand why you Spaniards seem to lisp, and hiss out your last syllables like secrets. As for the place we're going to next—”

“Valladolid?” I pronounced it as a Spaniard does, “Valyadoleeth.”

“Yes. That beats the Thith. My tongue isn't built for it, and I shall call it simply Val.”

With murmured regrets from the Cherub that we strangers were turning our backs on Burgos without seeing all its treasures, and sighs from Pilar for the Cartuja de Miraflores, and the most beautiful carved tomb on earth, we turned our faces towards Valladolid.

Our road cut through the arid plain that had stretched before us yesterday. Few trees punctuated the sad song of its monotony; but always in the distance rose yellow hills like lions crouched asleep, lights and shadows sailing above their heads with the bold swoop of the Titanic birds. More than once we crossed the poor, single line of railway, the main thoroughfare between Paris and Madrid, and Dick said that Spain needed a few Americans to wake her up. Three trains a day indeed, and a speed of fifteen miles an hour! People shook their heads and told you that Spain was no country to motor in. Well, it was certainly no country to travel in by rail, unless you wanted to forget where you were going before you got there. He wished he were a managing director; or no, on second thoughts, the thing he'd prefer would be to improve the future of the motor industry. Why, there was a fortune to be picked up by some chap with a little go, and a little capital. Look at these roads, now; not so bad, any of them, as far as we had seen; some, as good as in France; others, only rough because science hadn't been employed in making them; after rain they got soft and muddy, and then hardened into ridges. But a few thousands of dollars, well laid out, would change that. Then, with a good service of automobiles, see what could be done in the way of conveying market produce and a hundred other things. What was the matter with Spaniards that they didn't fix up some scheme of this sort?

The Cherub, listening politely to Dick's remarkable Spanish, and understanding perhaps half, answered mildly that it would be a great deal of trouble, and Spaniards didn't like trouble.

“But I suppose Spaniards like getting rich, don't they?” said Dick, who was resting, and letting Ropes drive, while he made a fourth in the tonneau.

“They are not anxious. It is better to be comfortable,” murmured the Irish-Spaniard. “Besides, it is vulgar to be too rich, and makes one's neighbours unhappy. It is a thing I would not do myself.”

“That is true,” said Pilar. “It isn't what you call sour grapes. Papa could be rich if he liked. We have copper on our land, much copper. Men came and told papa that if he chose to work it he might have one of the best copper mines in Spain.”

“And he wouldn't?” asked Dick.

“Not for the world,” said Colonel O'Donnel, with a flash of pride in his mild, brown eyes. “I do not come of that sort of people. I am an officer. I am not a miner.”

“But,” pleaded Dick, bewildered by this new type of man, who refused to open his door and let money, tons of money, roll in, “but you could sell the land and make an enormous profit. You could keep shares, and—”

“I have no wish to sell,” replied the Cherub.

“Well, you might let others work the mine for you.”

“But I prefer living over it. It's beautiful land. I would not have it made ugly. My ancestors would rise from their graves and cry out against me.”

“Still, we are poor,” said Pilar. “New brother, pray be careful of Cristóbal's clothes,” and she laughed merrily. “It will be a long time before we can afford to buy others.”

“And all that copper eating its head off underground,” gasped Dick.

“We have cousins who are prouder than we about such things,” said Pilar. “Two girls and their mother, who live in Seville. They've a beautiful old house with lovely grounds, but nothing else. How they manage not to starve, the saints know. They've sold their china and jewels—everything but their mantillas—to keep their carriage; and they have to share that with two other families of cousins, each taking it in turn; but they have three doors to the carriage—a door with the family crest of one, a door with the crest of the second, and another with the third; so nobody outside knows. A Scotch company

want to buy their house and land for an hotel, and have offered enough money to make them rich for life; but they'd rather die than give up the place. And although one of my cousins can paint beautifully, and could make a great deal by selling pretty sketches of Seville, her mother won't allow it. I do think it's carrying pride too far; but there are lots of people I know who are like that."

"It makes me feel as if I'd came through a week's illness just to hear it all," said Dick. "I can't get over that copper."

Through village after village we sped smoothly, everyone delighted to see us except the dogs, who resented our coming, and made driving a difficulty, until Ropes picked up a trick which usually served to keep dogs and car out of danger from one another. He would throw up his arms suddenly and the dog, thinking of a whip or a stone, would mechanically spring out of harm's way. By that time we would have whizzed past.

After a short run we reached Torquemada, home of the Grand Inquisitor; crossed the Pisuerga by a long-legged bridge straddling across the river-bed; had a fleeting glimpse of Venta de Baños; came to a straight-cut canal of beryl-green water (which Dick gloomily pronounced a surprising evidence of energy in Spain), and slowed down to wonder at a village of cave dwellings, hollowed out in tiers in the hillside, above the road on our right.

It was such a place as Crockett describes excitingly in one of his books of adventure. All the long, yellow flank of the hill was honeycombed with little, dark doorways and leering windows, whence wild faces looked. From hummocky chimneys rose the smoke of hidden fires burning in the heart of the earth; while down in the road a donkey or two, with their heads in yellow bags and their forefeet tied together with rope, tried to hop away up the steep hill, as if they were gigantic rabbits.

By the waterside stood pollarded trees, scraggy and black, ranged along the shore like naked negro boys, big-headed, with shaggy lumps of wool, hesitating before a plunge. The sandy roads were welcome after stones, and suddenly the landscape began to copy Africa, with shifting yellow sand deserts, brushed by purple shadows of the Sahara. Far away, the mountains, rolling along the wide horizon, glimmered blue, rose, ochre, and white, like coloured marble or a Moorish mosaic. Again we flashed past a troglodyte

village in a hillside; crossed a magnificent bridge, which even Dick approved; wound through a labyrinth of strange streets like the streets in a nightmare, and roads to match; smelt mingled perfumes of incense, burning braziers, cigarettes, and garlic (the true and intimate smell of country Spain); saw Dueñas, where fair Isabel la Católica met Ferdinand in the making of the most romantic of royal courtships; spun through Cabezon: and then, as we entered Valladolid, began bumping and buckjumping over such chasms and ruts as had not yet insulted our wheels in Spain.

"Heavens! What can the City Fathers be thinking about?" gasped Dick, between the jolts which even the best springs could not disguise. On we went, through that famous old town which Philip the Second chose for the capital of Spain; and each street was a more awful revelation than the last. The car pitched and rolled like a vessel in a choppy sea, shuddering to right herself between breakers, though Ropes drove at walking pace. "Who ever heard of roads being all right outside a town, and going to bits in it?" Dick went on. "Why, in America—"

"But this is Spain," the Cherub reminded him.

We had left Burgos at half-past ten, and it was two when we plunged into the town which Dick shortened to "Val." There I took advantage of the part I played, and sought the hotel at which Carmona must lunch or perhaps put up for the night; but to my astonishment he was not to be found at either of the two possible fondas. I was hungry, for I had had no breakfast except a cup of coffee at the Sign of the Cid; but I would not eat until the mystery was solved.

The grey car had been seen coming into town, and none had seen it go out; nevertheless it, with all its passengers, had vanished. While the others went through a high-sounding French menu at the hotel first on the guide-book list, Ropes and I did detective work. It was he, really, who picked up the trail of the Lecomte, when we had walked back to the street it must have entered first; and even for Ropes this would have proved an impossible feat if our automobiles had not been the only two which had passed since the heavy rains. "I've got the pattern of those non-skids printed on my brain, sir, since yesterday," said he. "What I don't know about 'em, isn't worth knowing."

So he pounced upon the thick, straight, dotted line in the mud, and, losing it often, but always picking it out again, we turned and wound till the trail stopped in front of a private house. Later, it went on; but it was evident that the car had paused. The mud was much trampled, and probably luggage had been taken down.

We presumed, therefore, that those we sought were within; but the next thing was to find the resting-place of the Lecomte, lest it should disappear and leave us in the lurch, ignorant of its destination. Luckily for us, the worst was over. The trail led to a stable not far away, and as the doors stood wide open we had the joyous relief of seeing the car being cleansed of its rich coat of mud. The chauffeur was superintending, his back turned to the doors, and we walked quickly on lest he should spy a leather coat and guess that his own game was being played upon him.

“Now you can rest easy, sir,” said Ropes. “That car won't leave this town without my knowing; and it'll go hard if I aren't able to tell you in the course of the next hour whether it's due to start to-day or to-morrow.”

I laughed gratefully. “Thank you, Ropes,” said I. “I shan't ask how you mean to get your information. When you say you can do a thing, I know it's as good as done.”

“It's for me to thank you, sir—for everything,” he replied, flushing with pleasure.

Then we went back to the hotel. And whether Ropes lunched or not I cannot say; but I did, with a good appetite, Dick and my adopted family lingering at the table to hear my news.

In three-quarters of an hour Sherlock Holmes kept his word by sending in a short note, addressed (as I had suggested) to Waring. “Honoured Sir,” it ran, “Lecomte remains night. Master and friends stopping with his relatives. Will let you know time of start in morning, and have our car ready—Respectfully, P. Ropes.”

Some servant of the house or stable-boy had doubtless earned a few pesetas. Just how the trick had been done, was of little importance, for it was done. With a light heart in my breast, and Cristóbal O'Donnel y Alvarez' uniform still unsuitably adorning my back, I went with the others to do some sightseeing, and look for Monica.

We wandered rather aimlessly through the streets, stopping before any building which caught our interest; staring up at the windows behind which Cervantes wrote part of “Don Quixote” when he had come back from slavery; admiring the graceful mirador of that corner house where Philip the Second was born; (“Much too good for him, since the world would have been better if he hadn't been born at all,” said Dick, who has Dutch ancestors and a long memory;) trying to identify the place where Gil Blas studied medicine with Doctor Sangrado; wandering into two or three churches, but wasting no time on the cathedral spoilt by Churriguera.

“As a Spaniard, what's your opinion of the Inquisition?” Dick suddenly asked the Cherub, as if he were inquiring the time of day. We had stopped for a moment in the Plaza Mayor where Philip had watched the heretics burning in their yellow, flame-painted shirts, in the first great auto-da-fé which he organized.

As another Spaniard, I know that this is the one question of all others, perhaps, which it is not wise to put to a Spaniard, even in this comfortable twentieth century. But Dick either did not know, or wished it to appear that he did not know; and I watched the effect of the words. But the Cherub was equal to the occasion—and his cherubicness.

He glanced round instinctively, as a man might a few centuries ago, to make sure that nobody overheard; then smiling slowly, he replied, “I am no judge, señor; I am half-Irishman.”

Pilar had looked disturbed, but she gave a little sigh at this, saying, “Come on, and see the museum.”

Nowhere in Spain can there be a more beautiful thing than that façade, well named Plateresque because of its resemblance to the workmanship of silversmiths; and inside the museum we found a collection of carved wooden figures marvellous enough, as Dick said, to “beat the world.” There were crucifixions, painted saints, and weeping virgins by Hernandez and Berruguete, faultlessly modelled, so vivid and beautiful as to be well-nigh startling; and I hoped that Monica might come while we lingered. But she did not, nor did we see her in the Colegio de San Gregorio. There, in the lovely inner court, however, I found a little grey glove on the marble pavement, and so like a certain other glove did it look that I annexed it, to

compare with that other which lived in my breast-pocket with its friend the rose.

The pair matched in size, colour, and dainty shape. Even the fragrance of orris hung about it, and I knew this second glove had not been dropped by accident. Monica had been here, and she had left a message for me to read if I followed.

XV

How the Duke Changed

“Lecomte getting ready, sir,” were Ropes' first words to me next morning; “and I've brought our car to the door.”

He had other news, too. An automobile had come in last night from Madrid, a sixty horse-power Merlin, and the chauffeur had reported snow half a metre deep on the mountains. The Merlin had stuck, he said, and had to be pulled out with oxen. Supposing the Duke intended going to Madrid instead of turning off by way of Salamanca, he—and incidentally we—seemed likely to come in for an adventure.

We had all taken coffee and rolls in our rooms, as nobody dreams of going downstairs for breakfast in a Spanish hotel; and soon after eight we were jolting out of “Val” through streets as execrably paved as those by which we entered. We had kept Ropes waiting after his announcement only long enough to strap our luggage on the roof; and as the other car had luggage and passengers also to pick up, we were just in time to see it leaving the house of the Duke's relations with everyone on board.

As the Lecomte took the road to the south on leaving town, it gave us an assurance that it would not make for Salamanca; but there was still doubt as to its movements. It could go to Madrid direct over the snow heights of the Sierra Guadarrama, or it could pay a visit to the Escurial. It might even halt there for the night; and as there were so many alternatives, we were anxious to keep our leader continually in view.

The wind was bitter cold, and Pilar shivered in her cloak, which was not made for motoring. When Dick saw this, before I could speak he had his own fur-lined coat off, insisting that she should put it on. “I can take Casa Triana's,” said he, “since he's still posing as a soldier of Spain.” And a glance warned me not to blunder by asking

why, in the name of common sense, she shouldn't have mine which I wasn't using, instead of his, which was on his back. He *wanted* her to wear his coat, and hang common sense!

After an instant's stupid bewilderment I saw this, and could hardly help chuckling. How many days had he known her? Two and a bit. At Biarritz he had given me sound advice on my affairs; couldn't understand this fall-in-love-at-sight business; thought a girl wasn't worth a red cent till she was twenty-two couldn't see himself being sentimental in any circumstances; was going to wait to make his choice till he went back to America; believed a man owed it to his own country to put his country-women first; and anyhow couldn't stand a girl who wasn't able to converse rationally. Yet Pilar, if she were to talk with him in his own tongue, must perforce limit her scintillations to “Varry nice, lo-vely, all raight”; while, if he wrestled with hers, he could scarcely go beyond phrase-book limits.

The language of the eyes remained; but that has no place in the realm of common sense. My overcoat was singularly unbecoming to Dick; but he beamed with happiness in it, as he regarded Pilar cosily folded in his; and looking on the picture, certain things occurred to me which I might say to Dick when I got him alone. But after all, I thought I would keep them to laugh over myself.

On this morning of biting wind and brilliant sun, there was still more dazzle of snow to illumine the mountain tops; and though the road was dull, the beauty of the atmospheric effects was worth coming to Spain to see. The road we travelled and the near meadows seemed, as we went speeding on, the only solid ground in sight; as if we had landed on an island floating at the rate of thirty miles an hour, through a vast sea of translucent tints that changed with the light, as an opal changes.

Forests of strangely bunchy “umbrella” pines were blots of dark green ink splashed against the sky; and scarcely five minutes passed but we saw the finger of an old watch-tower pointing cloudward from a hill. Sometimes our road, dividing endless cornfields, stretched before us long and straight for miles ahead, over switchback after switchback, as if the hills chased each other but never succeeded in catching up. Then, when we had grown used to such an outlook, the road would twist so suddenly that it seemed to

spring up in our faces. It would turn upon itself and writhe like a wounded cobra, before it was able to crawl on again.

Ours was a silent, uninhabited world, without a house visible anywhere, save here and there some stony ruin—a landmark of the Peninsular War. One could but think that gnomes stole out at night from holes under the hills, to till the land for absentee owners; for the illimitable fields were cultivated down to the last inch. We shared a queer impression that we had strayed into a country which no human eye had seen for centuries; but when we crossed the broad Douro running to the Bay of Biscay and Oporto, and steered the car jerkily through the ragged village of Mojales, at an abrupt turn of the road we were in a different world—a desert of stones.

Prehistoric giants had played with dolmens and cyclopean boulders, and left their toys scattered in confusion. Stonehenge might have been copied from one of their strange structures; and they had given later races a rough idea of forts and cities. Giant children had fashioned stone elephants, heads of warriors, dogs sitting on their haunches, granite drinking cups, and misshapen baskets, all of astonishing size. Or was it water, slow as the mills of the gods, and as sure, which had wrought all these fantastic designs, and piled these tremendous blocks one upon another?

A high stone bridge spanned a rocky ravine carved by that slow power in a few leisure millions of years; and there, sheltered from the wind, would have been an ideal place for motorists to picnic. But the Duke did not picnic, therefore we must not. Following hard upon his heels we went on, up and up into the mountain world, still in the playground of vanished giants, winding along a road as wild as the way to Montenegro. Rising at regular intervals before us, on either side stood tall stone columns, sentinel-like, placed in pairs to guide wayfarers through white drifts in time of winter storms. The country was wooded, and began to have the air of a private park, though the heights were close above us now, and our road ascended steadily. From the scenery of Montenegro we came plump into the Black Forest; and Baden-Baden might have lain in the valley below these pointed mountains clothed in mourning pines.

Squish! The brown slush of melted snow gushed out in fountains as our fat tyres ploughed through, and on either hand it lay unbroken in virgin purity beneath the pines. Half a mile higher, and

even the traffic of heavy ox-carts and the sun's fierce fire had had no power to break the marble pavement. It was shattered and chipped, and carved into deep ruts by wooden wheels; but there were no muddy veins of brown. Ten minutes more, and our engine began to labour. Then, before there was time to count the moments, we were in snow to our axles.

The motor's heart beat hard, but with a sturdy, dependable noise which comforted Pilar, who was half laughing, half frightened, at this her first adventure. At any instant now we might come upon the Lecomte held in the snow-trap which threatened to catch us.

Ropes kept the car in the wide ruts made by ox-carts, but even with his good driving we swayed to right and left, leaving the rough track and ploughing into drifts dangerously near the precipice edge, or skidding as if we skated on polished ice, failing to grip the frozen surface.

Now was the time to relieve the willing engine. Dick and I sprang out, and Colonel O'Donnel followed, though we would have persuaded him to keep his place. Only Pilar was left in the car, with Ropes driving, while we three men, knee deep in snow, set our shoulders to help the Gloria as she made the supreme effort. Pushing, and slipping at every step, our blood (which had run sluggishly with cold) racing through our veins, we were putting on a great spurt of united force, when gallantly rounding a bend we all but rammed the back of Carmona's car.

There it was, stuck in a drift like a frozen wave; and there was Carmona himself up to his knees in diamond dust, gloomily superintending his chauffeur who packed snow into the radiator to cool the overheated motor.

All the extra power of the Lecomte gave no advantage over the Gloria here. Fate had set the stage for us, and we must obey the cue. No ingenuity of Pilar's could hide us in the wings any longer, and we must play our parts as Destiny prompted.

Only one thing was clear. Carmona could have had no idea until now that the O'Donnels (with that young soldier so like the Forbidden Man) were travelling in the red car whence he had already plucked a suspected passenger. The coincidence would seem strange to him; and if he were sure enough of his ground to risk

another error, he would probably denounce me to the police in the next big town. Disguising my outcast self as an officer in a Spanish regiment would not be a point in my favour; but—he could do nothing now. Monica was here, and the moment was mine.

There was a savage joy in the situation, born of exaltation, of the high altitude, and of uncertainty as to what might come next.

"Shall you keep out of the way?" asked Dick; for we were still screened from Carmona's sight by our own car, which Ropes had stopped with a grinding of the brake; and Pilar's face was veiled.

"Not I. I'm going to have some fun," I answered. "It must come sooner or later, better sooner, or what's the good of playing Cristobal O'Donnel?"

With that, I appeared from behind the car, and the others were following, while Pilar leaned out in anxious expectancy.

"How do you do?" said I, in Andaluz as lazy as the other Cristóbal could have used. I took off my cap to the ladies, and so did Dick and the Cherub, exposing heated foreheads, damp from honest toil. "Sorry to find you in such a difficulty. But we'll soon get you out of that, won't we, Señor Waring? Here are three of us with stout shoulders and willing hearts."

"Four, counting my chauffeur," said Dick in English, playing up to my lead, since there was no stopping me now. "We're delighted to do anything we can."

Carmona glared as an animal glares when it is at bay; only, an animal can attack his enemies, and he could not attack us; for he was not sure whether we were enemies or no, and whether he would not be making a fool of himself if he let us know what passed in his brain.

It was evident that he thought very hard for a moment, and was of two minds as to what he had better do. But suddenly the baited look vanished from his face, as a shadow is chased away by the sun, and I guessed that a course of action had occurred to him with which he was well satisfied. This seemed ominous for me, and I would have given something to read his thoughts.

He answered our "How do you do?" with great cordiality—for him; said that he had been taken by surprise, at first, as he had no idea the motoring tour of which Señorita Pilar spoke would begin so soon, or

bring us upon his track. It was a good thing for him, however, that we were here, and not only was he pleased to see us for our own sakes, but would be glad to accept our kind offer.

Meanwhile Pilar had pushed up her veil, and she and Monica were exchanging greetings. As for Lady Vale-Avon, her veil was up, too, and her lorgnettes at her eyes. I did not doubt that she and the Duke had compared impressions concerning our family party, after the episode at Burgos, impressions startlingly confirmed now, and Carmona's cordiality in such circumstances must have puzzled her. As to the Duchess, her large face was hidden behind a thick screen of lead-coloured tissue, and I could judge nothing of her feelings.

When Monica heard the proposal for propelling the grey car through the drifts, she had the door open in an instant, and would have been out in the deep snow, if we had not stopped her.

"You must all stay where you are," said Carmona hurriedly, fearing, perhaps, that some opportunity for a word would be snatched in spite of him, if I were really Casa Triana. "The weight of three women makes no difference whatever; isn't that true, señor?" and he turned to Dick, who, according to our story, was the owner of the red automobile as well as the host of the party.

Of course Dick agreed, and so did we all, that the ladies were not on any account to get out. The Duke's chauffeur jumped into his place again, and, with a twist of the starting handle, the tired motor quivered to its iron entrails. There was a sudden awaking of carburetor, pistons, sparking-plugs, valves, trembler, each part which had been resting after the long pull, striving to obey its master. With a sighing scream of the gearing, the car stumbled forward and up, our united force pressed into service. Staggering, plunging, pushing, we gave all the help we could, and for a few minutes it seemed that with our aid the motor would claw its way to the highest point.

Our hearts drummed in our breasts, and sent the hot blood jumping to our heads as if in sympathy with the mighty struggle of the engine. But the Lecomte's forty horses, and the strength and goodwill of five men—counting Carmona, who did as little work as he could—were not enough. The wheels sank to the axles, whizzing round in the snow without propelling the car; with the motor unable to do its part, we men alone could not do all. The automobile would

not budge for all our pushing; and, seeing that labour was lost, we stopped to breathe and raise our eyebrows questioningly at one another. Carmona, alarmed at finding that his chestnuts could not be pulled out of the fire by any cat's-paws at his service, wondered audibly what he ought to do.

“Someone who came to Valladolid last night was hauled through the drifts by oxen,” said I. And even as I spoke, like a ram caught in the bushes ready for the sacrifice, I spied in the white distance the black silhouette of an enormous ox.

He was not alone, for a more penetrating glance showed that he had a yoke-fellow as big and black as himself; and guided by a red-sashed boy in scarf and shawl they advanced towards us slowly but so surely that I suspected something more than a coincidence. The great lumbering animals were like blobs of ink against the snow, and the lithe figure of the boy made a fine spot of colour as he walked before his beasts, his stick to their noses as if it were a magnet which they, anchored head to head with a beam of wood, were compelled to follow.

It flashed into my mind that this youth and his oxen were not wandering through mountain snow-drifts for nothing. The wolves which howl in these same wild fastnesses on a winter night scent prey; and so I thought did the boy, with the trifling substitute of petrol for blood. This youth had made a good haul (in every sense of the word) by accident yesterday; was out searching for other hauls to-day, and would be while the snow lasted.

We hailed him. He feigned surprise, and hesitated, as if to enhance his value. Then, casting down long lashes as he listened to our proposal, pretended to consider pros and cons. It would be a terrible strain for his animals to drag such a great weight, but—oh, certainly they would be *able* to do it. They were docile and strong. Every day nearly they drew heavy loads of cut logs over the mountains. For twenty pesetas he would risk injuring his oxen, but not a real less; and they would drag the grey car to the top of the pass, that he could promise.

“What extortion!” protested Carmona, who is not famed for generosity, except when something can be made out of it.

“Oh, he's too handsome to beat down!” pleaded Monica.

That settled it. To please her he would have given twice twenty pesetas for half the distance. The boy was engaged without further haggling; the animals were harnessed to the big Lecomte with rope which the youth "happened" to have; and with a thrilling cry of "A-r-r-r-i! O-lah!" he struck the two black backs with his goad.

"I can't bear to see it!" Monica cried, covering her eyes, as the great heads were lowered to adjust the strain, and every muscle in the powerful, docile bodies writhed and bunched with the tremendous effort. Big as they were, it seemed impossible that two oxen could do for the car, with passengers and luggage, what its own engine refused to do; nevertheless the huge thing moved, at first with a shuddering jerk, then with a steady, if lumbering crawl.

"O-lah!" shouted the boy; "thump" on the thick hide over the straining muscles fell the goad, and thus the car lurched through the deep snow, all of us following except Ropes, who having poured melted snow into the radiator, and let the cooling stream flow through the waterpipes, was bringing on the Gloria slowly, by her own power. She had now but two passengers, and not half as much luggage as the Lecomte, which perhaps explained her prowess; nevertheless I was proud. "Brava, Gloria!" I should have liked to shout.

I could now have pushed ahead, and keeping pace with Carmona's car, as the oxen struggled nobly up the pass, have tried for a word or two with Monica. But perhaps Lady Vale-Avon expected such a move on the part of the troublesome young officer; and by way of precaution she had crowded near to the girl in the tonneau. A conversation worth having would have been hopeless thus spied upon, and I disappointed the chaperon by making no such attempt.

To my surprise, Carmona walked with us, instead of forging on beside his own car. His friendliness puzzled me. Each look directed at my face was sharp as a gimlet, though his words were genial; but the final shock came when he announced that he was bound for the Escurial, and asked if we would like to join his party.

"I know the palace like a book—better than I know most books," said he; "and if you've never been, I can get you into places not usually shown."

The Cherub thanked Heaven that he had never been; and far would it be from him to go to-day or any other day. He had beheld the Escurial from outside, and had been depressed to the verge of tears. Often since he had consoled himself for various misfortunes by reflecting that, at worst, he was not enduring them at the Escurial. But he would sit in the automobile and compose himself to doze while his dear children and friends were martyred in the Monastery.

“You're very good to personally conduct us,” Dick answered the Duke, “but we've no time for the Escurial.”

“It will be worth while to make time,” I hurried to break in, though Dick glared a warning which said, “You silly ass, don't you see the man's laying a trap, and you're falling into it?”

I was ready to risk that trap, and realizing that I meant to see the thing through, Dick urged no further objections.

XVI

A Secret of the King's

Pilar said that the oxen were idiotic dears to break their hearts for nothing, not even a percentage on the twenty pesetas. But four-footed beasts are tragically conscientious, and these farmyard martyrs accomplished their task without a groan, while the Gloria crept up close behind on her own power.

I thanked the patron saint of cow creation when the straining brutes got to the top. The summit of the pass was crowned by a lion on a granite pedestal; a lion with a cold air of pride in his mission of marking the limit between Old Castile and New. For me also he marked something for which I owed him gratitude; my deeper advance into the heart of my own land.

Close to our resting-place at the top of the pass there was a rude hut, and one or two wagons which had strained up from the other side were halting their smoking teams. Here, seated in the car again, as we waited to see the oxen unyoked and the boy paid, a girl came out from the little house with a large volume, in which she asked us to sign our names. The Cherub scrawled something; and as Dick was scribbling, Carmona strolled across, to see whether or no I entrusted my name to the book. I had meant not to do so, but now I would have changed my mind had not Colonel O'Donnel stopped me. “I wrote your name, Cristóbal,” said he, in his ambrosial voice; and the situation was saved. Carmona made some commonplace remark to account for his approach, and walked away with a self-conscious back, as Pilar's glance and Monica's crossed the distance between the two automobiles and met mischievously.

The grey car took the lead again, and at a turn of the road it seemed that the whole world lay at our feet; yet it was not even all of Old Castile, so vast a country is my Spain.

Far as the eye could travel spread the fair land, green with the tender green of spring, yellow with patches of golden sand, darkly tufted with woods; struck with flying shafts of light, ringed in with ethereal blue.

Nothing could steal from me this illuminated missal of memories, and were I to be banished to-morrow, I should have Spain to keep in my heart, I said, as we rushed down the steep, winding way that serpentined along the southern slope of the Guadarrama. A breakneck road it was, but nobly engineered, twisting back upon itself in many coils, letting us fly with the speed of a bird to lower levels; and it seemed that scarcely had we sunk over the brink of the mountain than we were at the turn on the right which would lead to the Escurial.

Straight before us, rising out of the bare mountain side and seeming a part of it, towered and stretched a building vaster than any I had seen even in the limitless spaces of dreamland. Were it not for its cold regularity, I should have thought myself approaching another desert of giants who made toys of monoliths and obelisks; but these appalling domes and towers could be the work of man alone. There was no toying here; all was forbidding and gloomy; for this was the Escurial—immense, sinister, as if fashioned from the grim product of those iron mines which gave its name.

I could imagine the fanatical satisfaction Philip's dry mind had found in planning this monument to represent the gridiron on which Saint Lawrence was martyred. He who was to stand in history as the great Inquisitor, must build his monastery and palace in honour of a martyr! But Philip was the last man to have a sense of humour; and it was like him to appease an injured saint by giving him a church a thousand times bigger than the one destroyed on Saint Lawrence's own day, in the battle of San Quentin.

“Wouldn't the Escurial be hideous if it were anywhere else but just here?” asked Pilar.

She was right; for on the Sierra it seemed an expression of the Sierra; and in spite of Philip rather than because of him, it was splendid in the melancholy strength which made it a brother of mountains.

We lunched on extremely Spanish food at a fonda opposite the Escurial; and when the time came for sightseeing—a time for us, but not for the public—the Duke began by marshalling us all, except the weary Duchess and the lazy Cherub, through the great door guarded by Saint Lawrence. Once within, we saw the treasures, as a bird in flight sees the beauties of a town over which he swoops; but we did see them, and once I had three words and one look from Monica, before it occurred to Lady Vale-Avon to link an arm in her daughter's, in a sudden overflow of maternal affection.

Carmona had made a point of the “influence” which could open for us doors that, for others, would remain shut; and he did smuggle us into the Library of Manuscripts, the Queen's Oratory, and the Capilla Mayor to see the royal tombs. But after we had stopped longer than he wished in the church, and the Choir, where Philip learned that Lepanto had saved Europe from the Turks, and listened to the sad music of Mary Stuart's requiem, the Duke promised something still better, in the palace. “What you shall see there,” he said, “is a secret. It was a secret of King Philip's—so great a secret that even the writers of guide-books know nothing of it; while, if a tourist should have heard a rumour and asked a question, the attendants would say, ‘There's no such thing in existence.’ Only the Royal Family know, a few privileged people about the Court, and the guardians of the Escurial. As for me, I was told by someone here—someone whom I myself placed in the palace.”

My curiosity was excited; and even Dick, who resented this expedition, looked interested as we arrived at the palace—the great gridiron's handle. At the entrance Carmona separated himself from the rest of the party, saying that he must have a few words in private with the attendant who would show the rooms of Philip the Second. He walked ahead, engaged the brown-liveried guide in low-voiced conversation, and seemed to ask a question with some eagerness.

Observing the pantomime from a distance, I fancied that, for some reason, Carmona was to be denied the privilege of which he had boasted; but, apparently, he did not intend to accept defeat without a struggle. He and the guide moved on, then stopped again to argue—this time with their backs to us; but, from the action of Carmona's elbows, I judged that he put his hand into his pocket. Five or six minutes later he returned, to announce that after some

difficulty he had succeeded in getting his own way. We might go, unattended, into the private apartments of Philip the Second; and while we were there, other visitors would be kept out. “If there are any, they'll be taken another round,” said Carmona, “and won't be ready to come into the King's rooms until we're ready to come out.”

The guide led us down the narrow staircase to the outer door of Philip's suite, then slipped away, shutting the door behind him. Lady Vale-Avon and Monica (the mother still clasping her daughter's arm), Pilar, Dick, Carmona, and I were now alone between the gloomy walls behind which the bigot and despot had lived his miserable life and died his miserable death.

There was a chill in the sombre place which froze the spirit; yet I, for one, did not feel sad. I was conscious only of an excited expectancy, as if I were waiting for something to happen.

We let our imagination set the meagre form of Philip in his chair, or by the desk at which he used to write; examined the grim relics of his monk-like existence; and finally moved to the death-chamber, set like a stage-box at the theatre, beside the high altar of the chapel.

So small was the room that it was filled by our little party of six; yet I felt there another presence which none of us could see—a grey ghost agonising for his sins, through a bleak eternity.

Monica felt it too, for she shivered, and exclaimed, “Let us go. This room seems haunted with evil. I can't breathe in it.”

“But now for the secret,” said Carmona. “Would you guess at any hidden opening in these walls?”

We stared critically about, and I began to test the wainscot, but the Duke stopped me. “You'd never find the place,” he said; “and I promised the person who told me not to give away the secret; but that doesn't prevent me from showing you what's behind the door.”

He moved close to the wall, stood for an instant, then stepped back, as we heard a slight clicking sound, like the snap of a spring on an old box-lid. At the same time a part of the wainscoting rolled away, leaving a narrow aperture.

It was dark on the other side, but Carmona took a gold match-box from his pocket and struck a bunch of little wax fosforos.

“Philip had this cell made for a place of penance and self-torture,” he said, “and it's just as it used to be during his lifetime, before he

was too ill to go in any more. His twisted wire scourge is there, with his blood on it, his horsehair shirt, and a girdle bristling with small, sharp spikes. Will you have a look, Lady Vale-Avon? I can't go with you, for the cell isn't big enough for two, but I'll hold the matches at the door."

Lady Vale-Avon is of the type of woman who enjoys seeing such things as these; and though she would not have tortured herself had she lived in feudal days, I am sure she would have dined calmly over an underground dungeon where an enemy—an inconvenient wretch like me, for instance—suffered the pangs of starvation.

She squeezed into the cell, descending a couple of steps, remained for two or three minutes, and came out, pronouncing it extremely interesting.

"Now, Lady Monica, it's your turn," said Carmona; but Monica drew back, "I hate seeing torture-things," said she, "and blood, even wicked old blood like Philip's, which I used to think, when I read about him in history, I'd love to shed. No, I won't go in, thank you."

Pilar also refused, for if she went she would certainly have a nightmare and dream she was walled up; thus there remained only the three men to inspect the hidden horrors.

Carmona held his match-box to me, saying that when we had seen the place he would look in to refresh his recollections. But Dick calmly helped himself to several fosforos and took first turn, probably suspecting something in the way of an oubliette, especially prepared for me.

He reappeared presently, however, his suspicions allayed. "Beastly hole," he remarked; "almost bad enough for Philip, though he did grill some of my best ancestors."

I took a couple of matches, lighting them on the Duke's box; then, bending my head low, and pushing in one shoulder at a time, I squirmed through the aperture. In so doing, however, I contrived to trip over Carmona's foot, which must have been thrust forward, staggered against the opposite wall of the narrow cell, and lost both my lighted vestas. Carmona exclaimed, I stumbled, and almost simultaneously the door slid into place with a sharp click.

There was not space to fall at length. I merely lost my balance, and saved my head from a bump by shielding it with a raised arm, I

steadied myself in a second or two; but I was in black darkness. Outside I could hear a confused murmur of voices, and would have given something to know what Dick was saying at the moment.

I was thinking that I should not like to be a prisoner in this hole (only large enough for the swing of Philip's scourge) for many hours on end, when there came an imperative tapping. “Holloa!” I answered, expecting to hear Dick speak in return; but it was Carmona's voice which replied. Evidently he was speaking with his mouth close to the secret door.

“I'm very sorry for this accident,” said he distinctly. “When you stumbled, you knocked my arm, and made me touch the spring. Unfortunately the door closed with such a crash, that the spring seems out of order, and I can't move it. But if you'll be patient a few minutes, I'll look for an attendant who understands the thing, to bail you out of gaol.”

If I had been Lieutenant Cristóbal O'Donnel I would have heard no more in the rhyming junction of those words “gaol” and “bail” than met the ear, but being the man I was—the man he suspected me to be—I did hear more; and I believed that he wished me to catch a double meaning.

“Does he mean to hand me over to the police now, on suspicion?” I wondered in my black cell—“before Monica's eyes?” But aloud I said, “Thanks; don't be too long, or I shall be tempted to smash the door.”

“You'll find that impossible,” answered Carmona. “Don't worry if I seem to be gone an age. There's only one man on duty to-day who knows the secret of this room; I asked for him when we came, but his comrade said he was away on leave till four o'clock. It must be that now, and I'll have him here as soon as possible. He will be the more pleased to set you free, as he's an old friend of yours. You remember little Rafael Calmenare?”

I was silent, seeing, as if by the glare of lightning, the whole design of the trap, and seeming to see also the triumph which must be in Carmona's eyes. But the pause had not lengthened to a second, when I heard Pilar's voice, speaking also close to the door.

“Of course you remember, Cristóbal. Rafael Calmenare of the Duke's ganaderia. But it's a long time since he went away.”

“After he was gored by Nero and lost his health, through the influence of a friend at Court I got him a place here,” I heard Carmona say. Then raising his voice for my ears, he went on, “Poor Rafael will be pleased to see you again. You must have played with him when a boy. I'm off to find him now.”

Silence followed these last words. I could picture the consternation of Dick and Pilar. Neither could do anything to help me, nor could I help myself. I could but wait in this suffocating black hole for the moment when a stranger should give me light, and exclaim, “This is not Don Cristóbal!”

Almost I admired Carmona for his quick wit. After a few moments of rage, at sight of the suspected man of Burgos Cathedral on his track in the red motor-car, the thought of the Escurial and his old servant must have sprung into his mind.

Had Calmenare been available at first, Carmona would have been spared the trouble of shutting me up in Philip the Bigot's torture-chamber; but hard pressed for an excuse to keep us at the Escurial till his man came back, he had put me where I could be kept while needed. And now that he was gone in search of Rafael, we three loyal comrades could not discuss the situation, because of Lady Vale-Avon's presence.

A brilliant stroke of Carmona's to have me betrayed by another than himself, so that Monica might not bear him a grudge! Who was this person masquerading as an officer of the Spanish army? would be the first question of the police. And the answer need not be long in coming. The Duke had reason to congratulate himself; I had been a fool to drop like a fly into his net, and now that I was in, I saw no way out.

“Oh, how I wish we could open the secret door!” I heard Monica exclaim.

“I can't even see exactly where it is now,” Pilar said. “Cristóbal?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Poor little Rafael; a good fellow, wasn't he?”

“Very good,” I replied. To what end was she working? I wondered. But I was not to be made wiser. Before she had time to finish the hint I heard Carmona speaking.

“I've sent for Calmenare, who has returned, and will be here in a few minutes,” he called to me. It was like him to hurry back, so that by no possible means could the three suspected ones reach any understanding.

The moments dragged on, and I could have lashed myself with Philip's scourge in fury at the rashness which might involve the whole O'Donnel family in my disaster. Never had I been able to think less clearly; but perhaps it was the stifling atmosphere of the cell which made me feel that fingers in a mailed glove were clenched round my temples.

Outside, voices buzzed; but those who spoke must have stood at a distance, for I could catch no words. Then, at last, there was a new voice in the room. Calmenare had come.

“How do you do, Don Rafael?” Pilar exclaimed, as politely as if she had addressed an equal. “I'm glad to see you again. I've been waiting for you impatiently. Only think, *my dear brother Cristóbal, whom you know so well*, is in that dreadful place and can't get out, because the Señor Duque shut him in—by mistake—and broke the spring.”

“I do not find that it is broken, señorita,” answered the new voice.

“I couldn't make it work,” Carmona said hastily.

Click! went the spring under skilled fingers. The door sliding back gave me a rush of light and air which set me blinking for a second or two; and there I stood at the stranger's mercy.

What I saw, when my suddenly contracted pupils expanded, was a little man in the palace livery; a pale little man with insignificant features, and large, steady eyes. There was absolutely no expression in his face as for one brief instant our glances met. Then—“God be with you, Don Cristóbal,” said he. “I am glad to have been even of this slight service. I hope, señorito, you have not suffered from lack of air?”

“Very little,” said I. I held out my hand. He took it respectfully.

“Is it long since you saw each other?” asked Carmona, sallow and red by turns.

“About two years only, Señor Duque,” replied his ex-servant, expressionless as before, and quietly respectful to all. “I could not forget the date, for the Señor Colonel and the señorita, as well as the señorito himself, were always very good to me.”

The Duke was silenced. The test invented by himself had failed. Calmenare accepted me as Cristóbal O'Donnel; he was obliged to accept me too—at least for the present.

"Shall we get out of this place?" he said to Lady Vale-Avon.

She swept her daughter with her; but Monica had a backward look for me, sparkling now with malice for Carmona, radiant with relief for Casa Triana.

We said good-bye to Calmenare in the Duke's presence; and I would have pressed a gold piece into his hand for "opening my prison door," but he would not have it. Afterwards, while we followed the grey car on the downhill road to Madrid, Pilar told the whole story with dramatic effect to the Cherub.

"My one hope was in Rafael," she said. "I was good to him, you remember, when he was ill. And he and I had a great sympathy over Corcito, the dear grey bull. I prayed he'd never forgiven the Duke for that crime, and that he'd still be grateful to me. Well, I looked Rafael straight in the eyes when I said, 'My brother Cristóbal is in that place, shut up by the Duke, who has broken the spring.' With all my soul I willed him to understand, and he did. 'If the señorita chooses to have a strange gentleman for her brother, he is her brother for me,' is what he said to himself; no more! But what if he *hadn't?*"

"That's where I should have come in," remarked Dick.

"What would you have done?" asked Pilar, breathless.

"I don't know," said Dick. "I only know I should have *done* it; and that if I had, maybe Carmona wouldn't have been feeling as well as he feels now."

XVII

Like a Thief in the Night

No longer did the Duke desire our company. He had played his little comedy of good-fellowship, and it was over, though it had not ended according to his hopes. The grey car did its forty-horse best to outdistance us on the way to Madrid, but the road—so good that perhaps we lost nothing in the detour to the Escurial—distributed its favours evenly. We kept close on the Lecomte's flying heels until one of our four cylinders went to sleep, and Ropes had to get down and wake it up by testing the ignition.

Some fellow-motorists would have turned to offer help, but the Lecomte was ever a Levite where we were concerned; and when we were ready to go on, the grey car was not even a speck in the distance. Luckily, however, there was little or no doubt where its occupants would put up.

Though the Madrid house of the Carmonas had been burned down ten years ago (since when the Duchess had made her home at the old palace in Seville), there was scarcely a Continental paper which had not described the splendours of the Duke's apartment in one of the finest modern flat-houses of Madrid. Naturally, he would entertain his mother and guests there, so that it would be difficult to slip away with them unknown to us.

The thing I did not know was, how long he meant to stay in the capital; but as he must show Seville in Holy Week, and later perhaps other places in the south of Spain, to Lady Vale-Avon and Monica before their return to Madrid for the Royal Wedding, it was almost certain that he would go on in a couple of days.

The O'Donnels recommended to us the Hotel Inglés, the best Spanish hotel in Madrid, as well as the most amusing, and it was with a heart comparatively light that I looked forward to a first sight of my country's capital. How would it compare with Paris, with

Vienna, with London? What adventures awaited me there? What was to be the next pass in this queer duel with Carmona?

But I need not have searched for comparisons. As we rushed into Madrid without threading through any suburbs,—since suburbs the city has none,—I discovered that it bore no resemblance to any other place.

We flashed from open country to a shady park, set about with buvettes and beer gardens; ran through a massive gateway, and were in the heart of Madrid. Electric trams whizzed confusingly round us, and far above the hubbub of such traffic loomed proudly a hill crowned with an enormous palace. There was no need to ask if it were the royal palace, for it was essentially Royal, a house worthy of a king.

My father had fought to put Don Carlos there—Don Carlos, far away now in Venice; but with all my admiration for his brave son Don Jaime, my sympathies flowed loyally towards the young dweller on those heights.

We swept under and round the palace hill, as Colonel O'Donnel directed. In spite of his instructions, however, Dick lost the way twice, plunging into wrong turnings; but the second time he did this it seemed that San Cristóbal—whose medal now adorned our Gloria and shaped our destinies—must have twisted the steering-wheel. There, before the door of an official building guarded by sentries, panted the grey car of Carmona; and among its passengers Carmona alone was absent.

“That's the Ministry of War,” said the Cherub, and with a quick thought I asked Dick to slow down. Taking advantage of her son's late cordiality, I spoke to the Duchess.

“We thought we had lost you,” said I airily. “I hope nothing's wrong, that you stop here?”

“Not in the least, thank you,” coldly replied the Duchess.

But Monica spoke up bravely. “The Duke didn't tell us why he wanted to go in. He only said he wouldn't keep us many minutes. Señorita O'Donnel, shall you be in Madrid long?”

“Only a few days,” said Pilar. “And you?”

“We shall be here again at the time of the wedding,” Monica answered quickly; “so I believe the Duke and Duchess will—”

“It is undecided,” Lady Vale-Avon cut in before the girl could make us a present of Carmona's plans. “We may take some excursions. As there's a fine road to Barcelona, we may go there and to Montserrat; and the Duke has said something about Bilbao—”

“But, Mother, surely we're going to Seville for Holy Week!” cried Monica.

“There's no reason why we should arrive before Maundy Thursday,” replied Lady Vale-Avon, hiding annoyance. “But isn't that the Duke coming out? I hope he won't be long. It's windy here, and you have a cold coming on, my dear Duchess.”

We were dismissed; and raising our hats again we drove on, Pilar waving a small, encouraging hand to Monica. “They won't do any of those things,” said the Spanish girl. “Something tells me they mean to start for Seville as soon as they can.”

“Something tells me so too,” said I. “And something tells me that Carmona's errand at the Ministry of War is to find out whether Lieutenant Cristóbal O'Donnel y Alvarez is really away from Burgos on leave.”

“That's what I was thinking,” murmured the Cherub. “But the thought will not bring a grey hair. Cristóbal *is* on leave; and he told his brother officers that he expected to go with his family to Seville. It was at the last minute that his plans were changed. No one was taken into his confidence; and it will be very negligent of San Cristóbal to let him meet in Biarritz any common acquaintance of his and Carmona's.”

“I'm putting my faith in San Cristóbal,” said I. “But as he has a good deal to attend to, the less I show myself in Madrid, where my adopted brother must be known, the better.”

“He hasn't been as often here as Pilar and I,” said the Cherub, “so he knows few people. Still, Cristóbal's uniform should now be put away, and Cristóbal should wear civilian clothes.”

“He certainly will,” I answered, laughing. And Colonel O'Donnel gave himself up to directing Dick which way to go, as we were in the most crowded centre now, close to the Puerta del Sol.

This big, open space, shaped like a parallelogram, walled by hotels, Government buildings, and shops, struck me as a Spanish combination of Piccadilly Circus and the Mansion House, thrown

into one. Ten busy streets poured their traffic into the place; intricate lines of tramways converged there. The pavements were crowded with loungers who had the air of never doing anything but lounge, and wait for excitements. There was much coming and going of leisurely pedestrians, talking and laughing, all classes mingling together; men in silk hats on the way to their clubs chatting with men in capas and grey sombreros, who belonged to very different clubs; smart officers in uniform shoulder to shoulder with bull-fighters whose little twisted pigtails of black hair appeared under their tilted hats; ragged but handsome beggars thinking themselves as good, if not as fortunate, as their brothers in broadcloth; merry boys shouting the evening papers, black-eyed women and men selling cheap but colourful jewelry, post-cards, toys, and marvellous sweets. It was as gay a scene as could be found in any capital, and it seemed to me that this absolute democracy was after all the true note of modern Spain. Whatever else we may be, we never have been, never will be a nation of snobs, we Spaniards whose favourite saint is the peasant Isidro.

Steering cautiously through the throng which scarcely troubled itself to move before us, we took one of the main arteries leading out from the Puerta del Sol (where no sign of a gate was to be seen), and turned into the deep blue shadows of the Calle Echegaray to our hotel.

Already I had discovered that it is not the habit of Spanish landlords to descend from the important first floor to the unimportant ground floor and welcome their guests. They are glad to have you come if you choose, but they do not care if you stop away, for there are plenty of others; and whether you are cousin to the King of England or an American millionaire, or a Spanish commercial traveller, very timid and just starting in business, you will be given the same reception, unless you put on “proud airs,” when you will be shown that you had better go elsewhere. But with an old friend, all is different; everyone welcomed the Cherub and the señorita; for their sakes everyone welcomed Dick and me. I was vaguely introduced as a relative—no name given; no name, in the flurry of greeting, asked; for Spain is not like France or Germany, where the first thing to do is to write down all particulars about yourself on a piece of paper.

Ropes drove the car off to a garage, and we were shown to rooms which made us realize that we had left the provinces behind and come into the capital.

"Thank goodness I shall have a pillow to sleep on to-night," said Dick, "instead of doing the carved-knight-on-a-marble-tomb act. I looked particularly at the two neat, rounded blocks those chaps in Burgos Cathedral had to rest their heads on, and the alleged pillows on my bed were an exact copy, hardness and all."

"I like them hard," said I.

"That's right! Stand up for Spanish institutions."

"There's one anyhow I don't think you'd run down," I remarked.

"Which one?"

"Spanish girls."

We dined in great spirits that evening, in the big scarlet and gold restaurant; and in rich, red Marqués de Riscal Dick drank confusion to the Duque de Carmona. The Cherub had told us where Carmona's flat was situated, saying that his car would perhaps be kept under the same roof with his carriage and the state coach.

The company was interesting to watch. Leoncavallo had as a guest the famous ex-bull-fighter Mazzantini; a Russian prince entertained several beauties of the Opera; and there were two or three politicians greatly in the public eye. We were hungry; the dinner was good; there was much to talk over; and all seemed to be going well.

But about half-past ten, when Pilar had gone, and the Cherub was having a "yarn" and a cigar in the sitting-room of our suite; Ropes appeared, looking serious.

"Something bad has happened, sir; and I blame myself," said he.

"Something wrong with the car," I asked quickly.

"Something *out* of the car, sir," he amended. "The main shaft of the change-speed gear."

"Impossible!" said I. "A car can't go along dropping her gearing, as a woman drops her purse!"

"No, sir. But she can, so to speak, have her pocket picked. After all that's come and gone, I ought to have kept my eyes open."

"Out with it, my good chap," said I; "don't try to break it to us."

“It's the car that's broken into, sir. I found the garage all right, left her safe and sound, came back here, but after dinner thought I'd go round again to tinker a bit at the car in case of an early start to-morrow. When I got to the place there were three new fellows on duty, and they seemed astonished when they saw I intended to work on the Gloria. The chauffeur who looked after that car had been in, they said; and you can believe, sir, I pricked up my ears. He'd been working like a demon, said they, opening the gear-box and dismounting the main shaft. Then he went off with it over his shoulder, after telling the foreman his master wouldn't believe the pinions were so worn there ought to be a new set, and he was going to show it to him. They were surprised, I can tell you, sir, when I said we'd been robbed, and that the thief wasn't your chauffeur. But just then one of the old lot came in, and bore witness that I was the right man. It did seem like a bad dream, but a peep at the gear-box showed me it was real enough. I was a fool not to give somebody warning, or pay a man to stay by the car.”

“I can't see that you had reason to be suspicious,” said I, “although it's a rascally outrage, and makes me feel murderous. Did they describe the supposed chauffeur?”

“They did sir; and I expected to recognize the description. But I didn't; they're too smart for that.”

“You think we know him?”

“Sure of it, sir. Nothing easier than a bit of disguise.”

“It might be a common motor-car thief, who wanted a main shaft for a Gloria car.”

“And then again, sir, it mightn't.”

“Anyhow,” said I, “the thing to do would be to apply to the police, have the ruffian run to earth and arrested, no matter what his position. The worst of it is, though, I'm not anxious to have the eye of the Spanish police turned upon me, and there are those who count on that fact.”

“Wouldn't I like to smash their heads for this! Wouldn't I like to smash their car!” growled Dick.

“No. That would be playing it too low down,” said I.

Ropes coloured under his sunburnt skin, and began to search for non-existent dust on the leather cap in his hand.

“You're right, sir, no doubt,” he said, in a meek voice.

I was half sorry that he, or anyone, should agree with me. It seemed somehow as if my chauffeur were taking this monstrous thing too coolly. “Well, the fact remains that we're done,” I said, with suppressed fury. “If the Duke of Carmona has had a hand in this act, it's a sign that he means to get off while we're held up waiting for a new shaft and pinions to arrive—probably all the way from Paris. He can go to-morrow—”

“Beg pardon, sir; he can't, not in his own car,” said Ropes. “If *we* can't leave, no more can't he.”

“Why, what have you done?” I tried to speak sternly.

“Oh, next to nothing, sir. A bit of a touch on his magneto ignition, and a tickling of his coil, just enough to keep him in hospital till he's doctored up.”

Rope's expression was so childlike that Dick and I burst out laughing. “You demon!” I said. “How did you get at the car?”

“Much the same as they did at ours, though I don't pretend to be as clever as some. I said to myself, as this car of the Duke's is new, and he doesn't drive it himself, chances are he's never had a motor before, and wouldn't have a garage in Madrid, though he does live here part of the year and must have fine stables. I inquired what was the best garage besides ours, and strolled round, thinking the chauffeur would have gone straight to the Duke with his news. I found the place, and all the chaps were standing outside open doors, watching a couple of dogs having a fight. I walked in, without a word to anyone, though I'd have said I came from the Duke if I'd had to. There was the car; and before one of those blessed dogs had chewed the other's nose off, I'd polished up my little job. Then I came to you, feeling a bit better than a few minutes before.”

“You ought to be crushed with remorse,” said I; but I'm afraid I grinned; and Dick remarked that if he were King of England he'd give Ropes a knighthood.

“Heaven knows what the next move will be,” I commented, when the avenger had gone, not too stricken in spirit. “It begins to look as though the enemy would stick at little, and we can't go on giving tit for tat.”

“He won't take open action against you for the present,” said the Cherub, “as he isn't sure you aren't Cristóbal O'Donnel; and you're warned if he tries to strike in the dark. He's probably found out through the Ministry of War that Cristóbal's on leave, so to rid himself of your company he's resorted to the only means which occurred to him.”

“I have to thank you that he had no surer means,” I said.

“It's the fashion in Spain, if a friend wants a thing, to tell him it is his,” replied Colonel O'Donnel. “You wanted me for a father, Pilar for a sister. I said, ‘We are yours.’ There's not much to be thankful for. I would do ten times more for your father's son; and my confessor's a sympathetic man. Besides, to tell you a secret of mine which even Pilar doesn't know, though she has most others at her finger-end, your mother was my first love. I adored her! You have her eyes!”

Whereupon I shook hands with the Cherub.

XVIII

The Man Who Loved Pilar

When Ropes had gone to send a telegram to Paris, Dick and I talked the matter over from so many points of view, that Colonel O'Donnel apparently went to sleep. It was only when I burst into vituperation against Carmona, that the excellent man suddenly showed signs of life.

"I've been thinking," said he, and I found myself cheering up at the statement; for I had noticed that, though the Cherub often had the air of being silent through laziness; that from his mellifluous Andaluz he discarded all possible consonants as he would discard the bones of fish; yet, with his murmurings, invariably rolled from his tongue some jewel of good sense.

"We have a friend near Madrid," said he, "who has an automobile. I know little about such things; but when I heard that you had a twenty-four horse-power Gloria, I thought, 'It is the same as the Conde de Roldan's.' It will be days before your new parts can come from Paris, even if you send Ropes; and there are few automobiles on sale here, if any. It's a hundred chances to one you could get parts to fit your car in that way. But if Don Cipriano's car is what I think, he will give you what you want. When the new parts arrive, they will be for him."

"Colonel O'Donnel," said Dick, "you and your family are bricks!"

"That's true," said I; "but if you could persuade your friend to such an act of generosity, I couldn't accept. I—"

"Oh," said the good man, with cherubic slyness, "he would give his left hand for such a chance to please us! Perhaps you haven't noticed that my nina is rather attractive; but it has not escaped the observation of Don Cipriano."

So the wind blew from that quarter! I threw a glance at Dick, and saw on his face the same expression of disconcerted amour propre I had once seen when a bullet went whistling by his nose. But he said nothing about either missile; and now it was left for me to justify our appreciation of the señorita.

Ordinarily, if there is one thing which the Cherub loves, it is to dawdle, but now he rose without a sigh and remarked that there was no time to waste. He must fetch Pilar.

"She will have gone to bed," I objected.

The Cherub smiled. Pilar go to bed at half-past ten on her first night in Madrid after months of absence? Not she. Her father was willing to bet that she was at her window looking down upon the street, and wishing she had been born a man that she might be in it. "Night is the time for amusement in Madrid," said he. "One can lie in bed till afternoon without missing anything; but at night—that is the time to be alive here! And though our home is in the southern country, when we are in Madrid my Pilar and I, we are true Madrileños. Had she and I been alone, she would have made me take her to the theatre or circus. We should not have got home till one: and then I should have had to give her supper. Oh, she will be enchanted when I call her back to life!"

With that he trotted off, and before it seemed that he could have explained anything, he had brought Pilar to us in triumph, her hat on her head, dimples in her cheeks, and stars in her eyes. "I'm ready!" she exclaimed.

"Ready?" I echoed. "For what?"

"Why to drive with you all to Don Cipriano's! What else? We mustn't lose a minute, or our bad fairy will have time to work some other evil charm before we've remedied the first. Oh, I may be only a girl, and not of importance; but Don Cipriano thinks me important, and I shall have to be there to make smiles at him. He has a Gloria, and it is twenty-four horse-power. Father sent to order a carriage while I put on my hat and coat. Don Cipriano's place is only half an hour out of Madrid, even with a 'simón.' He breeds horses, and oh, such dogs! Come along—come along!"

"At this time of night?" said Dick. "He'll think we're mad!"

“It's always early till to-morrow morning in Madrid,” laughed Pilar. “Ah, how nice to have an excitement!”

“He won't be at home,” said Dick.

“Yes, he will. San Cristóbal will keep him there.”

Before we knew what we were doing, this small Spanish whirlwind had swept us downstairs in her train, into the vehicle which had actually arrived, and out into the midst of a night-scene as lively as a fair. Many shops were open and brilliantly illuminated. Café windows blazed like diamonds; half the population of Madrid was in the streets, and a stranger might have thought that something unusual had happened; but Pilar assured us it was “always like that.” “You can live in the street if you like, in Madrid,” said she, “and I should think lots of quite charming people do. There are sweets and fruit when you're hungry, and water and wine and fresh milk of goats when you're thirsty, cool doorways or nice hot pavements to sleep on when you're tired, with lettuce leaves or a cabbage for a pillow, all at a cost of a penny or two a day; and if you're clever somebody passing by will give you that penny. So, rich or poor, with a palace or no home, you can be happy in Madrid.”

“I wonder how you'd like New York?” muttered Dick.

“That depends on the person I lived with!” said Pilar.

Soon we had left the gold and crimson glow of the streets, and were out in the blue night. Over the Puente de Toledo we passed, and on along a broad white road.

Pilar had said that we would reach our destination in half an hour; but her enthusiasm ran faster than our horses; and it was nearly midnight when we stopped in front of a tall archway that glimmered in the dark. A clanging bell had to be pulled, and was echoed by a musical baying of many dogs. “The darlings!” exclaimed Pilar. “I know their voices. It's Melampo, and Cubillon, and Lubina, the dearest pets of all; named after the dogs who went with the shepherds to see the Christ-child in His cradle—you remember—so they can never go mad.”

By this time the gate was open, and a wave of beautiful greyhounds surged round us, although called imperatively back by a man who looked like a cross between a porter and a gamekeeper. Then came a cordial burst of recognition between the Cherub, Pilar,

and the servant. We drove into a courtyard, and before we could descend from our carriage the master of the house had appeared at a lighted doorway, tall, brown, ruddy, picturesque in Spanish riding breeches and short coat; a handsome man of thirty-five, perhaps, whose face lit from surprise to rapture at sight of Pilar. Dick and I came in for a welcome too, though I could see that the Conde de Roldan was not easy in his mind about these young men who seemed on terms of intimacy with his friends.

From the courtyard we passed through a doorway into a patio, and from the patio into a nondescript room which could have belonged to no one but a bachelor and a sportsman. There was, however, a mother, and the poor lady would have been torn from her bed to greet the welcome ones, had not the father and daughter protested. To-morrow, if all went well, they would come again, and see dear Doña Rosita; but now, let her sleep. We were here on business.

"May I explain you?" Pilar appealed to me. "Don Cipriano is safe. And I want him to be interested."

Poor Don Cipriano! He had visibly a bad half moment, trembling lest we had rushed out to announce my engagement to the adorable Pilarcita; but it was good to see the light come back to his eyes when he heard that I—blind worm—had fallen in love with another girl. Clever Pilarcita made this fact clear, so that Don Cipriano's jealous heart might warm to me before he knew what thing was wanted. Dick became tolerable also, as a friend following in the train of my adventures; and soon the poor fellow was ready to put not only the gearing of his motor-car, but his house and everything in it, at our service.

He blessed his patron saint for bringing us to his door, and for permitting him to have ridden home from a distant farm in time to greet us; he roundly cursed the Duke of Carmona, consigning him to Purgatory for a longer period than usual; and when everyone of us (except Dick) was in the best of humours with everybody else, we paid a visit to his car.

She might, in all but colour, have been twin-sister to mine. There seemed reason to hope that the pinions of this Gloria would fit the other Gloria, and that no time might be lost in making the experiment, the Conde de Roldan volunteered to spin us into

Madrid, letting our “simón” go back empty. If we decieved ourselves, rather than I should be delayed (said he), his car was mine to take where I would, and the Cherub stepped on my foot to check a refusal.

There was a chauffeur in this interesting household, but he was several other things as well, and was a better dog-doctor than the vet. At that moment he was assisting at an addition to the family of Lubina's daughter; but in any case, Don Cipriano, protested, he would have allowed no one to drive us save himself.

We raced to Madrid in a fourth of the time we had taken in coming; and two hours after the moment when we had news of the disaster, we arrived at the garage of my injured Gloria.

A somnolent night-porter (one of the few persons in Madrid who appeared to use the night for sleep) let us in; and at the sound of our entrance the figure of a man sprang from the cushions of my car. Pilar gave a cry, which changed to a laugh as she saw that it was Ropes.

“San Cristóbal failed you for a few minutes this evening, didn't he? But he's going to make up for it now,” she said. “And I'm going to see him do it, if it takes all night.”

In vain did the Cherub try to persuade her that it would be well to let him escort her home, as the experiment would be a long affair. Nobody seconded his efforts, and, if they had, ten chances against one that Pilarcita would have listened. Never, in all her life, said she, had she known anything like the excitements of the last few days, and it was too probable that she never would again.

With this, she climbed into her old place in my Gloria's tonneau, her bright eyes bewitching in the uncertain yellow light; and enchanted with the prospect of retaining her society, Don Cipriano proposed a feast. He would not listen to discussions, but rushed the bewildered watchman off to a neighbouring restaurant, whence a waiter appeared with the speed of magic. Supper was ordered; chicken, salad, champagne, all that could be found of the best; and dulces for the señorita.

While Ropes and I worked as if for a wager, a swarm of amused waiters came buzzing about the garage, bringing chairs, a table,

clattering dishes, clinking knives and forks, and silver pails wherein tinkled ice embedding gold-labelled bottles.

Ropes is unrivalled as a mechanic, and I am not unhandy with tools, so that between us, under the inspiration of Pilar's bright eyes and sayings, we had the pinions out of Don Cipriano's car by the time the champagne was cold. Then, while corks were popping, the great experiment was tried. “A fit! a fit!” I exclaimed, and joyously we drank to the health of the two Glorias.

Such tips as they got that night, those waiters and that watchman could never have seen. No doubt they thought us mad, and perhaps we were; but it was partly the fault of San Cristóbal.

XIX

A Parcel for Lieutenant O'Donnel

Never was such a man as Don Cipriano, Conde de Roldan. Not content with lending me his wings that I might fly while he was left to crawl, he proposed to heap other favours upon the friend of his friends.

He offered me an asylum at his place for my rejuvenated car, lest the enemy in reconnoitring should learn our secret before the time; and, better still, he volunteered to visit the camp of that enemy, and discover his plans.

Being an acquaintance of the lady whom Carmona had jilted, he was no admirer of the Duke's. Nevertheless, he was a member of a club which Carmona frequented when in Madrid, and he thought that the Duke would look in next day. Even if he should decide to proceed by rail, after discovering how “two can play at the same game,” such a change of plan would mean delay; therefore Carmona and his party would spend at least one day in Madrid. Don Cipriano offered to go early to the club, and not to leave until he had seen the Duke. The moment he had any news he would bring it to us.

I accepted my new friend's invitation to house the Gloria, as his place was so close to town that Ropes or I could spin her back at short notice; and at dawn, when merry Madrid was thinking of bed, my car towed out his dismantled one. Pilar and her father had gone home to dream their good deeds over; Dick, when he heard that we were to drive behind the Conde's horses, developed a headache, and Ropes and I had to carry the business through ourselves.

We bathed and breakfasted in the country, and drove back to Madrid while the gay world slept. He would now, Don Cipriano

announced, spend the day in the city, on watch-dog duty; but as he would have no news until afternoon, I might visit the picture galleries if I liked. “They will make you feel proud of your country,” he said; and so they would, no doubt. But I resolved to sacrifice them in the fear that, after all, Carmona might evade me if I gave him so good a chance.

Never had I seen Dick so gloomy as when I returned to him, and the black dog was not chased away by my praises of Don Cipriano. He cheered up, however, at the prospect of sightseeing with the Cherub and Pilar; the Cherub martyred; Pilar joyous in the thought of showing off the Murillos and Velasquez which she adored.

They did the Armería and picture galleries all the morning, until they were drooping with fatigue; waggled back in a dilapidated cab, clamouring for their lunch and my tidings; departed again in the afternoon to finish what they had left undone.

Meanwhile I had heard nothing; and the day, spent in waiting for Don Cipriano or for some bit of gossip picked up by Ropes, was long.

But five o'clock and Don Cipriano came together. Carmona had been to the club. The Conde de Roldan had not spoken to him, but the Duke had talked to another man, a motoring friend of the King's. Perhaps, with few others, would the Duke have been so expansive. He had said, “I'm only in Madrid for the day. Should have been off this morning, with my mother and two ladies who are going to visit her in Seville, but had an accident to my automobile, which has made me a lot of bother. I hope to get away, though, sometime to-morrow.” Then he had asked after the health of a certain actress, and the subject had been definitely changed.

This was a triumph. I heartily thanked Don Cipriano, all the while feeling a guilty thing; for if I were loyal to Dick and wished him luck, I must be disloyal and wish defeat for my benefactor.

We spoke of the road, which he knew, and said was not too bad; and about brigands, who were making themselves talked of just then. “You'd better buy arms, if you haven't them,” said Don Cipriano; “but there's not much danger on this side Seville.”

He had brought a road-map; and we were examining it, in the reading-room of the hotel, wondering whether Cannona would take the direct way through Manzanares, Valdepeñas, and Cordoba, or

another which Don Cipriano considered better, though longer, by Talavera de la Reina, Trujillo, and Zafra, when the concièrge came to say a messenger with a parcel wished to see me.

"It must be a mistake," I replied.

"He asked for el Teniente O'Donnel; and he has a packet for you."

"Bring it in, please, and let me see how it's addressed."

"He won't give it up, sir, without seeing you himself. Those were his instructions."

I got up impatiently and went into the hall, where a boy in the livery of some shop handed me a small parcel. There was no address upon it, and I wondered if this were not some purchase of Pilar's, sent back to my care. However, I decided to open it, and found nothing inside except a little steel paper-knife with the word Toledo engraved on the black and gold handle.

I stared at the thing stupidly for a moment, as I fumbled for a pourboire to give the messenger, when it occurred to me that he might explain the mystery. "Did a lady buy this?" I asked; "a young lady, with a tall señor also young, and another middle-aged?"

"A young lady? yes, sir. But she was with only one señor, and two señoras, both of an age."

"You saw them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe all four, and you shall have two pesetas instead of one."

"One señora was Spanish, brunette, fat, with dead eyes in a large, soft face of two chins. The other was tall and foreign, handsome, but with an air! I would not be her servant. The señor was distinguished. Dark, with a thin nose that turned down, like his moustache; a face of an old picture; one shoulder higher than the other."

"But the young lady?"

"Oh, sir, the señorita was a white and gold angel, made of a sunbeam! It was she who bought the knife, while the others chose a thing for the tall señora. She quickly gave it and the money to an attendant, with the address, saying it must be put into the gentleman's own hand."

I gave the boy five pesetas instead of two.

A paper-knife with the word Toledo engraved upon it from Monica for me! No message, only that! But was it not in itself a message—the only one she could find a way to send?

I went back to Don Cipriano. “I've just heard,” said I, “that when Carmona starts, he intends to go to Toledo.”

XX

The Magic Word

When the others came back, and the paper-knife was shown, all agreed with me that it could mean but one thing. The best of it was that to go to Toledo the grey car must pass the Conde de Roldan's place where my Gloria lay; and all we need do would be to await the moment when the Lecomte flashed by. Then we might give Carmona a surprise.

None of us doubted that he must guess the cause of his accident, as we guessed at ours; nevertheless, the blow he had inflicted was far more severe than our retaliation, and he doubtless hoped that, despite our revengeful scratch, he could slip out of Madrid leaving us hors de combat.

Don Cipriano dined with us that night, and went with the others to the Teatro Español, where the great Guerrero and her husband were acting. It was not thought well for me to appear, lest the Duke should be there, and say to some acquaintance, “You see the O'Donnel's. Is that the son who is in the army?”

When they returned, Pilar had news. Carmona, with the Duchess, Lady Vale-Avon, and Monica had all been at the theatre in a box.

“I knew that girl was beautiful,” said Pilar, “but I didn't know how beautiful until to-night! With her pearly skin and golden hair among all the dark heads, she gleamed like a pearl amid carbuncles, and everyone was looking at her. You know how we admire fair beauties, and how we expect to adore the young queen when she comes? Well, if it had been Princess Ena herself, people could hardly have stared more, and the Duke was delighted. He wants everything that's best for himself, and to have others appreciate it. He was so proud of Lady Monica between acts, and kept bending over her as if she belonged to him. I don't think he saw us; but I was glad you weren't there, or you would have been wild to fly at him.”

“You make me wild to do that now,” I said.

“Have a little patience, and you will steal her,” said Pilar.

“If she would only let me! But she won't.”

“Who knows what she will be ready to do if they press her? And after to-night, too! She seemed half afraid of him, as if she began to realize more and more what he is. Oh, if you weren't here I should want to do some desperate deed and snatch her away myself! He likes having her admired, while she's not yet his; but he has enough of the Moor in him to shut up a wife, so that no other man should see her beauty. And then presently he would tire, and be cruel.”

“Don't let's talk of it,” said I. “It's not going to happen.”

Though it was so late before we slept, we were dressed at an unearthly hour—according to the Cherub—and driving out with the small luggage which accompanied us on the car, to Don Cipriano's place on the Toledo road.

Ropes had spent the night there, and the Gloria was ready. The luggage was got into place; and Don Cipriano and his mother—a fairy godmother of an old lady, with a white dome of hair under a priceless black lace mantilla—were determined to provide us with food and drink as if to withstand a siege.

There was a snow-cured ham from Trevelez, the most famed in Andalucía. There was delicious home-made bread, cuernos, molletes, and panecillos; and olives large as grapes. There was white, curded cheese; quince jam or carne de membrillo; angels' hair, made of shredded melons with honey; mazapan, smelling of almonds, and shaped like figures of saints, serpents, and horses; oranges from Seville and Tarifa; fat figs dried on sticks; and, most wonderful of all, a wineskin of the country, so old that the taste of the skin was gone a generation ago, and plump with as much good red wine as would have filled six bottles.

“You will need these things,” insisted the old lady, giving the Cherub a friendly pat on the arm, as she encircled Pilar's waist. “It is different on the road between Madrid and Seville, from those you have travelled. You will want to lunch out of doors, in the sunshine, for you won't find good things like these at any little venta. I know, for I have been with my son. I am a heroine, my friends say. We will pack everything well for you.”

“And the wineskin you must hang on the side of the car,” said Don Cipriano, all solicitude for our welfare, poor fellow, believing happily, as he did now, that neither Dick nor I was dangerous. “There's no cure for Spanish dust, except Spanish wine. Besides, you're going through wild country where automobiles are seldom seen. If peasants are inclined to throw stones, the sight of a good skin of wine should soften them. And what true man would risk damaging a wineskin?”

That fairy godmother, Doña Rosita, conceived a fancy for Dick, who flirted with her in his bad Spanish so outrageously that she was delighted. He made her feel young again, she said, and it was a shock to find that he was an American. She had not forgiven America for the Cuban war, which she had not understood in the least. “But *you* are not wicked!” she exclaimed. “I thought all American men were wicked, and would do anything for money. Ay de mi! I must again pardon Columbus for discovering your country, I suppose; though I have often said in these last years, how much better if he had left it alone. I used to stop in my carriage near the Cristóbal Colón statue in the Prado, when the war was on, and laugh to watch the people throw things, because they were annoyed with him for the trouble he had brought. Yet now I see there's something to thank him for, after all.” This last with a look at Dick which must have melted his American heart like water if she had been of the age of Pilarcita. But what would she have said had she known that—indirectly—Columbus had sent to Spain a rival for her adored Cipriano?

Ignorance being bliss, the delightful mother and son were a hostess and a host almost too hospitable.

As if the hampers stowed in the car were not enough, a tremendous breakfast on a table loaded with flowers was provided for us. But just as we sat down, at ten o'clock, a servant on duty as scout appeared, panting after a scamper across fields, to say that a motor had passed. Our chauffeur sent word that it was *the* motor; and was ready to start our car.

This was the signal for confusion, cries of regret, wishes for good luck, laughter, and exclamations. Pilar and the Cherub were persuaded to finish their cups of thick chocolate, flavoured with

cinnamon, while Dick and I drank our strong coffee and left our aguardiente.

Off we went, in flowery Spanish speech kissing the señora's feet, while she kissed our hands; Don Cipriano leaped upon a horse to see us off, all his dogs about him; and ten minutes later our pneus were pressing the track in the white dust made by the Lecomte.

We soon lost sight of gay Madrid, with its domes and spires clear cut against the white mountains, to run through a green landscape of growing corn and grape, vineyards framed for our eyes with distant hills flaming in Spanish colours, red and gold. Colonel O'Donnel pointed out an isolated elevation which he said was the exact centre of Spain; and of course there was a convent on its top. Every other hill had a ruined watch-tower, brown against a sky of deeper, more thoughtful blue than Italy's radiant turquoise. Men we met rode upright as statues on noble Andaluz animals, grand as war-horses in mediæval pictures; but some did not scorn to turn abruptly aside at sight and sound of our motor, to go cantering across fields to a prudent distance. Carters with nervous mules held striped rugs over the creatures' faces till we had passed; donkeys brayed and hesitated whether to sit down or run away, but ended in doing neither; yet no man frowned.

Dick said that now, at last, he began to feel he was really in Spain, because we met the right sort of Spanish faces, the only kind he was ready to accept as Spanish. He had been satisfied with the strongly characteristic qualities of everything else (especially the balconies, the hall-mark of domestic architecture in Spain); the rich, oily cooking; the pillows, oh, the stony pillows! the manners of the people, and the costumes of Castile. But the features of the people hadn't been, till to-day, typical enough to please him. He had expected in the north mysterious looking Basques; then, something Gothic or Iberian, if not Moorish, with a touch of the Berber to give an extra aquiline curve to the nose. But not a bit of it! Noses were as blunt as in England, Ireland, or America, and might have been grown there. It was only this morning that we had flashed past a few picture-book Spanish features, and fierce, curled moustaches.

“Wait till you get farther south,” murmured the Cherub, “you will see the handsome peasants. They put townspeople to shame.”

“And mantillas—I want mantillas,” said Dick. “I've only seen one so far, except in the distance at Vitoria; I expected every woman to wear one. Now you, señorita, owe it to your country.”

Pilar laughed. “Fancy a mantilla in a motor-car. You haven't *seen* me yet, señores—no, not even when I went to the play. When we're at Seville, why, then you'll be introduced to the Real Me. Look you, I have but one sole hat in this wide world, beyond this motoring thing I bargained for at Burgos. You've no idea what a hat—such a hat as a self-respecting señorita can put upon the head God made—costs in this land of Spain. Twice—three times what it would be elsewhere, so travelled women say, and to have a smart one is necessary a trip at least to Biarritz. As for Doña Rosita, she is old-fashioned, and always wears the mantilla; indeed, on her wedding tour to Paris she had to buy her first hat in Marseilles, she says; for thirty years ago, you could hardly find one in Spain. Now, most of the ladies in Madrid wear hats, except for the bull-fight; but in dear Seville, it's different. I shall no longer have a headache with the hatpins which pinch these hairs of mine. Santa María Purísima, you shall see what you shall see.”

She spoke as if to me; but she glanced at Dick, who—though he had still to pose as the owner of the car—was growing fond of the tonneau, while Ropes drove. Woe betide Don Cipriano if he had seen that glance!

By and by we turned off the main road at Cetafe, and got caught by closed bars at a railway crossing.

“We shall probably be here an hour, and might as well lunch,” said the Cherub resignedly; but when a humble-looking luggage train had crept in, it was so impressed with our air of superior importance that, to our surprise, it backed out rather than obstruct our honourable path; and the gates were wheeled back for us to pass in front of the engine's polite little nose.

It was a spin of but fifty miles from Madrid to the olive plantations (the first I'd seen in Spain) near Toledo; but the road surface was not of velvet; and we had often to slow down for animals who hated, because they did not understand, that most faithful and loyal of beasts, the automobile. Therefore it was close upon one o'clock when the noble old town rose in wild majesty before us on its granite, horseshoe hill, girdled by the dark gold bed of the Tagus.

Madrid seen from afar off had scarcely been impressive, but this Rome of Spain—though we did not approach it by way of the world-famous bridge—was grander than any picture had led me to believe.

We had seen nothing of the grey car yet, not even a cloud of dust, but we knew it must be here, and everyone of us looked forward to watching the face of the Duke when we should march into the dining-room of the best hotel, where by this time he and his party were probably about to lunch.

In a few minutes I should see Monica, perhaps be as near to her as at the fonda of the Escurial. That was the thought most absorbing; yet my spirit was on its knees before this ancient throne of kings.

I could hardly believe that the sullen yellow stream pounding its way through the gorge, and shouldering aside huge rocks as if they were pebbles, was really the Tagus, enchanted river of my childish dreams—the river my father loved—the golden river I had scarcely dared hope to see.

Not a legend of the Tagus or Toledo that I did not know, I reminded myself dreamily. I knew how, in the grand old days of the city's glory, the Jews of Jerusalem had respectfully sent a deputation to the wise Jews of Toledo, asking: “Shall this man who says He is the Son of God be given up to the Roman law, and die?” And how the Jews of Toledo had hastened to return for answer: “By no means commit this great crime, because we believe from the evidence that He is indeed the long looked-for Redeemer.” How the caravan had made all speed back, arriving too late; and how, because of their wisdom and piety, the Jews of Toledo had been spared by the Inquisition when all others burned.

I knew how, in a time of disaster and poverty for Toledo, San Alonzo, a poor man, prayed heartily to the Virgin, in whose lifetime the cathedral had been begun, imploring her help for the town; how she came at his call, and looking about to see what she could do, touched the rock, which throbbed under her fingers like a heart, until all its veins flowed with molten iron; how this iron was drunk by the Tagus in such draughts that the water became the colour of old gold; and how after that, the city grew rich and famous through the marvellous quality of its steel, which, the faithful believe, owes its value to the iron-impregnated Tagus.

I knew how the King of the Visigoths had here become a Christian, and made of Toledo the ecclesiastical capital of Spain. I knew how the Cid had ridden to the city on Babieca, beside treacherous Alonzo. I knew how Philip the Second had been driven away by the haughtiness of the clergy, pretending greater love for Madrid, that town built to humour a king's caprice. I knew how, even as in the mountains round Granada, in every cave among the rocks of the wild gorge, sleeps an enchanted Moor in armour, on an enchanted steed, guarding hidden treasure, or waiting for the magic word which will set him free to fight for his banished rulers. And yet, here was I entering this ancient citadel mighty in history and fable, in an automobile, with a photographic camera!

“But you are a banished prince yourself,” said Pilar, when I spoke something of what was in my mind. “And you've come out of your enchanted cave at the magic word. That magic word is—Love.”

XXI

The Duchess's Hand

High on the hill Colonel O'Donnel pointed out the Alcázar of many vicissitudes, long since turned into a military academy, which has made Toledo to Spain what Woolwich is to England. “There your father and I went to school,” said he. “I come every year or two, and wander about with my thoughts.”

With this, he began bowing right and left to young officers who sauntered inside the gateway. Nearly everyone knew and seemed delighted to see him; indeed, who could see the excellent Cherub, and not be glad?

He himself was happy. “There go your father and I!” he exclaimed, picking out the two best-looking infants in a procession of incredibly small boys proudly wearing a smart uniform. “Oh, where are the girls who used to smile at us?”

So we drove into the Moorish-looking stronghold, through a labyrinth of steeply ascending tunnels which were streets. They were so narrow that I would not have believed the car could scrape along without smashing the mud-guards, had not the Cherub valiantly urged us on, with assurances that it could be done. And always we did slide through, the sides of the Gloria so close to open doors and windows that we could have reached into dark rooms, and helped ourselves to loaves of bread, brass cooking vessels, coarse green pottery, jars of flowers, or astonished babies.

There was no space for dwellers in these shadowed lanes to rush from their houses before our car, when warned by the “choof, choof” of the motor as we rattled over the “agony stones,” that something extraordinary was coming; but mothers shrieked for their offspring, while young girls hailed their friends to the free show; and men, women, and children jostled each other good-naturedly in every window and door as we approached, pouring out in our wake,

though seemingly half afraid even then that the dragon might take to charging back upon them.

Beautiful faces peered from behind rusty bars, with eyes to tempt any man to "eat iron," as the saying is. Dark men with sun-warmed eyes, and black heads wrapped in handkerchiefs of scarlet silk, stared curiously at Pilar's veil; and when we emerged from the stone-and-plaster labyrinth, into a wider space where the hotel stands like an ancient palace, we were swamped by the laughing crowd which had formed into a trotting procession behind us.

Just as the marble whiteness of the patio cooled our eyes, down the stairs came those with whom my thoughts had raced ahead; the Duchess of Carmona; Monica and her mother; behind them the Duke.

Monica grew rose-red at sight of us. Her elders, not in the Duke's confidence concerning the Gloria's disabilities, appeared as little surprised as pleased; but Carmona's various and visible emotions included extreme astonishment. I looked at him, my cap off for the ladies, smiling and nonchalant as if nothing had happened since our last meeting; and despite the self-control inherited from Oriental ancestors, for an instant he tried in vain to hide mingled rage and bewilderment. Possibly he might have fancied that we had come by train, had not Ropes been starting the car at that moment, en route for some resting-place masquerading as a garage; and the "choof, choof" of my Gloria came in through the open doors like a defiant laugh.

Then he must have wondered how, by all that was demoniac, we had contrived to track him to Toledo!

"This is quite a surprise, Señor Duque!" said I, as we met in the patio at the foot of the stairs.

"Ye—es," he answered, tugging at his moustache, and wishing us and our car on some uninhabited planet.

"And a great pleasure!"

"Um—er—of course," he mumbled; and I dared not meet Monica's laughing eyes, lest our lips should laugh as well.

They went to lunch; but we were not many moments behind, and Pilar, murmuring in my ear, "Cats may look at a king, whether the king likes or not," gaily selected a table next to the others. She then

kept up a stream of talk with Monica, exchanging impressions of Madrid. “Didn't you love the shops?” she asked. “And shall you buy Toledo things to-day; scarf-pins and hatpins and paper-knives; or did you buy too many yesterday?”

“I think I bought *just enough*,” said Monica, with a quick smile. “But I shall get more here. We're going to a metal work-shop, after the cathedral.”

But this was sheer audacity, and was punished as I feared it would be.

Not wishing to pursue with too conspicuous violence, lest we defeat our object, we let Carmona's party leave the dining-room before us. A quarter of an hour later we followed, going out into the strange grey streets, haunted by men and women who have made history. Dick (armed with a book by Leonard Williams, greatest of authorities on Spain) was allowed to walk beside Pilar, while that most unsuspecting and kindly of chaperons, the Cherub, bestowed his society on me. But, according to his habit, he was often silent, giving me time to dream of Toledo's past.

Picturesque enough were the figures of to-day in the old grey capital of the Visigoths, yet they were not as real for me as other figures which only my mind's eye could see.

Here was the long, flat façade of the building legend had chosen as the palace of Wamba the Benefactor—the Farmer King. I saw the old man waking to life in the dungeon where the treachery of one loved and trusted had thrown him, dressed in the monkish garb which never again could be changed for robes of state. I saw a haggard company of Jews marching into “Tarshish,” scarred and bleeding from the persecutions of Nebuchadnezzar who had flung them from Jerusalem. I saw Moorish men fighting to take Toledo—the “Lookout,” “the Light of the World,” and fighting again to save it for themselves.

There, in the towering Alcázar, had Rodrigo betrayed his beautiful queen, Egilona, for the still more beautiful Florinda, daughter of Julian, Espatorios of Spain; at least, so legend said, mingling the romantic music of its ballads inextricably with the deep organ notes of history. Below, on the cliff above the Tagus, in the Tower of Hercules, had Rodrigo taken the painted linen cloths from the

enchanted casket, and seen the awful vision of the Moorish horde with his own figure fleeing before them, one day when he forgot the prophecy which warned all kings of Spain against entering that mysterious, locked door.

Up this narrow street in the town, behind that barred window with its curious cannon-ball decorations, perhaps the incomparable Doña Flor of Dumas' “Bandit” had smiled and pierced the heart of the “Courier of Love” with her beauty.

It was like awaking from a brilliant dream when the Cherub stopped abruptly, to point up at the vast, incongruous bulk of the cathedral towering over us. But there was nothing incongruous in the rich, Gothic splendour within; and my sole shock of disappointment came when I gave up hope of finding Monica.

They had punished her by changing their plan of campaign, and I must seek her elsewhere. But I could not wrench my friends from this great monument of Spanish glory, merely because I cared more to look on Monica Vale's face than the face of any saint, carved or painted by a master's hand.

I stayed, therefore, finding such consolation as I could in the jewelled gleam of rare old glass, the magnificence of bronze doors; tombs of kings and heroes; and all the wonders of gold, silver, pearls, and diamonds which, stored in the sacristy, do honour to the famous Black Virgin, the cathedral's Queen.

Coming out again into the town was like stepping with a single stride back from Europe into Africa; for nowhere can Moslem and Christian civilizations be more closely tangled than in Toledo. Moorish streets were like scimitar strokes cleft deep in the city; narrow chasms lined with secretive houses, giving here and there a glimpse of some bright, flowery patio, through half-open doors studded with iron bosses, and heavy enough to resist a siege; yet above the tiled roofs soared Christian spires in the translucent blue.

No one cared for us now that we were no longer gods in a car, except an occasional beggar, to whom the Cherub would murmur, “God will aid you, sister!” “Pardon me, brother!” and then, changing his mind, drop a penny into a withered old hand, or a pink, childish palm.

“They'll leave the shopping to the last, because Lady Monica told us it was to be done first,” said Pilar sagely; so we wandered through the shabby aisles of Rag Fair, Pilar hoping against hope to unearth a treasure; because, did not a man once pick up, for a song, a Greco worth a fortune, and did not one always find something at least amusing in the Rag Fair of Madrid? Thence we went on to the Moorish mosque, which the Visigoths began, and so to San Juan de los Reyes, which, Pilar said, I must like better than anything else in Toledo, because she did. With an air of possession she explained the votive chains of captive Christians darkly festooning the outer walls, and I did not tell her I had heard the story long ago. She shuddered as she pointed to the crucifix which used to go with the procession of the auto-da-fé. “Only think how different times are now!” said she. “When Philip the Second was going to be married to his bride, not fourteen, a great show in honour of the marriage was a burning of heretics, here in the Zoco—the market-place of Toledo! I shouldn't have cared much to see a royal wedding then. I don't even like to look at that crucifix, it gives me such thoughts. But see, aren't those carved stone galleries where Ferdinand and Isabel used to hear mass, like two great chased silver goblets? I hope the king and queen never sat there watching the poor wretches bound before marching off to the Zoco to die; but I'm sure Isabel wouldn't: she was so sweet, she must often have wished she hadn't made that awful promise to Torquemada.”

“You're Catholic, yet you say that!” I exclaimed, as we stood looking at the gorgeous shields of Los Reyes Católicos. Dick was near, listening with concealed eagerness for the girl's answer,—and no wonder, since he was Protestant, and not the man to be a turncoat, even for his love.

“Oh yes, I'm Catholic,” said she. “But,”—half whispering,—“Spaniards, even the most ardent Catholics, didn't really love the Inquisition. It was thrust on them; and—I suppose in those brutal old days it was a horrible excitement to see the burnings. It's natural to us Latins to have excitement; and after years of such dreadful ones as we had in those times, do you wonder the people clamour for bull-fights?”

“Then you don't think we Protestants deserve burning?” asked Dick, staring at the crucifix.

“How can you ask such a question?”

“But you—couldn't make a real *friend* of one, I suppose, or—er—let yourself care about one much?”

“I should try and convert him—or her.”

“Supposing you couldn't?”

“Then, I'd have to like him—or her—in spite of all. And he—or she—would have to leave my religion alone. But I'm tired of solemn things; and brother Cristóbal's dying to buy metal-work.”

I don't think that Dick knew whether he had been encouraged or not. And he must have remembered that the Conde de Roldan is the best and most eligible of Catholics. Poor Dick! Perhaps he was beginning to realize how much easier it is to advise another man to be sensible than to be sensible yourself.

Pilar had been right in her surmises as to the workings of Carmona's mind. When we came to the showroom of the Fabrica de Espadas, where the dusk was shot with a thousand gleams and glitters of strange weapons, there were those we had sought in vain till now. The Duchess, yellow with fatigue, was resting her stout person on a bench in the long, low room, Lady Vale-Avon beside her, looking tired and bored. But Carmona was at the glass-covered counter, begging Monica's advice in the selection of his purchases.

His back was towards us as we entered, and, unnoticed by him, we saw him hold up to the light a small sharp dagger, with a handle beautifully ornamented. He was indicating with his finger, for Monica's benefit, the delicate tracery upon gold, when, warned by lack of attention and wandering glances on the part of his companion, he turned in our direction. Then, hastily laying down the dagger, he pushed it away as though resenting the intrusion of our eyes.

“After all, we went to the Cave of Hercules,” said Monica, “and to the house where the Moorish nobles were supposed to be murdered; so we missed you when we got to the cathedral. Señorita O'Donnel, do come and help me choose presents for some girls at home, in England.”

She spoke brightly, yet wistfully, as if wondering whether she would be allowed to go back to those girls, a girl herself, and able to call England home.

Pilar crossed to her at once, and Dick and I followed. The good Cherub tactfully engaged the attention of the Duchess and Lady Vale-Avon, looking so innocent that it was more than they could do to be rude to him. And while the Duke sulked, we picked out wonderful knives and forks for our luncheon-hampers, and thin sword-sticks of leather which imitated bamboo and concealed blades so flexible that they could be rolled up like watch-springs.

“Let's all buy presents for each other, in memory of the day,” suggested Dick; and began by offering Pilar a pair of splendid hatpins. She retaliated with sleeve-links; so, emboldened by this prelude, I begged Monica to accept a brooch shaped like a shield. “Now I shall never lack protection,” said she, with gentle emphasis; and it was well for me that the Cherub was showing Lady Vale-Avon some marvellous sword passes. “Let me see,” the girl went on, when she had defiantly pinned the trinket into her lace cravat, under Carmona's furious frown. “What shall I give you for luck? Shall it be a dagger? Where's the one you were looking at, Duke?”

“I don't know,” he answered, so angry with me for my presumption that he could hardly speak, though not daring to show his true feelings and imperil his chances. “It seems to have disappeared. But we must really go at once. My mother is tired, and we still have several things to see before I can take you back to the hotel to rest.”

Purposely, he spoke in a loud tone, and Lady Vale-Avon heard through the Cherub's honeyed murmurs. She rose, and called Monica, who was swept away without finding the dagger.

It was dinner-time when we returned to our hotel; but Carmona's party did not appear in the dining-room. We lingered on hoping that they would come, until it was useless to hope longer, and as we drank black coffee, in the patio, Colonel O'Donnel asked a waiter where were the people who had lunched with us. “They have taken a private sitting-room,” replied the man, which was a relief, as I began to be haunted by black fear that Carmona had flitted by night.

By and by Pilar's long lashes drooped, and the Cherub, catching her in the act of stifling a yawn, laughingly ordered her off to bed. “You haven't had enough sleep these last few nights to keep a cigarron alive,” said he. Soon afterwards his own eyes began to look like those of a sleepy child, and he excused himself with all the

ceremony of Spanish leave-takings. Dick and I were left alone together, and were discussing what the morrow might bring forth, when a waiter hovered near us, bowing.

"The Excelentísima Señora Duquesa de Carmona would consider it a favour if Señor Waring and Teniente O'Donnel would visit her in her sitting-room," he announced.

Were the heavens about to fall? My lifted eyebrows and Dick's questioned each other in bewilderment. But our lips were silent as we followed the servant.

The sitting-room of the "Excelentísima Señora" was on the first floor, perhaps a big bedroom hastily transformed. What we expected to see as the waiter opened the door I hardly know; but we assuredly did not expect to see the Duchess sitting alone.

The table where the party had dined was covered now by a piece of gaudy, pseudo-Moorish embroidery, and adorned with flowers. A few guide-books and novels were scattered about, and in her hand the Duchess held a paper-covered volume, as if she had been reading. But the expression of the dark, heavy face contradicted her pose. We could see that she was excited.

"Forgive my not rising, as I am tired," she said, as we came in. "It is kind of you to be so prompt, and I thank you." Then she paused, and we waited.

"I beg you to sit down. I want the pleasure of a talk."

We obeyed. And still waited.

"I am a little embarrassed," went on the Duchess. "You must be patient. What I wish to say is difficult. And yet the Señor Teniente, being himself Spanish, will understand. We are in Spain, the land of formality and rigid etiquette, among people of our class. That an automobile with two young unmarried men in it (and even Colonel O'Donnel is a widower, not old)—that such an automobile should be closely following ours which contains a beautiful girl, is calculated to cause gossip. Everywhere we go along this route my son and I have acquaintances, friends; and already there has been talk, which flies from place to place in gossiping letters between women. I am sure you would not like to think that you had caused me this distress on account of my sweet young guest and her mother?"

Never had I been more completely taken aback. She had us at her mercy; for how is a man to fight against a woman?

"We are motoring in your direction," I said lamely. "The chances of the road bring us together."

"Ah! but I ask you, as a woman of my age may ask a favour of young men like you, señores, not to take those chances. If it is as you say—and of course I believe—that you happen to be motoring on our road, it would be no great hardship to delay and give us a longer start. Remember, it is for the sake of a young girl, and for an old woman's peace of mind. Will you do this kindness, then, for me?"

She had struck me dumb. I did not know how to answer her, and she knew it. Even Dick, with his quick Yankee wit, for once was unready. And indeed, the Duchess had us at a hateful disadvantage.

"We are in something of a hurry, Señora Duquesa," I stammered awkwardly.

"Then, rather than cause you loss of time, we will be off very early, and go as far as may be in the day. If we leave at—let us say seven o'clock to-morrow, it would not be too inconvenient for you to wait till nine? That is all I ask; and to stay the night at Manzanares instead of trying to get on to some other stopping place. If you promise this, you are honourable men, and I know you will keep your word."

She had her lesson well, and had evidently rehearsed it with her son, for this lymphatic, weary-eyed woman was not one to know in advance the names of halting places on an automobile tour. It was clever of Carmona to use his mother's plump hand as a cat's-paw to pull his chestnuts from the fire; but it was not brave, because he must know that we could not let it touch the flames.

I thought for a moment in silence. Only boors could in so many words refuse such a request, put with apparent frankness by a woman old enough to be their mother. Yet I must not be trapped into promising anything that could separate me from Monica.

To be near her, at her service always, was the one thing of supreme importance; but to throw aside my sheep's clothing and declare myself a wolf would be to lose her; for the instant that Carmona was sure of my identity he would denounce me. I would be sent across the frontier while Monica remained with him,

unprotected save by her mother, who was his loyal friend. This was sure to happen, even if I did not count the trouble I might cause Colonel O'Donnel if I were arrested while posing as his son.

It seemed to me that we must agree to do what the Duchess asked, and, while keeping the letter of our promise, take means to see Monica in Seville. There, I must let her know all that had taken place, even if I could not communicate with her before. And I must implore her to come away with me lest some plot had been hatched meanwhile behind my back.

“What do you think, Waring?” I said. Then, giving him a cue, “I feel that we must consent, even though we may not see things according to the Duchess's point of view.”

“Why, of course, a man can't refuse a lady; a lady generally knows that,” Dick answered, avenging our wrongs with one sharp dig.

She thanked us effusively. “Then I may depend on you?” she asked, looking at me.

“You may depend upon us,” I said. “And pray don't trouble to leave at an inconvenient time. My friend and I promise you two hours' start.”

XXII

The Luck of the Dream-Book

It was late, and Monica must have gone to bed, therefore it was impossible to send her a message. Next morning I was up early, and had my coffee and roll on a little table in the patio, in the hope of snatching a word with her. But she came down as closely attended by her mother and the Duchess as if she had been a queen, and they her ladies-in-waiting. I had only a chance to say good-bye, as they were ready to drive off; and when I would have added a hasty explanation of our delay, the Duchess began to speak, so that Monica was whisked away without hearing.

"Wicked—old—*cat!*" was Pilar's exclamation when Dick told her the story of last night's dilemma. But when asked what she would have done in our place, her invention failed; and the Cherub approved our course.

The others had taken full advantage of our generosity, and had not left Toledo till nine. Therefore, according to our contract, we were obliged to wait until eleven, surprising Ropes by our procrastination.

But as we were on the point of spinning away from the hotel, a goat-herd turned the corner at the head of his shaggy flock. The man, tanned a dark bronze with constant exposure, wore his rags with the air of a king marching to conquest, and rather than show vulgar curiosity, strode past scarcely deigning a look at the automobile, though it was as likely as not the first he had ever seen. His goats, equally unconcerned, strayed among our wheels without hurry, and when they chose clattered off with much play of little cloven hoofs on cobblestones. A sharper note of contrast could hardly have been struck, Dick and I said to each other. A meeting between the automobile, latest product of man's restless invention, made to fly across states and continents, and the goat-herd whose knowledge of the world might extend ten miles beyond the place

where, since his birth, he had carried on one of the most ancient occupations on the globe. So the ages seemed united, and Virgil and Theocritus brought suddenly face to face with Maeterlinck and Henley; and an instant later we had taken a small excursion into the middle ages of superstition. Pilar told us gravely that in a volume of "Dreams and Love Lore," valued beyond all other books by the young girls of Andalucía, one read that it brought good luck to lovers to meet a flock of goats when starting on a journey in the morning.

Thus encouraged to hope for what I dared not expect, we set off, again and again finding ourselves hard put to it to get the long chassis of the Gloria round sharp corners of narrow streets. More than once it could be done only by backing the car, a feat which was witnessed with cries of astonishment by a crowd of water-sellers with painted tin vessels, milkmen on donkey back, knife-grinders, and Murillo cherubs who were following to see us off. Thus attended we slid down the steep hill which twisted past the old fortifications of Toledo, and brought us out at last upon the Puente de Alcántara, that most wonderful bridge of all the world.

The Tagus, grandest river in Spain, and golden as old father Tiber himself, plunged through his narrow gorge a hundred feet below the arch of stone, and on either hand stood up the sun-baked cliffs, Toledo seated on their summit, crowned with towers, like an empress upon her throne. Far beneath, in the swirl of yellow water were Moorish mills, white with age, grinding corn for their new masters.

As we passed across the bridge at a foot-pace between strings of tasselled and jingling mules, little grey donkeys loaded with pigskins of wine, brown jugs of olive oil, or bags of meal, and charming children who offered us roses for a perrilla, we had our last sight of the cathedral spires. The voice of a young girl, washing white and blue clothing in a trough of running water, sped us upon our journey. Her head was bound in a scarlet handkerchief; and smiling at us while she pounded the linen, she sang a strange song, half chant, with that wild Eastern lilt which has been handed down from the Moors to the sons and daughters of Spain.

"She's improvising a copla!" exclaimed Pilar. "Listen; it's for you, brother Cristóbal."

So I listened, and heard that my eyes though dark as starless skies, could blaze as the sun with love, and that the blessing of a poor girl who had none to care for her, was upon the rich girl who held the treasure of my heart.

"You must blow her a kiss to pay for the song," Pilar said. "Don't you know that? But then, you haven't been in Spain long—except in your thoughts. That's expected; just as a girl must politely kiss her hand to a bull-fighter if he kisses his to her; for if she doesn't, she puts the evil-eye upon him; and like as not he's gored the next time he goes into the arena. Oh, I love the coplas! And wasn't that woman singing in good Spanish? Even the common people speak well here, for Valladolid and Toledo Spanish is the best in Spain."

I looked back and kissed my hand to the girl, who would have been insulted had I thrown money; and lifting my eyes once more to the towering city, I saw a mediæval background such as old masters love to give their pictures.

The landscape was wild, and unchanged to all appearance from the days when the Crescent and the Cross battled for supremacy on those stony hills and in those savage gorges. Once again, I felt myself a crude anachronism, in my automobile, nor did the impression leave me when Toledo was hidden round a corner; nor when we flashed past ancient Eastern norias, slowly turned by sleepy horses or indignant donkeys; nor with glimpses of sentinel watch-towers, or ruined castles—such "castles in Spain" as Don Pedro promised to the Black Prince's soldiers—and seldom gave if they were worth giving.

Now, our business was to hark back to the king's highway between Madrid and Seville—that road on which Dick thriftily planned his quick service of automobiles for passengers and market gardeners; but to-day there was none of that excitement of the chase to which we were accustomed. I was depressed despite the good omen of the goats, and an encounter with a mule who had four white feet—a sign of some extraordinary piece of luck, according to Pilar's Dream-Book. The gently undulating, olive-silvered country, with its occasional far-off hamlets and fine church spires did not interest me, and I was not as thankful as I should have been for the good road.

At last we had left the zone of brown cities and sombre hued villages, and come into the zone of dazzling white habitations, which meant that we were nearing the southern land, loved by the sun. The

huge, semi-fortified, high-walled farmhouses standing in lonely spaces were white as great shells floating solitary on seas of waving green. The close-grouped knots of cottages huddled together for mutual protection might have been cut from blocks of marble; and their tenants were vivid creatures, burning like tropical flowers against the dazzling white of their rough walls.

Never for ten minutes was the landscape the same. From olive plantations we rushed into a bleak country of savage hills, where windmills planted upon rocks beckoned with slowly moving arms; so down into flowery valleys with a thread of silver river tangled in the grasses near a long white road. And always the horizon was broken with tumbled mountains, purple, gold, and rose, swimming in a sea of light and changing colour.

“Soon we'll be in Cervantes' country,” said the Cherub; “and good country it is—for sport. I come myself sometimes with friends, after wild boar; and there are plenty of rabbits to be had when there's nothing better.”

“Don't speak of rabbits,” said Dick. “It makes me hungry to think of them; and as nobody has said anything about lunching, and we're having such a good run, I haven't liked to mention it. Still, there's that Andaluz ham and goodness knows how many other things wasting their sweetness—”

The Cherub shook his head. “We mustn't stop here. It will be better to wait till we come to another road-mender's house. We're sure to pass one before long. Then we'll pull up, and the women will bring us water, or anything we want.”

“I believe what you're really thinking of, is brigands!” exclaimed Pilar.

“Well,” smiled the Cherub, “maybe something of the sort was in my mind; though you need have no fear, my Pilarcita.”

“As if I would—a soldier's daughter!” sneered Pilarcita. “I wish we would meet the Seven Men of Ecija, or El Vivillo himself—if they haven't caught him yet. It would be fun.”

“No fun with you among us, child,” the Cherub said. “The chivalrous bandoleros of the past exist in these days only in story books and ballads. Vivillo is a villainous brute, and a little farther south we'll find no one on the road who'll care to speak his name.

They'll call him Señor Coso. As for the Seven Men of Ecija, one says that they're disbanded long ago, yet there's a rumour that they still exist; and by the way, Don Ramón, for generations that famous band of seven brigands has had a connection—at least in old wives' gossip—with the Dukes of Carmona."

"How's that?" I inquired, interested; for though I had heard many things about that house, I had not heard the story at which Colonel O'Donnel hinted.

"I wonder you don't know!" said he. "Why, the tale runs that, more than a hundred years ago, the baby heir of the Carmonas was ailing. If they lost him, the title would go to another branch of the family; but the Duchess had died within a few days of his birth, and no foster-mother could be found to give the child health. Then the Duke caused it to be known far and near that, if any woman could save his boy, she should have a pension for life, enough to keep her in comfort with all her family; and that her daughter and her daughter's daughter should, if she chose to make the contract, be foster-mothers of future Dukes of Carmona. In answer to this proclamation came a woman of Ecija, the town of the brigands; a Juno of a creature. She nursed the ailing heir back to health, and when the child had become devoted to her, the secret leaked out that she was the married sister of the terrible priest who led the brigand band. But she was not sent away for that reason. Instead, the Duke used his influence successfully to obtain a pardon for her husband, the priest's brother-in-law, when he was taken red-handed for robbery and murder between Carmona and Seville; and in gratitude for this the man promised that his sons and sons' sons should be always at the disposal of the ducal house. For the rest, the story goes that more than once in the last century this promise has been exacted and fulfilled in secret."

"I wouldn't put it past the present Carmona to have a nest of bandits up his sleeve," said Dick. "It's a pretty black sleeve, if some of the things one hears are true. But here's a road-mender's cottage. What about halting, and cocking snooks at El Vivillo?"

"It will do very well," replied the Cherub. "If worst came to worst, we could make a good defence from inside."

"Honestly, aren't you pulling our legs about the brigands?" asked Dick, half-scornful and half-amused, as we slowed down.

“No,” said the Cherub. “I'm not joking, if that's what you mean; for we are on the borders of the bandido country now. It will be years before brigandage is stamped out in Spain; and you must have read of the trouble there's been lately. Not that I think there's much chance of an encounter, but it's well to be prepared; for if a band of men jump at you with carbines to their shoulders, there's no getting out revolvers.”

“H'm!” muttered Dick. “I suppose you know what you're talking about; but I wouldn't mind betting that these people would laugh if we asked, 'What about brigands?'”

“All right; let us ask,” said the Cherub calmly.

By this time the car had stopped close to a tiny white box of a house set a few yards back from the road, with a strip of grass for a lawn; and an old man, evidently an ex-soldier, with a plump wife and a pretty daughter were coming out. We interchanged various compliments; said that, with the kind permission of his honour, the road-mender, we would lunch near his house; were told that the house and everyone as well as everything in it, was at our worship's disposal; and finally the Cherub murmured a question as to whether any bandidos had been seen lately.

This way and that the old man glanced before answering. Then below his breath replied that, as it happened, four gentlemen of the profession had passed no more than three or four hours ago. They were out of luck, for they had been hunted by the civil guard; and as they were hungry had gone over to the right, there, to see what could be got at the nearest farm. As for this place, it was safe enough, for there was nothing in it which even a brigand would have; and one had to be agreeable to these persons, if they stopped to rest or chat; it was more prudent.

“You see, you would have lost your money if I'd taken your bet, Señor Waring,” said the Cherub.

Never was such a lunch as that we had by the roadside. We all worked at spreading out the contents of the hampers, while the road-mender and his family bustled about, not as inferiors with the hope of a tip, but helping us as friends and hosts.

When we arrived, not a soul was to be seen, save the dwellers in the white box. The only living things beside the trio and ourselves,

were the larks that sprang heavenward pouring jewels from throbbing throats, and a few unknown birds of brilliant red and yellow, like drifting flower-petals. But whether these birds carried the news, or whether it blew over the country with the scented wind, certain it is that an audience collected to gaze upon us, as clouds boil up over a clear horizon.

It was not an intrusive crowd that came; neither did they approach offensively near, or stare with vulgar curiosity. It's component members—three or four handsome young mule-drivers, princely in shabbiness; an elderly tiller of the soil, with the eyes and profile of a half-tamed hawk; an old woman and a young girl madonna-like in their hooded cloaks, as they sat their patient donkeys; and a couple of shy children with the eyes of startled deer—hovered, paused, and ruminated, ready to take flight, like wild creatures of the forest, at a rude look or chaffing word.

But they got no rude looks or chaffing words from us, though we dared not smile too invitingly, lest they misunderstand, and flee from us, offended. We bowed gravely; they gravely bowed in return. Then, following a hurried whisper of advice from the tactful Cherub, we continued our meal. But presently, sandwich in hand, he strolled towards the scattered group, mingled with it, and murmured. What he murmured, we in the car and round it could not hear; but the chill uncertainty on those dark faces brightened into sympathetic amusement.

“He's telling them about ourselves and the automobile,” chuckled Pilarcita. “Oh, I know him! He's probably making up nonsense about the car and its workings. In another minute they'll be his slaves, and friends of us all.”

As she whispered, the plump figure sauntered back. “I think that now it's safe to offer them a share of our food,” said he, in the manner of one who imparts a delicious secret. “They are dying for some; but they'll refuse unless we go about it in the right way, for they're as proud as we are.”

Pilar was not allowed to move, because, in Spain, women are to be worshipped from afar, and must not mingle with strangers. But she handed plates of the dainties supplied by Doña Rosita, to Dick and me, and thus laden we wandered towards our audience.

“Offer something first to the road-mender's family,” suggested the Cherub, and we obeyed. “Probably you are not hungry,” was his preface. “Why should you be, when you have plenty of food as good as ours, maybe better? But here are things from Madrid. It may happen they are new to you. We shall be pleased if you taste them.”

Then proud, hesitating fingers hesitated no longer, but descended upon thin slices of ham, shredded and sweetened eggs, cheese, and mazapan. Nobody betrayed eagerness, but faces beamed, especially when the road-mender, proud of us as if we had been his relations, went round with our wineskin, cordially bidding every man put it to his lips.

As the company ate and drank, the Cherub circulated among them, and soon was primed with the abbreviated life-story of each person, though he had apparently asked no questions. Somehow, it was the first impulse of the most reserved soul to confide in the Cherub; and when the meal was finished, and no excuse remained for lingering, the wild birds, tamed by kindness, flew away regretfully.

“They'll all have good words to speak for automobilists after this,” said Pilar.

“Until some ruffian comes tearing along, upsetting their carts and breaking their illusions,” added Dick.

When we were ready to go on, the road-mender's wife would not be content unless Pilar would have a look at the house, which she took, and came back delighted. “Tiny rooms, but clean as wax,” she reported. “Pictures and crucifixes and Toledo knives on the snow-white walls, and beautiful bright copper in the kitchen. I believe I could be happy to live there—with someone I loved.”

Was the image of Don Cipriano in her mind as she said this? or Dick's tanned face and whimsical grey eyes? Or did she think only of an existence in the society of her father?

“Beware gutters!” was the road-mender's last word as we spun away; and we were glad of the warning; for despite careful driving, a few seconds of inattention might have sent us crashing into and over a deep trough across the road, half hidden by thick dust. There were many of these gutters, which might have been put underneath in the

form of culverts; but, as the Cherub remarked, since nobody takes the trouble to complain, in Spain, why should anyone bother?

There were broken patches, too, where somebody had begun to build a bridge, and then apparently forgotten all about going on with it; but luckily there were side tracks made by other pioneers, by which, with care, one could skirt the great square hole, and land safely on the other side.

Thus we arrived before a walled town with a Moorish gateway; and, for all the changes which had come or gone since the days of those who set it up, the place might have been under a spell of enchantment, a kind of "sleeping sickness," for at least five hundred unnoticeable years.

Our maps said that it was Ciudad Real; Colonel O'Donnel added that of all garrison towns it was the one which young officers hated worst. And while the car paused with panting motor for a discussion as to the way on, two dark youths by the roadside interested themselves in our situation. They had red handkerchiefs twisted round their heads, and the smarter of the pair wore two sombreros, one over the other—a simple way of carrying his Sunday hat on week-days; and they looked up from a meal of maize bread and onions to enter into conversation.

Had our honours any doubt as to the road? If so, and our worships would deign to mention the destination desired, they might have the happiness of helping us.

We wanted to go to Manzanares, I replied.

In that case, replied the owner of the two sombreros, there was a short cut which would be of assistance. Not only would it save us a bad section of road, but an hour's time as well. We must not go through the town, but turn to the left round the wall, nor must we enter the village which we would soon see, but skirt that also. Presently we would come to fields planted with olives, and our way would lead through these. We must not be disheartened if it appeared wild and rough. We should be able to pass, and in the end would be glad that we had availed ourselves of such advice.

Taking this for granted, I gave each of the lads a peseta, which they accepted more as their just due than as a favour. To avoid the town, it seemed that we must steer into chaos, void and formless;

but there were only a few hundred yards of desert. Beyond, we found ourselves in a good road, which led to the white village we had been told to expect; and there, as we were already primed with information, we wasted no time in asking questions. Instead, we plunged into open country, with a vista of olive trees in the grey-green distance. From fair, the road dwindled to doubtful; then to a certainty of badness. It narrowed; softened to a sandbank; hardened into a wilderness of rocks and stones scattered between deep ruts dug by the wheels of ox-carts. Apparently no other vehicles than these had ever weathered the terrors of this passage; yet we persevered; for here were the promised olive trees, so near, indeed, that we lurched against them as we rocked from side to side. We had been warned whatever happened not to be discouraged, and we cheered each other bravely, while our heads bumped the roof. “We shall be out of this presently,” we gasped. “It will surely be all right soon.”

Meanwhile, however, it was a nightmare; the sort of thing which a delirious chauffeur might dream and rave of, in a fever; and instead of improving, the way grew worse.

“Can it be possible those chaps deceived us on purpose?” I jerked out between chattering teeth, as the car sprang from one three-foot rut into another, in spite of Ropes' coaxing.

“I'll bet it's a trick of Carmona's,” gasped Dick, at the risk of biting his tongue. “I thought that fellow in the two hats looked a fox.”

“I *did* see them laughing when I glanced round after we passed,” said Pilar, as jumpily as if she rode a trotting horse. “But I—thought—they were pleased with the pesetas.”

“I expect they'd got more than we gave, to send us the wrong way,” growled Dick. “We must have been dreaming not to think of it.”

“We can't go about suspecting everyone we meet to be in Carmona's pay,” said I. “We'd be mistaken as often as right, and then we should feel small. After all, there isn't much harm done.”

“It's a wonder we haven't smashed something, sir,” sighed the much enduring Ropes.

“That's what Carmona prayed to his demons we would do,” said Dick.

“I'll back San Cristóbal against them all,” said I.

“Besides, there was the mule with the four white feet, and the goat-herd,” Pilar reminded me.

“I can't say they've brought us luck.”

“Wait,” said Pilar.

“Meanwhile let's turn back,” said Dick. “Another hundred yards like this, and even if we don't smash the differential or the chassis, Ropes will get side-slip of the brain. Half an hour of such driving must be equal to a week in Purgatory for a chauffeur.”

We did turn back, and feeling years older, arrived once more at the point from which he had started. We would have given something to see the man with the two hats, and his companion, but they had prudently taken themselves off, like full-fed vultures. This time we made no inquiries, but trusted to our intuition and our maps, which, without once contradicting each other, led us into a decent road that seemed like a path to paradise after all we had endured.

Making up for lost time, and revelling in joy of motion, we put on our best speed, which for a few moments brought the roadside telegraph posts as close together as fir trees in a Norwegian forest. But suddenly the motor slowed, and stopped with a tired sigh within sight of a village white as newly polished silver.

“Petrol gone,” said Ropes. “It oughtn't to be, but it is. Extra strain in that short cut of the Duke's used it up.”

He got out, and untied a bidon from the reserve store fastened upon the foot-board. But the tin was light in his hand as a feather. He gave a low whistle, and a shadow darkened his face, a shadow which was not made by the brim of his motor-cap as he bent his head to examine the bidon.

“There's a leak here, sir,” he said to me—for though Dick was now supposed to be his master, in moments of stress he clung to old habits. “Looks as if the tin had been pricked with some sharp instrument. H'm! Shouldn't wonder if it had been. It would be of a piece with all the rest.”

“You mean at Toledo?”

“Yes, sir. Everything was right, then. I bought enough petrol in Madrid to last to Cordoba, pretty well all we could carry, and ordered

more to meet us there, grande vitesse, in case I couldn't get it—as you said we were sure now to go that way."

"Well, let's look at your other bidons. We shall be in a fix if we're held up here."

"Two more empty," announced Ropes. "And three bidons don't suddenly take to leaking, of themselves. I suppose if I'd had my wits about me, I'd have looked, at Toledo, before starting; but who's to think of everything? I did have a thorough go at the car, for fear of mischief, but forgot the bidons However, there's one to go on with, I'm pretty sure; for it's stowed away in a place nobody would think of, if they had to do the villain act in a hurry."

Whereupon he handed out a new bidon from the tool box, and we both gave a sigh of relief to see that it was intact. At least, we had now enough to get us to Manzanares; and at worst we could but be hung up there while Ropes went back by train as far as Madrid to buy petrol.

While we had been making these discoveries, however, the village had been discovering us. It was not the time of year, as Pilar said, for bears and monkeys to arrive by road, therefore when something was seen approaching rapidly and stopping suddenly, the inhabitants of the white town had not been able to bear the suspense. Somebody had given the word that there was a thing to see, and out Torralba came pouring in its hundreds, a brilliant procession a full quarter of a mile long.

Youth and beauty took the lead. Girls with arms thrown round the shoulders of one another's blue, pink, or yellow jackets skipped along the dazzling road like peasant graces. Little, star-eyed brown boys had apparently taken the trouble to step off Murillo's canvases to find out what we were, while their toddling sisters cried at being outdistanced. Behind these came men, middle-aged and old, in strange-shaped caps like fur and leather coal-scuttles, women with bare black heads, or faded blue handkerchiefs shadowing withered faces, and beggars hobbling on their sticks; a shouting, laughing army pouring its bright coloured stream down the white line of the straight road. And before the Gloria had been refreshed with her long drink of petrol, the wave of life had broken round her bonnet. Bright eyes stared, brown hands all but touched us; and children knew not whether to shriek with fright or laugh with joy as they saw

themselves reflected in the glass turned up against our roof. But at the first cough of the motor as it throbbed into waking, the throng rolled back, dividing to let us pass, as if the car had cloven it in two, and joining again to tear home in our wake.

All the able-bodied women who had not come out to meet us were sitting before the doors of their white houses, making lace mantillas and flounces for the young Queen-elect,—Torralba is famous for its lace-makers,—and they waved work-worn hands as we ran by, wishing us good speed, or throwing an improvised copla after the vanishing Gloria.

Now we were in Don Quixote land; and had we gone back to his day as we entered his country of La Mancha, our red car could have roused little more excitement. Village after village turned out for us; always the same gorgeous colours against the background of white houses and blue arch of sky; always the same brilliant eyes and rich brown faces with scarlet lips that laughed. It was even a relief to the monotony to meet a band of fierce-eyed young carters ranged in a line with big stones in their hands, wanting to bash in the aristocrat's features, if the aristocrats frightened their mules. But neither the aristocrats nor mules showed fear. Pilar even leaned out, as if daring the four or five sullen fellows to throw their stones into a girl's face, and their arms fell inoffensively.

“I don't believe any Spaniard, no matter how bad, would hurt a woman who had done him no harm!” she exclaimed.

The road, with its rutty, irritating surface, seemed endless. We had started late, according to our promise, and having lost more than an hour on the “short cut,” grey wings of twilight began at last to fold in the landscape. It was long since we had passed a village; Manzanares was not yet near, and I began to wonder whether the Gloria would not again grow thirsty before we could give her drink.

Turn after turn; always the same jolting; always the same scene, till our minds wearied. Then, suddenly rounding a bend, we came upon something which made every one of us forget boredom.

There was the Duke's car—the grey car which we had sworn to avoid—stuck in a caniveau that cut the road in two. There were Carmona and his chauffeur staring balefully into the inner workings of the motor; there were the Duchess and Lady Vale-Avon,

dust-powdered and disconsolate, sitting forlornly on roadside hillocks; and there was Monica, her veil off, walking up and down impatiently with her little hands buried in the pockets of her grey coat, the last gleam of sunset finding a responsive note in the gold of her hair.

“What did I tell you!” exclaimed Pilar. “The goat-herd! The mule with the white feet! It's the luck of the Dream-Book!”

XXIII

The Glorification of Monica

Slowing up, we were almost upon the group; and for once we were welcome to our enemies. Even Carmona's face brightened, a flicker of hope lit Lady Vale-Avon's grey eyes; and the Duchess deliberately courted us with a smile.

As for Monica, she was radiant as a child who has been surprised by the home-coming of loved ones; yet there was a new wistfulness in her eyes, despite the joy she showed.

“Oh, how glorious that you've come to the rescue!” she cried, all dimples and roses. Still, she looked from me to Pilar, and from Pilar to me, as if she longed to ask one or the other some question which it was impossible to speak; and I said to myself that it would go hard with me if I did not find out before I was many hours older, what that question was.

Any port is welcome in a storm or among fellow-motorists, if you are helpless by the roadside with several ladies when night is coming on; and Carmona's first words showed that he had no scruple in making use of us. But with the trials he had gone through, and his natural preference for the help of any other car rather than the hated Gloria, he was in a black mood. He wished to be civil, lest we should be goaded into leaving him in the lurch; yet it was plainly such an effort that I could have laughed aloud. Pilar would have been able to quote paragraph and page of her Dream-Book.

The worst damage to the car was a broken spring, though something seemed to have gone wrong also with the ignition in that disastrous bump into the caniveau. They had been where we found them for a couple of hours, Carmona admitted, without encountering any vehicle or animal to give them a tow. The first hope had been to stagger on to Manzanares (which originally they had meant to pass) with a broken spring; but the bee in the motor's

bonnet could not be made to buzz, and in despair, Carmona had been about to send his chauffeur on foot, in search of some conveyance for the ladies and their luggage. More hours must have passed, at best, before the man could have returned to the rescue, and already everybody was hungry.

The ladies of the Duke's party had to be transferred to the Gloria; and Dick, with airs of ownership, urged vague and voluble reasons why I should be their companion in the tonneau. We were the masters of the situation, and Carmona's face, as he was obliged to take his seat beside the chauffeur who must steer the car in tow, repaid me for grievous wrongs.

Pilar, not to be outdone in ingenuity by Dick, did for me what I could not do for myself, in contriving that I should sit next to Monica. Though I could say nothing for her ears which other ears might not hear, it was a joy to feel her slight shoulder nestling warm against my arm, to know that she could not be snatched from me by her mother or Carmona, but that as it was now, so it must be for many moments, perhaps an hour, to come. There was also satisfaction to be got from the fact that my enemy, bumping on behind in his own disabled car (propelled by our generosity and power), was glaring with malice, envy, and all uncharitableness at my back.

My one regret in these moments which should have been perfect, was that my prophetic soul hadn't caused me to write a long letter to Monica, which I might have been able to slip into her hand under cover of rugs and darkness.

Ropes had to light the lamps before we saw more of Manzanares than an illusive church spire which kept appearing and disappearing like a will-o'-the-wisp. But the petrol held out, and the Gloria's breathing was regular, despite the weight she had to tow over ruts and across gutters. Once, however, Ropes looked back at me with an expressive movement of the shoulders which I interpreted as, “we're lucky if we get there!” so I could have shouted “hurrah!” at sight of the first houses, though they brought my last moment of happiness.

Another instant, and the population of Manzanares was answering to the thrum of our motor, as soldiers to the call of the drum. From somewhere, their saints alone knew where, an army of children poured into the long straight street, and as we slowed to

avoid wholesale murder, they took advantage of our consideration to swarm up the car like ants. They ran shouting beside us, climbed on to the steps, hung on behind, fighting so ruthlessly for choice positions that they all but fell under the wheels. One would not have supposed there could be other children left in Spain. How there could be room for these in the town of Manzanares was a wonder; how they could all have turned out on the second in their thousands, was a miracle; and their promptness would have done credit to any commander.

The shrill cries of this legion, drowning the sound of the motor, and increasing as the contingent was swelled from each side street, roused the town. Families left their tables and rushed to the door, their supper in their hands. Bakers with white arms left to-morrow's bread in the troughs; a group of farriers shoeing a horse stopped work, until the glowing iron paled. Shopkeepers who had lighted their windows with a blaze of electricity, ran into the street. Mules and donkeys tied to doorposts shared the general excitement, plunged and reared before the advance of the human breaker with the car on its crest snapped their cords, and dashed into their master's houses.

Never, among all our successes, had we made such a succés fou as this; but then, never before had we had a car in tow. Half our triumph belonged to the Lecomte; yet either of us would gladly have dispensed with all; and had it not been for a small but determined policeman who struggled to preserve the credit of the town, we might have been half the night fighting our way to an hotel.

He dealt blows and exhortations indiscriminately, piloted us through side streets which it would never have occurred to our imagination to enter, and with exertions worthy of him who “singly kept the bridge,” helped us make a lane for the ladies to dart into the door of the little fonda.

It was an iron door of elaborate openwork, leading, Moorish fashion, through a shallow vestibule into a patio—the first we had seen on our way south; and if it had not been slammed shut with a loud click, by some person inside, half Manzanares would have poured after the fugitives.

Assured of the ladies' safety, the men of the two (outwardly) united parties remained to help the chauffeurs and a bewildered

landlord to take down luggage. Overwhelmed by a wave of halfgrown children and a thick spray of babies, Carmona's man lost his presence of mind. The two cars had hardly stopped before the little creatures were in them, and on them, and under them, trying to pinch the tyres, blowing the horn, squalling, laughing, crying. “Mon Dieu, c'est un obsession!” wailed the unfortunate Frenchman; and even the imperturbable Ropes showed signs of “nerves.”

As fast as the thronging goblins were beaten off, they were up again in redoubled force; but so merry they were, and so handsome was each bold brown face, with its dazzling eyes, that it was impossible to be angry. Somehow, we rescued the luggage, and with the aid of the landlord pitched, or slid, or rolled it through the door, momentarily opened.

“For Heaven's sake, sir, see me through this!” implored Ropes, noticing that the men of the party were on the point of following the luggage. “Hate to trouble you, but I don't think my Spanish will run to it.” In pity I climbed into the car to go with him to the stable which the landlord indicated as our garage. It was an experience to be remembered in nightmares; yet there was in it a sort of schoolboy pleasure. We seemed to have done battle against the whole force of the army out against us; nevertheless when we returned to the fonda, swept along by a large bodyguard, we found a regiment assembled round the door. How we got through was food for another wild dream, but we did get through, to stand panting on the other side of the grating, in the patio.

Dozens of dark faces were pressed against the bars, like tier above tier of glowing pansies in a flower-bed; and we knew at last the sensation of those who are the observed, not the observers, in a menagerie.

Everyone was in the patio, where electric lights hanging from the balconies mingled with rich yellow lamplight and ruddy firelight streaming from the kitchen. All the luggage was piled anyhow, in a chaotic heap surging with suit-cases, boiling with dressing-bags; while near by, like Marius and a friend or two at the ruins of Carthage, stood the Duchess, Lady Vale-Avon, Carmona, Dick, and the Cherub. Monica and Pilar had been talking at a distance with a young girl of the house, but seeing me gravitate in their direction, Lady Vale-Avon called her daughter.

“The ladies are saying they can't stay here,” announced Dick, his voice in sympathy with a twinkle in his eyes.

“I'm not saying so,” cut in Monica. “I think it will be fun; a real adventure. The landlady's wonderful, and all her daughters and nieces beauties. If we're nice to them, they'll be adorable to us.”

“The place is a den!” exclaimed Lady Vale-Avon. “There must be something better in the town.”

“I'm afraid there isn't,” said the Duke. “This accident has made me helpless. I'm horribly sorry; but we can't get on anywhere else to-night.”

“We can sit up,” said the Duchess, “in the automobile.”

“Do let's look at the rooms,” begged Monica. “And don't let them see we're finding fault. Their feelings will be hurt.”

“What nonsense!” replied Lady Vale-Avon. “As if they had feelings!”

“If you don't consider them, they won't take pains to make you comfortable,” I said, knowing by instinct the people with whom we had to deal. “They're beginning to suspect already that something's wrong, and judging from the expression of their faces it will take only a little more for the landlord to say he has no rooms. Then we really may have to sit in the automobiles.”

The keeper of the fonda and his family, who had come so warmly to welcome the strangers, were now hovering aloof, silent and suspicious, their spirits dashed by the contemptuous looks of Lady Vale-Avon and the Duchess. Standing in semi-darkness, the landlord's face was a blur of brown shadow, featureless, save for a pair of enormous eyes burning with an emotion which was no longer hospitality. His wife, whose broad shoulder was pressed against her husband's as if to form a line of defence, was a dark-browed, gypsy-like woman, who must once have been beautiful, and might now be formidable. Behind them were grouped a handsome boy, and three or four extraordinarily pretty girls with red and white roses in their hair.

“They wouldn't dare turn us out!” exclaimed Lady Vale-Avon. “They can never have had persons of our sort before.”

“If you asked, they'd probably retort that Dukes and Marquesses were thick as blackberries,” said I.

She glanced at Carmona, hoping for support, but he shrugged his shoulders in despair; and a look from me was a signal for the Cherub to step forward.

The atmosphere had begun to tingle, and in a few moments more it might have been too late to make peace with these proud and self-respecting people, who had never submitted to indignity. But in the space of six seconds the magnetism of the Cherub had begun to do its work. He murmured, nodded, and smiled, took the family into his confidence with a few graphic gestures, explained that the ladies were upset by an accident, appealed to the landlord's chivalry, and the landlady's heart. Gathering frowns were chased away by smiles; and when Monica showed her dimples to the boy and girls with a look which pleaded for kindness, the battle was fought and won.

They had not many bedrooms. Several were engaged by commercial travellers, but these gentlemen should be stowed into one room, their clothing and luggage moved at once. Oh, they would not object when they learned that it was a question of accommodating ladies; or if they did, they must eat their objections for supper; it was no matter. And the landlord and landlady would give up their room, a good one, their worships need have no fear. All should be ready in the opening and closing of an eye. But would we meanwhile have supper? There was always enough for a few unexpected ones.

Having listened so far, the Cherub turned blandly to Carmona. These arrangements need not include the Señor Duque's party, unless he liked, of course, but—his palms were extended as if to receive the decision. Plump it fell into them. Everyone must stay, and make the best of it.

So the ladies were bundled into a room where they might get rid of the dust, and the men into another; clean rooms, with whitewashed walls, bare save for a pictured saint or two in lurid colours; floors covered with coarse, bright matting; and iron beds with lace-frilled and embroidered pillows.

In a quarter of an hour everyone was ready for dinner, but five out of fifteen minutes I had given to the hasty scribbling of a pencilled note for Monica. I hoped to slip it into her hand in the dining-room, but she was closely under guard; and Carmona annexed four seats at the head of the long table, by which manœuvre he secured isolation

for his party. It was safe from any sortie of ours, as there was a scattered contingent of commercial travellers already earnestly engaged in dining on either side of the table. Two polite men on the left, and three on the right, all with napkins tucked under their chins, rose, offering to move rather than divide friends; but Carmona assured them that the sacrifice was unnecessary. As they were all paralysed by Monica's beauty, of a type so different from any to which they were accustomed, they had not the self-command to protest; and as dinner went on (in many courses of which the landlord was evidently proud), they could scarcely do justice to their merluza served with grilled lemon and minced red Spanish pepper; their tortilla of eggs, potatoes, peas, and ham; their pigeons with olives, or even their freshly baked maccaroni, for gazing languorously at the vision of pink and white and gold.

Such charms as Pilar's, though unsurpassable of their kind, went for nothing with these ardent gentlemen; and even the landlord's son, daughters, and nieces who waited upon their guests, forgot half their duties in abject admiration. “An angel!” “a saint!” “a princess of fairyland!” were a few of their whispered adjectives; and when the object of their worship was snatched away by her mother and the Duchess, before the goats'-milk cheese had been brought round, a gloom fell upon the room. The commercial travellers galloped through the remainder of the meal, and went out, hoping perhaps, if they promenaded the street, to have the joy of seeing a light in the radiant being's window. The pretty girls of the household vanished with murmured excuses, leaving us at the mercy of the boy, who sighed grievously, dropped a sugar bowl, and spilled coffee within an ace of the Cherub's shoulder.

Pilar presently disappeared also, leaving her three men alone at the table, observed only by a few dozen eager faces pressed against the iron bars protecting the open window.

Soon we heard peals of laughter from the patio; the pretty girls were sallying forth on a foraging expedition in search of a warming-pan to heat the beds of the three great ladies, who feared dampness. In twenty minutes they came back, and we arrived in the patio in time to see the triumphal entrance of four or five charming creatures, bearing among them a long-handled brass vessel which had probably existed since the days of Philip the Second. But this

was only the beginning of the fun; and we made an excuse of our cigarettes to linger, and hear what we could not see.

It was not a beautiful patio; and the public still surged outside the iron-grated door in the hope of further insight into the private lives of the travelling menagerie; but our luggage had been carried to the rooms which were now ready (thanks to the complaisance of the dazzled commercial gentlemen), and there were garden seats, on which we settled ourselves in spite of the chill in the evening air.

From the rooms above we heard laughter and ecstatic cries. Evidently the warming-pan was making a sensation as it went its round, or something else had happened; and when at last the girls trooped downstairs from the balcony, I beckoned them to come our way. They skipped to us, wild with delight at the prospect of pouring out their hearts to an appreciative audience.

The great warming-pan, stuffed with embers that glowed and paled, was laid on the tiled pavement while the girls wove themselves into a group, with interlacing arms.

“Why are you so happy?” I asked

“Happy? We have been in paradise, with the angels,” replied the prettiest girl with crimson roses stuck in a bank of copper hair.

“There was but one angel,” objected her brunette cousin.

“That is true. The two old ones think themselves everything, but they are less than nothing. I would not change my years for theirs, with their jewels and their quarterings. Thanks be to God, in our Spain, we are all as noble as the nobles, or at least in this province!”

“You are also all beautiful!” said I.

“That you can say so, señor, after seeing that wonder!” exclaimed the landlord's eldest daughter, a creature of carnation and flame. “Ah, the joy of it, we have been undressing her!”

“If you could have seen her, with gold hair down to her knees!” gasped a gypsy of fifteen. “And when we had got her dress off, and she was in her—”

“Hush, Micaela! it is not seemly that you should mention such garments in the presence of señores!” broke in the girl of the copper coronet.

NOW YOU ARE AS BAD AS I WAS, MARIQUITA

“But why, then, since they are most beautiful? You know well, Mariquita, you yourself said they were like the handwork of fairies, and her shoulders—”

“Be silent, foolish one, or I shall have to burn your nose off with the warming-pan!”

“And what did the elder ladies say to the young lady's new maids?” I asked quickly, as great eyes began to flash, and scarlet lips to pout.

Back came the smiles, and the maidens fell into a fit of schoolgirl giggling.

“There was but one Majesty there, praise be to the saints, the English one, who is no doubt the mother of our lady angel. They have two rooms between them, but that of the señorita is tiny, with no door of its own, and only a square glazed hole for a window, though the bed is as good as any, and we have given it the best linen. When we took in the warming-pan, our angel tried to say in Spanish that she was sure our beds were dry and well aired, as indeed they were. She had taken off her bodice, and was undoing her hair, which was so beautiful we could have fallen down and prayed to her as a saint. Then we could not resist, but began helping her to undress, talking about her beauty. She was not offended, though we kissed her hands, and that silly Micaela one of her tiny white feet when we had pulled off the stocking—”

“Now you are as bad as I was, Mariquita.”

“No, indeed; what is a stocking? A thing it is as well to go without as to wear. That is different. The angel laughed till she was close to tears, and said we were far nicer maids than the one her mother had sent on by railway train in starting by automobile. After this, she would be spoiled for others; and she gave us each one a present. Lola, two wondrous hatpins with blue stones in silver—not that she would ever suffer the tortures of a hat, but it is a great thing to have them. Teresa, a sweet round purse of blue leather, of the size to hold a five peseta piece; Micaela, a handkerchief with lace on the edge, and me an embroidered veil like a gossamer. What did we care that Her Majesty the mother would have sent us away if she could? She had not enough Spanish to make us understand what we did not wish to understand, and at last she saved her breath for another day. But by that time we had finished, for we had put our angel into her

night-dress, a thing of cobwebs and lace kept together by blue ribbons, which I should have thought good enough for a queen to wear when mounting her throne."

"You must show us your presents," said I, with deliberate cunning. All were displayed on the instant, with chattering, laughing, and clamourous claims for rival merits. But the veil was the thing which I looked on to covet. She had worn it one day after rain, when the roads had been clear of dust, and her face had gleamed through the lace as a star gleams through a floating cloud-film. I felt that I could not see it in other hands than mine.

While the Cherub compared the gifts with eloquence, I drew Mariquita apart. "I want that veil very much," said I; "so much that I'll give you a hundred pesetas if you'll part with it."

She opened her tobacco-brown eyes. "But the señor is only a man, and cannot know that the bit of embroidered net is worth no more, in money, than fifteen pesetas at most."

"It wasn't its money-worth I was thinking about."

"A—ah, I see! The señorito—yes, of course, it would be strange if he did not! I love my new veil, not only because it is pretty, but more because it came to me from the most beautiful señorita I have ever seen. Still, since the señorito will value it even more than I can, I will give it to him, though not for the hundred pesetas. I will give it for nothing except his thanks."

I told the girl she was too good; that I could not rob her of the gift just made; but she insisted, and I saw that her pride would be hurt if I refused. So I accepted, while a way of benefitting myself and rewarding her occurred to my mind.

"You see how it is with me." I said, with a confidential air. "You have been very generous. Will you be helpful too?"

"You may trust me," she answered. "I love a love affair, especially if there is difficulty. I shall have an acknowledged novio myself soon, I hope. He is a bull-fighter—only a beginner, but he will be great one day, and though my father made a long face at first, now he shrugs his shoulders; and when that is done, there is always hope. Her Majesty the mother makes the long face, does she not?"

I nodded.

"She will shrug the shoulders by and by."

“I doubt it. But meanwhile, I've written a letter. Will you try to give it to the young lady?”

“Yes,” said Mariquita. “I will try my best. I think I can do it. Not to-night, for she has gone to bed, and there would be no excuse to get back to her room, since I must pass through Her Majesty's. But to-morrow morning I will take the ladies' hot water, with oh, such an innocent face! And I will take the letter too.”

“Thank you many times,” said I.

“The thing isn't done yet.”

“It's for your goodwill I thank you in advance. And this is for your bull-fighter, as a present from his novia.”

I took out my scarf-pin. Her face flushed with pleasure, as it would have flushed for no sum of money. She might have waived away a present for herself, but she could not resist one for the novio, and I was thanked far beyond the gift's merit.

If she went to bed happy, so did I, for I believed that Monica would have my letter in the morning; and if the wistfulness in her eyes meant some new trouble in which I had a part, I hoped that the words I had written might banish it.

XXIV

The Goodwill of Mariquita

Nevertheless I could not sleep on my hard but clean pillows, for wondering about that look of Monica's, and its meaning; and whenever I shut my eyes, hordes of red and yellow figures poured out of white houses upon white roads, forming irritating, kaleidoscopic patterns on my tired retina.

Each hour that passed was cried by the watchman, far away, and then close under my window; a fearsome cry like a groan of agony uttered by a madman in a dying spasm.

I was glad when morning came; and after such a bath as two or three miniature jugs of water afforded (the deer-eyed boy wondered in the name of all the saints what I could do with so many), I threw off the brain-clouds of a sleepless night.

Before long Monica would have my letter. She would know—if she could have doubted—that if I had loved her at first, I worshipped her now. She would know why we had not followed more closely yesterday; and why—unless Carmona chose to accept our help again—we would go on before the grey car to-day. She would know also that my most earnest hope was to take her away, out of the reach of harm.

I was dressed, and had had my coffee and hard, fat roll of Spanish bread, by half-past seven, as I was sure Ropes would be wanting to see me. I would not have disturbed Dick, who slept in a room across the patio, but I found him in the dining-room, wrestling with a glass of thick chocolate and a finger-shaped sweet biscuit. “I'm trying to like Spanish customs,” said he.

I laughed.

“Because, if I'm going to carry through that scheme of mine about motor traffic, I may have to live on the spot, you see.”

“Oh!” said I. “And what about Colonel O'Donnel's copper mines? Have you thought of a means to persuade him it's his duty to have them worked?”

“In a way, I have,” Dick answered dryly. “An indirect sort of way. What about our gasoline? Heard anything about it?”

“No. I'm going to find Ropes.”

“Rather a sell for Carmona, if he did order our bidons pricked, to feel it's his fault if we're held up as long as he is.”

“There's Ropes in the patio,” I said. “I'll go and interview him.”

“What news?” I asked.

“Well, sir, I did what the landlord said last night, and had a try for moto-naphtha—as they call it here—at the chemist's.”

“Did they have any?”

“Oh yes, sir, they had some. As much as a pint apiece, in the two shops. They wanted to sell it by the ounce.”

Dick and I laughed, though my mirth was not care-free. I had visions of being stuck at this place until Ropes made a journey to Madrid and back, Carmona's car slipping away long before we were ready.

“I was afraid it was hopeless to look for petrol here,” I said, striving for resignation, even though I saw Mariquita going upstairs with two battered tins of hot water.

“Not yet, sir. A man who heard me asking for moto-naphtha at the chemist's, advised me to try the cemetery.”

“The cemetery? You misunderstood the word.”

“No, sir; it *was* cemetery. And what's more, he said the Mayor keeps it there to kill lobsters.”

This statement, delivered somewhat nervously, was received with derision.

“The fellow was stuffing you,” said Dick.

“I don't think so, sir.”

“Then he's mad,” I insisted. “Fishing for lobsters with moto-naphtha in a cemetery at Manzanares is a story Baron Munchausen would have thought twice about before telling.”

“Langostas does mean langouste—or lobsters, I suppose, sir?” asked Ropes.

“Ye—es,” I answered thoughtfully. Then lightning flashed across the darkness of my mind. “It means locusts as well,” said I. “They use petrol to kill locusts, and for some reason best known to themselves keep it at the cemetery. We'll go, Ropes, and persuade them to sell us more than an ounce.”

“Right, sir. At once?”

“In a moment,” said I.

Mariquita, empty-handed, was coming downstairs. I waylaid her, under that portion of the balcony hidden from the window of Lady Vale-Avon's room.

“Did you deliver the letter?” I asked.

“Yes, señor.”

“To the young lady herself?”

“To herself. But I must tell you what worries me, señor. As I was leaving the outer room, I heard a sound like a cry of distress, from the inner room. I looked back, and Her Majesty the mother had gone in. That is all I know. I could do nothing, whatever had happened, and I felt it would be well to escape before I could be questioned.”

“What do you think happened?”

“How can I tell, señor? Unless the terrible lady snatched your letter from the angel.”

“At least, I hope the angel had had time to read it.”

“I do not know, señorito. There was not much time; but she might have been quick; and if the letter was not long, there is still hope.”

This was poor comfort. All my joyous anticipations dashed, I tried to think of some way of finding out whether Monica had read my letter, and whether there were any way of smuggling another to her.

The note had been written in such haste, that I scarcely knew what I had said. No name had been signed; nevertheless, if Lady Vale-Avon read what I had written, she would say to herself, “It is not Cristóbal O'Donnel who says these things, but a more dangerous man.” If she had the letter, she could show it to Carmona; but, as I thought the matter over, I decided that it was unlikely she would do this.

Spaniards, especially Spaniards with Moorish blood in their veins, do not like to think girls they love capable of carrying on secret

correspondence with other men; and I imagined that Lady Vale-Avon was a woman to guess this. Already Carmona knew that Lady Monica was interested in someone else, or had a girlish fancy for him, which might or might not have been frightened away. But his desire for her would not be whetted by the fact that she was receiving letters from that someone else, perhaps sending them to him; and it struck me that Lady Vale-Avon would conceal the correspondence, rather than flaunt it in Carmona's face. If I were right, then I was as safe as before from the Duke's jealousy; but, had Monica read my letter?

On the alert as her mother would be now, I should find it more difficult than ever to communicate with the girl. Yet I could not bear to leave Manzanares in fear of a misunderstanding.

Nothing more could be done at the moment, however; and I hurried Ropes off that we might finish our errand and get back by the time that Monica was down.

It appeared that the man who had volunteered information about moto-naphtha was waiting to act as guide. He was still at the chemist's, and from there led us to the Casa Consistorial. At the Casa Consistorial were two policemen in the hall, warming themselves over a hole in the ground, where glowed charcoal embers. But the Mayor had not arrived. Without him nothing could be arranged. Besides, even if he were present and willing to consent, the key of the cemetery was with the cura, who might be anywhere.

Off we dashed to the cura's house, and just in time. Five minutes later, and we might have had to wait hours for him. But there he was, a delightful, white-haired old man, who would be charmed to open the cemetery for our worships, since it was not to bury us; but he could make no move in that direction without the honourable concurrence of the Mayor.

Back, then, we bustled to the Casa Consistorial, with the sensation of shuttlecocks, played between battledores at cross purposes.

But at last the second battledore was ready to send us in the right direction. The Mayor, a young man, who looked like a lawyer in tall hat and frock-coat, was as polite as only a Spaniard can be. He put himself, and his house, and Manzanares at our service. It was something like being given the freedom of London; and what was

more to the point than anything else, he offered us as much moto-naphtha as the town possessed, at any price we pleased to pay.

The question was, how much did the town possess; a single quart, or a hundred gallons? The Mayor himself was not sure, so we rattled off in an ancient “simón” to the cemetery to find out; and luckily were able to carry away all we were likely to need for the next two days, while leaving some for the locusts. But between the Casa Consistorial, the house of the cura, the distant cemetery, and the drive back to our stable-garage, it had taken us nearly three hours to achieve our end. Then there was a little lingering with the car, to make sure that all was well and no more tricks had been played; and the walk back to the fonda exhausted the last of my patience. I had not expected to be gone more than an hour, and I had been gone three. Meanwhile, I said to myself, almost anything might have happened. My idea had been to get back by the time that Monica was dressed, and now, for all I could tell, she might have gone.

Dick laughed at this suggestion, for, said he, Carmona's chauffeur was not a worker of miracles except, perhaps, on other men's cars; and he could not have got his master's in order and ready to start. His arguments were reasonable; nevertheless, like many other plausible deductions, they were wrong; for the first news we heard at the hotel was that the grey automobile had left nearly an hour before. The chauffeur, it seemed, had been up all night working, and had had assistance in the early morning at a machine-shop. The injuries had been patched up, and the car was expected to get on either to Andujar, or Linares if a certain bridge had been finished.

After all, this was not as bad as if we had made no promise to the Duchess. We were bound not to lie in wait for, or closely follow, her son's car; and had it not been for the “luck of the Dream-Book,” Carmona and his party would have been far away last night when we arrived at Manzanares. Had I not been tortured by doubts about the fate of my letter, I might have been philosopher enough to say: “Patience, until Seville!”

As it was, patience was the last virtue I could cultivate; and for what remained of that day, I was unable to find the smallest pleasure in motoring.

Again we were on the highroad between Madrid and Seville; yet the waving ruts and ridges of hardened mud were sprinkled with a

green glaze of grass, as if in treacherous attempt at concealment. Dust curled behind us like smoke, creeping under the tarpaulin that covered our luggage on the roof, and into our suit-cases, powdering our clothing like fine white sugar.

Despite the good springs and deep cushions of the car, Pilar's light body danced up and down, as Dick said, like a bit of American popcorn over a hot fire; and our two guests, who had thought themselves motor enthusiasts, did not respond ardently to Dick's forced praises of the sport.

How glorious, said he (every other word emphasized with a bump), how glorious not to be bound down to the fixed and inconvenient hours of trains. To stop where and when you like; to start on again when you choose; never to have your view of the choicest bit of scenery blotted out in a tunnel; to be grimed by no railway smoke; always to feel your face fanned by a fresh breeze, tingling with ozone; to read—if you had the seeing eye—the whole life of the country in writing on the road; the tracks of heavy carts; the delicate prints of donkey's feet, trotting to market laden with wine or fruit; the tracing of diligence wheels, or old-fashioned carriages on their way to a bull-fight; the footmarks of peasants economically carrying their shoes over their shoulders; the clover-like imprint of sheeps' little hoofs, and goats'; the pads of shepherd dogs. To flash through kinematographic glimpses of vineland and oliveland, and graceful blue mountain shapes; to see strange villages of whose existence you would never know when plodding along by train; to fly from one living reminder of Don Quixote to another, as we were doing to-day (had we not seen the inn where he was knighted?)—Bang! Never before can I remember hailing with delight the pistol-like report which can mean but one thing; the bursting of a tyre. But I was enchanted that Dick's eloquence should be interrupted.

We had jolted through wine-making Valdepeñas, where the red juice of the grape seems to spout from a grey valley of stones; we had passed, in the quaint market-place, the posada which Don Quixote knew; we had bounced through Santa Cruz de Mudela, with its fine old fifteenth century church, and had seen its famous and gaily coloured garters exposed for sale in the shops; and now we were far from towns or villages, out in the country.

Luckily, everybody was ready for lunch, and Pilar and the Cherub had had the forethought to order things which would not have occurred to Dick or me. Not far away, on the crest of a hill-billow, stood a road-mender's house, with an outside, adobe oven like a huge beehive. We crawled to it, travelling on the collapsed tyre, and were served by a delightful brown family; served as if we had been the King and his suite who had lunched (so said the brown family) on that spot a few weeks ago. Out came the chairs which the King and his friends had sat in, plates and glasses from which the King and his friends had drunk; and the simple people derived a childlike pleasure from dwelling on the episode.

As before, the news of our presence seemed to flash through the air and bring, in the same mysterious way, an audience out of empty space. Pilar said that the people who came were in reality wild birds, seen by our sophisticated eyes in the form of human beings; and as if they had been wild birds, we coaxed them, till they trusted us and fed with us, drinking from our wineskin the blood of the Spanish grape, almost innocent of alcohol. The soft Spanish language, as it fell from their lips, was rich as the taste of that Spanish wine on the tongue, and stirred in my heart a pride of kinsmanship.

While we others lunched, Ropes jacked up the Gloria and changed the inner tube, pausing now and then to munch a sandwich or swallow a draught of wine with an unruffled air characteristic of him. When the road-mender mentioned that four bandidos had been captured in the morning by the civil guard, on the road along which we had passed, his expression did not change by the twitching of a muscle. Indeed, he looked equal to disposing of half a dozen brigands without the aid of a single guardia civile.

After forty minutes by the wayside, we set off to penetrate farther into that melancholy country which Cervantes loved, and almost at once were in the Venta de Cordeñas, that wide and stony waste where Don Quixote rode to do his penance. The gayest spirits must have been dashed by the gloom of the knight's self-imposed prison, and mine were not improved. I had a disquieting impression that Monica's voice, calling an appeal, came echoing from the mountain walls.

Of course, there was nothing in it, except superstitious nonsense of which I ought to be ashamed; yet I could not shut my ears to her

voice, which seemed to cry the words her fingers once had written: “Don't desert me! Don't leave me alone!”

Always the echo followed, as the car mounted higher on the slopes of the Sierra Morena, and such glories of Spain opened out before our eyes as we had not seen yet, even in the splendid Gorge of Pancorbo.

Crest above crest, great chains of mountains cut the smooth sapphire of the sky; and as we serpentined into their closer grasp, each loop of the Alpine road gave a new and more fantastic combination of rock and stream. The car was boring into a gorge of astounding sublimity, a hammer-stroke of Vulcan which had cleft the mountain and left behind chips of copper, of gold, of silver, and a rich sprinkling of precious gems.

As the god's hammer fell, out of the ruin it made were shaped marvels of form; Olympian castles and giant statues, images of such savage creatures as roamed devastating the earth in days when man was in his childhood.

Even the calm countenance of Ropes was transfigured by this burst of splendour. “Makes you forget that roads can be bad, and tyres go wrong, doesn't it, sir?” he said to me. “I could drive through places like these, day and night on end, without food or drink, never knowing if I was done up.”

And praise from a chauffeur is praise indeed!

We were in the defile of Despeñaperros, the most terrific and, at the same time, the noblest gorge of Spain; and I should have known it from stories told by my father, who had once fought with bandoleros upon this very road. Down into the river that tossed up white plumes of foam far below, he had flung one man, while another fired shot after shot from his carbine, screened behind a rock on the opposite side of the ravine, scarcely a biscuit-throw away.

Long before, too, history had been made in this mountain passage whose walls had rung with wilder sounds than the screaming of our siren. The rival battle-cries of Moor and Spaniard had echoed among the rocks, and Christian blood and pagan had mingled in the white spume of the river.

I thought of these things, as I looked down into the silent depths of the gulf, and saw the sparkling veins of granite, and purple masses of slate gleam with volcanic life and colour. But still I heard the haunting echo of Monica's voice, in the solitude through which she must lately have passed, perhaps leaving some message, if I could only know.

Was it merely a fantastic twist of my nerves, or was her spirit calling, trying to make itself heard and understood?

It was Pilar who broke the spell by a sudden clapping of her hands. “Andalucía! dear Andalucía!” she cried; and each one of us, subdued and silenced by the majesty of the scene, started as if waking from sleep.

She was pointing at a stone obelisk, looking at which her father smiled and raised his hat.

“No more cold,” said he; “no more winds to nip our noses. Here's the dividing line between the north countries and the country of the sun.”

Then, as if the obelisk had been the finger of some genie invoking a magic change, an enchantment blurred the stem features of the landscape. It was as though the fierce face of an angry giant had been transformed into that of a beautiful, laughing woman with the sun in her eyes.

The defile opened when we had slipped past a half-hidden mountain hamlet or two; widened into a valley bright with colour as the jewels on the spread tail of a peacock; and boat-like, the car rode an undulating sea of green and azure and gold, that scintillated as if a spray of diamonds were tossed into air with the speed of our going.

At Santa Elena we were in a Spain I had not seen. At La Carolina we burst into a world fair and fertile as the Garden of Eden; and I remembered the Moorish legend that Heaven is built on the blue that hangs over Andalucía.

Hedges of aloe brandished zincen swords and darts; cacti sprawled and leered along the roadside; set in the vivid green of ripening grain, olive groves seemed carved from jade; or the bare rosy shoulders of sloping hillsides turned by contrast their pale tints to tarnished silver. Vines with young gold leaves trailed the purple earth; avenues of acacias dripped perfumes; and as the sun leaned

towards the west, the quivering pink light on violet mountains gave to Andalucía the vivid, almost violent colouring one sees in sensational posters.

Each girl we passed wore a bright flower shining star-like through the black cloud of her hair. The men had discarded the fur-trimmed Louis XI caps for the broad-brimmed, grey sombreros de Cordoba, and the horses or mules were harnessed with gay splashes of red and blue colour, and bobbing tassels.

We had talked of Linares, the lead-mining town, as a halting-place for the night, as we were pledged not to track down the Lecomte; and on the outskirts of Bailen, as twilight fell, the Gloria was brought to a sudden stop in the midst of a pulsating crowd, that we might ask the way.

If we aroused their curiosity, they piqued us to the same emotion, for most of the men, and there were hundreds, not only wore upon their legs a kind of divided pinafore, but carried on their backs an apparatus which would have excited wonder in any other than this fairy country.

The machine reminded me at first glance of a fire-extinguisher; then of some appliance used by miners to hold a supply of oxygen. One part of me wished to know what the instrument was; the other preferred to remain in ignorance, lest the explanation should prove too commonplace. But Waring had all my curiosity, and none of my scruples; so he asked a question with a gesture more intelligible than his Spanish; and just as I had feared, the weird union of reservoirs and nozzles was no more than a contrivance for spraying vines to protect them from phylloxera.

As always, we brought the fascinations of the Cherub to bear upon the crowd, as one trains the latest gun upon the enemy; and his crooning brought out facts which made Dick think it high time he got things into shape, and his motor service to running. It seemed that once upon a time a good road had been made from Bailen to Linares, but the road was crossed by a river; and when the masonry supports for a bridge had been built, it turned out that girders had been forgotten. Somehow, it was nobody's place to jog anybody else's memory, and there the matter had ended, so long ago that grass and flowers had sprouted among the futile stones.

It appeared the most natural thing in the world to the people of Bailen, who were accustomed to ford the river, when they wanted to cross, with horses; but though the weather had been dry for the last few days, the recent torrents which had fallen in the mountains, still swelled the volume of water to such a height that it might “put out the fire in the automobile.”

I was glad to hear this, because if it would put out our fire, it would put out Carmona's; and as he was prudent in matters concerning his car, he would probably have stopped at Andujar; thus fate would again bring me near to Monica, despite our promise.

The main reason for going to Linares was because the Cherub believed there was a fair hotel, built to accommodate Englishmen collected for the lead-mining; therefore it was without regret that we turned the Gloria to follow the carretera to Cordoba.

Our advisers ran after us with a warning to avoid the rough cobbles of Bailen by taking the ronda which skirts the town on its left. So slowly, in dusk that blossomed blue as the myrtle flower, we passed round outside the town, regained the high road, leaping at speed into a world of wide, silvery spaces and mystery of violet hollows, diving into the deep valley of the swollen river, and rejoicing in a hard surface of good macadam for fifteen miles or more.

Thus we arrived at Andujar, the lights of our great acetylene lamps (lit before the sky turned from opal to amethyst) prying into dark doorways and windows as Röntgen rays pry through flesh to bone.

In the white glare, pretty girls in doorways looked like actresses in a costume play, waiting in the wings to “go on.” But no yells of a stage mob ever were so realistic as those of the unrehearsed band who howled over my poor Gloria as she deposited her passengers at the fonda; and Ropes and I pushed her through a wall of human beings to a stable-garage, where her flywheel gushed a protest of fiery sparks on the high stone step of entrance.

The fonda was passable; but Carmona and his party were not there; neither were they anywhere else in Andujar, as we made it our business to discover; and we guessed that the grey car must after all have ventured to Linares.

As it had vanished, we were free to start when we chose next morning. So we chose an early hour, flying over good roads through a land embroidered with the scarlet of poppies, the blue of gentian, the pink of clover, and gold of buttercups, stitched in with the silver of little running streams.

" 'Give us bread and give us bulls,' is the cry of this country," said the Cherub, greeting with joyous glances each feature of his loved Andalucia.

"It sounds like a beef sandwich," Dick reflected aloud; but Pilar reproached him for flippancy. "You mustn't make jokes about bread in Andalucia!" she exclaimed. "And it's called a sin ever to throw away a crumb. Because it's the gift of Heaven, if you drop a bit you must pick it up and apologize by kissing it."

"Why not eat it instead?" asked Dick.

"You can do that afterwards. And if bread's made with holes in it, you must stand the holey side up, because the spirit of God enters through the holes to bless you."

"I thought only olives were sacred in Andalucia," said Dick, staring away over enormous tracts of the silver-grey trees growing out of copper soil, waving as far as the eye could follow, to the floating line of ethereal blue mountains.

"They're sacred, too," assented Pilar. "Did you know, in the old days they used to be sold only for gold, gold carried on mule back in great bags, and exchanged on the spot, for the trees—so many for so much? We have olives at our place, and they're gathered in such a nice old-fashioned way; papa doesn't care for new ways, even if they make a little more money. It's pretty to watch. I should like you to see it, only—Señor Waring doesn't like old-fashioned things."

"I like making the 'little more money,' I'm afraid," Dick confessed.

"Sometimes I like money too—when I want to buy anything. At other times I don't care. Lately I've been saving up. I've got one thousand nine hundred pesetas."

"Good gracious!" laughed Dick, "are you going to buy a bull-farm with such a gigantic sum?"

"Funny you should have said that. I'm going to buy one bull. He's the only possession of the Duke of Carmona's that I want, and I want him so much that I've sacrificed oh,—I can't remember how many

Paris hats, and shoes, and silk petticoats, and pretty dresses to get him, with *all* my own money! The worst of it is, he'll *never* know about the hats and things."

Dick was looking interested now.

"What in the name of goodness will you do with him when you get him?" he inquired.

"Save him," said the girl.

"From what?"

"From the bull-ring. Oh, he's a toro bravo, is Vivillo, a heart of gold. Not the most famous torero in Spain shall pierce it. I've loved him for four years, since he was a baby at his mother's side, and Rafael Calmenare used to take me to visit him; loved him better even than Corcito, and all this time I've been saving up to buy him before he's of the age for a corrida. Now I've enough, or nearly, and there aren't many weeks to waste, for soon he'll be five; and already he has the strength and courage of three bulls, my Vivillo! I long to see him again—long for the day when I can put my arms round his great neck, and say, 'Hermanito, you're mine!' "

"Your arms round his neck!" gasped Dick. "A fighting bull! You're joking. Say you mean an Irish bull, and put me out of misery."

"He's a true Spanish grandee of a bull, and my arms have been round his neck often," said Pilarcita.

"Then he can't be very fierce."

"He can be terrible. He has nearly killed two men—strangers who teased him, so he meant no harm, poor darling! and they daren't let any except black horses come near him. No Muira bull is more savage than he if he's roused. You know, the Duke of Carmona's bulls are as celebrated as the Muiras themselves. But Vivillo has always loved me, and one or two others—me best, though—and he'll eat out of my hand, the great brown velvet beast, like a kitten."

"How long since he's seen you?" asked Dick.

"Six weeks."

"I wouldn't trust his memory."

"I trust it as I would my brother's. You shall see me petting him."

"Great Scott! you won't let her risk her life with this wild beast, will you, Colonel O'Donnel?" Dick cried out.

But the Cherub smiled his placid smile.

“Don Cipriano calls her Una, because she can tame wild beasts,” said he.

Dick's face became almost too expressive. If he did not want Pilar's eyes to read his every emotion, I thought he would be wiser to put on his motor-mask.

XXV

What Cordoba Lacked

Through a flowery field of cloth-of-gold we came, while the afternoon was young, into Cordoba—“Kartuba the Important,” lying like a grave entombing its dead glory, prone at the foot of tombstone mountains.

After the dazzle of wild-flowers shining in the sun, and the ozone of country breezes, a sudden entrance into the network of narrow streets was like being thrown, without a clue, into the Minotaur's dark labyrinth.

I had thought that no town could have narrower streets than Toledo; but the streets of Cordoba were mere slits between house-walls. As we scraped through on the car, Dick likened the town to a huge white cake divided into slices by a sharp knife, but left in shape with only one or two pieces pulled out to loosen the mass.

Still, the stone-paved slits contrived to make pictures; with here and there a pair of splendid Moorish doors, a row of ancient eastern-patterned windows, or a fairy glimpse of a sunlit patio beyond a tunnel of shadow; a fountain spraying jewels, a waving of palms and glow of hanging roses.

“She's sure to be here,” I said to myself, as we stopped at last before the principal hotel. “Since the journey's supposed to be a pleasure trip, Carmona's bound to give his guests time to see the sights of Cordoba.”

But nothing was known of the Duke and his party at the hotel, although there was a rumour that an automobile had passed through the town in the morning.

The Cherub, consulted, was of opinion that if Carmona's car had come, it must have remained.

“There'd be nowhere for them to stop afterwards short of Seville,” he said, “unless Carmona, and that's near Seville. They must be lurking in Cordoba—perhaps at the Marqués de Villa-blanca's, who's a friend of the Duke's. We shall come across our lovely little lady presently, if we get about in the town; in the Paseo del Gran Capitán, or the Patio de los Naranjos, or the cathedral, or by the ruins of the Alcázar.”

“Besides, I thought you'd made up your mind not to worry till we got to Seville,” said Dick.

“So I had,” I answered. “But I have a feeling as if something had gone wrong.”

“Any reason for the feeling—except the feeling itself?” asked Dick.

I shook my head, not caring to mention the letter that might have gone astray. “Nothing I can define.”

“Then I guess it's all right, and you're developing nerves.”

“I know *just* how he feels,” said Pilar, with a reproachful look at Dick, with whom she was at odds since the episode of the bull. “There was an expression in Lady Monica's eyes, wasn't there, at Manzanares, as if she were sad? Oh, I saw it; and they wouldn't let me get within whispering distance of her afterwards, or I should have found out what it meant. I had the idea that they were *particularly* anxious to keep me away, and I wondered if there were any new reason. I'm not surprised that Don Ramón is worried. One can see that Señor Waring's never been in love!”

“Oh, haven't I?” exclaimed Dick; which, of course made matters worse; and to mend them, he went on blundering. "What do *you* know about the symptoms?"

“Girls are born knowing things it takes men years to learn,” said Pilar.

It did not allay my anxiety that she should have noticed what I had noticed. But I clung to the Cherub's assurance, hoping, when we had set out on our explorations, to meet her, to see her face light up with the radiance I knew.

But there were no strangers save ourselves, and a few wandering Americans under the palms and orange trees of the paseo dedicated to the memory of El Gran Capitán.

We wandered—Pilar keeping at my side, and leaving Dick to her father—from gate to gate outside the Mosque-Cathedral which once made Cordoba the Mecca of Europe; gazing up at the tremendous mass of honey-coloured masonry rising like a vast fortress from its buttresses of stone; lingering under the bell-tower of the Puerta del Perdon because Pilar "felt as if something would happen there." But nothing did happen; and we went to face the blighting of renewed hopes in the Court of Oranges, whose melancholy charm and sensuous perfume was sad as the song of a nightingale when summer is dying.

She was not there; nor could we find her in the marble forest of the pillared cathedral, though, while Dick and Pilar made up their differences over the jewelled mosaics, I searched for her.

"I tell you, Ramón, there's some satisfaction in feeling that you're looking at the best things the world's got to show," said Dick, almost in my ear, "and there are lots of them in your country, especially in Cordoba, though I suppose the Moors would weep to see it now. But you don't seem to be enjoying them, in spite of risking such a lot to come where they are."

I didn't remind him that the risk I ran was for the one best thing in all the world, which was only temporarily in my country, and that my depression came because it was not at the moment visible. But Pilar did not need reminding, and in the way of sweet women, tried to "keep my mind occupied" by talking history and legend, confusing them deliciously, and defending her stories of beautiful Egilona and fair Florinda by saying that, anyhow, nobody cared whether they were true or not. Besides, what *was* history, since dull people were continually discovering that none of the best bits had ever happened?

"I choose to believe in Florinda," she cried, "and all the other beautiful women who influenced kings, and made wars, and upset countries. Without them and their love-stories, history would be like faded tapestry without gold threads."

So Dick ceased to argue, and in silence we left the gem-like perfection of the third Mihrab, to wander once more through the wilderness of gleaming columns that were now like over-arching trees, now like falling fountains.

No dusky vista out of those many changing ones framed the figure I longed to see; and when we had left the cathedral and climbed to the gardens and towers where stood once the Alcázar of Gothic and Moorish glories, it was the same story of disappointment. Only the Americans we had seen in the paseo were there, more interested than I in such fragments as they could catch of Pilar's tales. Dungeons where Theodofredo had been blinded, and Witica the wicked had paid for his crimes; vanished halls where Rodrigo reigned and loved before the dark day beside the Guadalete lost the crown for him and Christendom; what did they hold of interest since the garden of lilacs and roses which covered their ruins was empty of one Presence?

When we had seen everything, I left my friends in the hall of the hotel choosing curios from glass cases, and went out again in search of news concerning the automobile which had passed in the morning.

Presumably it had attracted a crowd, yet no one seemed to know anything of it until at last, just as I was giving up hope, I met an old man who had seen a large grey motor-car at the railway station. A few minutes later, I had solved the mystery of the Lecomte's disappearance. It had arrived early; its passengers had been conducted round Cordoba in the smallest possible time by Carmona; it had then been driven to the station; and with its late occupants had gone to Seville by the same train.

There might have been several motives for this move. The car might have been partially disabled, not having been properly prepared at Manzanares; or Carmona might have determined to thwart the destiny which so far had kept me near him. I was inclined to accept the latter theory, and it did not tend to promote my peace of mind.

I was glad to hear, however, that the train was not due at Seville until late that evening. If we made an early start next day, it was not likely that the situation could be much changed before I arrived, free of obligations to the Duchess.

Of course, said Pilar, before I had time to ask, they would be ready to start early, oh, very early. It would be beautiful to be in the country before the sun had drunk up the dew on the grass, and withered the roses of dawn in the clouds. There was no fear of cold

now that we were in dear Andalucía. Yes! we would have coffee at six, and leave at half-past.

I should not have dared suggest such a trial of moral courage, but I accepted the sacrifice; so the roses of morning which Pilar loved still bloomed in the garden of the sky, and trailed their reflection in the Guadalquivir, as we rolled over the old bridge and past the white, Moorish hills.

A morning in Paradise could scarcely be more beautiful; and the pinky-purple blossoms of the alamo shimmering in a rosy mist against dark cypress trees, or mingling with the white lace of hawthorn was a colour-symphony of Spring.

Dignified country houses no longer raised brown-tiled roofs from among groves of olives; but an illimitable sea of waving downs lay bathed in the amber light of Spain. Then, olive woods again, with a foam, of field-flowers spraying their gnarled feet, hedges of sweetbrier, tangled with tall, wild lilacs, and blossoming thorn. Beyond, high hills up which the Gloria stormed boldly, frightening the horses of a troop of laughing soldiers who rode without saddles; over stony roads, mere rough tracks drawn through meadows, where bulls grazed, and bellowed at the automobile; thus to a village which first showed itself like a white crown on a hilltop, and proved to be inhabited by women and children of surpassing beauty. Never were such eyes as those which looked from the faces in the quick-gathering crowd; eyes like black wells with fallen stars in their depths.

Peasant houses by the wayside had thatched roofs, grey and glistening as silver plush; and outside ovens like huge cups turned upside down. The fields were gay with flowers; the distance floated in waves of azure gauze which touched the sky.

On we swept, as though to find the joining place, but found only Ecija, the Town of the Seven Brigands, with its grand bridge and pearl-white Moorish mills, in the yellow, swift-running Genil.

Kings had been lodged behind those brass-nailed doors and wrought-iron balconies, the Cherub said; and malefactors famed in history and ballad had swung from that tall gallows which caught the eye before Ecija's eight church towers. There had been famous fighting, too, by the river bank; but now the place slept, dreaming of

peace, and the whirr of the mill-wheels sounded as comforting as the "chum-chum" of a motor that runs by night.

So we flashed out of the Province of Cordoba into the Province of Seville, and tall, slender palms, rearing feathered heads among walnut trees and oaks, were signposts pointing south. It was early in April, but the air was the air of an English June, and I wondered to see men muffled in long capas. "They do it to keep out the sun, as in the north to keep out the wind," explained Pilar; but she only laughed when Dick asked why they shaved their donkeys' backs, why they put red and yellow muzzles on their donkeys' mouths, why they always carried plaid "railway rugs" on their beasts' backs or their own, and why their trousers and leggings were made in one piece?

Beyond the olives, black clumps of umbrella pines flung ink-blots against the sky, and a purple carpet of budding heather was torn apart to let the road pass through. It was ideal motor-country, and Dick recalled with sneers the sixty horse-power man in Biarritz, who had feared the experiment.

"The way is to *do* what you want to do, and find out as you go along whether it can be done or not," he soliloquized.

I wondered if he were thinking of another difficult road, not to be travelled by motors—a road where perhaps Don Cipriano already knew the way.

Larks sprang skyward from beds of wild flowers as we fled by, little fountains of music; tall cranes flew out of screening bushes beside bright streams; and blurring the distance before us, a mist of rain floated like a veil blown across the face of Spring.

In sight of Carmona's splendid walls and ruined castle, the rain caught us; and for Pilar's sake we made the car cosey by fastening down the front glass and filling in the space with drawn canvas curtains.

After this, our fleeting glimpses of pine and palm and olive were dimmed as we bowled along a sandy road, yellow as beaten gold. Now and again a patch of purple blossom burning through the mist sang a loud, exultant note of spring and love; and pretty orange-pickers, in men's jackets and brown trousers, warbled of the same theme in that soft Andaluza which is beyond all other languages of passion.

The colour, and the music, and the day went to my head. I knew that I was young, and I wanted my chance of happiness—wanted it so much that I felt I could kill a man who dared try to snatch it from me.

XXVI

In the Palace of the Kings

“Now I've something serious to say, Don Ramón,” began the Cherub, when we had passed the first pink-and-white house which marked the suburbs of Seville. “You mustn't go to an hotel here. It would be dangerous. You must be our guest; and Señor Waring, too. I feel now as if our little play were true, and you were my son; while as for Señor Waring, we might have known him for years, might we not, Pilarcita?”

“Of course. For my part, I'm ready to adopt him for a brother, too,” replied Pilar.

I covered Dick's recoil at this blow by thanking the Cherub. He was more than kind, I said, but we couldn't think of—

“You will not think of disappointing us,” broke in the dear brown fellow. “Could you have imagined that our only reason is to keep you out of danger? No. We're not so unselfish. We want you. Partings will come soon enough. We must have you with us, under our roof, at our table, as long as we can. Now you understand, you will say ‘yes.’ ”

“In my country,” said Dick, as a broad hint to me, “when we tell people we want them to visit us, we mean it; and I guess Colonel O'Donnel and Miss O'Donnel are the same sort.”

Of course I wanted to say yes; and, of course, after this, I did say yes without further parleying.

“Now begins the most critical time in this adventure of yours. Don Ramón,” the Cherub went on. “You see, as our place is only five miles outside Seville, we know many people; and though Carmona is seldom there with his mother, he certainly has acquaintances, and some of them may be ours too. You have travelled since Burgos as my son, though you wore his uniform only for two days; but you may

be sure Carmona has been looking forward to shaking you off, once and for all, if you should venture to Seville to see the show of Semana Santa as other tourists see it."

"He perhaps thinks that, because of our promise—which we've kept—he's shaken Ramón off already," said Dick.

"He knows better. The trick answered for a few hours; but his car broke down, and he had to accept our help. He said then that fate was against him; I heard it; and Carmona's a man to be actually superstitious about you, now. So far, he's kept the little señorita out of touch with you, but that's nearly all he has accomplished."

"Thanks to you both," I cut in. "If it hadn't been for your help, I should have been 'pinched,' and hustled over the border long ago. I see that now; and though I should have come back and begun the chase again somehow, it would have been a thousand times more difficult."

"No use bothering about what *might* have happened," laughed Pilar. "Let's think of what did happen—and what will."

"Nevertheless," said I, "the thought's often in my mind; what if we had missed Colonel and Miss O'Donnel at Burgos?"

Dick chuckled; and when Pilar wanted to know what amused him, asked my permission to tell. I gave him leave; and with a memory for detail which I could have spared, to say nothing of an attempt at mimicry, he repeated, word for word, my objections to meeting the Irish friends of Angèle de la Mole.

We were so intimate now that my point of view before knowing them did seem particularly comic, and Dick made the most of it.

"Well, think what we have to thank you for!" exclaimed Pilar; "this delightful trip. If it hadn't been for you, Cristóbal would be here instead of with Angèle in Biarritz."

"Come back to common sense," implored the Cherub, "and help me plan for the Cristóbal who is here. If he sits in our box for the processions, Carmona will see him and say to some officious person, very different from Rafael Calmenare, 'who is that young man with the O'Donnels?' And the officious person will answer, 'I never saw him in my life.' 'Ah,' the Duke will exclaim, 'isn't he Cristóbal O'Donnel?' 'Not at all,' will come the reply; and Carmona will proceed to make trouble."

“For you as well as for me; that's the worst of it,” said I.

“We care nothing for that. It's of you we think,” said the Cherub. And because I knew it was true, more than ever it became my duty to think of him and his.

“Of course I don't want to lose any chance of seeing Monica,” I said; “but on the days of the processions I shall walk about in the crowd and keep out of Carmona's way.”

“As for us,” said Pilar, “we'll try for a box near the Duke's—though there may be nothing left, as the King's to be here and there's sure to be a crowd. I'll do my best to whisper to Lady Monica, or send her a note, or speak with my eyes if no more.”

“You know how I depend on you,” I answered. “She may give you a letter, an answer to one which I hope she got at Manzanares.”

“I'll be ready for the lightest hint,” said Pilar. “If she has a note for you, she'll show it behind her fan. Then I'll motion her to crumple it up and throw it on the floor as she goes out. If you don't appear in our society, the Duke will think perhaps that after all he's safe.”

“No. We mustn't count on any such thing,” broke in her father. “If he can't get rid of you in one way, he'll try another; and there's an old saying which is still true: anything can happen in Spain, especially in the south. Carmona will be watching for you. You must be prepared for that.”

“I shall be,” I said.

“We'll all be,” Pilar finished. “Oh, there's the old Roman aqueduct! Isn't it splendid; and strong as if it had been built yesterday instead of in the days before the Goths. I love Seville—love every brick and stone of it, from the ruins of the Moorish wall and the Torre del Oro, and the glorious cathedral, to the old house in the Callo del Candilejo, where the witch-woman looked out and saw King Don Pedro fighting his duel. I don't believe any other place could make up to me for Seville.”

By the side of the two-thousand-years-old-aqueduct ran a modern electric tramway; and one of the graceful arches made by Roman hands had been widened to let pass the railway line for Madrid. Farther on, Moorish houses with lofty miradors and beautiful capped windows were tucked between ugly new buildings, and across the shaded avenue of a green park was flung an extraordinary,

four-winged spiral staircase of iron. I groaned at the monstrosity, saying that Pedro himself had never perpetrated an act more cruel; and the Cherub excused it sadly, by saying that it was convenient for the crowds to pass from one side of the street to the other, as I should see if I stayed beyond the Semana Santa for the feria.

"Look at the Giralda, and you'll forget the iron bridge," said Pilar. My eyes followed hers, and lit like winging birds upon a beautiful tower soaring delicately against the sky. So light, so fragile in effect was it, I felt that it might lean upon a cloud. In the golden light of afternoon the little pillars of old marble, the carved lozenges of stone, the arches of the horseshoe windows, the dainty carvings of the balconies, and all the marvellous ornamentation that broke the square surfaces of the tower, were rosy as if with reflections from a sunset sky. Its beauty was a Moorish poem in brick-work, such as no other hands save Moorish hands have ever made.

I looked back until I lost sight of the Giralda, except the glittering figure of Faith on the top (strange symbol for a weather-vane), while threading through tortuous streets, mere strips of pavement veiled with blue shadow, and walled with secretive, flat-fronted houses, old and new, pearly with fresh whitewash, or painted pale lemon, faded orange, or a green ethereal as the tints of seaweed. Even at first sight the quaint town was singularly lovable, in its mingling of simplicity and mystery, and as Spanish in this mixture as in all things else.

The tall, straight palms, with their tufted heads like falling fountains, clear against the sky, were Oriental, and seemed scarcely kin to the palms of Italy and Southern France. Nor were the narrow streets, through which we pounded over cobbles, like the narrow streets of Italian towns. They were Spanish; inexplicably but wholly Spanish, although Dick was not sure they did not recall bits of Venice, "just as you turn away from St. Mark's."

It was odd that shops so small could be so gay and attractive as these with their rows of painted fans, their draped mantillas, their bright sashes, foolish little tambourines, castanets tied with rosettes of ribbon in Spanish colours; their curious and vivid antique jewelry; their sombreros cordobeses displayed in the same windows with silk hats from Bond Street; their flaming flowers, Moorish pottery, old lace, and cabinets of inlaid ebony and silver. And I knew that I

should learn to love the sounds of Seville better than the sounds of London or other cities I had seen.

Haunting sounds they were, these noises of a closely peopled old town, characteristic as those of Naples, not so strident as in Madrid; above all, the sound of bells, ringing, booming, chiming, so continuously that soon they would affect the senses like a heavy perfume always present. One would cease to hear them, and be startled only if their clamouring tongues were silenced.

In the streets, where the processions of Semana Santa would pass, already hundreds of rush-bottomed chairs were ranged in front of houses and shops, piled in confusion, which would be reduced to order for to-morrow, Palm Sunday. Beyond, in the Plaza de la Constitución—scene in old days of the bull-fight and auto-da-fé,—many men were busy putting the last touches on the crimson velvet and gold draperies of the royal box, pounding barriers into place in the tribune in front of the silver-like chasing of the Casa del Ayuntamiento's Plateresque façade, or arranging row after row of chairs in the open space opposite, leaving an aisle for the procession to pass between.

"Now there is something to do before we drive home to the Cortijo de Santa Rufina," said the Cherub. "I must see about getting a box in the tribune for the week; I must find out whether Carmona did come in by train last night. Don Ramón hasn't suggested this plan, but I think he would not dislike it."

"I meant to drop out of the car, to see what I could learn myself, and join you afterwards at home," I said. "But you can get hold of things better than I, a stranger, can."

"You must remain a stranger," he supplemented my words. "If your chauffeur will stop at the top of this narrow street, I'll walk down it a few doors to my club, and ask for the latest news. Carmona doesn't honour his house in Seville too often with his presence, though his mother is here every season, and his arrival will be the talk of the club. I can take steps too, about a box for the show. I won't keep you long; but you'd better wait at the Café Perla. Pilar can't go there without me. Oh, you may smile; but remember we're in Spain. She must wait at the house of a friend."

The Cherub's idea of a “little while” and a “long while” were always rather vague, and apt to dovetail confusingly one into another; but knowing what it was his aim to accomplish, I did not grudge the fifty minutes before his ample form and smiling face appeared in the doorway of the café.

“It's all right,” were his first words. “I felt my luck wouldn't desert me. Who do you suppose”—and he turned to Pilar, who had come on with him—“was the first man I ran across? No other than Don Esteban Villaroya.”

Pilar looked a little frightened. “But he's a friend of the Duke's. Won't that make it awkward?”

“No; all the better. I told him Cristóbal and my daughter and I had motored from Burgos with an American friend, an important writer for the papers, who was going to pay us a visit. Not an untrue word to trouble my confessor with. Don Esteban may or may not mention our meeting to Carmona when he dines with him this evening.”

“Dines with him? Oh, I hope that won't make mischief.”

“It won't. Carmona arrived late last night, with his mother and guests. It seems preparations have been going on in the house for the past fortnight; and the first thing Carmona and his mother did was to send out half a dozen invitations for dinner this evening. Afterwards, he managed, probably through royal influence, to get permission from the Governor to take the party into the Alcázar by moonlight, and he's going to have coloured illuminations, music, and Spanish dances given by professionals in the costumes of different provinces. A grand idea, Don Esteban thinks.”

“But why is he doing it?” asked Pilar, thoughtfully. “María purísima! It isn't as if he were an impulsive or hospitable man, fond of getting up impromptu entertainments. This is done in a hurry. What can be his object? for he always has an object.”

“To amuse Lady Monica, who's not pleased with him so far,” explained the Cherub. “And as he's a good Catholic, at least in appearance, to-night or the night after will be his last chance to entertain till Semana Santa is over.”

“Somehow, I don't feel that's reason enough,” said Pilar, looking so troubled that I felt new stirrings of anxiety, and must have shown it; for Pilar exclaimed that she was a “little beast” to worry me.

“You haven't worried me,” I protested. “Still, I think I'll go to that entertainment at the Alcázar.”

Pilar and her father stared. “I see what you mean,” said the girl. “You hope to walk in and meet Lady Monica. But you can't, because the Alcázar's closed to the public after sunset. It will only be open for the Duke as a favour, because he's rich and important, and care will be taken that no outsider slips in.”

“If there should be one more guitarist than he hired, do you think it would be noticed?” I asked, smiling.

Pilar clapped her hands. “You're a true lover, Don Ramón,” she exclaimed. “Ay de mi! Nobody will ever love a little dark thing like myself, as Lady Monica is loved. I must be satisfied with the affections of my relations, and a few others, I suppose.” Great eyes lifted sadly ceiling-ward as she spoke, then cast down with distracting play of long curled lashes. Spanish after all to her finger-tips, this María del Pilar Inés, despite her Irish quickness. Poor Dick!

“You believe I could manage it, then?”

“I believe you *will*. Señor Waring has told me about the masked ball, and how you played Romeo to somebody's Juliet.”

“The difficulty will be to get hold of the impresario.”

Pilar looked at her watch. “They'll know at the Alcázar who's been engaged. There's an hour and a half yet before closing time.”

“What if you and I take a stroll through?” suggested Dick.

“We'll all take a stroll through,” said Pilar, “and papa shall find out. You know, he can always make everybody tell him anything in five minutes. Even Cristóbal and I have never been able to keep a secret from him. If I'd planned to elope, he would only have to whisper and smile, for me to tell all, even if it meant my going into a convent directly after.”

“Yes, we must go to the Alcázar now, or it will be too late,” said the Cherub, with an indulgent twinkle at his spoiled daughter.

The car took us to the gate of the Alcázar, a gate of that unsuggestive Moorish simplicity which purposely hid all splendours of decoration from any save favoured eyes. The guardian knew and evidently respected Colonel O'Donnel; but with apologies which comprehended the whole party, he regretted that he could not let us

in. The King was to arrive in a few days, returning from his yachting trip to the Canaries, and would live in the Alcázar which was being got ready for him. From now until the day after his departure, the Alcázar was to be closed to the public.

This was just, and as it should be, admitted the Cherub; but we were not the public. We were special ones, even as special as the Duke of Carmona who would entertain his friends there that evening. Surely the guardian must know that the O'Donnel family was on terms of friendship with the Governor of the Alcázar, who would suffer severe pains of the heart if he heard that such visitors had been turned away. Thus the good Cherub continued to whisper. And whether or no coin changed hands I cannot tell; but certain it is that in less than the five minutes allowed by Pilar for the working of her father's fascinations, we were inside the forbidden precincts, accompanied by a lamb-like attendant.

It was from him that we must learn what we wished to know; but it would be unwise to betray a premature thirst for information on any subject save the history or beauties of the Alcázar. Asking a question now and then of our guide, we wandered from patio to patio, from room to room of that wonderful royal dwelling once called “the house of Cæsar.” Many a rude shock and vicissitude had it sustained when Goths fought for it with Romans, when Moors seized it from Christians, when Christians won it back, and conducted themselves within its jewelled walls in ways unworthy of their faith and boasted chivalry, yet the beauties which Pedro the Cruel restored in admiring imitation of the Alhambra, glowed still with undimmed splendour, in the sunshine of this twentieth century afternoon.

If I had not been preoccupied by my own private and extremely modern anxieties, I should have let imagination work the spell it longed to work, and make of me some humble character gliding shadow-like, but ever observant, through tale after tale of the “Arabian Nights.” In just such a palace as this had the Seven Calenders lost each an eye; behind any one of these fretted arches might one come upon a king, half man, half jet-black marble. The most captious of genies could have found no fault with the Hall of the Ambassadors save the absence of the roc's egg; and despite my

impatience the storied enchantment of the place soon had me in its grip.

Scheherezade, I said to myself, could have invented no tales to surpass in thrilling interest the scenes which had been enacted here. The drama of widowed Egilona and her handsome Moorish prince, ruined by her love; the tragedy of Abu Said, done to death by Pedro for the sake of his "fair ruby, great as a racket ball," and the store of gems for which men still search secretly in hidden nooks of the Alcázar; the murder of the young Master of Santiago, who came to Pedro as an honoured guest; the love story of Maria de Padilla, whose spirit, the guardian whispered, could be seen to this day flitting in moonlight and shadow along her favourite garden walks, or trailing white robes through rooms which had been hers.

"Perhaps, as the moon is full, Maria will appear to-night in the garden to the Duke of Carmona and his guests," said Pilar; and I knew from this preface that our probation was at an end.

The attendant laughed. "Perhaps," he replied; "but I think there will be too much noise to please her. The Duke has engaged a troupe of dancers and guitarists to entertain his friends."

"No doubt King Don Pedro used to amuse his in the same way," remarked the Cherub, "employing the forerunners of Ramiro Olivero and his school maybe."

"It is Ramiro Olivero who performs to-night," said the attendant, playing into our hands.

"Of course! He is the favoured one in such affairs," assented the Cherub. "It ought to be a pretty entertainment, and interesting to the Duke's English guests. It will be somewhere in the gardens?"

"In the lower garden of the Moorish kiosk," was the unsuspecting reply.

Pilar looked at me, and her eyes said, "The key you wanted is in your hand."

XXVII

Moonlight in the Garden

When the Cherub dies and is gathered to his Irish and Spanish fathers (far distant be the day!) he will not know a happy moment in Paradise unless he is doing something ingenuously kind for somebody. It is my conviction that he will have to be made a guardian angel; and I mentioned this theory to him as he took me to the house of Ramiro Olivero, ex-bull-fighter, present professor of Spanish dancing.

The others were waiting in the car, as, according to the Cherub's plan of campaign, he and I were to visit Olivero alone.

We climbed many stairs to the flat where the celebrated man lives and conducts his school for dancing. He it was who came to the door, and it was a sight worth seeing to watch his somewhat hard, middle-aged features relax in response to cherubic murmurings.

Colonel O'Donnel remembered Señor Olivero since the time when he was a banderillero; oh, incomparably the most brilliant banderillero of his day. Then, afterwards, what triumphs as a torero! Ah, that was something for an old admirer to remember. Not to regret, naturally, since the señor was as great an artist in his present profession as in that other doubtless sacrificed to family affections.

This gentleman whom he (Colonel O'Donnel) now ventured to introduce was from England, travelling with a friend from the States who wrote articles on Spain for well-known journals. The American could speak no Spanish, but with the gentleman from England it was like the native tongue. Therefore it was he who most often attended important ceremonies, and made notes for his friend to work up into articles. This entertainment in which Señor Olivero was assisting the Duke of Carmona, for instance; it would be all that was characteristic of Spain, as well as beautiful. If the señor would allow the gentleman from England to enter the Alcázar as one of his guitarists, an article

could be made for the great American newspapers which would not only be a credit to the journalist, but would widely advertise the skill of Señor Olivero and his pupils.

If every man has his price, it was not derogatory to his merits that these pearls of flattery should be the price which bought Olivero. Not a penny was to be paid for the favour. When the word “money” was hinted, rather than spoken, the ex-hero of the bull-ring waved it away with a superb gesture. But he would be glad to see the articles when they appeared; and this was promised, for Dick must write them for the neglected papers he was supposed to represent.

In return for the promise (and the compliments), it was arranged that I should present myself at his house about ten o'clock (the dance was timed to begin at 10.45), there dress for my part, and be furnished with a guitar. Once inside the Alcázar I need not play upon the instrument; but, said Olivero, it was well that I should be able to do so if called upon. My costume was to be a short chulo jacket and tight-hipped, loose-legged grey trousers, with a low-collared, unstarched shirt, and a broad-brimmed grey sombrero de Cordoba. With this hat, well tipped over my eyes, in moonlight or even spasmodic rose-and-gold bursts of coloured fire, recognition would be impossible at a distance; and I meant to keep at a distance from all the Duke's party—with one exception.

By the time the plan was mapped out, it was nearly seven o'clock, but the O'Donnels still urged me to dine at the Cortijo de Santa Rufina. The Gloria would eat up the six miles distance in ten minutes; I could bathe and dress before 8.15, when dinner would be ready (a telegram had been sent to the servants from Cordoba), and rested and refreshed, I could start for Seville in the car again at half-past nine.

So we flashed out across the Guadalquivir, by way of the bridge of Isabel Segunda, into that strange suburb which gave Trajan birth, and my family their name; ancient Trajana, now Triana, town of potters, picadores, and gypsies.

Dark-browed boys played toreros to our car as bull, their coats muletas, sticks their banderillas, yelling and springing lithely aside as the enemy rushed on them. Girls, handsome as Carmen, flung us flowers, staring boldly eye to eye; and this was my welcome to the

place near which the Casa Trianas had once lived and thought themselves great!

Almost could I have seen the towers of the old house—now the property of the King—as we passed into open country again; but I did not speak, nor did the others, though the thought in my mind must have been in Pilar's and Colonel O'Donnel's.

Five miles more, through falling dusk and sweet country scents and we turned off the main road into another, gleaming white as a path of snow in the opal twilight. Then, in a wide-reaching plantation of olives, spraying silver on a ruddy soil where glimmered irrigation tanks and grinding mills, we came upon a large, irregular clump of white buildings grouped together, and made one by a high wall with an open belfry at one corner.

"Here we are at home!" exclaimed the Cherub with a contented sigh, as he gently touched Ropes' shoulder. "Welcome, dear friends, to the Cortijo de Santa Rufina. It, and all within its walls, is at your disposition."

We drove in through a wide gate in the outer wall, where there was a clamour of greeting from the steward, many servants, and more dogs, dogs of all races, who selected Pilar for their wildest demonstrations. In a second she was out of the car, and half drowned in a wave of tumultuous doghood. Laughing, shaking hands with the servants, patting or suppressing greyhounds, collies, setters, retrievers, she had never seemed so charming. This was the *real* Pilar—Pilar at home; the Pilar it would be next to impossible to uproot from such associations. Again, poor Dick! And now he no longer tried to hide the loving admiration in his eyes. I think he would even have done his best to fondle a wild bull or two of her acquaintance had they been among the friends who gave her welcome.

Away boomed the Gloria to the stables—the sole garage at the Cortijo—while we were bidden through the Moorish entrance-porch and wrought-iron cancela into a patio surrounded on all sides by an arcade, roofed with green and brown tiling. The supporting pillars were of pale pink brick, not marble, and the pavement was of brick also, interset with a pattern of small blue tiles. But the tiles were old and good; from a carved stone basin in the middle of the court sprang the tall crystal stem of a fountain, blossoming into diamonds;

pearly arum lilies, pink azaleas, and pale green hydrangeas bloomed in huge white and blue and yellow pots from Triana, of the same beautiful shapes made before Santa Justa and Santa Rufina knew they were saints, and undertook to keep the Giralda from falling.

The windows leading into the rooms surrounding the patio were large as doors, and all were hospitably open, giving through thin curtains glimpses of old furniture carefully grouped to please a woman's dainty taste. Pilar again—always Pilar! Here were her lares and penates; and she was a goddess among lesser household gods. I knew that it would be safer for Dick to say a hasty good-bye upon the threshold; but I knew also that no power on earth could force him to do it.

"This is only a farm, you know," said the girl, meekly, all the while dimpling with pride in her home and what she had made it; "for we are only farmers, aren't we, Papa."

Our rooms—Dick's and mine—were not overstocked with furniture; but there were two or three things for which an antiquary would have pawned his soul. On one side, our windows looked upon the patio; on the other, we gazed through iron bars over olives and meadows where grain was green. There was no sound save the tinkling rain of the fountain, and now and then the sleepy note of a bird, or a far-away lowing of cattle—perhaps the welcoming bellow of Vivillo, the brown bull which was the sole possession of Carmona coveted by Pilar.

The two servants who waited at dinner were wreathed in smiles at seeing again their master and mistress; and their occasional furtive glances of interest in my direction made me wonder if they had not received mysterious instructions as to how they must answer any questions concerning me. But, whatever those instructions might be, I was sure they would be loyally carried out; for the Cherub is a man servants would obey through torture until death, if these days were as the old.

At half-past nine Ropes was ready to spin me back into Seville. We arrived earlier than need be; and having made an appointment to meet at a quiet hotel, where Ropes would await me from half-past eleven till half-past twelve, I decided to walk past Carmona's house and reconnoitre.

I knew where to find it, in the Calle de las Dueñas; but if I had hoped for a tell-tale glimpse within, as in a London or Parisian mansion, I was disappointed. Once a Moorish palace, it showed a closed, secretive front to the narrow street. But I knew, for I had read, that within there were six courtyards, ninety marble pillars, half a dozen fountains, a garden of orange and magnolia trees, with myrtle hedges clipped to represent the ducal arms; that there were vast treasures of statuary, pictures by Velasquez, Murillo, and Alonso Cano; gold-inlaid plate armour; tapestry from the Netherlands not to be surpassed at the Royal Palace at Madrid.

I knew that these splendours would loom large in the eyes of Lady Vale-Avon, and might count for something even with Monica, who confessed to a love of all things beautiful. I thought of the famous Carmona jewels, which would belong to the wife of the Duke, while she lived, as they had belonged to generations of Duchesses. Above all, I thought of the incomparable Blanca Laguna pearl and its glistening maids of honour, which, by this time perhaps, had been shown to Monica. There were few girls in Spain, or in the world, I remembered hearing my mother say, who could resist that pearl as a bride. And now it was offered to Monica, a penniless girl of eighteen, whose beauty formed her sole dowry.

There, behind the cold reserve of those white walls with the shut, brass-studded doors and barred windows, she was being fêted by the Duke, dining on gold plate, in a tapestried room fragrant with orange flowers. I could see the pictures. I could see the look in Carmona's eyes as they turned to her, saying, “all this is yours if you will have it.” And Carmona's eyes were handsome eyes; I had to admit that, in justice.

Would she hold true to me—true to a man with no palaces, no lands, no priceless pearls, and only half as many hundreds a year as her other lover had thousands? Would she be able to resist her mother, now that mother had seen with her own eyes how much there was to fight for and to win?

The question would come. But with it came a vision of Monica herself, pure and sweet as beautiful, loyal and loving as she was lovely. And I said to myself, “Yes, she will be true.”

It was with the clear ringing of these words in my mind that I turned my back upon the house of Carmona.

Once I had passed into the Alcázar with Olivero's band of dancers and guitarists I was free to do as I pleased. And I pleased to escape from my laughing, chattering companions before the arrival of the Duke and his guests, and the illuminations in their honour. There was no better place to wait and watch for the opportunity I wanted, than in the mock-Moorish kiosk at the end of the lower garden. From there I could see without being seen; and the moment a chance came I should be ready to take it.

It was early still, but Olivero lost no time in marshalling his little army into place, that they might make a good effect as a tableau vivant when the great people came. He seated his six men with guitars, their sombreros at precisely the right angle on their glossy black heads, and in a row of chairs in front six young women in black dresses with black lace mantillas, the red and yellow ribbons of their castanets already in their hands. Then, at intervals, he grouped the dancers, youths, and pretty girls, carefully dressed in the costumes of different provinces, making a bouquet of bright colours in the light of a few concealed lamps which supplemented the silver radiance of the moon, now almost at the zenith.

The minutes passed. The dancers talked in subdued tones which scarcely disturbed the nightingales. A breeze rustled the crisp leaves of the orange trees and myrtle hedges; far away the voice of the watchman told the hour of eleven, echoed by the chiming bells of a church clock; and the last stroke had not sounded when there was a burst of merry voices in a distant avenue. Carmona and his friends had come—late, of course—or there could have been no Andalucíans among them; and suddenly, as if on a signal, the gardens pulsed with rose-coloured light. In the pink blaze I saw Monica, slender and fair as a lily, in a white dress sparkling with silver; but I had only time to see that she walked beside Carmona, when the rose flame died down and left the garden pure and peaceful under the moon.

For an instant the soft light seemed darkness, and I lost the white figure. When it sprang to my eyes again in a sharp emerald flash, while all the hidden fountains in the garden walks spouted jewels, others were grouped round it; only the gold crown of rippling hair shone out clear as a star for me among other women's dark coils and braids.

Old ebony chairs with crimson velvet cushions and the Carmona arms in heavy gilding, had been sent to the Alcázar from the Duke's house, for the entertainment. The party sat down, and the dancing began, to the flamenco music of guitars and the clacking of castanets; the fandango, the bolero, the malagueña, the chaquera vella; all the classical dances of old Spain, and each one a variant on the theme of love, the woman coy, coquettishly retreating; the man persuading or demanding, the woman yielding in passionate abandonment at last.

In the midst of a sevillana I came out from the shadows of the kiosk and walked without a sound of rattling pebble or cracking twig, along a path which the moon had not yet found.

The high backs of the ebony chairs were turned to me. I could not even see the heads of the people who sat in them; but I had watched them take their places, and I knew that Monica's chair was the outside one on the end, at the right.

Everyone was absorbed in watching the dance. As it approached its tempestuous climax of joy and love, I moved into the deep shadow of a magnolia tree, close to Monica—so close that, reaching out from behind the round trunk which screened me, I touched her hand.

With a start, she glanced up, expecting perhaps to find that the breeze had blown a rose-branch across her fingers. Instead, she saw my face; for I had taken off the wide-brimmed grey sombrero and bared my head to her.

For a second she looked straight into my eyes, as if she doubted that she saw aright. Then, an unbelievable thing happened. Her eyes grew cold as glass. Her lips tightened into a line which I had not dreamed their soft curves could take. Her youth and beauty froze under my gaze. With a haughty lifting of her brows, and an indescribable movement of her shoulder which could mean nothing but scornful indifference, she turned away as if impatient at having lost a gesture of the dancers.

Astounded, I stepped back; and so vast was the chasm of my amazement that I floundered in it bewildered, unable even to suffer.

Then came a pang of such pain and anger as I had never known—anger not against the girl, but against Carmona; and the

knife which pierced me was dipped in the poison of jealously. My impulse was to leap out from the shadow and strangle him. My hands tingled for his neck, and through the drumming of the blood in my ears I could hear the crack his spine would make as I twisted it. For that instant I was a madman. Then, something that was myself conquered.

Horror of the savage thing just born in me overflowed in an icy flood that swept it, drowning, out of my soul. But never again, so long as I may live, shall I condemn a man who kills another in one blind moment of rage.

Even when the red glaze was gone from before my eyes, I could not trust myself to stand there, looking at Carmona as he smiled and patronized the dancers by clapping his hands. I turned away, not stopping until I had regained the kiosk.

There I sat down, elbows on knees, head in my hands, trying to analyse that look on Monica's face, trying to tell myself that I must have mis-read it—that such an expression as I imagined could not have been there for me.

Perhaps, as I suddenly appeared behind a veil of flickering moonlight and shadow she had not known who I was. She had mistaken me for some impertinent stranger, and rather than give an alarm, she had hoped that a frown might rid her of the intruder. Then, I had gone without giving her a second chance to recognize me.

After a few minutes of such reflections, I almost persuaded myself that I had been a fool and was wholly to blame for what I suffered. At least, I said, I owed it to her to make sure that the look had been for me, and the suspense must end to-night. I would know, even if I made her answer me under the eyes of Carmona and the others.

But a moment later I saw that I need not be driven to such extremes.

The first part of the dance was over; the Duke and his guests were walking through the gardens in the interval. They were coming my way—coming to the kiosk. As they advanced, I retreated into shadow. I let the group linger at the kiosk, admiring the beautiful azulejos; I let them move on; then, as Monica loitered purposely

behind the others, drooping and evidently sad, I put myself in front of her.

“Monica,” I said, “what has happened? You—”

The girl flung up her head, and though there was a glitter of tears in her eyes and her face was white under the moon, she stared defiance. “Don't speak to me,” she said. “I never wish to see you again. I'm going to marry the Duke of Carmona.”

XXVIII

Let Your Heart Speak

Men do not kill themselves for such things. Fools, or cowards, or children may; but not men who are worthy the name. Yet there was no joy of life left in me, as I went out of the Alcázar garden, having had my answer.

Love cannot die in an hour, and I loved Monica still, though I said that she was not the girl to whom I had dedicated my soul in worship.

She had let me follow her, only to say at last: “I never wish to see you again. I'm going to marry the Duke of Carmona.”

After all, she had proved herself a docile daughter. She had seen what the house of a grandee of Spain can be like. She had seen the Blanca Laguna pearl. Poor child of eighteen years, brought up to know poverty and to loathe it; was I to let my love turn to hate because she was not an angel, but a woman like others?

A despairing pity and a sense of hopeless loss weighed upon my spirit with such heaviness as I had never known. Not only had I lost the girl I loved, but there was no such girl; she was a dream, and I had waked up. That was all; but it seemed the end of everything.

My errand in Spain was finished, or rather broken short. She did not want me any more. The sooner I took myself out of her life and let her forget what must now seem childish folly, the better. I might have known—she was so young; and she had warned me of disaster when she said, “Don't leave me alone.”

I went to Olivero's flat and changed my clothes; then to the hotel where Ropes and the car were waiting. For the first time since we had come into Spain, I drove, “like a demon,” Ropes' surprised face said, though his tongue was discreet; and the wild rush through the air was wine to thirsty lips.

At the Cortijo de Santa Rufina they were all sitting in the patio in floods of moonlight, the great awning which gave shade by day, fully rolled back.

"You see," exclaimed Pilar, "we sat up for you. Well, how did it go off?"

I heard myself laughing. It did not feel a pleasant laugh, but I was glad to think that it sounded like any other. "Oh, it went off exactly as I might have expected," I said, knowing that it was useless to hide my humiliation, though I might hide my misery. "And consequently, my car and I will also go off, to-morrow. As for Dick, he must do as he pleases; but I advise him, now he's here, to stay for the Semana Santa."

"What do you mean?" asked Pilar, almost letting fall the guitar on which she had been playing. "Has—has Lady Monica promised to go with you—to-morrow?"

"Not at all," said I. "But what she's promised to another man makes it better that I should go. She's engaged to Carmona."

"I don't believe it," cried Pilar.

"I shouldn't, if anyone but herself had told me."

"She said it?"

"In exactly those words. She said too, that she didn't want to see me again."

"Oh—oh!" breathed Pilar. "Thank *Heaven* for that. You frightened me horribly—just for a moment."

I stared. "And now—"

"Now I know there's some mistake—dreadful, but not too dreadful to clear up."

I laughed again, as bitterly as I felt this time. "Extraordinary idea! Because she says she doesn't want to see me, there's a mistake—"

"Of course. Surely you aren't so cold-hearted, so disloyal, so—so *stupid* as to believe her? But tell me instantly all about it—everything; every word; every look."

"Easily done," I said, "if it won't bore you all. There were very few of either; but what there were left nothing to the imagination."

"Imagination indeed!" exclaimed Pilar. "But go on."

So I went on, and she listened to the end without interruption, as did the two others, who were only men, and therefore had no comments to make upon such matters.

As I told the wretched story in as few and as bald words as possible, Pilar sat grave-eyed, tense-lipped as Portia in the Court of Justice before her turn to plead. When I finished she was silent for a moment, I thought because, after all, she found herself with nothing to say. But, when her father in his compassion would have begun some murmur of consolation, she broke out quickly, "I suppose she *is* engaged to the Duke, or she wouldn't have said so."

"Not much doubt of that," I assented.

"Nor *any* doubt of her real feelings. Poor little girl, I know she's wishing she could die to-night. Those *devils!* Yes, I *will* say it, Papa. I shall be forgiven, for they *are*. They've told her some hateful lie, and made her so desperate she was ready to do anything. Why, it's just come to me; there's only one thing that would make a girl who loves a man do what she's done."

"What?" I broke in, breathless; for Pilar's fire had flamed into my blood now, and I waited for her answer as a man waits for an antidote to poison.

"Believing he's in love with someone else."

"How could she believe that? Who is there—" I stopped. My eyes met Pilar's, and she blushed, stammering as she hurried bravely on. "The greatest nonsense, of course. But—but—*oh*, don't you remember how she looked that evening at Manzanares when we saw her last? So wistful, as if there were something on her mind she mustn't tell? I caught her looking at me once or twice as if she were wondering—they must have begun, even then, to upset her mind, poor, lonely child; but the worst hadn't happened; she was only a little doubtful. If you could have spoken to her, or if I—"

"I did write," I said, "though I've always been afraid something went wrong with that letter."

"Ah!" Pilar caught at this, and would have the whole story with every detail. I even found myself confessing my old presentiment, the fancy that Monica was calling for me to help her.

"I believe she was, calling and praying. Of course she never got the letter. What was in it? If you don't mind my asking?"

“I said, a crisis seemed to be coming, and she must make up her mind to let me take her away.”

“A splendid letter to fall into her mother's hands. Did you sign your real name?”

“No name at all. I wrote in a hurry, and—”

“That's lucky. But even if you had, Lady Vale-Avon couldn't have shown such a letter to the Duke, he's too Spanish—too Moorish, I ought to say. She wouldn't have dared, as she wants him for a son-in-law.”

“That occurred to me.”

“But there aren't many other things she wouldn't dare, to get rid of such a danger as you. If she got the letter—and I'm sure she did—there was your handwriting at her mercy. Supposing she—”

“I know what's in your mind. But I don't think such things are done—out of novels.”

“Oh, aren't they; when people are clever enough? I know of one case myself. And the girl's life was spoiled. Lady Monica's shan't be though, if I can help it.”

“You're taking a great deal for granted,” I said. But I felt as if the radiance of heaven were pouring down upon me, instead of the pensive moonlight.

“Doesn't your heart tell you I'm right?” cried Pilar.

“Yes!” I answered. “Yes, you good angel, it does.”

XXIX

The Garden of Flaming Lilies

The voice of some maid servant singing a copla waked me early in the morning, after an hour or two of sleep.

El amor y la naranja
se parecen infinito;
Que por muy dulces que sean
de agrio tienen su poquito.

1

Yes, always a little bitter, I said to myself. But if for me there were after all to be some sweetness left?

Last night before parting, the Cherub, Dick and I had talked matters over from every point of view. I was only too thankful to take the advice of one girl on behalf of another, and give to Monica the benefit of that doubt which at first had not seemed admissible. But even Pilar confessed that Monica's engagement to Carmona made our part a hundred times more difficult.

Whatever her motive had been—revenge upon me for supposed disloyalty, dread of her mother, or awakened ambition--she had in any case consented to marry him, and Pilar suggested that the dinner invitations had been sent out as an excuse for a public announcement, which would more firmly bind her to her promise. The news would have flown all over Seville in twenty-four hours; when the King arrived on Tuesday Carmona would certainly lose no time in telling him; Lady Vale-Avon would not wait for Monica to write to the Princess, but would probably wire; and no matter what my private anxieties might be, for Monica's sake I must do nothing openly. As for defying Carmona to use his knowledge of my true name, and challenging him to fight, that must not be thought of. Monica's fair fame would never survive such a scandal, especially in

Spain, where a girl's reputation is as easily damaged as the down on a butterfly's wing.

But, as the Cherub said, there are many roads which lead to the centre of the world. He had learned at his club that the Duke had lent his box in the tribune to a friend, for such processions as he and his household did not care to see. That friend was a member of the club, and through him the Cherub had found out that the box in question was next to the royal box which would be occupied by the King, the Infanta Doña María Teresa, and her husband. Immediately upon making this discovery, the Cherub had begun to move heaven and earth to obtain a box for himself, either behind, in front of, or on one side of Carmona's box. He did not know yet if he should succeed, for things were not done in a moment in Spain. Of course all the boxes were already subscribed for the whole week by members of the aristocracy and other persons of importance in Seville; but, then, the Cherub had friends and acquaintances in every class. If it were a question of money, money would not be spared; if it were a question of a favour for a favour in return, that favour would be given. There was hope that the thing might be arranged; and once Pilar came within speaking distance of Monica, nothing short of sudden death could prevent her from telling the girl the truth, vowing by all the saints that she had been deceived for the one purpose of separating her from me. If Monica could be made to believe that, she would have courage to be true in spite of all; and then it would be for me to save her from keeping the engagement into which she had been tricked.

As for my going to Carmona's house and trying to see Monica, such a plan appeared useless, as I should certainly not be allowed to come near her. Therefore I must wait with such patience as I could, and let my friends help me in the subtle ways favoured in Spain.

Now, Palm Sunday had dawned crystal clear; but Pilar had explained that nobody occupied the boxes and chairs to see the procession of palms in the morning; that, though it was pretty to see, it was not one of the great sights; and, as one must be waiting early outside the cathedral, it was unlikely that anyone from Carmona's house would be there. Still there was the chance, and I could not afford to miss it; so the O'Donnels offered to go with me into Seville, Dick, of course, being of the party.

Consequently, every one at the Cortijo was astir by six; and before seven Dick and I were in the patio, just in time to greet Pilar utterly fascinating in a mantilla.

She was dressed as a Spanish woman of the upper class should be dressed on Palm Sunday; and though the tight-fitting, rich black brocade silk which she wore would, in any other country, have seemed a costume not for young girlhood but for middle age, it suited her wonderfully. Her clear-skinned, heart-shaped face, with its great soft eyes and red lips, was beautiful in the cloudy frame of black lace; and her piled hair, of so dark a brown as to appear black, except when the sunlight burnished threads of gold in its masses, looked ruddy as the leaves of a copper-beech gleaming through the figured lace.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Dick, jumping to his feet when he saw her. No more than that; but Pilar was woman enough to understand the value of the compliment; and she smiled, patting the flounce of her mantilla into still more graceful folds on her breast.

“You think me nice like this?” she asked. “I'm proud of my mantilla, you know. It came to me from my great-grandmother, as all the best ones do come to Spanish girls; and I've two lovely white mantillas which I wear on great feast days when I want to be very beautiful.”

“At bull-fights?” asked Dick, his eyes adoring her in a way he would have laughed at in any other man only a few weeks ago.

“I don't go to bull-fights,” said Pilar. “I love the poor bulls and horses so much, it would make me sad to see them die. Though, if I were a bull, I would myself choose a brave death in the arena, after a life of five glorious years, rather than the slaughter-house, or a weary existence of labour till old age or overstrain finished me. But I drive in the paseo on the bull-fight days, and for the feria. Ay de mi! A girl in Spain has few other chances to make herself pretty for the world to see, unless she lives in Madrid; and if it were not for the bull-fights, I suppose many girls would never get husbands. But, Our Lady be thanked, I do not have to look for one.”

Did she mean that there was any understanding with Don Cipriano?

I knew this was the thought which flashed through Dick's mind. And if Pilar had been desirable in motoring days, she was irresistible at home.

Before eight o'clock the Gloria was at the gates, and twenty minutes later we were on foot in the street of the Gran Capitán, mingling with the crowd who waited for the first procession of Semana Santa to pour out from the cathedral doors. But the crowd was not a dense one, and the face I hoped to see was not there. “It will be a long time before anything happens,” said the Cherub. “Here, when a thing should be at eight, it is at nine, or maybe half-past. What does a little time matter? But mass is being said. Who knows that the old Duchess may not have had a religious fit, and come to hear it, bringing her friends?”

No more was needed to make me anxious to go in; and we entered the cathedral, which is, to my mind, the most beautiful, inspiring, and poetic in the world.

The two O'Donnels flitted away in the dusk, mysterious as the twilight of the gods, and we guessed that they were going to hear mass. Soon they found us again. They had not seen those for whom we searched; but the procession was starting.

We made haste out before it, and none too soon, for it billowed forth after us in a glitter of gold and purple vestments, and tall, bleached palm-branches like beams of moonlight streaming against the blue of the morning sky.

“They're not here,” said Pilar, when the last gleaming crucifix and waving palm, blessed by the bishop, had disappeared. “I was sure they wouldn't come. And—it does seem hard to disappoint you—but I'm afraid they won't be in their box this afternoon. Oh, we shall go, of course! But that will be the time for the Duke to lend the Conde de Ambulato his box. Thursday will be the great day, when the King will be in the royal box, and will walk with his cofradia of the cigarette-makers before Our Lady of Victory. You know how anxious the Duke is to win back the favour of the royal family; and he'll hardly think it worth while to sit through the hours of a procession unless he can be next door to the King, with a chance of an invitation to his box.”

This was discouraging; still, I determined to be in the crowd during the afternoon; and I knew well that, though the splendid show of Semana Santa was an old story to the O'Donnels, they would not fail me for a moment.

Dick shamefacedly bought from one of many vendors an armful of blessed palms for Pilar to tie under the house windows, as a protection against the rage of thunder-storms throughout the coming year; and we drove to the country with the great glistening fronds blowing behind the motor-car like giant plumes.

I spent hours writing, tearing up, and rewriting a letter to Monica which Pilar was to try and deliver if she could, and when she could. We lunched and did our best to make careless conversation, as if we were not anxious and excited—Dick and I for our own selfish reasons; the two others in sympathy. We talked of Seville, past and present—once "Sultana of the South," still beautiful and gay, though her reign is over. "We are very happy even now, among ourselves, we Sevillanos," said the Cherub. "You should see a tertulia, if you want to know how families can enjoy themselves together. But there's another side of the picture, too. English and American people—there are a few—accuse us of being unsociable. They say we never give invitations to luncheons and dinners as people of other countries do; that a few calls are exchanged, and that is all, in an intercourse, it may be, of many years."

"Oh, I know what they say!" laughed Pilar. "I heard an American girl give a friend of hers a description of families she knew in Seville. 'You go to call,' said she; 'and if the ladies are at home (they won't be if they can help it), you're shown into a shut-up drawing-room smelling of mustiness. In front of the fireplace, if there is any, or else the brazier-table, a hard yellow or red satin sofa is drawn up, an armchair on each side. All the rest of the furniture's ranged in a straight row round the wall. It's in the afternoon, but you wait till the ladies dress, because if they're in they're sure to be in wrappers, unless it's so late that their carriage is ready for the paseo. After you're nearly gone to sleep, they come, and you talk of any uninteresting things they can think of; never interesting ones, because they're kept for intimate friends' gossip; and the girls simper and stare as if you were a curiosity, because you're allowed to walk in the street without a maid.' That's being 'sociable' in Seville,

according to the American girl; and I'm afraid that she's right from a foreigner's point of view."

All this, to amuse us; but unfortunately it was far from amusing to Dick. He sat looking introspective, and wondering no doubt, if Pilar meant to hint that, so far as the door of her heart was concerned, foreigners might save themselves the trouble of knocking.

Seeing him taciturn, as hostess she felt it her duty to console him, so when luncheon was over an invitation to go and visit Vivillo, the beloved bull, was delivered to all, with an especially beguiling look at Dick. He accepted with suspicious alacrity, and to please her I said yes; while the Cherub, who was evidently longing for a siesta, shrugged his shoulders dutifully. It seemed that we could see the pasture which was Vivillo's drawing-room without trespassing upon Carmona's land, on which I should have been loth to set my foot, even for Pilar; but when, after twenty minutes' walk across meadows, we arrived at the hedge which divided the Duke's ganaderia from Colonel O'Donnel's farm, Dick would not be satisfied with a distant inspection of the grazing bulls. Pilar (denuded of her mantilla, but still in the black brocade, ready for the afternoon in Seville) was going to pay a friendly call upon her darling, and Dick was resolved upon an introduction.

Pilar cried gaily to a herdsman visible in the distance, and joyously obedient to the girl's evidently familiar voice, the young fellow came running towards us, garrocha in hand. Between him and the hedge which separated the two properties, was a deep ditch which no bull, save in a state of fury, would care to jump. But not far away a long plank lay half hidden in rich grass, and the ganadero dragged it nearer, without a question, as if he knew already what was expected of him. Having pushed it across the ditch, to form a bridge at the spot where the hedge was thinnest, he took off his hat, and welcomed the gracious señor and señorita home. Vivillo, said he, was well, but would be the better for a sight of the señorita, who was the one human being he had seemed to love since the day of the tienta which had proved him brave.

Yes, there he was—the "lively one," well named indeed!—grazing for the moment off there to the south-east. Could not the señorita see his brown back among the grey and black ones, farthest away? But she had only to call. Vivillo knew her voice and would answer to

it as to no other. It was really a marvel. And was it true that she had begun negotiating for his purchase? Ah, it was a pity that such a toro bravo would not have his chance to fight in some splendid corrida, where the noblest bulls of Spain must meet the most skilled of the espadas. He—Mateo—had often thought what a grand spectacle it would be to see Fuentes and Vivillo together. But—well, better waste the best bull that ever grazed on these pastures, and please the señorita. For her interests it was a good thing that the Señor Duque seldom or never troubled to come and see los toros, for if his eye once lit upon Vivillo he would never part with him for any money, except for the honour of the corrida.

"Then be sure you don't let the Duke have a hint!" laughed Pilar, happy and fearless as a boy, as she squeezed through the hedge and tripped across the plank, followed by Dick.

"She is perfectly safe," said the Cherub, in answer to an uneasy look from me. "She's as well known over there almost as the herdsmen who tend the bulls from their birth; besides, she has some curious influence over animals. I have never seen anything like it in another human being, though I have read of such things. Since she was a child, I have no longer had any fear for her over there; and Señor Waring is safe also, while he keeps with her and Mateo, unless he were foolish enough to make some demonstration. But for me, I am no friend of los toros when they are at home."

Dick and Pilar were in Carmona's pasture now, moving towards a troop of grazing bulls, magnificent creatures whose terrible horns and silken hides (branded with double circles under a crown) glittered in the sun. Scarcely a head was tossed in honour of the new-comers; but as Pilar raised her girlish voice to give a peculiar call, I saw a dark form in the distance separate itself from a group. Then a brown, lean-flanked bull, nobly armed with horns grand as the antlers of a stag, bounded away from his companions, and rushed in so straight a line towards Pilar, that in spite of the Cherub's words, my heart was wrenched.

But I need not have feared. While the young herdsman and Dick stood by passive and admiring, this toro bravo of famous fighting breed reduced his run to a canter, and trotted up to Pilar as tamely as if he had been a belled cabestro.

The girl, opening a large knotted handkerchief which she had brought filled with sweet biscuit, took a step or two forward to meet the bull. Nestling against his huge head, powerful enough to bear up a horse and rider impaled upon his horns, she calmly fed the great beast from her store. Never could there have been a more beautiful picture since the day when another bull submitted to the caresses of Europa.

Vivillo scarcely deigned to look at Dick, who made some bids for his favour. All his chivalrous soul of toro bravo was absorbed in pleasure at Pilar's return, gratitude for her remembrance of him. I would scarcely have believed that it could be real, had I not seen it.

For ten minutes she stayed, Dick close at her side, always ignored by the bull; then she returned and walked towards us, slowly, the herdsman keeping near and Vivillo marching after in a resolute way which would have turned grey the hair of a nervous man or woman.

But if Dick were conscious of his nerves in such an unusual situation, he did not show it. His head was bent over Pilar's, talking earnestly, and though she never looked up at him in answer, once she broke out laughing, so merrily, I wondered what he had said.

In our own meadow again, safely delivered from the bulls, Pilar slipped instantly to her father's side and began chattering about Vivillo, who stood by the ditch looking wistfully after her as he chewed his last biscuit. Dick and I were thus thrown together; and though Dick's face is no tell-tale, I guessed somehow that his mind was not as calm as his features.

“I should think that might have been a little upsetting to an amateur,” I said.

“Maybe,” answered Dick, absent-mindedly. “But it isn't that, if I'm looking queer. Say Ramón, I've done it.”

“What?”

“Proposed to a girl for the first time in my life. What's more, I grovelled. I called Vivillo a lamb, though at the moment he was looking more like several dozen lions. I told her if she'd marry me, she could have him and any other bulls sitting about on our hearthrug; that we'd have a nice big one on purpose.”

“That ought to be an inducement—even from a heretic.”

“Oh, confound you, don't harp on that. I'm mad about the girl. I know all you're suffering, and if I ever put on superior airs, I take them back and swallow them.”

Even a man heartbroken would have had to grin; and Pilar had persuaded me not to be heartbroken yet. If I laughed, I sympathized too, and liked Dick better than ever because we were eating the same bitter-sweet orange of which the voice had sung. It seemed that Pilar had neither accepted nor refused him, but had asked for time to think; and he would have been a little encouraged if she had not suddenly said, “Don Cipriano *loves* bulls.”

At five o'clock we spun into Seville, with the car, for nobody knew at what time the procession might begin; nobody ever did know, it appeared. And Pilar was no longer merrily boyish, but feminine and seductive again in her black mantilla.

The vast oblong of the Plaza de la Constitución was already humming with the excitement of a moving crowd. The lane between chairs and tribune was thronged with the poor of the town and peasants from the country, who would have no seats and must press for places to see the procession; but there was no ill-natured pushing, and gentlest care was taken not to crush the toddling, star-eyed children who tumbled under people's feet. Soldiers laughed and edged their way past clinging groups of pretty girls. Civil guards, looking as if they had stepped out of old pictures, strove to keep order, their shouts lost among the cries which filled the air; cries of water-sellers bearing big earthen vessels; cries of those who wheeled cargoes of roasted peanuts in painted ships; cries of crab-sellers; cries of shabby old men, and neat, white-capped boys, hawking fresh-fried calientes, sugared cakes, and all kinds of dulces on napkin-covered trays.

English and American tourists in panamas wandered through the throng searching for their numbered chairs; vendors of seats shouted reduced prices; bareheaded women with brown babies in their arms offered programmes of the week's processions; tattered boys shrieked the daily papers, and coloured post-cards; while from the balconies of private houses ladies in black mantillas, children in white, and foreigners in gay colours looked down upon the scene.

So passed an hour, while the boxes and best seats began to fill. Spanish families of the middle class, men and women in black, took

front seats of the tribune, where the empty royal box made a brave splash of gold and crimson; but more slowly came members of the aristocracy and officers in blue and gold; and, jostled by the crowd, I waited in suspense.

Colonel O'Donnel had gone to his club for news of the box which, by strategic means, he had been trying to get. Pilar and Dick had gone with him, to remain in the car chaperoned by Ropes, until he should come out; so that I had no means of learning whether the Cherub had triumphed or failed. All I knew was, that a club acquaintance whose wife was ill, might be induced to offer his box, close to the royalties, to a second acquaintance in exchange for one directly behind that which the Duke of Carmona had taken. If this could be arranged, the O'Donnels would be given the latter, in exchange for—only the Cherub knew what. Borne back and forth with the moving throng, like a leaf in an eddy, my eyes seldom strayed for long from the tribune. Would the Carmona household come? Would the O'Donnels be their neighbours?

At last I saw Pilar and the two men entering the tribune. Yes, they had succeeded, I could tell from the Cherub's description of the Duke's box. But Carmona's was still empty.

The procession had not yet appeared, though the first cofradia had been due in the Plaza an hour ago, and twilight was falling over the vast square, ethereally clear and pale. Only the figure of Faith on the soaring Giralda, turned as if to watch the scene, still glittered in the sun; and its dazzling brilliance had faded before a bugle note rang out, poignant as a cry of bitter sorrow from a breaking heart.

This was the herald of a brotherhood with its sacred images; and the police began to sweep the crowd before them out of the lane between the chairs and tribune. Slowly the flock was forced along by the shepherd dogs; and as the way cleared, forth from the dim tunnel of Las Sierpes marched, with arms reversed, a squad of civil guards; then a company of mounted soldiers, their bugles still wailing that sad warning of some piteous spectacle to come.

The cavalry passed; it was but a modern preface to a mediæval poem which, following closely, brought with it into the Plaza sad ghosts, grim ghosts, sainted ghosts of long past days.

Headed by one of their number bearing aloft an exquisite crucifix, walked a band of penitents carrying great lighted candles. Their white robes of linen swept in long pointed trains over the cobbles, the silver buckles on their black shoes glinting with each step; through the narrow slits in the blue capuchas, whose conical peaks tapered far above the wearers' heads, their dark eyes burned with mysterious intensity. Two and two they moved, noiseless as bats save for the tap of silver batons, making an avenue of gliding stars, like will-o'-the-wisps, from the black mouth of Las Sierpes across the length of the Plaza.

Then suddenly, in that dark, distant tunnel flashed something luminous, something that moved, swung in air higher than the heads of men, something that was like a great blazing casket of jewels or a cloud of fireflies.

It came on, halting, starting again, reaching the open square, and revealing itself as an illuminated platform supporting a crucified Christ, life size, with no detail spared of tragedy and torture.

One of those fine sculptures of painted wood, such as I had seen at Valladolid, the sixteenth century artist had spent his soul in showing to believers what Christ had suffered that they might be saved; and so startling was the appeal of this terrible figure to the sympathies, that for an instant I found myself forgetting everything except a wild desire to rescue it.

As the paso, with its quivering silver lamps and strewn flowers, came near to where I stood, I could see, beneath the long velvet curtains which draped the platform, twenty pairs or more of slowly moving feet; and the frequent pauses were accounted for.

I watched the heart-rending figure pass round the corner of the Plaza, out of sight, swallows wheeling overhead as if once more to pluck the thorns from that bleeding brow; and as it vanished, far away in the dusk of Las Sierpes appeared another illumined mystery of clustering stars. Out from darkness into hyacinth twilight it floated, a canopied platform of purple velvet, crusted with silver and gold; under the glittering roof a virgin, who seemed to stand praying in a garden of tall lilies, lit by a sacred silver flame.

The crowding lilies, as the paso came nearer, were only white, waxen candles after all, but in their light the image of the Virgin

gained a womanliness and beauty extraordinary. Her gorgeous trailing robe of gold-embroidered velvet, her under gown of satin scintillating with diamonds, her blazing crown of jewels, the sparkling rings on her delicate fingers, her necklaces, her bracelets, were such as the Mother of Christ never dreamed of in her simple life; and half the watchers knew grinding poverty, which a few of her gems might relieve.

That thought, I knew, would leap to many minds; but they would be the minds of foreigners; and I, being Spanish, understood. I saw what this procession of emblems meant to these people, rich and poor alike. They were being reminded, in the realistic and dramatic way which appealed best to their imaginations, of all Christ had suffered for them, of all the mother-woman had endured. The gems, which to alien minds were incongruous, crystallized their tears, their love, their gratitude; and Our Lady's jewels were the jewels of the poor—rich possessions which could not be taken from them, joys for ever, objects of their highest pride.

Bending in gentle grief, the fair face bowed, the graceful figure passed in fragrance of lilies, perfumed wax, and incense sending blue clouds from silver censors swung by white-robed boys. With her, as she moved, went music—our Lady's own music, sad and beautiful as moonlight on a lonely grave, cool as peace after hot pain.

Now the box in the tribune I had watched so long was filled with strangers. Pilar had been right. Carmona had given his place to friends. But with that soft, haunting music in my ears, sweet as remembered days of joy, I could not fear anything. Somehow I was at peace, with good thoughts in my mind and hope in my heart.

Brotherhoods in black, brotherhoods in purple, and paso after paso went by; Christus bending under the weight of the cross, Christus praying among sleeping disciples in Gethsemane, Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of Tears, flaming rivers of light, suns rising out of purple clouds.

Night folded over the great square, with its crowd of people. No one had gone away. Electric lights burst out and made the scene like the auditorium of some vast theatre; but the stage and auditorium were one. Then the full moon, yellow as honey, looked over the thronged roof-gardens of tall houses opposite the tribune, and sailed high in heaven.

It was past nine o'clock when Colonel O'Donnel touched me on the shoulder.

“We saw you long ago,” he said. “You are so tall. Shall we go home to dinner? But on Thursday you will have another chance.”

Thursday! and there were three days in between. I wished that he could have left me in my dream of peace as long as it might last.

XXX

The Hand Under the Curtains

Like a dream the three days passed; but not a dream of peace, for that I lost with the last echo of the Virgin music and the fragrance of her lilies.

Dick thought himself miserable, but I would gladly have changed my state of mind for his. Sometimes he hoped, sometimes he despaired, but at all times he was really very happy, if only he had known it. He enjoyed visiting the Murillos with Pilar and the Cherub when I had no heart to go. He borrowed the motor to whisk them out to Italica. He went with the O'Donnels late every afternoon for the drive in the fashionable paseo along the river side, as pleased with the five handsome mules, in their smart Spanish harness of white and crimson rope and brown leather, as if they had been his own.

As for me, I would not go, although Dick urged that, in the never-ending double line of fine carriages, we might meet the Duchess of Carmona's. But I did not dare to see Monica again after what had happened unless there were some hope that Pilar could speak for me, or that I could speak for myself. Still, I could not resist questioning the family in the evening. Had they heard tidings of her? Had they seen her?

Presently there was news, but not good news. The engagement was known, and was being talked of everywhere. The story was that the wedding would be soon, as the Duchess was not strong, and professed herself anxious to see her son married. Gossip said also that the marriage would be celebrated in Madrid directly after the festivities of the royal wedding were over, so that the young duchess, as the wife of a grandee of Spain, could become lady-in-waiting to the bride-queen, when los Reyes returned from their honeymoon at La Granja.

The Cherub told me these things only because I insisted on hearing all; and on Wednesday evening I dragged further details from Pilar. They had passed the Duchess, Lady Vale-Avon, and Monica in the Carmona carriage, the handsomest in Seville; and the Duke had been on horseback, looking more attractive than Pilar had ever seen him in the chulo costume, worn at times as an amusing affectation by some young aristocrats of Andalucía. I could picture him in the wide-brimmed grey sombrero, the tight short jacket, and trousers fitting close as a glove until they widened below the knee. Yes, the dress would suit him; and Pilar admitted reluctantly that he was a perfect rider. I was horribly jealous, ready to fancy that, after all, Monica had actually begun to care for him.

There had been a procession on Wednesday, but it was not an affair of importance; and with Thursday, and the presence of the King, all the greatest events of this Semana Santa were to begin.

Early in the afternoon there was washing of poor men's feet by the great ecclesiastics in the cathedral, the King remaining at the Alcázar to bathe—as Dick put it—a few carefully selected feet on his own account, as a sign of humility. Later, would come the most splendid procession of the week, the King walking with his own cofradia; in the evening, the Miserere in the cathedral, and processions all night, till mass on Good Friday morning. To myself I said, therefore, that I was to have two more chances: the one for which I depended upon Pilar in the afternoon; the one for which I depended on an inspiration of my own in the evening. For all the world was going to hear the Miserere.

Though it was a week for penitence and fasting, Seville—honoured by the King—thrilled with excitement. Thousands of strangers had poured into the town for this day, and the crowds were three times as dense as on Sunday. Though there had been disquieting rumours, whispers of anarchist plots and bombs, the police had been alert; the King had taken a swift gunboat up the Guadalquivir, instead of arriving by special train from Cadiz, had reached Seville safely; and now anxiety was forgotten. All the town poured into the Plaza de la Constitución more than an hour before there was any hope that the procession might begin; and I was in the crowd.

The boxes filled earlier than before, many of the ladies no longer in black, but wearing Paris hats and pale-tinted dresses, though

to-morrow there would be black mantillas again, and red carnations. Pilar, Dick, and Colonel O'Donnel were in their places, and though the Duke's box was still empty, I was sure I should not be disappointed to-day. “He'll appear about the time the King does,” I was saying to myself, when suddenly there came a stir in the royal box. The mayor and town councillors walked in, looking important; four giant halberdiers of the royal guard took position, each in a corner of the box. Then rose a shout, “Viva el Rey!” and against the crimson velvet draperies the figure of the tall young King in white uniform stood out like a slender statue of marble.

He was accompanied by his sister, the Infanta, and her husband, three or four ladies, and a retinue of decorated officers; but for an instant I saw only the King, because—rebel as I was supposed to be—my hat waved as high and my cheers rang as loudly as any in the crowd.

I had not seen his face—that day at Biarritz long ago—when his automobile stopped for want of petrol. He had worn his motor-mask, and had not removed it, for he was incognito; but now, as he bowed in answer to the people's greeting, the young face was noble under the silver helmet. His smile brought a deep dimple to either cheek, and a pleasant light to the brown eyes. I was proud of my King, and found myself wishing that I could serve him, though it seemed that that could never be; and with a sigh for the perversities of fate I looked away, only to receive a shock of surprise.

Among the ladies with the Infanta were the Duchess of Carmona, Lady Vale-Avon, and Monica. With the officers and friends of the King stood the Duke, his dark face radiating satisfaction, as if this were the crowning moment of his life.

Not only was Monica with the man as his fiancée, but she was dressed, in compliment to him, like a girl of Spain. She wore a mantilla such as the Infanta wore, and so bright was her hair, so fair her skin framed in the black flounce of lace, that she was almost as much stared at as the King. On her breast, pinning the folds of the mantilla, there was a glint of crimson; and looking closely, I made it out to be a large brooch of rubies, forming the famous “No. 8 Do,” the motto of Seville. Only the Duke could have given her this, I thought; and she had accepted it!

There was no more hope, then. It did not matter that her unexpected presence in the royal box would prevent Pilar from speaking, or giving her my letter. Still, I clung desperately to the one chance left; the cathedral and the Miserere.

Hardly were the royalties and their friends settled in the red-draped box when the next brotherhood marched out from Las Sierpes, and halted their first paso before the King, that he might see it well. He was on his feet, his head bared and bowed; and while he stood veiled in rising incense, some emotional soul in the audience broke into a Moorish wail, the prayer song or saeta of the people, improvising words which caught the popular fancy.

A murmur of approval ran through the crowd, which pressed close, in spite of the police; and as all eyes for the moment turned upon the King, or upon the white-haired peasant singer, a thing happened which caught my attention.

The velvet curtain which hid the bearers of the paso resting before the royal box, parted very slightly at one side, as if someone were peering out; then a hand darted forth and received from a man in a black coat, who stood with his back half-turned to me, a faded bouquet of flowers, arranged Spanish fashion in a hard, stiff pyramid.

Quick as that darting hand a thought flashed through my brain. In a few seconds the paso would be moving on; the bearers were bracing themselves for a new effort. That bouquet! if it should hold the threatened bomb? This was the moment for such an attempt at wrecking the royal box, for the King was a member of the next brotherhood that must pass; and soon he would be leaving his sister and friends to walk with it, perhaps not returning to his box that day.

The passing of light is no more swift than was the flight of these thoughts; and without waiting to calculate the cost to myself, thinking only of the King and of the girl I loved, I instantly thrust both hands between the curtains, following the flowers as they were passed in. I grasped the bouquet firmly round the stiff base of the pyramid, and pulled it out before the hidden man who had received it knew that it had not been withdrawn by his confederate. It was all over in a second, and I had the bouquet. Also I had identified the man who pushed it through the curtains of the paso, though which

among the twenty or twenty-five concealed bearers had taken it from him I could not tell.

Whether my act had been wise or foolish, it was done, and the paso had moved on, carrying the secret of one beating heart under the curtained platform.

Prying cautiously among the tightly banked flowers, my blood quickened as I touched something round and hard, a thing about the size of a large orange, fastened into the centre of the pyramid by a network of thin wire. Intuition had not played me a trick. There was death in this bunch of roses, death for many, perhaps. Though it was of first importance to get the bomb as far away as possible from the King and from Monica, and to render it harmless, I would not give up my pursuit of the man in the black coat, who was fighting his way through the crowd, only a few yards in front of me,—a square-set figure, in the holiday clothes of a respectable workman. I saw only his back now, every muscle tense in his desire to escape the vengeance on his track; but I had seen his face for an instant, and could identify it anywhere.

What if, in his desperation, he turned, and in the hope of saving himself accused me of the crime he would have committed? It but needed that to ruin me—after Barcelona, and this long journey to Seville, where the King was due. Would any explanation I might make be credited, when the bomb was in my hand?

I pushed the crowding thoughts out of my mind. There were other things to think of—the bomb itself, what to do with it; and the man to be followed.

Meanwhile I was moving on after that broad back of which I must not lose sight, and away from the neighbourhood of the royal box. I was in the lane of the procession, close in front of the long ranks of occupied chairs, and opposite the tribune. There were only two persons abreast in the moving line which carried me along, driven on by the police, but we were tightly packed, pressed against on one side by the knees of people in the chairs, on the other by the purple brotherhood preceding another paso. The situation seemed desperate, since to give an alarm would endanger the crowd as well as jeopardize my future; and a panic would be a calamity.

Suddenly the cry of a water-seller struck my ear sharply. “Agua!—clear as crystal and cold as mountain snow. Agua!”

He was just before me with his earthen vessel. “Sell me your jar,” I said. “No, I don't want a glass of water. I want the jar—for a curiosity. Twenty pesetas for it.”

This offer saved questionings. The vessel with its contents was worth two pesetas to the vendor, perhaps, and, lest I should change my mind, its owner hastily handed over his jar and pocketed my silver. Even now I had to wait for an opening in the throng, till I had been pushed on as far as the lane leading from the square to the Plaza de San Fernando; and there, to my joy, I jostled against Ropes. Without a word of explanation, I said, “Follow that man in the cloth cap with the black coat and red tie. Get hold of him; take care he doesn't knife or shoot you. Don't let him go—and wait for me.”

This was all Ropes needed. “Right, sir,” said he, and forged after the black back, which in this freer space was gaining distance.

Unexpectedly relieved of my second task, carefully shielding the bouquet with the water-jar I worked my way into the lane, and struck the head of the earthen vessel against a stone coping.

The porous clay cracked like an egg-shell, the top coming off in one piece, with a few flying splinters; and I pressed the bouquet deep into the water.

This was the best I could do at the moment, though, if the bomb was made with picric acid, I had accomplished nothing. I could only hope; and pressing on I came up with Ropes, who had collared his man and jammed him against a wall.

Not a sound had the wretch uttered. He knew that, if he resisted, he would be instantly denounced and torn to pieces by a crowd not likely to wait for clear proof of such an accusation. Since he had failed, it was better to trust to the mercy of his captor and of the police than to the thousands wild with enthusiasm for the King. Fortunately for him, as for us, the crowd had something better to do than stop to watch what they took for some trifling private quarrel.

“He tried to knife me,” said Ropes; “but I stopped that. Knife's in my pocket. What next, sir?”

It was characteristic that he did not ask what the man had done.

“Give the brute up to the police,” I answered in English. “He was with another chap whom I've lost, in a plot to throw a bomb at the royal box; and the bomb's in this water-jar.”

For the first time Ropes' face lost its imperturbable expression. “What, sir!” he exclaimed, “after your troubles—excuse my mentioning them—you concern yourself in an affair like this!”

“I've no choice. We can't let this beast escape. If they have him, the police may get his mate. He looks a coward and sneak.”

“Beg pardon, sir, you have a choice. I've got the man. Give me the jar with the bomb, and I'll take the whole thing on my shoulders with the police, though it's a shame you should lose the credit. I've a clean bill; chauffeur to Mr. R. Waring, American newspaper correspondent. No need to bring you into it.”

“If you're blown up by the bomb—”

“Would get blown up just the same sticking to you, for I *would* stick like a burr, sir. (Now, no good wriggling, you beast, or gabbling about a mistake. There's no mistake, and you won't get away!) Better tell him what's in that jar, sir—my Spanish doesn't run as far—and that'll quiet him.”

“You can't manage the man and the jar.”

“Could manage two of each. There's a couple of civil guards. Now, if you've any kindness for me, sir, let go that jar; and don't be seen with me.”

I gave Ropes his way. But I lingered near enough to watch the scene which followed; and had that innocent-looking jar been broken, or had the contents of the soaked bouquet exploded of its own accord, I should have been near enough to share my chauffeur's fate.

He explained in broken Spanish, eked out with gesture; and the fact that he was English, with the most honest of English faces to vouch for his sincerity, helped him. The man in his grasp was Catalán, which was not in his favour at Seville. The civil guards looked at the jar with respectful interest, but did not offer to take it; and, after a moment of lively conversation, Ropes and his captive marched rapidly away with the men in red, black, and white.

At least, whatever happened now, the King was safe; and Monica was safe.

It was not until eight o'clock, when I went to the quiet hotel where we had appointed to meet and dine, that I found out anything more. Then they told me that the King returned to his box after walking in the procession, and that, soon after, Dick had been surprised by a visit from a member of the police in plain clothes. The man had come to the O'Donnels' box, inquired if the American gentleman were Mr. Waring, asked if he had a chauffeur named Peter Ropes, and being answered in the affirmative had told the story of the bomb. Dick had then gone with the policeman to see Ropes, had made a statement concerning himself, his business, his car, his chauffeur, his occupation in life, and the friends with whom he was staying. All had proved satisfactory. Ropes had been thanked by the police for his promptness and presence of mind, and threatened with active gratitude from higher quarters. Both had been asked to remain within reach for a few days; and the episode was over.

But it was not until they heard my part of the story that Dick or the O'Donnels knew precisely where and how Ropes had come into the drama.

XXXI

Behind an Iron Grating

“Say,” remarked Dick in a stage whisper, “there'd be a big drop in the bee industry if all the world turned Protestant and bought no more great wax candles.”

We were standing inside the Moorish arch of the Puerta del Perdon, in the Court of Oranges. Beyond, where the stuffed crocodile swung in a light breeze, was the entrance to the cathedral, black as the mouth of a cave. The wind which rocked that huge reptile—the gift of a disappointed Sultan—sent the petals of ten thousand orange blossoms drifting over our heads in a perfumed snow-storm. Past us trooped a dark-robed brotherhood, each man with his tall candle raining wax on the grass-grown stones of the old court.

This it was which had drawn forth Dick's reflection; but I scarcely heard his words. I was watching for Monica; and my last chance must come soon if it were to come at all.

Pilar and her father were not with us. They had gone into the cathedral, where they had secured seats not far from the royal chapel, and in the best position to hear the Miserere. Though it was early still, not quite nine o'clock, vast crowds were gathering and it was possible, they thought, that Carmona and his guests were already in their places. If they were seen there, Colonel O'Donnel would send out a messenger (a man employed in the cathedral) with a word for me.

Earlier, this person had come to the hotel, where he had been told to look well at me that he might not fail to recognize me again. And Dick and I had not stood on sentinel duty for fifteen minutes when he appeared, beating through the opposing tide of the multitude as it swept towards the cathedral.

“His worship the Colonel O'Donnel, wished their worships the two señoritos, to know that those they wished to find were not visible in the cathedral.”

“Could they be there, and invisible?” I asked.

“The cathedral is very dimly lighted; and they might not be seen if they were in some chapel. There are several with many people in them, and the doors are locked.”

“Is that allowed?”

“The people have given something to a verger not to let others in. I have power of the same kind, if any señor wished me to use it.”

“Here they come!” whispered Dick. “Carmona, Lady Vale-Avon, and Lady Monica.”

We stepped farther back into shadow, though such precaution was hardly needed. It was so dim in the Court of Oranges that the crowd groped its way over the cracked, uneven pavement. Only because they were close upon us, and he was watching, had Dick been able to make out the faces we knew.

“Stop with us,” I said to Colonel O'Donnel's messenger. “You shall have a hundred pesetas if you will open the door of an empty chapel for me, and lock it again when I give the word.”

“But I fear there are no empty ones—” he began.

“Then make one empty. Can you do that—for a hundred pesetas?”

“Yes, señor, I think I can.”

By this time Monica, still in her black mantilla, had flitted past us between her mother and the Duke, but we were following. Dim as it was in the court, the moon looked out from behind the Giralda tower, and it was not dark enough for my project. Inside the cathedral, however (save where blazed the Holy Week monument, an illuminated temple of white and gold), was a mysterious darkness. Not the hundreds of great wax candles sufficed to light the aisles in that vast forest of stone. Stumbling, groping to pass through a hanging veil of shadow, thousands of men and women drifted aimlessly to and fro, themselves black as the shadows they fought, save here and there some soldier whose uniform waked a brief flame of red and gold, or a hooded brother who glowed purple under a lighted pillar.

Purposely we pushed against the people before us, so that in a space black as a lake of ink the trio we followed was separated. The rush of people from behind was so sudden—so well managed by us,—that it took the Duke unawares. The three were caught in the eddy, divided, and before they could come together again I had my arm through Monica's, and was dragging her away, the messenger clinging to me closely.

"Don't be frightened," I said. "It's I—Ramón. I have to speak with you."

She looked up at me, her pale face dim as a spirit's in the dark.

"Shame!" she stammered brokenly. "To force me like this—you, who have—"

"Done nothing except love you too well; and you must give me the chance to win you back. You owe it to me," I said almost fiercely; and she was silenced.

"Monica! where are you?" I heard Lady Vale-Avon's voice call, and could have thanked her for giving me the direction to avoid.

"Take us to that empty chapel quickly," I said to the man. Then he, who would have known how to find his way in that stone forest blindfold, steered us through the sea of people, and into a haven beyond the waves. Not a chapel was lighted; but as my eyes grew used to the gloom I could see faces on the other side of the tall, shut gates of openwork iron which we passed.

"I have the key of this one. I will promise the people a better place if they'll come out," whispered the messenger, stopping before a pair of these closed doors, and unlocking it with a great key.

I heard him speciously informing a group of shadows that they would be too far from the music to hear it well. He had a friend who would open another chapel nearer. Eagerly ten or twenty persons snapped at the bait, flocked out, and the instant their backs were turned, I half dragged, half carried Monica in. Then before she could escape, if she had wished to try, the great iron gates were shut and locked upon us.

"They will be looking everywhere for you," I said. "Come with me to the back where it is so dark that no one can see us. This chapel must seem to be empty."

“I want to be found,” the girl answered cruelly. “I'm going to marry the Duke.”

“If you love him and not me, I shan't lift my hand to keep you,” I said. “The other night I believed it was so, and made up my mind to trouble you no more. But Miss O'Donnel said—”

“Miss O'Donnel!” exclaimed Monica. “I wonder you can speak of her to me.”

Her voice quivered with angry scorn, yet my heart leaped with joy at the words which confirmed Pilar's suspicions and my hopes.

“She's as loyally your friend as I am loyally your lover,” I assured her. “Now listen. There are things which you must hear; and if when you've heard them you ask me to take you to your mother and Carmona, I'll obey instantly.” Then, without giving her time to cut me short, I began to talk of the letter I had written at Manzanares, and how I sent it, and what it had said. “Did you get it?” I asked.

“No such letter as that. It was a very different one—a horrible letter. Oh, Ramón! if it were true; if *you* had been true! If you could have gone on loving me!” She broke into sobbing, and hid her face between her hands.

“Don't dare to doubt that I did, and always will. Tell me what the letter said?” I pulled her hands down, too roughly perhaps, and held them fast in mine.

She tried to check her sobs. “I could show you the letter if there were a light. Since that day I've carried it with me, so that I could look at it sometimes, and have strength to hate you if my heart failed.”

“My own darling—mine again,” I soothed her. “It's been a horrible plot. If that letter was not full of love and longing for you, it was forged; no doubt after the handwriting of the one I really sent.”

“You mean my mother—would do a thing like that?”

“She might have justified it by telling herself that the end sanctified the means.”

“I know—she was ready to do almost anything to turn me from you,” Monica admitted, leaning against me so confidingly that all I had suffered was forgotten. “I couldn't have believed this of her; but—she did tell me the night before Manzanares that at Toledo she heard you calling Pilar O'Donnel, ‘darling.’ ‘Young Mr. O'Donnel

seems very fond of his sister,' mother said, looking straight at me, though she seemed to speak innocently. 'I heard him call her "darling girl." ' You can imagine how I felt! But I hoped she was mistaken, or that she'd invented it to make me unhappy; so I wouldn't let myself be *very* unhappy, only a little distressed. Because, you know, Miss O'Donnel is awfully pretty and perfectly fascinating. Mother said, the night we were at Manzanares, that she was one of those girls whom most men fall irresistibly in love with; and—and I loved you so much, I couldn't help being jealous."

"As if any man could even *see* poor little Pilar, when you were near!" I exclaimed, forgetting Dick's difference of opinion.

"Oh, I had faith in you, then. But next morning that pretty Mariquita handed me a letter, which I was sure was from you, as she hid it behind a tin of hot water. I was taking it, when mother saw, and snatched it away. You can't imagine the things I said to her, to make her give it back. I was so furious, that for once in my life I wasn't in the least afraid, and I would have tried to rush past her and run out to you, when she'd refused to give the letter up, but I wasn't dressed. My room had no door of its own. I had to go through mother's room to get out; and before I knew what she was doing, she'd slammed the door between us, locking it on her side. I hadn't even a proper window, only a little barred, square thing, high up in the wall. I couldn't scream for help, even if I hadn't been ashamed to make a scene in a strange hotel; so what was I to do.

"She kept me there, wild with rage against her, for quite an hour after I was dressed and ready to dart out when I had the chance; but at last she unlocked the door, looking very grave. 'I've opened your letter,' she said, 'and read it, as it was my duty and my right to do. It is different from what I expected, and I've decided after all that it's as well you should have it.'

"Then she handed me a torn envelope, and I recognized it as the one we had crumpled up between us when she snatched it away. Your handwriting was on it, and I never doubted it was yours inside, though it looked as if you'd written in a hurry, with a bad pen. No name was signed; but the letter said you thought it best to tell me, without waiting longer, that you feared we'd both been hasty and made a mistake in our feelings. Our meeting was romantic, and we'd been carried away by our youth and hot blood. Now you'd had time

to see that it would be unwise of me to give up a man like the Duke of Carmona for one unworthy enough to have fallen in love with another girl. Accordingly, you released me from all obligations, and took it for granted that you were also free. Then you bade me good-bye, wishing me a happy future in case your car and the Duke's happened to go on by different ways. Do you wonder I tried to hate you, and that I said 'yes' the very next night, when the Duke asked me again if I wouldn't change my mind and marry him?"

For answer, I caught her against my breast, and we clung to each other as if we could never part.

"Such a promise is no promise," I said at last. "I have you, and I don't mean to let you go, lest I lose you for ever. Monica, will you trust yourself to me, and run away with me to-night?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I daren't go back to them. But what shall we do?"

"I'll tell you what I've been thinking," I said. "My car isn't far off. Colonel O'Donnel and Pilar, who'd do anything for you and me, are in the cathedral. Just outside this chapel the man who locked us in is waiting for my signal to open the door. With the O'Donnels and Dick Waring to see you through, will you motor with me to Cadiz, take ship for Gibraltar, and marry me on English soil?"

"Suppose there should be no ship for days?" she hesitated.

"There is one nearly every day; but at worst I can hire a boat of some sort."

"Once we were in Gibraltar, you'd be out of reach if the Duke tried to take revenge," she said. "Yes, I *will* go! I love you and I can't give you up again. Oh, Ramón, I never would have promised to marry him, if I hadn't longed to show you that—that I didn't care, and that there was someone who wanted me very much, if you didn't."

"How like a woman!" I exclaimed, laughing—for I could laugh now.

"He has only kissed my hand," she went on, "and I hated even that."

"Yet you're wearing his brooch," a returning flash of jealousy made me say; "and a mantilla, to please him."

“The brooch is his mother's. So is the mantilla. She at least has been kind; so I let her put them both on for me to-day, when she asked.”

“Kind? When there's time I'll tell you one or two things. But now there's no time for anything except to take you away.”

“Listen! The Miserere has begun,” she said. “Has it been long? I heard it only now. Can we get out before it's over?”

“Of course we can—though not quite as easily, perhaps, as if the crowd were moving with us. However, we can't afford to wait.”

“What wonderful music!” Monica whispered. “I wish I dared to feel it were blessing us.”

“Yes, feel it so,” I said, and involuntarily was silent to listen for an instant to the melodious flood which swept from aisle to aisle in golden billows. Out from the wave of organ music and men's voices, boyish soprano notes sprayed high, flinging their bright crystals up, up, until they fell, shattered, from the vaulted ceiling of stone.

From each dimly seen column shot forth one of those slender-stemmed, flaming white lilies of light, such as had bloomed in Our Lady's garden, as the pasos moved blossoming through the streets. It seemed as if they might have been gathered and replanted here, to lighten the darkness; and as the music soared and sank, its waves set the lily-flames flickering.

I peered out, and saw my man hovering near. In the gloom he did not catch the signal I gave him with my hand, but when I shook a handkerchief between the gratings he came quickly. As he unlocked the doors I slid the promised bribe into his palm; and having glanced about to make sure as far as possible that we were not watched, I called Monica.

“Take us out by the nearest way,” I said; and the man began to hurry us officiously through the crowd.

Monica clung to me tightly, and I could feel the tremblings that ran through her body. My heart was pounding too; for it is when the ship is nearest home, after a stormy voyage, that the captain remembers he has nerves. It seemed too marvellous to be true, that the girl was mine at last, and yet—what could separate us, now that I held her close against my side, and she was ready to go with me, out of her world into mine?

“This way, this way, señorito,” our guide warned me, plucking at my arm as I steered ahead, confused by a thousand moving shadows. I followed, brushing sharply against a tall man in conical capucha and trailing robe of blue. He turned, his masked face close to mine, so close that even in the dusk I caught a flash of glittering eyes. Then, giving me a sudden push, he cried out, “Help—murder! An anarchist—a free-thinker! To the rescue!”

It was Carmona's voice, and I knew instantly that he must have borrowed this dress from some friend in the cathedral—perhaps a member of the cofradìa to which he himself belonged—so that he could search for me and Monica, without being seen by us.

Thrusting the girl behind me, yet keeping her close, I hurled him away, but he sprang at me again, and this time something glittered in his right hand. I fought with him for it, and pulled a slim length of steel up through his closed fingers, so that the sharp dagger-blade must have cut him to the bone. He gave a cry, and relaxed his grasp; but though he was disabled for the instant a dozen men in the crowd, which swirled round us now, caught and held me fast. Monica was wrenched from me; the dagger had fallen to the ground (but not before I had seen it was of Toledo make); the figure in the blue capucha was swept out of my sight, and I was fighting like a madman in a strait-jacket for freedom.

XXXII

On the Road to Cadiz

It was a mouse who gnawed a hole in the net that entangled the lion.

Now, I am no lion in importance, nor was Colonel O'Donnel's messenger of as little significance as a mouse; yet he was the last creature to whom I would have looked for succour in a moment of stress. Nevertheless to him I owed my rescue.

"A mistake, a mistake," he chirped, jumping about, bird-like, just outside the circle of struggling men. "I am a verger here; this gentleman was with me. He did nothing. He is a most respectable and twice wealthy person, a tourist whom I guide. He is innocent—no anarchist, no free-thinker. That other—that pretended brother—has made a practical joke. See, he has run away to escape consequences. There is nothing against this noble señor; you have it on the word of a verger."

Because it was bewilderingly dark, and they might have got the wrong man; because, too, the verger was probably right, and it had been a joke played upon them by a person who had now disappeared, the twelve or fifteen men who surrounded me fell back shamefacedly, glad on second thoughts to melt away before they could be identified and reproached for disturbing the public peace, and spoiling the music to which their King listened.

I was free, but I would not leave the cathedral yet, for my hope was to find Monica again. I wandered in every direction, while the verger went off to bring Dick and the O'Donnels to meet me in the Orange Court.

Pilar's delight in the first part of my story was dashed by the sequel. Of course, she said, it must come right in the end, since Monica and I understood each other at last. But just for the moment everything seemed difficult. The Duke was sure now that I was Casa Triana, and not Cristóbal O'Donnel. He would almost certainly make

all the trouble he could, and a man of his influence could make a good deal. As his attempt to stick a dagger into me—by way of a quick solution—had been covered by the capucha of a cofradìa, I could not take revenge by laying a counter accusation. I might say I had recognized his voice, and that I thought I had recognized the dagger bought in Toledo; but I could prove nothing, and the Duke would score.

Still, as the Cherub remarked consolingly, he could not do much worse than force me out of Spain. Neither I, nor anyone else, had ever said in so many words that I was Cristóbal O'Donnel. If people had taken my identity for granted because of a few round-about hints, and because for a joke I had borrowed a friend's uniform for a day or two, nothing very serious could be made out of that after all; and as Cristóbal really was on leave, he need not be involved. He was a good officer, whose services were valued, and I was not to worry lest harm should come upon him. I need think only of Monica and of myself. Had I formed any idea of what to do next?

"I must get Monica out of Carmona's house," I said.

"You'll have to lie in wait and snatch her from under their noses next time they show them," suggested Dick; "unless—"

"Unless?"

"Carmona keeps his indoors until he's arranged to have yours politely deported."

"I can't be got rid of in an hour."

"You could to-morrow."

"I'm afraid you can," sighed the Cherub, "and that, though I shall do my best, I may be powerless to help you."

"What if it were known that he saved the King yesterday?" Pilar asked her father.

"The King is going away to-morrow. You know, he's off to England in a few days. Besides, the incident to-day will be hushed up. The King will know, of course, and a few others; but it will be kept out of the papers,—anyhow, until they've got their hands on both the men concerned."

"I've still got to-night," I said, "and it's not eleven yet. I hoped that in the confusion Monica had given her mother and Carmona the slip, and that if I waited here I might find her again. I thought she might

try to get back to the chapel where we had our talk, trusting that I'd look for her there. But she didn't come, and I searched everywhere in vain before I tried watching the crowd pass through the Court of Oranges. Now, I'm certain that Carmona or Lady Vale-Avon must have pounced upon her while I was surrounded, and forced her away. No doubt they're at home long ago. Why shouldn't I appeal to the English consul, and say that the Duke of Carmona's detaining an English girl in his house against her will?"

"No use," said the Cherub. "She's under age, and she's with her mother, who's visiting the Duchess."

"Then I'll go to Carmona's door and make such a row that they'll be obliged to let me in."

"You'd get into a police cell instead. A man's house is his castle, especially when it's a palace and he's a Duke."

I was silenced. I knew the Cherub was right; but it seemed monstrous that in this twentieth century such tyranny should divide a girl from her lover.

When I had thought for a moment I said, "Anyhow, I shall go to the house and try to bribe a servant. Once in, I'd not come out without Monica. I've done two satisfactory things to-day by bribery and corruption, and I don't see why I shouldn't bring it off the third time."

"The Duke's servants have been in the employ of the family for years, and their fathers and grandfathers before them. No money would bribe them to deceive their master and mistress," said the Cherub.

"I shouldn't have thought either the Duke or his mother capable of inspiring such devotion."

"It isn't devotion—it's fear. To an unfaithful servant in that house—well, almost anything might happen."

"Have you any advice to give me, then?" I asked, in despair.

The Cherub shook his head. "The prudent thing would be to go away to-night, and trust Lady Monica's loyalty. She can't be forced into marrying the Duke, you know; and if she breaks the engagement he'll have to let her alone, for dignity's sake."

"That might be prudent; but of course I won't do it."

“Of course you won't,” returned the Cherub, as if it went without saying.

“Very well, then; matters are desperate, and desperate remedies must be tried; things can't be worse than they are. I shall hang about Carmona's house early in the morning, and when the first person comes out I'll go in. If I don't come out, you will know what's become of me; and I don't suppose in these days even a Duke can kill a man without getting into trouble?”

“He would merely have you arrested as a housebreaker,” said the Cherub.

“Well, I should have seen Monica first, and perhaps have got her on the right side of the door.”

“We'll have a go at the business together,” said Dick. “It would be more sociable.”

“All right, thank you,” said I. “Then something's settled; and these best of friends can go home and sleep.”

“Sleep!” echoed Pilar scornfully. “Oh, if I were a man, and could do *something* to punish the Duke!”

“I wish you could set your bull at him,” said Dick. “Only, now I think of it, it's *his* bull still.”

Try as we might, it was impossible to persuade either Colonel O'Donnel or Pilar that they ought to return quietly to bed, if not to sleep. No, they would do nothing of the kind. Besides, no properly disposed person within ten miles of Seville would lie in bed that night. Processions would go on till early morning. Many people would watch them, or spend the hours till early mass in prayer in the cathedral, which would be open all night. Why should not the O'Donnel family do as others did?

There was no answer to this; and it was finally arranged that, if they wished to rest at all, it should be at the hotel in the Plaza de San Fernando, where we had dined. That was to be the rendezvous; and the Cherub would engage the verger we knew to watch the Duke's house in the morning, bringing news of our fate to the hotel—if we did not bring it ourselves.

Never—if I live beyond the allotted threescore years and ten—shall I forget that strange night of Holy Thursday in Seville.

Dick and I wandered through the streets, and in the Plaza de la Constitución, where electric lamps and moonlight mingled bleakly, while never-ending cofradìas passed.

A sky of violet was like a veil of silky gauze, and as the moon slid down the steeps of heaven the vast dome paled. One by one the stars went out like spent matches; dawn was on its way. Electric lights flared and died, leaving a pearly dusk more mysterious than any twilight which falls with night.

The crowds had thinned; but silent brotherhoods moved through streets where there was no other sound than the rustling of their feet, the tap of their leaders' silver batons. So faint was the dawn-dusk, that they were droves of shadows on their way back into night, their candle-lights lost stars. Now and then the clink of a baton brought to some half-shuttered window a face, to be presently joined by other faces, peering down at the dark processions of men and black-robed, penitent women.

Outside the great east door of the cathedral halted a paso, like a huge golden car. Christ was nailed to a cross not yet lifted into place. A Roman soldier, of exaggerated height and sardonic features, stood reading the parchment with the mocking inscription about to be nailed above the thorn-crowned head. His evil mouth was curled in a satirical smile. Two centurions in armour sat their impatient horses, and gave directions for raising the cross. The effect was startling; for in this pale beginning of light, and the atmosphere of tingling exaltation which steeped the town, it was difficult not to believe that the terrible carved figures of wood had life, and that with the eyes of one's flesh one beheld the world's great tragedy.

Somehow the impression of horror was but deepened by the fact that the bearers had come out from under the curtains of the paso, to take off the large pads they wore on their heads, to drink water, and smoke cigarettes with the penitents who had rolled up the masks from their pale, damp faces. They might have been comrades of the Roman soldiers, in their obliviousness of that tortured form on the cross.

It was not yet five o'clock when Dick and I plunged into the cool gloom of the cathedral, passing the spot where Carmona had struck at me, and the chapel where I had taken Monica. The stones were slippery as the floor of a ballroom, with wax dropped from

innumerable candles, and the air was heavy with the smoke of stale incense.

The searchlight of dawn could scarcely penetrate the black curtains which throughout Holy Week had draped the cathedral; therefore a solitary beam, like a bar of gold, slanted in through one superb window.

The amethysts, emeralds, and rubies of incomparable painted glass transformed the yellow bar into a rainbow which streamed down the length of the majestic aisle and struck full upon a golden altar. Then slowly the jewelled band moved from the gold carvings, the flames dying as it passed. Travelling, still like a searchlight, it found the prostrate forms of sleeping men exhausted by their vigils, snatched out of veiling darkness kneeling women clad in black, and at last rested on the Holy Week monument itself, paled its myriad candles, and made pools of liquid gold on the vestments of priests who had knelt all night in adoration of the Host.

"Say," said Dick, half whispering, "I don't gush as a rule; but doesn't it look like the light of salvation coming to save lost souls?"

Not a hotel in Seville had shut its doors that night of Holy Thursday; not a concièrge had done more than nod and wake out of a broken dream, for there had been an excited coming and going through all the dark hours.

At six o'clock Dick and I were at the fonda, inquiring for Colonel O'Donnel and his daughter. They had come in at two, and were now asleep, it seemed; but had left a note for the señores. In this note we were assured that the friendly verger of last night's adventure would be lurking in the neighbourhood of Carmona's house as early as six o'clock, and should we want him we would know where he was to be found.

We took bedrooms, bathed, dressed again, and after hot coffee and rolls decided that is was time to go on guard. To be sure, it was absurdly early; but by this time the Duke's household might be astir, and we must not risk letting Monica be carried away before we had had a chance to practise the gentle art of housebreaking.

The clocks of Seville were spasmodically telling the hour of seven when we entered the narrow and dusky lane of the Calle de las Dueñas. So fast asleep were the shuttered windows that our mission

seemed a fool's errand; but as we came in sight of the Duke's closed door the Cherub's messenger loomed out of the shadows.

Unshaven and haggard, his eyes glittered like black beads in the daylight; and he greeted us excitedly. “Señores,” he began, “I was going to look for you at the hotel. A thing has happened. The Señor Colonel told me I must watch the house of His Grace the Duke, and let you know when you came if anyone had been out or in. Who would think of people starting upon a journey before the day is awake? But so it is. The Duke, whom I have seen in other years, has gone away in an automobile with his honourable mother and two other ladies.”

“You are sure it was he?” I asked, completely taken aback.

“Sure, my señorito. The car was a large grey car. And”—his face grew sly as a squirrel's—“I can tell you where it is going, if you would like to know.”

“I want to know all you can tell,” I said.

“Well, the grey car arrived a little before half-past six, I should think. In it there was only the young man who drives, dressed in leather. ‘What is going to happen?’ I asked myself. It seemed better to wait and see than run to the hotel to say, ‘there's an automobile at the door for the Duke,’ and perhaps find it gone, no one could tell where, when I got back. But I do not sleep on my feet. There are always ideas running in my head. I pretended to be strolling past, and stopping for a look at such a fine machine. Perhaps I had matches in my pocket, perhaps not; in any case I asked the young man in leather to give me a light for my cigarette. He did, and it was a natural thing to fall into talk. ‘You make an early start,’ I said. He nodded. ‘Going far?’ ‘To Cadiz to-day, by Jerez.’ That is all, honoured señores; but I tell it for what it is worth. A few minutes later the grand people came out, and the automobile shot away.”

“Did they put on luggage?” I asked.

“All the automobile would hold.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Dick. “Carmona's thrown sand in our eyes this time. Who'd have supposed he'd turn tail and run away like a coward in the midst of the Holy Week show, with the King still in town?”

“I was a fool not to expect the unexpected,” I said. “If anyone except Colonel O'Donnel's man had told me I should have been between two minds whether to accept the story or not. But O'Donnel called him a trusty fellow; and he served me well last night. If we wait to verify his story, by the time we find out it's true the grey car will have got too long a start. I don't like Carmona's stealing off. It looks as if there were something up.”

“He showed last night that he was desperate,” said Dick. “I guess we'd better get on the road before much grass grows.”

“You're the best of friends,” said I. And paying the verger well for his services, we hurried back to the hotel to find Ropes and have the car got ready.

It was still very early, and the Cherub and Pilar had not had many hours beauty sleep; but we could not leave for an indefinite absence without bidding them good-bye; and we were on our way to knock at Colonel O'Donnel's door when Pilar appeared from the room adjoining.

A moment, and she understood everything. “You'll follow!” she exclaimed, without waiting to hear my plans.

“And I'll go with him,” said Dick, looking wistfully at her; for he had not had his answer yet, and who could tell when he would have it now, or what it would be when it came?

“Of course. I knew you would,” Pilar replied. And a light leaped up in her dark eyes. If it meant nothing warmer, it meant approval. “You'll want to go at once. Oh, I *am* sorry you'll miss the fair. You don't know what a fairyland Seville is, with miles of streets and park roofed in with arches of coloured lights, like jewels; and papa has a tent in the gayest place, where we stay all day, and see our friends, and it's such fun visiting the booths and side-shows! But maybe next spring you'll come back for the feria with your bride, Don Ramón; and as for you, Señor Waring—”

“As for me?” repeated Dick, anxiously. “Am I not to come back before that?”

“You're to come back when you like, and—papa will be glad to see you,” she answered, just as any conventional little señorita might have answered. But at least she had the kindness to blush; and I

would have moved away to give Dick a last chance if at that moment the Cherub had not come out of his room.

Instantly Pilar dashed into explanations, and between the three of us he soon had the history of events.

No one on earth looks less practical than the dreamy-eyed, soft-voiced Cherub; yet it was he who thought of practical details which we had forgotten. He it was who reminded us that it would not be prudent to take Ropes away from Seville. As the man who said he had discovered the bomb, his evidence would be wanted, and if he disappeared it would look mysterious. His real connection with the Marqués of Casa Triana might be unearthed by the police; and because of that miserable affair at Barcelona, whose consequences were continually cropping up, some hideous story might be concocted and believed.

Dick and I unhesitatingly decided to take the Cherub's advice, and leave Ropes behind. He was engaged in getting the car ready, and would no doubt be disappointed to hear that he was to be temporarily abandoned; but he would see the wisdom of such a course, and might be trusted to guard my interests. As for Dick, he might turn his back on the proceedings in Seville without danger, for he posed only as the employer of a man who had found the bomb; besides, as I suggested without glancing at Pilar, he could come back in a few days in case he were wanted to give evidence.

Thus it was settled; at eight o'clock we had said good-bye to Pilarcita and the Cherub, softening the farewell with a hopeful “au revoir”; and with Ropes staring disconsolately after us, we flashed out of the Plaza de San Fernando.

I drove, with Dick beside me, for there was no longer need for subterfuge. Carmona knew me for what I was, and I could help Monica more by defying him than by playing the old waiting game, of which I was tired.

It seemed strange to be racing across country again in the car, after those fevered days in Seville. With the steering-wheel in my hand, the steady thrum of the motor seemed to say, “You'll do it; you'll do it;—I'll help you to do it.”

The air was made of perfume—orange blossoms and acacias; and the vast flowery plain where Seville is queen gave us a tolerable road,

on which the car ran lightly. Soaring snow peaks of fantastic shapes walled the green arena of rolling meadows, and the day was like a day of June.

Save for the grey Lecomte, scarcely a motor had we seen since leaving Biarritz, except in Madrid; but now, when I tried to decipher the road hieroglyphics, the dust showed more than one track of pneus. Cars had come to Seville from Madrid for Semana Santa, and had evidently run out this way for a spin more than once. As I had not Ropes' detective talent I was unable to distinguish the Lecomte's tyre-marks from others.

In sight of the conspicuous church tower at Utrera—ancient home of outlaws—we came upon a dusty white line diverging to Ecija. Pausing to question a road-mender, I remembered Colonel O'Donnel's story of the Seven Men of Ecija, and the curious bond between them and the Dukes of Carmona. But what brought the tale to my mind—unless it was the name of Ecija on the road-map and signpost, or the fact that we were now in the real heart of brigand-land—I could not have told.

Yes, said the road-mender, he had seen an automobile go by—a big one, not long ago, steering as if for Jerez. Was it grey? He would not be sure, but at all events the thing was so grey with dust that had there been another colour underneath, no one could have seen it. Ladies in the car? Well, he was not positive, for it had gone by like a cannon-ball in a cloud of smoke; but there were several persons inside, and it was the only motor which had passed him to-day. Several cars had appeared in the distance yesterday, but they had turned back on the Seville side of Utrera.

One automobile, a big one, apparently grey, and with several persons inside, had gone by at a tremendous pace not long before. That sounded as if the car we chased could not be far away. Our eyes searched the tell-tale dust, and found the sleek, straight trail of a pneu in the midst of wobbling cart tracks. We had but to follow that straight trail, then, I said, to come up with Carmona and interfere with his new plans.

Now we were racing through a wide region of salt marsh, where within enclosures grazed hundreds of fierce black bulls, sooner or later to die in the arena. The country became desolate, and curiously

sad. We met no more peasants' carts or laden donkeys as the road began to undulate among the foothills of distant mountain ranges.

“What an ideal place for a band of Colonel O'Donnel's bandidos, eh?” said Dick; then drew in his breath with a sharpness that cut the sentence short, as we whirled round a hummock at a turning of the road.

XXXIII

The Seven Men of Ecija

Close in front of us was drawn up a large automobile, its front wheels mounted on a barrier of rough stones built across the highway. Rolled in the dust lay a leather-clad chauffeur, limp in unconsciousness or death; and with their backs to the car, two young men stood bravely defending themselves against seven.

So suddenly did we burst upon the scene, and so furiously had I to put on the brake, that I saw only a wild picture of determined faces pale above flashing blades, fierce faces under red peasant caps, and carbines used as clubs. Then Dick and I were out of the Gloria; and instead of two there were four against seven.

Where were the revolvers we had bought by Don Cipriano's advice at Madrid, for just such an emergency as this?—In our suit-cases at the Cortijo de Santa Rufina, forgotten from the moment of purchase until this moment of need. But, as by one accord, each seized a jagged stone which had rolled from the barricade, and before we had had time for two consecutive thoughts we had joined the strangers, and all four were fighting like demons.

Oddly enough, the seven red caps did not fire their carbines, and had apparently directed all their efforts to disarming or stunning the automobilists. But at sight of us their tactics changed. Surprised at first, their astonishment was burnt up by rage. Four of the seven turned upon us, and drew knives, but quick as light I had wrenched one of them out of a brown hand, giving its owner a smashing blow between the eyes with my stone.

Down he dropped like an ox, and I was ready for another; but the blade of a third would have slid between my ribs had not one of the seven cried out sharply, “Stop! A red car—a red car. These are the men we want.”

“Disable them,” yelled another voice; but it was easier said than done. The second's pause which followed the warning shout saved my skin. The brigand's knife flew; and he got a side blow on the temple which sent him spinning.

We were now four against five; but already the right arm of another red cap spouted crimson from the blade in a sword-stick which was flashing blue lightning, and another wore a dark spot on his shirt—a spot which spread and changed its shape.

There was no time to look at faces. I scarcely saw the features of friend or foe, and could not have sworn to the identity of one man had my life depended on it. But I knew that two beside whom we fought were brave beyond the common, that they were worth fighting for and with. We were all four shoulder to shoulder now, our backs against the car, though how we had won through to that position I could not have told.

Another red cap had gone down on one knee, cursing, and there was a fresh blot of crimson on a dark-stained shirt. We four had the advantage now, for we had come to no harm but a few bruises and an aching head or two, when suddenly there was a howl from the fellow last down, “El guardia civile!”

It was true. Out of the distance rode two men, dashing towards us from the direction of Jerez. Far away still, their white, black, and red uniforms caught the sun; and guessing from the knot of forms swaying round a motor-car that something was wrong, the pair spurred their horses to a gallop.

“It's too hot for us!” panted the brigand I took for the leader. He growled an order; and supporting two of their fallen comrades who were able to help themselves, the uninjured pair made off towards a small wood where I now saw horses tethered. After them we went; but they promptly left their half-disabled friends to shift for themselves, and loaded their carbines—so lately clubs—with quickness almost incredible.

An instant later two black muzzles covered us; and the tide of battle might after all have turned disastrously, had not the shrill ping of a bullet warned the enemy that there was no time to waste upon reprisals.

One of the civil guard had fired from a distance, but with precise aim, as a yell of pain announced. A man already wounded got another souvenir of the encounter; and out of the seven only four could get to their saddles. One limped in the rear, but he had lost his carbine; one sat where his comrades had flung him in their flight, and the last of the seven—stunned by my stone—lay breathing stertorously on the road.

"After them—after them!" one of the young men who had fought so brilliantly shouted now to the civil guards. "Don't let them get away."

For the first time I looked at him with seeing eyes. Then, I could hardly stifle an exclamation. It was the King.

He gave me back look for look, smiling that brave and charming smile which has magic in it to transform an enemy into a loyal servant.

I had my cap off now, and so had Dick, who wore the jaunty air I had seen him wear in more than one battle.

"I have to thank you both," said the King. "And—not for the first time. Our cars, as well as ourselves, have met before. Wasn't it—near Biarritz?"

I felt the blood stream up to the roots of my hair. "Your Majesty has a King's memory for faces," I stammered.

"There are faces one doesn't forget," said he. "But we'll talk of that presently. Now we have work here."

The King's companion was already down on one knee by the side of the chauffeur, pouring aguardiente from a flask into the man's half-open mouth. As for the fellow I had hit, I was sure that he would presently come round, but little the worse for wear; and I suggested that Dick and I find a rope in the car, which would bind him and the two other half-disabled ones. But the King would not let us work alone. He did as much as we, and more, before we were joined by the young officer who was his friend.

Discouraged and weak from loss of blood, as well as the loss of their carbines and their comrades, the wounded brigands made no further fight. But they were silent, save for a muttered oath or two, and I made up my mind that the true secret of this morning's work would never be torn from them.

For there was, of course, a secret. The King, who had not the clue which I held, saw that, and wondered why the brigands had not wished at first to shoot us. Plainly, their plan had been to make captives.

The obvious idea was that they would have conveyed their prisoners to some brigands' nest in the mountains, in the hope of obtaining a rich ransom. But they had evidently expected an automobile, or they would not have raised a barricade, just round a sharp corner on a particularly lonely piece of road.

Could they have been lying in wait for the King? This seemed impossible, as he had told no one that he was going out, and the expedition had indeed been made on the impulse, in the company of but one companion beside the chauffeur. He had intended to have a spin, and discover the state of the roads as far as practicable on the way to Jerez before turning back for the procession in the afternoon. And that evening he must return to Madrid. No, it was not the King for whom the seven men had prepared.

Who, then, was to have been their prey?

I believed that I could have answered this question, but I kept silent; and there was no reason why the King should guess that I had a suspicion.

“At all events,” he said, “we have you and your friend to thank that the affair was not more serious. I hope we should have been able to give a good account of ourselves; but seven against two are long odds. And there seems a fate in it that you should have come to me in the nick of time to-day as well as at Biarritz. I should like to know your names.”

I had dreaded this. Foolishly, perhaps, I felt that I could not bear to see the cordial light in his eyes fade to proud coldness, as it must when he knew me for a son of the man who had tried to place another on his throne. Besides, that I should at such a moment announce myself a Casa Triana would seem like bidding for pardon as a reward for what I had done. The confession stuck in my throat; and while I hesitated, Dick spoke.

“My friend didn't mean you to know, sir,” said he, gabbling so fast that I could not stop him; “but this isn't the *second* time he's happened to be around when there was a little thing to be done for

your Majesty,—it's the third. Yesterday it was he who snatched that bomb away from the man under the paso, collared the other fellow, and stuck the bomb in a smashed water-jar, although he gave the credit to the chauffeur—who, by the way, is 'shover' to this car. My friend here is travelling, as you might say, incog. for important private reasons, which he'll want you to know some day, sir, if he doesn't now; and that's why, when Ropes the chauffeur happened along, he made him a present of all the praise."

The King flushed, looking me straight in the eyes with an expression so noble and at the same time so kind that, had we lived a century or two ago, when men were not ashamed to show their true feelings, I should have thrown myself at his feet.

"I thank you again," he said, "for *everything*. I'm glad to know you are Spanish, even if I am to know no more. But am I to know no more?"

"Will your Majesty pardon me," I asked, "if I beg to remain nameless for the present?"

"I could pardon you far graver crimes," the King said smiling; "and I'm sure your reason, whatever it is, reflects nothing but honour on yourself. I owe you a debt. Claim it's payment in my gratitude whenever you will; the sooner the better. And if you want a friend, you'll know where to find one."

He held out his hand, and when I took it, shook mine warmly in English fashion. Something else he was about to say on a second thought, when his friend—who had now restored the chauffeur to dazed consciousness—drew his attention. "Sir," he said, "the guardia civile are coming back without prisoners."

A minute or two later the two men had galloped up to us, one wounded in the cheek. They had chased the brigands, exchanging shots, until suddenly, having passed beyond a clump of trees and a few lumpy hummocks of sand, the band had vanished as if by magic. The civil guards had explored the spot for some cleverly concealed hiding-place, which they knew must exist within the space of two hundred metres, but they had found nothing. And as they had had no time to ascertain the condition of the men left for us to deal with, they had thought it best to return lest the wounded enemy prove not to be hors de combat after all.

Fortunately the distance from this lonely spot to Jerez was not more than thirty kilometres, and within three miles there was a farm. Here a cart could be got to take the wounded brigands into the town; and from Jerez a posse of men would be immediately sent out to scour the country for the escaped brigands.

The King, whom the guardia civile recognized with respectful surprise, was now anxious to get back to Seville, where he was due in the royal box for the Good Friday procession, and must appear by five o'clock at latest. He delayed only long enough to be sure that his chauffeur was not hurt beyond a slight concussion of the brain, to speak a few kind words to the civil guard, and to say a significantly emphasized “Au revoir” to Dick and me. Then, taking the wheel himself, whilst the half-dazed chauffeur lay in the tonneau, he backed the big, reddish-brown car off the barricade, and darted away in a cloud of dust at a good forty miles an hour.

It was left for us to do what we could to advance the civil guard with their task; and though we had already lost too much time for my peace of mind, it was our plain duty to help those who had helped us. When we had levelled the rough barricade we reluctantly bundled the wounded men into our tonneau, and going at a pace which enabled the civil guards to gallop close behind us, we steered for the farm of which they had spoken. There, in a buzz of excitement, the brigands were piled into a cart; and leaving them to follow, presided over by one mounted guard leading his comrade's horse, we took the other on to Jerez in our car, so that the search party might be organized the sooner.

Sometimes virtue brings its own reward, and mine came when I learned that our new companion had met an automobile going at a great pace towards Jerez. It had gone so fast that, in the dust, he was not sure of the colour or number of persons inside, but he thought that he had seen several ladies.

If he could he would have compelled us to stop in Jerez and give evidence of the attack by brigands; but laughingly we told him that, rather than be delayed again, we would spill him out by the roadside and vanish into space before he could set the telegraph to work. As for the brigands, the leader with three others had escaped, and the faces of those captured were not known to the guard. But the fact that they had been seven was significant in his opinion; and he

believed that they would prove to be men of Ecija, forming a band officially supposed to be defunct.

Should we give a hint of our suspicions, we knew well that every effort would be made to detain us at Jerez, and such a catastrophe I would have avoided at almost any price, unless there had been a hope of handicapping Carmona. But that there was no such hope I was as sure as that the abortive plan had been organized by him.

How he had communicated so quickly with his friends the Seven, I did not pretend to say, unless he had known where to find their leader, and visited him this morning in his car. Whatever he had done, however, he would not have been fool enough to jeopardize his reputation for the sake of laying me by the heels. The fact that he had claimed the aid of bandits proved that he wished to dispose of me without implicating himself, though why he had not adopted the far simpler plan of denouncing me as Casa Triana to the police, I could not conceive. Still, there was ingenuity in this idea. If a young man—or two young men—were captured in a lonely place known to be infected with brigands; if such young men were held for ransom, and kept out of the way for weeks or months, what was all that to a Duke of Carmona?

What if, when one of those young men appeared in the world again (minus an ear or a finger, perhaps), he told a fairy story about the enmity of the Duke, and reminded the public of an old nurse's tale concerning a bond between the house of Carmona and the leader of the seven famous brigands? Who would believe him? Who would not think it a silly and spiteful attempt on the part of an embittered man to injure a grandee of Spain?

Carmona would not have taken the whole Seven into his confidence, that was certain. He would have appealed to the leader alone. That leader had escaped; and even if he were captured he would not betray the Duke. Why should he, since it would not help himself; whereas, if he were loyal, Carmona would secretly use influence to lighten his lot?

Dick and I discussed these matters in English, under the nose of the civil guard, as I drove on to Jerez; and shrewd Yankee as he was, for once he accepted the Spanish point of view. If we were to “get even with Carmona and pay him out for this,” it must be in some less clumsy way, Dick agreed.

XXXIV

The Race

It was lucky for us that the guard had met an automobile between the brigands' barricade and Jerez, otherwise we should have been at sea. The road-mender near Utrera had seen but one car, and that might have been the King's; but now we had something to hope for still; and Dick and I resolved to get out of Jerez as soon as possible, provided we could learn that the car we followed had gone on. If we lingered, the civil guard might, after all, think it his duty to have us detained, and we did not wish to give him time to change his mind.

"It's a pity, though," said Dick, with a thirsty sigh. "I've always had a sneaking fancy that if I ever came to Spain I'd stop at Jerez—'the place where the sherry comes from'—and potter about in huge, cool bodegas, sampling golden wine from giant casks with queer names on them. Only think what it would feel like to-day to have a stream of mellow 'Methusalem' trickling over our dusty lips and down our dry throats? Great Scott! I daren't dwell on it, since it can't be. But it's a grand chance missed."

Almost as he spoke we flashed into a neat white town, with green glimpses of patios; and groaning, Dick shut his eyes upon a great bodega where the famous names of Gonzalez and Byass loomed black on white.

We dumped our civil guard at the entrance to a side street which was, we hinted, rather narrow for automobiles, and, not waiting for his grateful adieux, we darted on, asking a bootblack the way to the best hotel. At the "Sign of the Swan" we paused just long enough to give the Gloria water, and to find out that a motor-car had stopped for a few moments about two hours ago. There were ladies inside, but they had not got out. A gentleman, covered with dust, had ordered sherry and biscuits, which he and the chauffeur had themselves carried to the other passengers, appearing rather

impatient with the waiters. This gentleman had spoken Spanish in the hotel, but had been heard conversing in English with his friends. They had remained about fifteen minutes, and had then gone on. A waiter remembered seeing the chauffeur and his master consulting a road-map, and had heard the word “Cadiz” spoken.

This gave us an apparently unbroken clue, and half expecting to be caught in a police-trap, we slipped stealthily out of Jerez, with a spurt of speed as streets were left behind.

Still we were watched by purple-robed, guardian mountains, sitting in conclave. A running fire of poppies swept the fields between which we travelled, while distant meadows were paved with gold, or with forget-me-not blue like squares of the sky's mosaic fallen out. The air grew luminous as the crystal bell which hangs over the lagoons of Venice; and with the subtle change of atmosphere we had in our nostrils the first tang of the sea.

Here and there a strip of lush green was belted with cactus, but we were driving through salt marshes, and round us spread a plain piled with strange, shining pyramids of salt, white and bright as hills of diamond dust. Then, suddenly, a broken line of turrets and domes and spires was cut in gleaming pearl against the sky; and it was not the opal clearness of the air alone which took the memory to Venice. Here was the same ebb and flow of salt water in glittering lagoons, the same dark, waving lines of seaweed, the same wide stretch of sapphire beyond the alabaster domes.

For Spain, the road was good, and we glided smoothly through the pretty old town of Puerta de Santa Maria, with its big bodegas and Byronic associations. Across the Guadalquivir, where it tumbles into the Atlantic, dashing through an aromatic forest of umbrella pines we came out at Queen Isabel's white, Moorish looking Puerto Real. Thence, distant Cadiz on its rock appeared to change position bewilderingly, like a group of fairy castles, as we swept round the rim of that semicircular bay where once the Phœnicians traded in metals of England, and amber of the Baltic; where the ships of the Great Armada lay; and where Essex wrought destruction.

At San Fernando, I was assailed by doubt. What if, after all, the car we sought had not gone to Cadiz, but had here taken the coast road to Algeciras? The great conference was only just over, there; tourists of all nations were flocking to the town, attracted by

curiosity; and as the place boasts the most beautiful hotel in Spain, it seemed likely that in flying from Seville the Duke should choose Algeciras instead of Cadiz. But some fishermen, on that rope of sand which binds Cadiz to the mainland, had seen a car pass a few hours before. Yes, only one; and they thought it was grey. It had four or five passengers, and was going to Cadiz.

Thither we spurted, Dick studying a plan of the city as we flew along the straight road embanked above the sand. By the time we arrived in silver Cadiz he was able to say in which direction I must drive to find the chief hotel; and in an open *place* not far from the crowded port we stopped.

Dick stayed to guard the car from the crowd which quickly collected, while I went to question the landlord.

No travellers with an automobile were stopping with him at present; but one had arrived a couple of hours ago, perhaps, and its passengers had wished to remain overnight. Unfortunately, however, as a big ship had just come in from America every room was taken.

There was no other hotel at which persons of taste could stop in comfort; and after some discussion, the owner of the car had decided to run on to Algeciras by way of Tarifa. The party, consisting of three ladies, one gentleman, and the chauffeur, had taken a hasty meal, and had got away about an hour and a half before our arrival.

“Those beastly bandidos!” I exclaimed to Dick in a rage of disappointment. “If it hadn't been for them we should have been on the heels of the grey car, and caught it up here at the hotel. I should have been able to snatch Monica away from under their noses—for I know she wouldn't have failed me.”

“Those beastly bandidos introduced you to the King,—don't forget that,” said Dick consolingly. “And the day may come before long when you'll be glad of that introduction. You can never tell, in a life like yours. And once Carmona's at Algeciras, why, you've got him in a kind of cul-de-sac from which he can't escape, any more than a mouse can jump out of a basin half full of water. If he takes rooms at the Reina Cristina, you'll come plump upon him. If he tries to return by road, he'll run into your arms; and one or the other must happen

unless he puts his auto on a train or steamer, neither of which is likely."

Somewhat comforted, I proposed to follow at once, but Dick wistfully reminded me that the afternoon was wearing on, and he was wearing with it. Soon he would be worn out, unless I gave him something to eat. It seemed years since that cup of coffee and roll of the early morning.

If we needed nourishment, the car needed water. Both needs were supplied somewhat grudgingly by me, though the physical part of me did appreciate the coolness of the restaurant, and the strange dishes for which Cadiz is famous; the mushroom-flavoured cuttle-fish, the golden dorado in sherry.

Then off we started again, to take a road which the landlord warned us was none too good. People who travelled by carriage or diligence had evil things to say of the fourteen to eighteen hours of journey, though the scenery was fine. This did not sound enlivening; but what good horses could do in fourteen hours, the Gloria could do in three or four.

Through ramifications of narrow streets I steered the car out of Cadiz. In all directions they branched off from one another, interlacing, overlapping with the intricacy of a puzzle. The houses were high, too, and there was not a window with glittering balcony of glass and iron, where dark-eyed women did not lean between heaven and earth, to smile down upon our humming motor. It was all very quaint and gay, in spite of ancient, tragic memories; and though few cities of Spain are older than Cadiz—which claims Hercules for founder—the white houses looked as clean as if they had been built yesterday or some mediæval model.

We tore back to San Fernando; and soon came upon the bad surface which had been prophesied. The Gloria bumped over ruts and grooves, and scattered stones, and perforce I had to slacken speed lest she should break some blood-vessel. Nevertheless we did not waste time in covering the six miles to Chiclana de la Frontera; and when we had crashed through this ancient stronghold of the Phœnicians we jolted out into an open, sandy solitude, with only the knoll of Barosa to break its blank monotony.

Even a mind preoccupied must spare a few thoughts for Graham and the "Faugh-a-ballaghs," on this ground where Spanish men and British men fought shoulder to shoulder against the French invader. But when we passed the road branching away to Conil, and held straight on across the little river Salado, I heard a thing more instructive than history, more exciting than romance.

A man we met—who looked almost old enough to remember the brave days of the great tunny fishing—had seen a large automobile, not more than an hour ago. Evidently, then, we were gaining on the quarry. The news gave me courage.

The sea and the Straits of Gibraltar were near now, and though they were not in sight yet, nor the sandy headland of Trafalgar, the smell of salt came to us with the wind.

At the old Moorish town of Vejer de la Frontera (scarcely a town in this storied corner of the world but tells, with its "de la Frontera," of days when the Moors were crushed back, ever farther and farther) we had travelled full thirty miles from Cadiz. Childish voices screaming round the car cried that another automobile was not far ahead; and like a racehorse nearing the finish, we put on speed, dashing at a rush to the Laguna de Janda, over the ground where Tarik the Conquerer began his great running fight with Rodrigo. So through little Venta de Tabilla, leaving the lake to plunge into an imposing gorge which was a doorway to the sea. There, spread out before, were the straits and the burning African coast; Europe and Africa face to face; white Tarifa jutting into the green waves; Trafalgar in the distance, smothered in clouds like clinging memories; Tangier opposite, a crescent of pearls, tossed seaward by towering blue waves which were the Atlas Mountains. Taking the wild beauty of the scene with all that it meant, it was one of the great sights of the world—the world once supposed to end here, with Hercules' pillars.

As the Gloria sprang on towards Tarifa, a fierce wind which had been lying in wait leapt at the car and sent her staggering. Gust after gust darted from ambush, half blinding our ungoggled eyes with the sand they flung by handfuls into our faces. But we jammed on our hats; and the Gloria bore the onslaughts bravely, her voice drowned in the screaming of the wind, which might have been the war cries of

those Moorish armies whose battleground this land had been for seven centuries.

As the good white road mounted the shoulder of a down on its way to Tarifa, that most Moorish of all Spanish towns stood up like a model cut out of alabaster in a frame of jade. Clear against the sky rose the crumbling tower of Guzman el Bueno, the Abraham of mediæval history; but our way, instead of leading through the strange old city, passed the horseshoe gate of entrance, and bore us up into the mountains.

Not a soul did we meet, once we turned our backs upon Tarifa. Only the wild wind would not desert us, but roared in strange voices along the hollows of the land, in a country where all was wild. The rough mountain sides were peppered with stunted oaks; and as our way ascended more thrilling grew the views, with the smoke of great steamers streaming black pennons over the sea, and the Atlas Mountains squatting Sphinx-like to guard the African shore.

Then, we lost the hard blue line of water, screened behind mountains; and slipping down over the summit we hid from the bellowing wind. The car flew like a circling bird round the wide curves, and dropped us in peaceful vales sheltered by cork forests, and rocky walls inlaid with the silver of trickling streams.

Thus, back to the wide sea view and downs whose flowery carpet was torn by jagged nail-heads of rock. Cork trees, sombre as giant olives clad in mourning, strong in their corselets and shields of half-stripped bark as knights in armour, covered the hills like a vast army. At the foot of the hoary warriors, waved bracken and yellow iris in tangled masses; high above their heads sailed here and there a golden eagle of a vulture, looking like paper birds or Japanese kites.

Far below us the white houses of Algeciras lay scattered, a broken necklace of white beads; and from across the water that dark lion, Gibraltar, crouched as if waiting to spring.

Whether Dick or I saw it first I can't tell, but we exclaimed together, “There's the other car!” And there it was, a moving speck upon the road in a white cloud of dust.

After it we went with a bound of increased speed. No need now to stop and ask the way to the hotel; all we had to do was to follow and catch up with the Lecomte at the steps of the Hotel Reina Cristina. A

wild idea flashed into my head, that I would snatch Monica as she alighted from Carmona's car, fling her to Dick in mine, jump in after her myself, and be off before the others had time to recover from their surprise.

The more I thought of this the more feasible did it seem. No slowing up for sharp turnings now; trust to luck that the road was clear ahead! I was thrilling with hope and excitement as we dashed after the disappearing dust-covered automobile into a wide open gateway. The scent of heliotrope and rose geranium, hot under the April sun, intoxicated me as we swept along the white avenue, and came in sight of the other car just drawing up before an arcaded loggia.

XXXV

The Moon in the Wilderness

Two ladies and their maid were getting out. An American young man was helping them down. The grey car was not a Lecomte. The owner, his chauffeur, and the three women were of types entirely different from those we sought.

The discovery, coming after such exaltation of hope, was like a blow over the heart.

“Hard luck,” exclaimed Dick. “But Carmona's car must be somewhere.”

“If it ever started,” I said. “I begin to think now that Carmona rallied his brigands, and sent me out to meet them, knowing I'd surely follow if I believed he had gone that way.”

“Oh come, there's hope still,” Dick consoled me. And turning to the owner of the car, he asked if he had seen another grey automobile. He had not; and, on further questioning, he went on to tell us that he had started from Seville meaning to stop at Cadiz and come on here to-morrow; but the hotel had been full, so he had “rushed it” to Algeciras. These details proved that his was the motor we had been chasing from the first; and the excellent Spanish which the Californian spoke to the porters accounted for one misleading bit of information.

While the party of care-free tourists went indoors, Dick and I stood in our coats of dust to discuss the situation. We soon agreed that there was but one thing to do. Wire Colonel O'Donnel for news of Carmona's movements, and wait where we were for an answer.

To none save those who count every moment precious could such a delay have been irksome. The place was a paradise, the garden a corner of Eden, and the Reina Cristina more like the country house of some Spanish millionaire than a hotel.

Leaving the Gloria, we went in to write a telegram; and in a court, charming as the patio of a Moorish palace, we sat to plan out a message. The people of the hotel confirmed our fears that no answer could come from Seville till morning; so Dick busied himself in choosing rooms, while, to save time, I took the car by the sea road to the telegraph-office in town.

How many miles up and down those flower-bordered paths Dick and I walked next morning waiting for news, neither could have told. Eleven o'clock had struck when Colonel O'Donnel's answer was brought to me in the garden.

"On receipt of wire, interviewed verger," I read. "Made him confess to accepting large sum from agent of C—— to send you on wrong track. Making inquiries and hope let you know in few hours whether C—— really gone; if so, which direction. Advise you stop Algeciras till hear from me again. Am sending on luggage there."

"A few hours!" I was beginning to know too well what a few hours could mean in Spain where, to a population of philosophers it mattered nothing if a thing happened to-morrow or the day after.

Gibraltar was empurpled with night and sequined with ten thousand lights when the next telegram arrived—a message which covered two telegraph forms.

"Just learned C—— left to-day for Granada with same party. Took train, and whether shipped automobile not found out. C—— believed to be ill. Friend at club says C—— been heard say knows at Granada man worth twenty physicians, natural bone-setter, herb doctor. Perhaps wishes consult this person. Illness seems mysterious. House of C—— well known at Granada. Inquire at Washington Irving, where suppose you will stay. Will wire or write to that address."

I should have been off within the hour, but the quickest way of reaching Granada was by Ronda, and there was no road for automobiles. One could walk, one could ride, along a bridle path through gorges unsurpassed for grandeur; but it was an expedition of two days, whereas if we could curb our impatience until early morning, we would reach Ronda by train in about four hours.

Not being quite mad, we waited, rose at five, and before seven were steaming out of Algeciras, while the great cloud-cataract of the Levanter churned and boiled over Gibraltar. On a truck, travelling by

the same train, was my brave Gloria, none the worse for yesterday's wild flight, and ready for another when she could take the road beyond Ronda. I had not ceased yet to wonder at the expedition with which she had been shipped. Dick discovered, however, that the manager of the line was a Scotsman, a kind of fairy godfather for all the region round, which explained the mystery; and his road was wonderful. In a glass coach, which was an "observation car," we tore through scenery so diversified that it might have been chosen from the finest bits of a whole continent. There were wooded ravines tapestried with pink sweetbrier; there were far hill-towns like flocks of gulls resting on the edge of giddy precipices; there were strange old fortresses; ruined Moorish castles; velvet-green fields with aloe hedges grey as lines of broken slate; dark, noble gorges sprinkled with mother-o'-pearl flakes of white wild roses, that drifted down the red rock into water green as onyx. There were blossomy bits of Holland and long tracts of Switzerland. Glacier-mills in narrow gorges were like empty niches for colossal statues of saints; pink and white orchards foamed at the feet of ancient look-out towers; black rocks, like huge watch-dogs, seemed to crouch on cushions of wild flowers; and weeping willows fringed the river with silver before it dashed away to do battle among the mountains; acacias showered perfume, and orange groves pushed so near to the train that a hand reached out could have plucked their golden globes.

There were caves and underground rivers, haunted by enchanted Moors; and at last, a brief glimpse of Ronda hanging high against the sky, vanishing like the fabled Garden of Iram, and not to be seen again until the train mounted the cliff by many loops.

Just as we arrived at the end of the journey a thought in my brain seemed to snap like the trigger of a carbine. In my haste to get off by the first morning train I had forgotten to try and find more petrol at Algeciras, although I had not enough left to get the car to Granada.

There was just time to telegraph back to the Reina Cristina and beg some of the young Californian, who had fallen so deeply in love with the place that he intended to stay a week. We had become friendly and he would certainly grant the favour, therefore we might count on travelling that night by acetylene and moonlight. Meanwhile, there was a long day to wait, but I tramped off my restlessness as best I could in exploring every foot of Ronda.

After that one look upward from the train, when Ronda hung before our eyes over a thousand foot gorge, we had at last sneaked in, so to speak, by a back door. If it had not been for that first glimpse, and if we had not read "Miranda of the Balcony" we should not have guessed, in walking from the station to the Alameda, that Ronda differed from other Moorish towns. But far away was a barrier of iron railing, and a curious effect as if beyond it everything ended except the sky. We walked on, reached that railing, and leaned over.

No picture, no book had been able to give us a real idea of Ronda. It was stupendous—wonderful. We stared down at the world beneath as if we hung in a balloon, for the rock fell away from our feet, a sheer precipice; and men working in the valley below were like tiny crabs. The Moorish mills were white, broken hour-glasses, shaking out a stream of silver; geese on the river were floating bread-crumbs; a string of donkeys crawling up the steep Moorish road were invisible under their packs, which looked like mushrooms with moving stems.

The noise of the river floated up to us with a muffled roar, and across the deep valley its water had cut, tumbled a wild mountain-land, crossed here and there by white threads of road which clung to the sky-line and disappeared.

"Great Scott, if this eagle's nest doesn't take the cake!" exclaimed Dick, always modern. "If there were any more to take, it could have that, too. Hurrah for you, rock and river. You're sublime."

But we had not seen all, by hanging over that iron railing, nor nearly all. There was the palace of the Moorish King, and the terrible steps cut by Christian captives. There was the bridge swung over the gorge; and the far-famed "window" of rock, one of the wonders of the world. There was the old Roman amphitheatre, turned into a bull-ring; the town wall, which Hercules helped to build; the Roman gate, and the Moorish gate, and the house where Miranda lived; and a hundred other things to be found by mounting steep hills or sliding down wild precipices.

The splendid mountain air had given Dick a ferocious appetite; nevertheless he could hardly be torn from the cliff above the "window," and vowed that it would be worth while coming all the

way from New York to Ronda next year when the grand new hotel should be finished.

Rain fell while we lunched, but we wandered out again, in a thin mist like a sieve, through which sifted turquoises and silver spangles; nor did we cease wandering until it was time for the train to arrive with the expected petrol. The Californian had not failed us; and with a good supply of food for the Gloria, and enough for ourselves to last until morning, we set off, against the advice of everyone.

The sky had cleared, and twilight would soon merge into moonlight; but we would need the moon and stars as well on the road we had to travel. In more than one place it was marked on my map by an ominous, thin black line which meant "Motorists, beware." The country was sparsely populated; people whispered of bandidos; and if anything happened to the car in the middle of the night, there would be no means of getting help.

Still, if we won through without serious mishap, we should save a day; for there was no train to Granada until morning, and Dick was as keen on the adventure, for the adventure's sake, as I was for another reason.

After all, we reminded each other, it was a journey of only a hundred and twenty miles. With no traffic to interfere, the Gloria ought to fly over the distance in four hours; and what if everyone did try to discourage us? We had experienced that sort of thing in Biarritz, and the dangers had resolved themselves into chimeras. Nothing in Spain was as troublesome nowadays as the busybodies would have one believe—not even the beggars.

My big searchlights cast a flashing ring on the road, which the car seemed to push swiftly before it as it ran.

Dick peered through the uncertain light for the hill town of Teba, from which the Empress Eugenie took her title, but my eyes were glued to the road.

To think, if we had known at Jerez that Granada was the lodestar, we could have reached Ronda in a run of four hours day before yesterday! But it was useless to repine, and fate had given us Ronda.

By the time we had passed through the straggling village of Campillos the moon was up, a great white, incandescent globe of

light, so brilliant that instead of draining colour from rock, and grass, and flower, it gave new and almost supernatural values to all.

We had the world to ourselves, a wonderful world like a vast silver bowl half full of jewels. Over the tops of mountains cut jaggedly of steel, strange figures seemed to run along the horizon. Bathed in unearthly radiance lay fields of poppies like deep lakes of blood filling the valleys between little rolling hills, and here and there a miniature mountain of pink or glittering grey, rose out of the plain like a fairy palace which would be invisible in daylight. Olive trees stretching away in straight lines on either side of endless avenues, fountained silver under the moon, each avenue swept by a wave of poppies. It was an Aladdin's Cave landscape made out of rare metals and precious stones that imitated trees and flowers.

Antiquera on its wild crags, was a ragged black hole in the silver sky, until we shot into the town under the dominating castle of crimson memories.

There, was life and music still; guitars tinkled, children who should have been in bed frolicked in the streets with lambs that followed them like dogs, while everyone, old and young, laughed and hooted at the Gloria as she shot by without stopping, on her way to Loja and Granada.

A sharp turn to the left swept us out of Antiquera, and so good was the road that Dick and I began to laugh at the gloomy prognostications which thus far had not been fulfilled.

My spirits rose to such a height that as we passed under the Lovers' Rock, still haunted by the Moorish maiden and her Christian lover, I quoted Southey, verse after verse of the old-fashioned poetry coming back to my mind. The Peña de los Enamorados stood up like a small model of Gibraltar, rising out of the plain; and as we wound on among other pinnacles almost as majestic, we could see the bleached skeleton of Archidona hanging on its mountain. Once the place had been a famous nest of brigands; and when after climbing a tremendous hill, we had come into its long white street, Dick was of opinion that Archidona of to-day was still an ideal summer resort for the fraternity in case they should crave a town life. Each low-browed house in the interminable avenue looked a fit nursery for mysteries and secrets. Here and there a dark face framed in a knotted red handkerchief peered from a lighted doorway, staring after the Gloria

until she had slipped over the brow of the hill to coast smoothly down another as steep.

There, had we but known, the peaceful olive grove through which we passed and hushed the song of nightingales was to be our last glimpse of peace. Beyond that silver barrier lay chaos, a chaos of wild mountains, deep chasms, and grim steppes, solitary, unpeopled, forbidding under the moon!

If we broke an axle here, with leagues to walk to the nearest farm, there was no hope of Granada to-morrow. And now the road was equally well fitted for breaking axles, necks, and hearts.

It was made of rock in petrified waves, among which the Gloria floundered and buck-jumped as long ago Dick had expected her to do when she crossed the Spanish border. Every part of her shivered as though she were a horse in the bull-ring, and I pitied her as if she had a nerve in every spring and chain.

“This is no road; it's a nightmare,” groaned Dick. But if it were, it was a nightmare which ran with us glaring, showing frightful fangs, for mile after mile of horror. Just as the steep slope of a descent offered a softer cushion for the suffering tyres, and hope stirred within us, we broke into such a region as imagination pictures in the streets of Lisbon after the great earthquake. Gullies and vertical rifts scored the highway serpentining hither and thither, the chasms gaping to swallow the Gloria or at least bite off a wheel.

Now the earthy lip of a cleft would crumble and fall in as our driving-wheels skimmed along the edge; now, steer with all the nerve and nicety I might, the Gloria would rock as she hung half over a gully. Somehow I coaxed her down the hill, and driving out from the labyrinth of crevasses, I breathed a sigh of relief. But the next instant, I had only time to jam on the brakes to save the car from vaulting into a small river which ran across the road. Carefully embanked on either side, the stream flowed swiftly, cutting the descent at right angles.

Whatever the depth might prove, I had to risk it. Mounting the nearer embankment, I drove down into the running water, where the moon laughed up at me as I broke her glittering reflection.

“Good old San Cristóbal!” cried Dick as we came through without damage and climbed the opposite bank, to plump down a breakneck descent on the other side.

But it was early still to praise the saint. We had only to look ahead to see how much more he had to do for us, if we were to win through to Granada at all. Where a little clump of houses had assembled at the bottom of the hill, as if to watch our struggle, another and far broader river flowed.

It also raced across the highway, as if roads were made for river-beds; and this time the situation was so serious that I stopped the Gloria to reflect.

There was no doubt about it; this river was deep. Though a cart might ford it safely, and have the flood of rippling silver no higher than the axles, it was different with an automobile. I wondered bleakly what would happen to the silencer if its mass of heated metal were suddenly plunged into cold water, and what would happen to the commutator.

“When in doubt, play a trump,” said Dick. “And I guess that camel-backed bridge is a trump, if it's only a knave—or the deuce.”

It was true, there was a narrow erection which might pass as a bridge, if one wished to pay a compliment. It was of stone, and came to a steep point at the apex, like a “card tent” when two cards receive support from one another. It was the question of a fraction of an inch, if the Gloria were to squeeze over; but between the danger of a jam and the danger of a burst cylinder, I decided to risk playing Dick's trump.

First I got out and unscrewed the wheel-caps to give more clearance, then in again for the trial, while Dick walked, ready to offer aid if it were needed. I had rasped through to the top, and the Gloria had actually started on the down grade, when she gave a grinding scream, and stuck between the parapets.

I tried to move, and could not. The car was hopelessly jammed.

“Nice fix,” said Dick. “If I was writing a book, I'd say, ‘this route only suitable for hundred horse-power cars, built in small sections, and carrying cheerful passengers.’ Now, we were cheerful once—and may be again. Chuck me over the key of the tool-box, will you?”

I did so without a word, lest if I uttered any they should be too strong. But curiosity overcame me when I heard a metallic chinking, then the blows of a hammer.

“Only knocking down a bit of this old parapet,” was the calm answer to my question. “Some of it's gone already; why not more? I bet future generations will thank me—as it's certain never to be mended.”

As he spoke, there was a great splash, when a piece of the parapet, already weakened by years of storm and stress, plumped over into the river. The car was released, and slid down the other slope of the camel's back.

Now it did seem that we might safely thank San Cristóbal, since nothing could well be worse than the pass from which he had just delivered us, scratched, bruised, yet unbroken. We had but to scramble out of the rough river-bed, bump over the level crossing of a railway, to come out upon a broad, smooth highway like a road to paradise. Ready to shout with joy, I put on speed, and the Gloria sprinted over the white and silent way as if she were happy to turn her back upon Inferno.

Yesterday's study of the map assured me that at length we had struck the main road from Malaga, and there seemed every reason to believe that the ordeal just over would be our last. Flying along at a good fifty miles an hour, under a tired moon that sought the west, presently a town rose grandly up before us, throned on rocks in a wide valley, and pallid in the strange light as some sad queen.

Loja, tragically lost key of Granada, sister of famed Alhama, stronghold of that fierce alcayde who called Boabdil's sultana daughter! Loja, and only thirty miles more to Granada.

We rushed towards that wide valley, and on to the mountain town which dared to repulse Ferdinand. In the deserted streets the only sound was the singing of many springs, the same musical voices, the same strains that Lord Rivers heard close upon five hundred years ago, when he came with his English archers to help conquer the wild place. El Gran Capitán, too, had come here, a lonely exile, after all his splendid services to an ungrateful king. He, too, had heard the singing of Loja's springs, not in triumph, but in sorrow.

Down in the valley beyond, the river cried a warning to us; but we did not heed, even when the road surface changed again to gluey mud; squelching on, mile after mile, at the best pace we could, and saying always that soon we should be on the Vega. So the dawn stole up and quivered on the snows of the Sierra Nevada.

The moon was gone, and it must still be long before the sun would shine over the mountains, when a black shadow like a great coffin deserted on the road, gave me pause. I pulled up in haste, only just in time, and could hardly believe I saw aright. But there was no illusion. We were on the highway from the port of Malaga to Granada, yet here was a broken bridge, a noble structure which should have outworn centuries, tumbling into ruin.

The fall of the great central arch was no new thing, for moss and lichen enamelled its jagged edges with green and gold. Some branches loosely strewn across the road were the only signposts indicating this tragedy, though perhaps it was a story as old as the great earthquake of two-and-twenty years ago.

A yard or so more and we should have been over; but San Cristóbal had not forgotten us; and the next thing was, how to cross the river without a bridge. I turned and went back, discovering wheel-tracks which showed an obscure bye-path dipping over the edge of the embankment. I followed, and beheld the ford, a little farther on in a baby forest, where a broad stream lay in flood between low banks.

“We'll have to get through,” I said, and drove the Gloria into the water. If there should be mud—but there were stones instead; and with tiny waves swishing among the spokes of her wheels she set out to rumble over.

“I believe she'll do it—” I had begun, when she gave a great hiss, as when a blacksmith plunges a red-hot horseshoe into water; and a cloud of steam gushed up. Still I forced her on, expecting each instant to hear some fatal crash, while we plunged deeper into the stream. Now the little waves splashed coldly across my feet. Would they mount to the carburetor, spoil the ignition, or, still worse, would they crack the cylinders?

Neither of us spoke, and the car stormed on, sobbing. For a moment she clawed in vain at something, and then stumbled, as if

on her knees, up the farther bank. Dripping water and puffing steam she climbed to the high-road again, and, with a bound, started on through spouting mud, as if nothing had happened. One would have thought her fired by some incentive as powerful as mine, which forced her on in the face of all difficulties; and perhaps it was a song of gladness which the motor hummed, as she came out upon the Vega.

Suddenly the first beams of the sun streamed down the white slopes of the far Sierra Nevada, touched the vast fertile plain, and wrought magic with a castled hill which floated up, dreamlike, from a purple haze where a great city lay asleep. Clustering vermilion towers blazed with the gold of dawn, and dazzled our eyes with the glamour of romance. For the sleeping city was Granada, and the red towers and gardens on the castled hill were the towers and gardens of the Alhambra.

The adventure was over. And under one of those roofs, dove-grey in the dawn, I hoped that Monica was sleeping.

XXXVI

Wiles and Enchantments

In spite of dykes and dams, said Dick, we had arrived at a place to visit which had once seemed to him as wonderful as finding the key of the rainbow. Yet here we were; and Granada—after we had entered at last by crossing still another river—came out from under its spell of enchantment when we saw it at close quarters. Only that wonderful hill above was magical still, as magical to the eye as when Ibraham the astrologer decreed its gardens.

More than half the miradored Moorish houses had given place to modern French ones; and descendants of the banished owners in far Tetuan and Tunis, might as well fling their keys and title-deeds away.

The dome of Isabella's cathedral and the towers of old, old churches rose from among the roofs of commonplace streets; ordinary shops of yesterday and to-day ran up the steep hill towards the Alhambra; but at a great gateway—la Puerta de las Granadas, raised by Charles the Fifth—the centuries opened and let us drive through into the past.

At this hour of the morning, the deep green forest of the Alhambra park, beyond the classic arch, was still as the enchanted wood which hid from the world the Sleeping Beauty in her palace. The nightingales had gone to sleep, and the daylight birds had finished their first concert, but another voice was singing, the joyous high soprano of water—water unseen, rippling through subterranean channels; water seen tumbling in crystal runnels on either side of the road in its bubbling way downhill.

Still we saw nothing of the enchanted vermilion towers which draw all the world across sea and land. There was but a glimpse of ruddy battlements once at a turn of the road, through a netting of

trees and branches; then we were in a green cutting in the deep wood, where two pleasant, old-fashioned hotels faced each other.

We were expected at the house named after that delicate and genial soul who awoke Europe and America to the charm of the Alhambra. I had hopefully telegraphed from Ronda that we would arrive early, en automobile; nevertheless, the landlord, knowing the route, was smilingly surprised to see us.

There was a telegram; that was the first thing we learned; and it was from Colonel O'Donnel; but he had no news to tell. He merely wired his advice that, if possible, Señor Waring should come back to Seville immediately, as his evidence was now wanted in the affair of the bomb.

Dick at once said that he would not desert me, but I urged upon him the advisability of going. He had seen me through my great adventure; and if Carmona and the others were in Granada there was nothing he could do at the moment which I could not do for myself. If he failed to appear in Seville, there might be trouble; and should I find that I needed his help, I would telegraph.

Pilar's name was not spoken, but it rang in our thoughts, and Dick could not hide the flash of eagerness that lit his eyes. Perhaps by this time she would have made up her mind whether he were to have “yes” or “no” for his answer.

“My going shall depend on whether Carmona's here or not,” he said; and I turned to the landlord with a question. Did he know whether the Duke of Carmona and his mother had come, and brought friends to their palace in Granada?

The Spaniard laughed. He knew but too well, since the arrival of the distinguished family had roused something like an emeute in his and other hotels. Carmona palace was perhaps the most interesting show-place left in the town of Granada, except the tombs of los Reyes Católicos in the cathedral. It was the palace where Boabdil had fled from his father's wrath; and after the Alhambra and the Generalife it was the one thing that tourists came to see. Now they were prevented from seeing it by the arrival of the Duke and Duchess, a calamity which did not happen in the high season once in ten years. If the house (which had in these days but one grand suite of furnished and habitable rooms) was occupied by its owners, it was

usually for a few weeks in the height of summer, after strangers had ceased to come south; or else in the autumn, before the time for travellers. Now there was great dissatisfaction among the foreign visitors, who considered themselves defrauded of their rights. Yesterday morning several parties of tourists had insisted upon an entrance, and in the afternoon, in fulfilment of the Duke's request, two civil guards had been stationed before the door to keep would-be intruders at a distance.

This did not seem a hopeful outlook for me, in case I wished to try some such coup d'état as I had planned in Seville. But there would be other ways of reaching Monica, I told myself, when the landlord had gone on to say that the Duke was supposed to be seriously ill. If Carmona were suffering, he would not be able to watch the members of his household as closely as before, and it ought not to be impossible to let Monica know that I was in Granada. Once she understood that I was ready and waiting to take her away, means would be found to reach her.

There was only time, when Dick had finally decided to go, for a bath and breakfast before I spun him down to the station for the morning train.

Meanwhile I had learned that every room in our landlord's two hotels was occupied, for it was the most crowded season. But I was to have a villa belonging to the hotels given to me for my entire use, a villa in an old Moorish garden of tinkling fountains, flowing rills, rose-entwined miradores, jasmine arbours, myrtle hedges, and magnolia trees. The Carmen de Mata Moros was to be mine for as few days or as many weeks as I chose to remain. Satisfied, therefore, that I should not have to camp under the trees of the park, I determined, when I had seen Dick off, to put up the car in the town of Granada, and reconnoitre the neighbourhood of the Carmona palace.

An inquiry here and there took me to the street without much delay. The palace, sacred to memories of Boabdil, his gentle Sultana Zorayda, and his stern mother Ayxa, was to be found on the outskirts of the Albaicín, that part of Granada once favoured by the Moorish aristocracy, now almost given up to the poorer Spaniards, and gypsies rich enough and sophisticated enough to desert their caves. Ferdinand and Isabel had granted the house to a rich Moorish noble

who had fore-sworn his religion to help them in their wars, and who became the first Duque de Carmona, owner of many estates and many palaces.

My landlord had not been misinformed. The fine entrance, with its fifteenth century Spanish coat of arms over the Moorish portal, was kept by two civil guards. I walked up, and with the air of a tourist, inquired how soon the palace would be open to visitors. The men could not tell me. Was the Duke ill? They believed so. And as I could get nothing further from them I walked away.

Above, on the hill, clustered the red towers of the Alhambra. I fancied that in those towers there must be windows which overlooked the patio of Boabdil's old palace, and I resolved to prove this presently, but I was not yet ready to leave the Albaicín.

I had brought down my Kodak as an excuse for lingering, and now I began, within sight of Carmona's doors, to take leisurely snapshots. When I had been thus engaged for nearly half an hour, I saw a young woman, evidently a servant, leaving the palace with a small bundle under her arm; and without appearing to notice her, I strolled in the direction she was taking. Once beyond eyeshot of the civil guards, I spoke to the girl, taking off my hat politely.

“You are from the Duke of Carmona's?” I said. “I am an acquaintance of his, and intended to call, but I hear he is seeing no one.”

“That is true, señor,” replied the girl, a handsome creature of the gypsy type, with bold eyes which took in every detail of my features and clothing. “His Grace arrived very fatigued and is obliged to lie in bed; which is inconvenient, as there are foreign guests who must be so constantly entertained by Her Grace the Duchess, that she has no time to nurse her son.”

“I trust he has a clever doctor,” said I.

“Oh, a very clever one,” the girl answered eagerly. “Not an ordinary physician, but a wonderful person. My brother knows him well, and goes into the Sierra to find herbs and flowers for his medicines and balsams.”

Evidently the girl was proud of the acquaintance, and I humoured her.

“Such remedies are good in cases of fever and malaria,” I said.

“And for many other things,” she persisted. “His Grace has contracted some poisoning of the hand. I do not know how; but he is better already, and will no doubt soon be well. If the señor would care to send a line of sympathy, I might arrange for it to reach the Duke. At present not even the most intimate friends are admitted, but I am in the confidence of Her Grace's maid, who came with her from Seville. Indeed I'm now on the way to do an errand for her.”

I caught at this opening.

“I should like to send a note,” I said, “but not to the Duke.”

Having got so far, I took a roll of bank-notes from my pocket, as we strolled slowly on together. A young woman so anxious to convey an impression of her own importance, must have ambitions beyond her place in life.

The dark face sparkled at sight of the money, and tactfully I explained that my principal interest centred in a young guest of the Duchess's. Any person who could take word from me to her, unknown to others, would be well rewarded. I should not think five hundred pesetas too much, to give for such a service.

A hint was enough. In an instant the girl became a woman of business and a mistress of intrigue. She would not, she said, dare attempt to deliver a note. It would be simpler, less dangerous for all concerned, to be at work in a corridor through which the English señorita must pass; to murmur a few words which would attract her attention; to receive a verbal message in return; and to bring it to me when she could—not to-day; that would be impossible; but to-morrow evening about nine, at which time she had already permission to go out.

Should I trust her? Her face was one to inspire a man's admiration rather than trust, but I had no alternative. If I surrendered this chance, I should hardly find another as promising; and as I must depend upon someone in Carmona's house, why not upon this woman? The bribe I offered was tempting enough to keep her true, if anything could.

I hesitated no more than a moment in accepting her amendment of my proposal, since she assured me it was impossible to make an appointment sooner. And the message I sent Monica was cautiously worded.

The friends who had seen her last in the cathedral of Seville were anxious to see her again, and begged that she would arrange to meet them as soon as possible, to carry out the plan which had been interrupted.

The girl repeated these words after me, promised to remember them and give me the answer to-morrow night at nine, in case any message were entrusted to her. We were not to meet at the same place, however, but on the Alhambra Hill, in the road leading up from the "Wasinton" (as she called the hotel) to the Carmen de Mata Moros. She had a brother living not far from there, she said, whom she expected to visit the following evening. I offered half the money in advance as an incentive to loyalty, and it was accepted with dignity. Then, when we were parting, I asked if one could see into the palace patio from the Alhambra, which towered above us on the height.

"From the middle window of the Sala de Ambajadores the señor will find himself able to see very well," she answered. "And there is still another patio, into which there is a better view from the gardens of the Generalife. Certainly the gardens are very high and far; but if the señor has a spy-glass of some sort? And if he chooses I can try to tell the young lady that he will be first in one place, then in the other, hoping for a sight of her. Let us say, in the afternoon between four and six at the Alhambra; after that, at the Generalife, till the sun is gone."

This neat plan was worth an extra twenty-five peseta note, and I gave it. Afterwards, having no other personal affairs to distract my attention, I wandered through the streets of Granada and into the chill cathedral before going up to make acquaintance with the Carmen de Mata Moros.

When I had seen the villa, with its enchanting terraced garden, hanging on the hillside high above the Vega, a wild hope blazed within me that I might snatch Monica, persuade the English Consul to marry us, and keep her here for the honeymoon, flaunting my happiness in Carmona's face. Of course the idea was fantastic, but it gave me a few moments of happiness.

I lunched in the garden under the thick shade of nisperos trees, and before the time agreed upon I started to walk to the Alhambra.

Not for worlds would I have taken a guide to show the way. All my life, since the days when my mother told me legends of treasure hidden and Moorish warriors enchanted, the Alhambra had been a fairy dream to me. There was no one in the world, save only Monica, whose company I would have craved for this expedition. Other people's thoughts and impressions of the place might be better than mine, but I did not want to hear them; I wanted only my own.

Under the huge leaning elms, which people who trust guide-books attribute to Wellington, I wandered until I came to a great red tower, with a horseshoe arch for entrance. There on the keystone was the carved hand; beyond, over the arch within, the key; and remembering the legend that never would disaster come until the Hand had grasped the Key, I knew that this must be the Gate of Justice.

Now, a spell fell upon me. It was as if the Hand had come down to touch me on the shoulder, and give the Key to hidden wonders, which only I might be allowed to see. That was the fiction with which I pleased myself; for he who comes to the most famous of places is as truly a discoverer as he who finds a new world. No matter how much he has read, how many faithful photographs seen, he must discover everything anew, since it is certain that nowhere will he find anything more than he has within himself. The picture he sees will fit the frame his mind can give, and no one ever has, no one ever will, see there exactly what he sees. If a man's mind cannot create a beautiful frame, then the picture must have but a poor effect for him, and he will go away belittling it.

Now, I believed that I had been making a fine jewelled frame for this picture of the Alhambra, and I hoped that I deserved the Key which the Hand had lent.

Inside the gateway, when I had climbed a winding lane, I found myself in the great Place of the Cisterns, which, with the vast incongruous palace half finished by Charles the Fifth, I recognized from many pictures; but not yet would I look down over Granada and the Vega. I would wait until I could stand at a window in the Hall of the Ambassadors and see what I had been promised. So, without a glance over the parapet, I walked on to an open door, where stood two or three men in gold-laced hats. One moved resignedly forward to act as guide, but a word and a piece of silver

convinced him that I was a person who might be trusted alone, though I lacked a student's ticket.

I passed through the room devoted to officialdom, and then—the time had come to use the key, for I was already in fairyland; the covers of the “Arabian Nights” had closed on me, and shut me in between the pages.

Physically I was not alone; for there were faded and strident tourists in the marble-paved court of the Alberca, whom I fain would have had stopped outside and put into appropriate costume for fairyland; but spiritually I had the place to myself.

The little glittering fish, like tropical flowers under green glass, flashed towards me through the beryl water, just as ancestor fish had flashed when jewelled hands of harem beauties crumbled cake into the gleaming tank. My mother had told me a legend, that fair favourites of banished sultans prayed to return after death to the Alhambra, in the bronze and gold, rose and purple forms of these fish of the Alberca; and now I half believed the story. Where—since Mahomet grants no heaven to women—could they be happier than here? Floating ever under their roof of emerald, did they think themselves more fortunate than their husbands, lovers, and brothers permitted to rest within the Alhambra walls in the guise of martens wailing shrilly for days that might not come again?

Dreaming, I passed into the Court of Lions, where I and the twelve quaint, stone guardians of the place stared at one another across a few feet of marble pavement that measured centuries. Each prim beast, beautiful because of his crude hideousness differing from his fellows; each with a different story to tell if he would. Which one remembered that night when the brave Abencerrages faced death, there in the hall to the right, where the fountain kept ominous stains of brown? Which had the seeing eye in these fallen times, to watch when the ghost of those noble Moors passed by silent and sad in the moonlight? Upon which had blood-drops spattered when the boy princes died for jealous Fatima's pleasure? Which had known the touch of Morayma's little hand or lovely Galiana's?

I asked the questions; yet the deep answering silence of the court, and of all this hidden, secret, fairy palace seemed to say so much that it was not like silence, but reserve.

“The Alhambra is music and colour and knowledge,” I said to the lions. “When I am gone I shall shut my eyes and hear as well as see it; hear the magic music of the silence, played on silver lutes of Moors, and tinkling fountains, a siren's song to draw me back again; and I shall know and feel things which I've never been able to think out quite clearly before.”

Would Monica come here? I wondered. No face more lovely than hers had ever looked down from those latticed windows supported by pillars delicate as a child's white arm. If I could but see her face now! Not seeing it, I knew that no place, however beautiful, could be perfect for me. Shadows of sorrow, of separation, would stand out the blacker against the sunlit, jewelled walls of the fairy palace; and even happiness must sing in minor notes here, lest it strike out a discord in the tragic poem of the Alhambra. No wonder, in losing their crown jewel, the Moors lost hope, and with it all the art and science which had set them far above their Christian rivals! No wonder they plunged, despairing, into the deserts they had left, mingling among savage races as some bright spring mingles with a dark subterranean river, never to glitter in the light again.

But none of my day dreams cheated me into losing count of time.

If my messenger were true, soon Monica would be in one of the patios of Carmona's palace, looking up at the Alhambra towers. “The middle window as you go into the Hall of the Ambassadors,” I repeated, and found my way back through the court of the Alberca; for you do not need to know the Alhambra to find your way from sala to sala, seen a hundred times in imagination.

So beautiful had I guessed that room above all others, that I had not expected to be surprised; yet I was surprised, and oddly excited, for supreme beauty is always exciting to the Latin mind. A vast bower of jewels, and old point-lace embroidered with tarnished gold threads and yellowing pearls, it seemed; its portals lace-curtained too; rich hanging folds of lace and fringe, like the lifted drapery of a sultan's tent, supported on delicate poles of polished ivory.

Behind me was the beryl block of the fish-pond, set in silver instead of marble by the sunshine in the court. Before me, across the pink-jewelled dusk of the Sala de los Ambajadores, a blue and green picture of sky and mountains was framed by lace and precious stones.

I walked to the middle window and looked sheer down over tall tree-tops to the valley of the Darro, where the roofs of the Albaicín clustered together, softly grey and glistening as the ruffled plumage of nestling birds.

Far away to the left lay the Vega, shimmering under a mist of heat, which gave the look of a crystal sea engulfing the plain, trees and scattered villages gleaming through the transparent flood. Straight before my eyes, on the cactus-clothed shoulder of a hill opposite the tower, glittered a splash of whitewash dotted with black holes, which were the doors and windows of gypsy caverns. And above me, to the right on a higher hillside, rose the towers and miradores of that ancient "summer palace of delights," the Generalife.

One sweeping glance gave me these details; then, adjusting the field-glass I had brought, I fixed my attention on a house near the Albaicín, which I easily identified as Carmona's palace.

Gazing down from such a height, I had a bird's-eye view of double patios thick with clustering shrubs, orange trees, and cypresses. The powerful glasses brought out clearly the delicate marble pillars supporting the Moorish archways of the upper gallery in one of these patios; but the other was shrouded for me by a group of cypresses.

For a long time I waited—hours it seemed; but no one moved along the gallery or appeared in the half-shuttered windows that looked down into the court; and at last I decided to try the gardens of the Generalife, which I had been told commanded the second patio.

Once, said legend, a prince had been secluded by his father in those gardens and those towers, lest he see the face of a woman, and learn sorrow through love; nevertheless, he had found out the great secret, and had had news of the most beautiful lady in the world. I hoped, as I walked along the avenue of cypresses, that I might be as fortunate; and in the gardens all things spoke of love. There, under the giant cypress, the handsome Abencerrage had come to keep the tryst which cost his head, and thirty-five others as noble. There, at the top of that shaded flight of stone steps, whose balustrades were jewelled with running water, Prince Ahmed had sat to play his lute. From that arcaded balcony Zorayda had looked when love was young, and Boabdil still the lover. In the mirrors of the water-patio Galiana had bent to her own image and asked, "Am I worthy to be loved?"

Out of the tangle of red and white roses, bunched in with golden oranges and scented blooms mingling together in one huge bouquet, I looked to find my love. It was true, I could see clearly now into the cypress patio; and suddenly a white figure came out from a window upon the gallery. The glass at my eye, I thought I recognized Monica's slender girlishness; but a moment later a larger form appeared. The two women stood together looking up, Lady Vale-Avon pointing towards the towers of the Alhambra or the Generalife.

Was it possible she saw me? Yet no, she could not without glasses. But if Monica had indeed been told where I would be at a certain time, could she not have contrived some means to elude her mother and come to the balcony alone?

Long after the two vanished I lingered; waited until sunset; waited until the sky was flooded with rose and gold, and towers and hills were purple in a violet mist. But Monica did not come again.

If she had not been given the message, what guarantee had I that she would receive the other far more important?

It was in a fever of uncertainty that I must spend the next four-and-twenty hours.

XXXVII

Dreams and an Awakening

That night, in my villa above “the road of the great Moor-killing,” the nightingales were the only serenos. Their song was the song of the stars; and the song of the stars was the song of the nightingales. At dawn, from my window, I was taken into the private life of my neighbour birds. I heard them wake each other; I saw them make their toilets; and from the town far below my terraced garden the sound of bells came up—church bells, bells of mules and horses beginning work, while their masters sang coplas with a lilting Moorish wail.

Once again I went down to look at Carmona's door, to find it still kept by guardia civile; and most of the day I spent in the Alhambra, seeing rooms and courts I had missed yesterday, looking down often into the patio of the palace in the Albaicín.

I dined in the hotel garden, and before nine I was at the appointed spot in the road outside the high wall of my Carmen. The moments passed as I walked up and down, my cigarette a spot of fire in the growing moonlight; still the gypsy-faced girl did not come.

Twenty minutes late, said my watch, and as I stared at it, a man stopped in front of me.

“Is the noble señor expecting someone?” he asked.

I put my watch away and looked at him. The moon, obscured though it was by clouds, showed a tall figure, with strong shoulders, and a face which seemed in the night as dark as a Moor's. The man had lifted his hat from his thick black hair, and I said to myself that he was a model for an artist who wished to paint a gypsy.

Finding that I did not answer on the instant, he went on—

"The señor must forgive me if I have made a mistake; but my sister, who had an errand to do for a gentleman, has sent me in her place."

"In that case you have made no mistake," I said. "You have a message for me from your sister?"

"And from a lady. The message is, that if the señor will come to my house in an hour, he will find what he seeks."

My blood quickened.

"What do I seek?"

"A lady who loves you, and has sent you this through my sister."

The man produced a tiny white paper packet which I took, but would not open in his presence.

"Do you mean that the lady will, meet me at your house—to-night?" I asked.

"She hopes it, for there is no other place or way. My sister will bring the lady; but it is not a house, in your way of speaking, señor. It is a cave in the hillside which I have made my home, for I am a gitano."

"You live above the Albaicín, in the gypsy quarter, then?" I said.

"No, señor, nearer here than that. You must have seen, if you have walked about the neighbourhood, that there are many other caves which honeycomb the hillsides. To find mine you must go towards the cemetery, take the first turn to the right, follow the winding road which descends, then up a rough path, and stop at the first of the three gypsy caves. I must not wait for you, as I have to see that my sister and the lady arrive safely. But you cannot miss the place; and if I am not waiting at the door, open it without knocking and walk in. Is that understood, señor?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then I will go to watch for my sister near the palace. At half-past ten, señor."

"At half-past ten." I echoed his words, and watched him out of sight as he tramped away in the direction which would take him to the Albaicín. Then I hurried back to the villa and opened the packet. It contained the shield-shaped Toledo brooch by the gift of which I had infuriated Carmona; that, and nothing besides. But—unless it

had been stolen from her—it was an assurance that she had sent the messenger, that she wished me to trust him.

Nevertheless, there was danger that I might fall into a trap in keeping a night tryst at the cave of a gypsy, especially a gypsy who had either deserted or been banished from the colony. But not to run this risk was to run a far greater one, that of losing the chance offered by Monica; and of such an alternative I could not even think.

If I told the man, Pepe, who looked after my wants at the villa where I intended to go, I might succeed in compromising Monica, in case she were so late that Pepe was alarmed. As her name must be kept out of the affair at any cost, I decided that due caution would be protection enough. Unless the news of my presence in Granada had reached Carmona in his bed, there was little fear of treachery; and when I slipped into my hip pocket the revolver bought in Madrid, I felt that I was safe.

It was a dark and lonely road, that way of the dead. Not a soul had I met when I reached a narrow path, a mere goat track, leading higher up the hillside to a row of four or five tiny lighted windows in the rock. These must, I knew, mark the cave dwellings of which the gypsy had spoken, some little offshoot from the main settlement by the Albaicín. The door which I reached first was closed. No one stood waiting, but I opened it and went in.

A faint light, cast by a small paraffin lamp set in a niche hollowed out of the whitewashed rock, made darkness visible in a tiny room with a rough earthen floor. A red calico curtain at the far end signified a second cave-room beyond. No one was visible, no one answered when I spoke, and I sat down to wait on a dilapidated rush-bottomed chair which stood with its back to the red curtain.

After that, nothing.

And then, dreams.

There was one dream about a room, a large room it seemed to be, shadowy in the corners, and with walls where Christian and Moorish warriors fought in tapestry, leaping off sometimes on their stallions, and spurring back into place again.

In the room was a great bed with dark silk curtains. A man lay in it, but suddenly sat up, and looked eagerly at something which seemed to be myself, dead or dying. But I did not care. I knew who

he was, and that we hated each other for some reason which I could not remember, but it was impossible to recall his name. That was twisted up in a thousand skeins of silk; or was it a woman's yellow hair?

The man exclaimed, “Good—very good,” more than once to someone I could not see. Then he said, when the someone else had spoken, “Only keep him till after I'm married. I don't care what you do with him after that. Fling him into a well, or let him go. Either way he can never find out or prove anything troublesome.”

This was all of that part of the dream, though there was another which came soon after, and was somehow connected with it. It was a dream about a long dark passage, which smelled like a cellar, and I was being dragged through it by two voices, a thing which did not appear at all out of the ordinary, though it was disagreeable.

After that, concrete thoughts were lost in one tremendous throbbing ache, which was in the back of my head at first, but spread slowly down the spine, until at last my whole body felt as if it had been pounded with giant hammers.

I had an idea at one time that I had fallen into the power of the Inquisition, and been tortured by the head screw and the rack, because often a man in a black capucha flitted about me; but later I realized that my suffering was caused by becoming conscious of the world's motion—a terrible, ceaseless whirling, which, being once felt, could be escaped only in death.

This was appalling. I lived through many years of the horror, but I fell off the world at last on to another planet, where there came a period of peace.

When I waked up I was looking at my hands.

To my great surprise they were no longer brown and strong as a young man's hands ought to be, but of a sickly white, and so thin that I found myself laughing at them in a slow, soft way, as one laughs in one's sleep.

At first it did not seem to matter that I should have hands like that; but suddenly, with a rush of blood to the heart, I realized that it was unnatural, dreadful, that something hideous must have happened to me.

In a moment my head was clear, and I felt as if a tight band had been taken off my forehead.

Yes, something had happened, but what?

I looked round and saw a room unfamiliar, yet already hated. It was a small, but beautiful room, the walls covered with Moorish work, such as I had seen at the Alhambra. I lay on a divan-bed, in an alcove without windows; but in the room beyond, I saw one with a dainty filigree frame, supported by a marble pillar. There was also an archway, from which a curtain was pushed aside, and I could see the end of a marble bath.

How had I come to this place? Where was it, and how long had I been there? were the next questions I asked myself.

There was no more dreaming now. The room was real; and the whiteness and emaciation of my hands were real. A man must have been very ill, and for a long time, to have hands as white and thin as that.

Suddenly I sat up, crying aloud, “Monica!”

The sound of her name brought her image before me. What horrible thing had been done to me that I should have forgotten her very existence?

Strength failed, and I fell back, a dampness coming out on my forehead. Above all, what had been done to her? “Don't leave me alone,” she had begged; yet I had deserted her. I was—here.

The motoring days came back to me; happy, hopeful days in the open air. How long ago were they that I should be thus broken, that I should feel like a man grown old?

Slowly, and cold as the trail of a snake, a thought crawled into my mind.

I remembered a short story I had read once. It was by Gertrude Atherton, and at the time I had thought it the most harrowing story ever written. A woman had gone to sleep, young, beautiful, beloved. She had waked to find her hair grey, her hands old and veined. Twenty blank years of madness she had spent in a lunatic asylum, after being driven mad by a shock, waking to sanity at last only to find herself an old woman.

Had I been mad? Was I old now, with my wasted white hands?

Tingling with dread I touched my face. My chin was rough with a stubble of beard. I fancied there were hollows in my cheeks. Was my hair grey?

Somewhere there must be a mirror. I tried to struggle up and find it, that I might see my own image and know the worst; but a giddiness came over me, and I had to lie down again, or I knew that I should faint.

"I have Carmona to thank for this," I said aloud, furiously. But then I asked myself, how did I know that there ever had been a Carmona, that there ever had been a girl called Monica Vale? Perhaps I had dreamed them both, in the time of madness.

There had been many dreams. Suddenly I remembered a man's voice saying: "Only keep him till after I'm married." The voice had been Carmona's. I knew that now.

No, I had never been mad. A horrible trick had been played on me—in the gypsy's cave. I remembered that. Everything was blank since, except for the dreams. Perhaps some of them had been true. Perhaps, half-unconscious—(for somebody must have come out from behind that red curtain and struck me on the head)—I had been taken to him, that he might be sure it was the right man. Somebody had been ordered to keep me, until after—Again I sat up, with a groan. I must get out of this. I must save Monica from the man, and from her own mother. But—if it was already too late?

There was a sound in the room. From a door I could not see, someone had come in. A key had turned, and was being turned again. The dream of the Inquisition came back to my mind, for the man in the black capucha stood looking at me.

"Who are you?" I asked. Although for many years I had spoken English, and Spanish only for a few weeks, it was mechanically that I used Spanish now.

"Your good friend," came from under the capucha, while there was a glitter of eyes through the two slanting slits in the black silk.

"If you're my friend, you'll let me out of this place, wherever it is," I said.

"But I am your doctor as well, and you are too weak to go out. This is the first time you have spoken sensible words, and now they are not wise."

“I'm not too weak to hear how I came here, how long I have been, and—” He cut me short, with a wave of a yellow old hand. Under the capucha he wore an ordinary black coat, such as elderly Spaniards of the middle class wear every day.

“You must not excite yourself,” he said. “As for your coming here, I found you lying in the road one dark night, with your head cut open, and out of compassion I brought you into my house.”

“If you are a doctor, and have no reason to hide your face from me, why do you cover it up with a capucha?” I went on incredulously.

“It is the capucha of the cofradìa to which I belong,” explained the man. “I wear it at certain hours because of a vow which will not expire till Corpus Christi. If I were a wicked person, who wished you harm, why need I trouble to hide my face so that you should not know it again? I live alone in this house, and if I wished you evil, I need never let you leave these rooms. But instead, I have taken care of you, and you have repaid some experiments I have made, for now I think you are getting well. You have only to be patient.”

“Tell me how long since you played good Samaritan and picked me up by the roadside,” said I. “Then perhaps I shall try to be patient.”

“How long?” he echoed. “I can't tell you that. To a philosopher like me days and weeks are much the same.”

“Philosophers have often been in the pay of dukes,” I said.

“Those days have passed. I live my life without dukes.”

“Without the Duke of Carmona?”

“The Duke of Carmona? That is a mere name to me. Why do you speak it?”

“I think you can guess.”

“I fear that after all your brain is not clear. We must have a little more of the good medicine.”

Before I knew what he meant to do, he was out of the alcove, and out of sight in the room beyond. Again I tried my strength, and would have followed, but before I could do more than struggle up from the bed, the door had been unlocked, and locked again.

“He must keep the key in his pocket,” I thought.

I did not believe a word of the plausible explanations. The continued mental effort I had been making had cleared, rather than tired my brain; and I was out of that black sea of horror in which I had been drowning.

I had not been mad, and I could not have been in this house for many weeks, since the man in the capucha talked of Corpus Christi as still in the future.

I remembered Colonel O'Donnel's telegram, and his mention of a man in Granada whom Carmona valued above many doctors. It seemed not impossible that this person and my “good friend” were one and the same; but if—weak as I was now—I hoped to get out of his house alive, perhaps I had better change my tactics, and keep my suspicions to myself, until I should recover strength. If the man believed that he had convinced me of his innocence and kindly intentions, he would perhaps think it easier to let me live than to put me violently out of the way.

I made up my mind to cultivate a more reasonable spirit, until my body might help me defend other convictions. And one thing gave me courage to keep the resolution. The fact that my host was not willing yet to discharge me as cured, argued that there was still a strong motive for detaining me behind locked doors. The time of which Carmona had spoken in my dream had not come. He was not married yet, and I said to myself that he never would be, if it depended on Monica's consent to be his wife.

Since that hour in the cathedral of Seville nothing would make her believe me disloyal, I thought; therefore nothing could make her disloyal to me.

Knowing little of illness, I trusted that, after all, I had not been put away here for long. Maybe a few days of fever and delirium would waste the hands and bleach out the brown stain of sunburn. At the moment, though I was young, and had been strong, I would have no chance against even an old man; but if I ate, and could crawl up to take a little exercise, a day or two ought to make a vast difference.

I was still of this mind when the capucha came back. So softly did he unlock the door that I did not hear him, but he was not as stealthy about locking it again. He had brought me a glass of milk; and when

I had drunk it he asked me to get up, and let him judge of my strength.

Weak as I was, I felt that I could have risen, but I determined to fight him with his own weapons. Making a faint effort, I fell back on the pillows, and closed my eyes.

“It will take many more glasses of milk before you need again ask ‘But when do I leave you?’ ” said the voice through the capucha.

I agreed, and pleased myself with my strategy after the man had gone out, until to my alarm I was overcome with sleep.

He had put something into the milk.

XXXVIII

The Fountain

The delicate fretwork of the walls was blurred in twilight when I waked from heavy, irresistible sleep.

I felt dull, but could trace no other bad effect from the drug. Indeed, I fancied that I was stronger; and very slowly, with occasional rests, I got upon my feet and began to crawl about the room.

There was very little furniture, but what there was, was good, and of a graceful Moorish design which suited the wall decoration, and the horseshoe shape of the window. This had an elaborate lattice of wood, which let in plenty of air, as there was no glass; but outside were six stout bars of iron, and the lattice was securely fastened. I stared through the pattern of wood into a very small but charming patio, paved with brick and tiles, and having in the centre a fountain, with a shallow basin. Feathery plumes of water played over a few low palms in great blue and white pots of Triana ware, but as I looked the plumes shrank almost to nothing, then ceased to wave. The fountain was asleep for the night.

Supporting myself with a hand on the wall, I got to the room of the marble bath. There, the window was but a foot square, and was set high in the wall. On a low, carved bench, lay the clothing I had worn on the night of my visit to the gypsy's cave. I sat down, and explored the pockets. What money I had had—six or seven hundred pesetas, so far as I could remember—was gone; so was my gold watch, and the revolver I had so gaily carried as a sure means of self-protection.

"Gypsy perquisites," I said to myself, but the sight of the clothes brought back the past so vividly that I could see myself bidding good-bye to Dick at the railway station. Loyal, resourceful old Dick! Why had he not found his friend in all this time, while my hands were growing white and thin?

Surely there must have been some hue or cry, when I did not appear either at the villa or the hotel? A man cannot vanish off the face of the earth, I told myself, and leave no trace. I longed for the man with the capucha to come back, so that I could ask him more questions, even though I could put no faith in his answers; but he did not appear again that night. I slept after a time, a sleep of exhaustion; and when I waked in broad daylight, I found a glass of milk on a small Moorish stand by the bed.

I could not bear to drink it, lest the same drug should make me sleep as before. But how regain strength without food? And evidently I was to have this or none.

For a time I waited, hoping that my "good friend" would come, and that, if I told him I disliked milk, he would give me something else, not so easy to mix with a drug. At last, however, I grew faint. Perhaps, I thought, the milk was innocent this time. I drank, and the same heaviness overcame me. So, through most of the day I slept, and raged against myself when I awoke.

Again, a full glass stood by the bedside, but I would not drink. Many hours of dozing had left me wakeful; and my eyes were wide open when, an hour or two after dawn, the door in the outer room was softly unlocked.

He had not forgotten his capucha, though he must have expected to find me asleep. In his hand was a glass of milk, but when he had seen that I lay awake, he saw also that the other glass had not been touched.

I was neither hungry no thirsty, I said in excuse. And I could not rest because I was not comfortable. It had got upon my nerves, I explained, to feel my hair long on my neck and my face unshaven. Would my host get in a barber?

The man reflected for a moment, and then said that he would do his best as a barber. At present, and until his vow had been accomplished, he did not go out, except after nightfall, and therefore could not ask anyone to come to the house.

The instant he had turned his back, I slipped off the bed, so that I might be ready to stagger as well as I could from my alcove, and pounce upon him when he had the door open; for I believed that I was strong enough now to have some chance. But his hearing must

have been keen, for he turned, and told me not to exert myself. What—I was only getting up so as to be ready when he came back with shears and razor? I need not trouble. He would do all while I was in bed; and he would wait until he had seen me return there.

He was master of the situation, and knew it. I was obliged to give him his way; and afterwards he was so quick in getting to the door that, in my weak state, I could not have reached him in time.

When he came back, however, I was ready. Waiting just inside the door, as it was cautiously opened I threw myself upon him. But I had overestimated my strength, and underestimated his. Quick and lithe as a leopard, the old man wound himself round me, and for a moment we struggled together for the mastery, I thinking of the razor he had promised to bring, and hoping to get it. If I could do that, I should be able to keep him at bay, without any violence, save threats.

Once, I had almost got him down, or he let me fancy it; but with a sudden twist he caused me to lose my balance, which was none too steady. I slipped on the tiled floor, and had half saved myself when a quick push sent me staggering back. Instantly the capucha was on the other side of the door, a bolt slid into place, and the key turned in the lock.

Rage gave me a brief spurt of strength. I caught up the carved wooden bench in the bathroom, and dashed it furiously again and again against a panel of the door. But the strong wood did not even crack under my blows.

As hour after hour passed, and I was left alone, from time to time I renewed my efforts, with no result except that eventually I broke the bench. Then I tore at the lattice of the window, thrusting my fingers through, and trying vainly to pull the woodwork to pieces. Though the iron bars on the outside would prevent my escaping into the patio, I thought, if the lattice were broken, shouts might be heard more easily.

At last, when I had been obliged to give up hope, I pressed my face against the close pattern of the woodwork and yelled lustily, till my voice failed. But my own shouts were the only sounds I heard, save distant church bells, and the singing of subterranean waters, silent only at night when the fountain went to sleep. It would be all but

impossible, I had to admit, for anyone outside to judge the direction of a cry, coming through a screened window surrounded on all sides by high house walls.

Darkness fell; and I grew so hungry that I would gladly have drunk the milk left since morning. I tasted it, and found it spoiled by the heat, for the day had been warm. In disgust I threw it away, but when all that night had gone and part of the next day, I regretted my fastidiousness.

Frequent draughts of water from the room of the marble bath gave me an occasional fillip, but a man recovering from congestion of the brain or some such malady, following the breaking of his head, cannot live long on water; and it was clear that my host, disgusted with my "ingratitude," intended to punish me cruelly or to put an end to me by starvation.

When the second night closed in, I made up my mind that he had decided upon my death. Perhaps, if I had been docile, when the time fixed by his employer had expired, he might have chosen to set me free, trusting that I believed his story. But seeing that I did not believe it, that I would spare no effort, no trick, which might enable me to escape while my presence in the outside world was still highly undesirable, the man had probably crushed all humane feeling for his prisoner. Since no one had sought me, living, in his house, it was unlikely that I should be sought for there when dead.

I was at the window, as I told myself these things, looking out into the patio, where the palms, and the shell which was the upper basin of the fountain, were faintly definable in starlight. Robbed of my watch, the only way I had of calculating time after nightfall was by the silence which came about an hour after sunset. Then the gurgling voice of hidden water (which sang underground in this secluded patio as everywhere in the Albaicín, and on the Alhambra hill) abruptly ceased, after a distant ringing which I took to be that of the bell in the Torre de la Vela, regulating the irrigation of all the country round. At this same moment the diamond plumes of the fountain invariably fell, and disappeared, not to wave again until the morning sun was up.

I was always sorry when the fountain died, for it was the sole companion of my captivity, my one dim pleasure watching its

nymph-like play. And to-night the dead silence of the patio seemed the lull before my own death.

It must have been, I thought, somewhere about ten o'clock when I heard a new sound in the court, slight, elusive, but distinct. Chink—chink—like metal on stone, as if a troll were mining underground. The old man was taking time by the forelock, I said grimly to myself, getting ready a place in some cellar to lay me away when I should be finished. I should last some days yet; but it took time to do these things well. At the hotel they had told me how a year or two ago, in destroying an old house in the Albaicín to build a new one on the sight, workmen had come across the skeletons of two French grenadiers neatly sealed up in a wall of stone, where they had kept guard since the time of the Peninsular War. Probably a night or two had been needed for the making of their niche.

Chink—chink! Yes, the old wretch must be at work in a cellar. The noise certainly came from underground; and it was not as agreeable to my ears as the tinkle of the vanished fountain. I wished the hour would come for the water to leap up and drown that other stealthy sound.

Suddenly, as I turned a wistful gaze on the alabaster shell dimly glimmering among the low palms, to my astonishment it seemed to totter. I thought that it must be a mere illusion of weary eyes, or that the effect was created by a cloud obscuring the starlight. But again the white shell moved against the dark green background, this time swaying from side to side.

Could there be an earthquake, so slight that I did not feel the shock? Even as I asked myself the question, the shell of the fountain was loosened from its support, and fell into the main basin, now almost empty. The water-lilies and their green pads which floated sparsely there muffled the sound of the crash, but there was a noise of breaking. The slabs of coloured mosaic which paved the lower basin upheaved, as if the earth beneath were bursting, and scattered from side to side, falling over the crushed lines. Then through a ragged black aperture rose the head and shoulders of a man.

The metallic sound had stopped; but from somewhere in the house there came the slamming of a door.

The head and shoulders, motionless now, were sharply defined against the scattered heap of white fragments, like the bust of a man modelled in black marble. Someone whistled softly, and the tune was, “The Girl I Left Behind Me.”

“Dick!” I called through the close wooden lattice.

“Hurrah!” he answered; and the black marble bust became a full length statue of a man.

How he had found me, how he had come, I did not know; but there he was, and the gate of life had not closed upon me after all. Dick was out of the jagged hole in the basin, and half across the patio, when a door, which I had always seen shut, burst open to let out a stream of light, and the figure of the old man I knew so well, leaped on him.

I was weak, and for a moment I turned sick, the patio with its broken fountain, and the forms of the men in a halo of yellow light, whirling before my eyes as if there were indeed an earthquake. Then the mist cleared, and like a rat in a cage I watched the fight which meant life or death for more than one of us.

There was no capucha now to cover the grey-streaked head and venerable beard. Once I caught a glimpse of a profile sharp as a hawk's. The old man had come out of the house with a Toledo sword-stick, such as the King and his friend had used with the brigands, and as he saw the enemy he had to deal with, he had thrown away the bamboo stick. The long, thin blade glittered in the same light that showed me Dick, armed with an iron crowbar, formidable and threatening.

If it had been a scene in a play, and I in the audience, I should have applauded, for there was something in me which cried out that it was a fine picture. But Dick's life and mine were in the balance.

XXXIX

Day After To-morrow

The pair stood eyeing each other like two fencers, Dick with the crowbar raised, and pointing at his heart the blade which would pierce it when the Spaniard dared advance an inch.

I longed to shout “Fling the crowbar at his head!” But if Dick's eye released the eye of his opponent he was a dead man, I must not risk distracting him for the fraction of a second.

It seemed an hour, though it could not have been a minute when, as if my thought had winged to his brain, the thick iron bar whirled through the air, and struck the old man full upon the forehead. The Toledo blade dropped from his hand, and he fell back without a cry, his head inside the open door.

“Is he dead?” I called.

Dick bent over the limp body; but, after a long moment, he was up again, waving a big, old-fashioned key.

“No,” he answered. “Heart beating. Bad penny. He'll be all right. This the key of spider's parlour?”

“I think so,” I said. “Dick, you're just in time to keep me from giving in. I'm starved.”

He stooped and picked up the crowbar.

“Old brute! I've a mind to finish him!” he exclaimed.

“You don't mean that,” I said. “But look for something to tie him up with. He may come to himself before we're off.”

“I guess I'll just tote him along with me,” said Dick. “Safe bind, safe find.”

Gathering up the long body as if it had been the form of a sleeping child, Dick disappeared into the house. I knew that he was looking for the door of my cage, and presently—for the first time with

pleasure—I heard the slipping back of the bolt and turning of the key.

Already I was at the door, opening it for Dick to come in with his heavy burden.

“Here's the bed,” I said, and Dick laid his burden down, not too gently. Then I think the next thing we did was to shake hands.

“Blessed old man!” exclaimed Dick, a little unsteadily. “What a beastly business.”

“It's a mystery,” I said. “And how you got to me—”

“Conduit,” said Dick, “But I'll tell you all about that, and everything. Got no electric light here?”

“Nothing but starlight. For Heaven's sake, tell me about Monica!”

“She's all right,” said Dick. “Not a Duchess yet, if that's what worries you. Look here, if this place has been good enough to box you up in all this time, it's good enough to keep *him* in—” (He nodded towards the alcove.) “He lives alone here, without servants; I've found out all that, with a lot more; and his master—guess you know who—is in Madrid; so when this chap comes to himself he can try how he likes your quarters. They seem rather nice ones, judging from what I can see; but Carmona always does himself well.”

“Is this Carmona's house?” I asked.

“You bet it is. Little private sort of place he keeps ready when he wants to amuse himself in some way which his mother and Monica and other people mightn't approve of in Dukes. This old Johnny's a combination of caretaker and physician in ordinary to his grace. But let's get out of this. I can't give you a marble bath or Moorish decorations at my hotel, but I shouldn't wonder if you'd prefer the accommodation; and after that conduit business I need a ‘wash and brush up’ as much as you do. Why, old man, what's the matter? Not going to crack up, are you?”

“I'm all right,” I said; “but I haven't had anything to eat since the day after I saw you off, except milk, and none of that for the last two days.”

“Great Scott! you're joking. We parted five weeks ago!”

The words gave me a shock in spite of the stubble on my chin and the whiteness of my hands. Dick had his wet arm round my

shoulders, and we were at the door, which he was about to lock, and I startled him by caving in a little at the knees.

“See here,” he said, hanging on to my arm as if he were afraid I should vanish in thin air, “we won't wait to dine at my hotel. We'll nose round a bit in this old Johnny's larder. You must be bucked up before you go out into the street. Oh, it's safe enough. The old brute's a hermit—for his own reasons or Carmona's. Nobody comes near the house, and we can take our own time. While you're eating you shall hear everything I've got to tell.”

He locked and bolted the door, and helped me down the stairs, up which I must have been carried unconscious; perhaps by the gypsy, assisted by the master of the house.

Below stairs the place was dark save for the light which had streamed out into the patio with the opening door. It came from a good-sized room evidently intended for a kitchen, but also used by the solitary tenant as a dining-room. It had a window opening on the court; this, however, was not only covered with heavy shutters, but protected by a curtain as well, and ventilation came through an adjoining room from a window that looked on another small court.

Evidently my gaoler had been interrupted in the midst of his supper, and hearing a noise in the patio had stopped only long enough to snatch up a sword-stick. On the table was a simple meal of cold meat, salad, goats'-milk cheese, and fresh fruit; but to my starved eyes it seemed a feast. There was also a bottle half-full of red Spanish wine; and I did not wait for Dick's suggestion to sit down. I must get back my strength if I were to be of any use to Monica or myself, and I hardly listened to Dick's warning that a starved man must not satisfy his first hunger.

“Eat slowly, and not too much,” he said, with anxious eyes on my face, which must have been frightful, though he was too tactful to make comments. As I obeyed, he told me his story, briefly and disjointedly, as the points came back to him.

“Didn't hear from you,” he said, “and began wondering what was up. Wired twice; no answer; was a bit taken up with my own affairs just then, I'm afraid. Yes, I mean Pilar. After five days, wired the landlord. He answered you'd left with a friend. I thought that queer, and set out for Granada by next train, Ropes with me. At the

Washington Irving I found both my telegrams to you and a letter. Landlord said he got a note from you, dated Motril, telling him you'd met a friend and gone off unexpectedly in his automobile. You enclosed more than enough money to pay bill and tips, and asked him to have your luggage packed and kept till your return, which might be in a few days or not for some time. Naturally, he hadn't worried; and as he'd destroyed the letter, I couldn't tell if it was your handwriting.

"Well, I thought you *might* have rushed off suddenly on account of some lark of Carmona's; but I soon found out he was still in Granada, slowly getting better; and the guests hadn't gone. By the way, I called, but nobody in the house was seeing visitors. Ropes discovered that your car was in a stable down in the town, where you'd left it, without saying for how long. He and I were getting scared, and I went to the police, but didn't dare give your real name without your permission, especially as the authorities had a kind of prejudice against it. Fired off my best Spanish, though, and insinuated that Carmona wasn't very fond of you; but when I began hinting that it might be convenient for his plans that you should disappear, they wouldn't take me seriously, were polite, and all that, promised to look you up, as if you were a stray kitten, but intimated that most people who vanished had private reasons for doing so.

"After that, I didn't expect them to find out anything, and they did their best not to disappoint me. I saw that if anybody was going to do the Sherlock Holmes' act, it must be Ropes and me. We sat tight at the Washington Irving, and looked around; but at the end of a fortnight no one was any wiser than at the beginning. Then what should happen but the dear old Colonel and Pilar popped down to see if they could help. Oh, and I forgot to tell you that meanwhile the people at Carmona's palace had cleared out. They'd gone back to Seville again by train; and what should happen but the Colonel and Pilar met Carmona face to face in the station."

"Not Monica?" I broke in.

"No. I suppose the others had got into a carriage; he was lingering behind to give a valet directions about luggage. And then there was a scene. Pilar told me all about it. Carmona bowed; and before the Cherub could pull the little girl away, as he tried, seeing danger in her eye, she gave the Duke a piece of her mind. Said he was a villain,

or some kind words of that sort. He retorted by saying to her father that he could make a lot of trouble for Cristóbal if they didn't take care. Pilar said they could accuse him of worse things than he could them; and somehow or other, in an evil moment, the subject of Corcito, a grey bull Carmona was once nasty about, came up. Then, before she knew what she was doing, Pilar flashed out the name of Vivillo, the beast she wanted to buy, you know. And from that minute the fat was in the fire as far as she was concerned. But about that later. What with you and the bull, she was in a dreadful state of mind when she got here, poor child. However, she put on her thinking cap, and said she, 'Try the gypsies. See if they don't know something.'

"That was enough for me. I took a sudden fancy to Captain Pepe, the chief of the gypsies, and went every night to see a dance in his cave. But I soon saw he was straight; and they weren't a bad lot of people in the colony. The nasty ones he kicked out, and they had to hustle for themselves. Captain Pepe told me about one fellow, Juan Castello, who'd got himself disliked, though he was a nailer with the guitar; and when he said the chap had a sister who had a fine position in the house of a titled person, because she was the best seamstress in the country, I pricked up my ears. You can bet, after I'd heard the titled person was Carmona, I turned my attention to Mr. Castello, dropped in on him one day, named a big price, and asked him to give me lessons on the guitar. He didn't mind if he did, and we got quite friendly. I spent several evenings in his cave, where one night I heard a dog howling, as if it was mighty sick, behind a red curtain."

"That red curtain!" I exclaimed. "I shouldn't be where I am now, or have a scar on the back of my head, if I'd looked behind it."

"By Jove! Well, I got some idea of that sort. Castello said the dog belonged to a gentleman in Granada, who lived all alone in the Albaicín, and kept this beast as a watch-dog; but he was afraid it was going mad, and told Castello to shoot it. However, it was a valuable animal, and Castello was undertaking to cure it for his own benefit. Already it was better, and the owner talked of buying it back if it recovered. The old gentleman was coming up to see the dog that very evening, perhaps, Castello said; and being evidently proud of a respectable acquaintance, he went on talking about him, I

encouraging him all I could, because any friend of his might prove interesting to me.

"The minute I heard the chap was a kind of herb doctor, and sometimes treated grand people, I nearly jumped off my seat; for you know why Carmona was supposed to come to Granada?"

I nodded.

"Well, Castello was in with this doctor in a way, for he was engaged by him to fetch herbs and flowers from the mountains—like the Manzanilla, for instance, which only begins to grow at an elevation of twelve thousand feet. Castello believed that the old fellow could make poisons too, as well as antidotes; and said I to myself, 'Maybe that little dagger in the cathedral was specially prepared, eh?' Which would account for Carmona hurrying off to Granada after it had found the wrong billet.

"Anyhow, I said I'd like to see the dog, so I was taken behind the red curtain into Mr. Castello's bedroom, and on a shelf lay a revolver which might have been twin to the one you bought in Madrid."

"It was still more nearly related," said I.

"Well, I thought so, but wasn't sure enough to call on the police. I went away when I'd said nice things about the sick dog; but I didn't go far. I hung around till Castello's visitor had been and gone, and then followed him to the door of this house. Such a mild, intelligent looking, well-dressed old gentleman, the herb doctor was; but I guess I needn't describe him to you!

"Next day I bought some things at a baker's not far from here, and buttered up the shopkeeper, saying his store was too good for the neighbourhood. Of course he told me he had rich customers, and it was jolly lucky I'd been fagging up Spanish for Pilar's sake, or I should have missed a lot, right there. I soon got him on the subject of the herb doctor, his best client, who, though supposed to be well-off, and living in a good house, did all his shopping himself and kept no servants. Nobody knew much about him, except what he said of himself; that he could set bones, and was able to make as much money as he liked, selling his herb medicines to great personages. Who were the great personages? The baker couldn't tell; but the doctor had lived in his present house for years, after taking it when in a bad state of repair, and having it done up inside by workmen he

brought from Madrid. From that day on, no one the baker knew had ever been invited in, though he'd heard stories of veiled ladies, and sounds of music at night.

"At that, the thought jumped into my mind that maybe the house was Carmona's, a little secret plaything of his. And I remembered reading about a famous old palace in the Albaicín with an underground way to the Alhambra. Why shouldn't there be such a way from Carmona's palace to the doctor's house? And what a convenient place it would be to keep a troublesome person."

"Or to kill one," I amended.

"I thought of that; but I hoped. People don't commit murder when their blood is cool if they can get what they want cheaper. I went again to the police, said I believed that my friend was detained against his will in the house of Doctor Molina. But when they wanted my reasons I couldn't give any to convince them. They thought I was mad, and refused to search. I was afraid they'd warn the old chap to look out for a crazy American, so I hurried up and took matters into my own hands.

"I wasn't sure enough of anything to jump on the man outside his own door and do the burglar act openly, lest the police should jump on *me*, and I should be laid by before I'd found you. But about that time I began to have water on the brain; or rather, I got possessed with the idea of sneaking into houses by means of conduits; and no wonder, when the whole Albaicín is honeycombed with watercourses, gluddering and gurgling from morning till night.

"In the next street to this, there's a Moorish house of much the same sort, being torn down. They were selling old tiles to curiosity dealers one day, so I strolled into the patio. The pavement was up, and I saw how the conduit ran underneath and supplied the fountain. That was instructive. Opposite this place of Molina's is a mill. I found out how the miller got his water, and that after it turned his wheel, it poured in this direction, being turned off every night about nine. At the miller's the conduit is open, only guarded by a rail; and I developed a taste for making sketches and taking photographs—tourist in search of the picturesque; miller got used to seeing me about, while I made myself familiar with the landscape. Then I bought a crowbar and a little electric lamp. The bar I hid under my coat; and when I was ready to shed the garment, Ropes

put it on. I guess it was a looser fit for him than that conduit was for me, and there were twelve feet of conduit; good long strait-jacket, but I've been in it a lot of times now, and feel quite at home. You see, the job couldn't be done in one go, for I had to make the hole under the fountain bigger, and I've been tinkering away for nearly a week, o' nights when the water was stopped. And if I'd come up at last, like a demon in a pantomime, to find I'd had my trouble for my pains, I can't say what I should have turned my wits to next."

"Does Pilar know?" I asked.

"She and the Colonel went off in a hurry to Madrid just before I took the job on. They thought they could influence the police at headquarters, which was their principal reason for going; though they had one or two others besides. But see here, you've got the story pat now, and you're looking a thousand per cent. more healthy than when you sat down at this table ten minutes ago. Poor old Ropes, who always hangs about keeping guard, will be mighty glad to see you; but before we open the door and walk out as if we owned the house, let's have a look round. There may be something which will give me a chance to say 'I told you so!' to the police."

Refreshed with wine, and such scanty rations as Dick had allowed, I walked steadily enough into the adjoining room, while Dick carried a lamp. There were no such gorgeous decorations here, as in the suite I had reluctantly occupied. A modern bed stood in one corner. There were shelves on the wall, fitted with glass doors which protected jars and bottles. On a large table lay an outfit for chemical experiments, and on another some yellow flowers half buried in green leaves. In the window was a modern desk, and Dick at once began to rummage among the few papers in the pigeon-holes. There was nothing, however, which seemed to bear upon our affairs, with the exception of a telegraph form, which I seized upon. It was dated June first, and had been sent from a Madrid office. There was no signature, but there was a hint of something secret in the three words it contained. "Day after to-morrow."

Dick and I stared at the paper, as if we expected the meaning of the message to spring up to our eyes.

"My name's not Richard D. Waring if Carmona's signature oughtn't to be tacked on to that," he said. "Now, we've something to go upon, for a beginning. This telegram will be traced to the sender

before I'm many hours older; we can trust our dear old Cherub for that."

"Day after to-morrow," I repeated. "What's going to happen day after to-morrow, that Carmona should have wired to this man?"

"I should say it was his way of letting Molina know that the cage door could open."

"But why day after to-morrow? He—" I broke off suddenly, and it seemed that my heart would stop beating. "Dick," I began again, in a queer voice that did not sound like my own, "is Monica—" I could not finish the sentence. But Dick understood.

"Forgive me," he said. "I saw you weren't strong enough to bear it at first. I wanted you to eat, and then—I'd have kept it back a bit longer if I could, just till I got you to the hotel. She's going to marry him—on the third of June, Heaven knows why, though Pilar vows the girl can't be to blame, and that they've made her believe somehow she's sacrificing herself for your sake."

"What day is this?" I asked.

"The first. The Royal Wedding was yesterday, and a terrible bomb explosion, in which the King and Queen had a narrow escape, and—but come, Ramón, I want to get you to the hotel."

"I'm not going to the hotel," I said. "I'm going to Madrid, to stop Carmona's marriage."

XL

Through the Night

Dick looked at me with indulgent sympathy, as if I were a child.

"It's after eleven o'clock at night," he said. "The train for Madrid went two hours ago, and—"

"Did you say Ropes was waiting for you outside?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And my car's still in the garage where I put it?"

"Yes; but you're not in a fit state for a journey. If you could see yourself—"

"Oh, I know I'm a nightmare apparition," I cut in; "but when I'm shaved and—"

"The trip would kill you."

"It would kill me not to take it."

We looked at each other for a moment, then Dick said—

"All right. Come on. I know what you feel. But what about that old reprobate upstairs?"

"I'll wait for you here while you take up some food and leave it in the room. We can't waste time in Granada on his account. I'll tell my story, and you can tell yours to the police in Madrid, after I—after I've done what I'm going there to do."

"How long a drive is it?" Dick asked resignedly.

"It's about two hundred and seventy miles. If we can start by one or two, bar accidents we ought to be in Madrid by noon."

"The royal bull-fight's to-morrow," answered Dick. "Although the wedding's next day, and the invitations have been out a fortnight, Carmona and Lady Monica are bound to be there, as it's a royal invitation show; that means a command."

“Very well,” said I. “Since it may be as difficult to reach her in Madrid as in Seville and Granada, I shall wait outside the entrance to the bull-ring, and as she's about to go in, she shall see me and hear the whole truth. Don't look as if you thought it would do no good, Dick; if she's promised to marry Carmona in spite of all, it's because he has made her think he can ruin me if she refuses. Pilar's instinct is right, I know; and now for the first time I understand why Carmona didn't denounce me to the police as Casa Triana, when Monica refused to keep her engagement with him, as I'm sure she did. No doubt he told her lies—that I could be imprisoned—for years, perhaps. And his wounded hand—what an opportunity for him! Ah! he wouldn't waste it. He'd make her believe I stabbed him in the cathedral that night. How plausible! And as he's been very ill, can't you imagine what her fears for me must have been? Dick, I regard her coming marriage as a proof of love, not of indifference.”

“I'm ready to agree with you,” said Dick. “But you're risking your life to prove it.”

“Nonsense,” I answered. “The thought that I'm free, that I'm going to her, and that at last I have Carmona in my hand, will give me strength enough to get through.”

Dick raised his eyebrows, but did not answer. He was collecting bread and meat on a plate, to leave for the man upstairs.

Five minutes later we were out of the house and in the street. In front of the miller's premises Ropes was walking up and down. He did not say much when he saw that Dick had a companion; but as he wrung the hand I held out to him, I heard him breathing hard, and he swore under his breath when he saw my face by the light of a street lamp.

It was the look on his which made me realize, as Dick's persuasions had not, that I must delay long enough to be made again into some semblance of a sane man. An hour more before getting on the road would not endanger success, though it would try my patience. A quarter of a mile's walk to the garage was a sharper test of my strength than I would confess; but when Ropes had roused the watchman, filled the good old Gloria with petrol, and started her up the hill, the rush of pure night air gave me life.

At the hotel, we walked in without waking the dozing concièrge. Dick made me free of his things; and when, between us, we had finished my toilet, he admitted that I was not as appalling an object as he had thought. He changed his wet clothes, left a note for the landlord, and it was not yet two o'clock when we started, Ropes driving, Dick with me in the tonneau.

"To Madrid, top speed, quickest way," was the word; and I hoped for a non-stop run, or as near it as possible.

The quickest way was by Jaen, a road which none of us knew, and the starlit sky was obscured by dark clouds which heralded a summer thunder-storm. As Ropes steered across the Vega towards that gap in the mountains which is the door of the north, there came a waterspout of rain on the roof. Thunder drowned the purr of the motor, and a flash of lightning every other moment dimmed the flying circle of our acetylenes. There had been rain more than once of late, and this deluge made the road, already bad, soft and greasy as an outworn sponge. The Gloria waltzed and slipped in a mass of brown porridge, but Ropes knew that we were to drive against time, and, throwing caution to the wind, tore through the treacherous mud as if to win the cup in a great race.

We flung Granada behind us, dashing in among the foothills of the mountains, mounting a slippery defile, with the rain like whips lashing our faces. Orchards flashed by; there was a rock tunnel, where the lights shone fiercely on rough-hewn stone, and the thrum of the motor became a roar.

Out again, and still up, the beams from our lamps shooting across vineyards, plantations of figs and pomegranates, and striking silver from the curves of the Guadalbullon River. A glimpse of an old castle commanding a dark gorge, and we were at Jaen; then, presently, the road became familiar, for we had travelled it before. At this very corner we had stopped to ask the way of men who carried strange implements like fire-extinguishers, for this was Bailen; but now, instead of receiving our first glimpse of Andalucía, we were leaving it behind.

Eighty miles out of two hundred and seventy we had come, though the pace had not been good. Still the rain was ceasing, and we could make up for lost time, as country traffic had not begun yet.

La Carolina, Santa Elena; the road was mounting for the well-remembered defile of Despeñaperros. Hoot! went the siren, screaming along the face of tremendous cliffs, and a louder shriek rang as if an echo. A line of fire down in the gorge meant the train from Madrid to Seville. It glittered like a string of stars drawn across a spider's-web viaduct, then vanished into a tunnel, while we swept on towards the plains of La Mancha, Ropes crouched like a goblin over his wheel.

Rain again, blurring villages, and sweeping through the stone streets of a town: fields once more, and at last Manzanares. There Dick insisted that we should stop for food, lest strength fail me when I should need it most; but I could not bear to go back to the fonda I knew, to see the pretty girls there look at my pale face with shocked eyes, perhaps to have them question me about the “white and gold angel.”

It was eight o'clock when we got away from the café, where we had spent some twenty minutes; and the road was no longer clear. We were obliged to moderate our speed, and lost more time than we could afford getting on to Aranjuez.

“Do your best now, Ropes,” I was saying, when the Gloria—for once perverse—burst a tyre with a loud explosion. Ropes threw me a rueful look.

“I'd hoped to get through without trouble, sir,” he said, “but the car's lain up for more than five weeks, and there was no time last night to look her over.”

“You've done splendidly,” I assured him. “I'll get out with Mr. Waring and stretch my legs.”

I was glad to walk, and still more glad to feel that instead of being exhausted as Dick had prophesied, strength seemed coming back. As we strolled up and down, so sure was I of Dick's sympathy that I began to talk about my hopes and fears. He did not disappoint me, but once or twice he answered absent-mindedly, with a far-off look in his eyes, and suddenly, with a pang of remorse, I remembered that I had not once referred to the progress of his love affairs. My own had preoccupied me to the exclusion of everything outside, and I had spoken of Pilar's only in connection with Monica.

Anathematizing myself aloud as an ungrateful and ungracious brute, I asked if Pilar had made up her mind.

"You needn't blame yourself," he said. "All this time she's kept me on tenter-hooks, because, though she admitted liking me, she couldn't reconcile her heart with her conscience. I got the dear old Cherub's blessing, and flaunted it in her face; but that wasn't enough. I also argued that it was her duty to marry me and try to make me as good as herself, but she seemed to think it might work out the other way. Then you disappeared, and the last word she said was that if I found you, she'd take it as a sign that San Cristóbal wanted the match; seems he's a matchmaking saint, when he's in Spain, as well as a motoring one. So, you see, she'll have to keep her promise now; and I'll owe my happiness to you."

"I haven't come back to life in vain, then," I said. "It will be a good moment for me, whatever happens, when I see my little sister Pilar again."

"She'll be at the royal bull-fight," Dick sighed.

"I thought she hated bull-fights—for Vivillo's sake."

"It's for Vivillo's sake she's going. She's moved heaven and earth to get invitations."

"And she's succeeded."

"Thereby hangs a tale. But I'm not going to bother you with it."

I insisted, urging him the more to atone for past carelessness.

"Well, then," he said with another sigh, "Vivillo's fifth bull in the royal fight to-day."

I was shocked, knowing how Pilar loved the noble brown beast, and how she had counted on possessing him. But, if I had had my wits about me, I might have guessed last night how matters stood. Dick had told me then that, in the impromptu scene between Carmona and the O'Donnels, with Seville railway station for the stage, "the name of Vivillo had unfortunately come up." Now, Dick explained that Carmona had caught at the girl's hasty words, had written his agent at the ganadería instructing him not to part with the bull at any price, no matter how far negotiations had gone with Colonel O'Donnel. A day or two later the agent was directed by telegram to send Vivillo immediately to Madrid, as the Duke had offered him as a gift for the great show of the royal bull-fight. This

news had come to Pilar at Granada in an ill-spelled, but well-meaning letter from Mateo, the ganadero.

"It was sheer spite," went on Dick, "and Pilar was broken-hearted. If she hadn't blurted out Vivillo's name in a temper, the bull might have been safe. Carmona wouldn't have interested himself, as he trusts his agent in all business matters. It's true several of the grandee owners of bull-farms have been asked to give each a picked bull for the royal fight, which is expected to be the grandest affair of the generation; but Carmona could as well have given another instead of Vivillo."

"It's like him," I said. "Poor Pilar!"

"She's simply ill. But queerly enough, she hasn't given up hope yet—or hadn't when she wrote, and enclosed an invitation-ticket she'd contrived to get for me. She begged me to come if I could, and 'see her through,' though I haven't the vaguest notion what she means. All I know is, she and the Cherub have been doing everything they could till the last minute to make an exchange of bulls. The dear old chap rushed off to Madrid, as I said, to stir up the police in your affair; and Pilar hoped she might get a chance to see Lady Monica, and ask what the dickens she meant by throwing you over. But any spare time the two had, I guess they've put in for Vivillo. They bought a fine Muira bull, at a tiptop price, and offered it to the authorities in exchange for Vivillo, who has been at pasture for the last ten days, recruiting after being boxed up for his long railroad journey. Whether Carmona had a hand in that part or not, anyhow nothing could be done."

"And Pilar is going to see her pet die!" I exclaimed.

"I can't understand the Cherub allowing that," said Dick. "I went to a bull-fight with him the day after I got back to Seville. Jove, it was a sickener, though there were some fine moments, I admit; and I can understand how Spaniards, brought up to understand every stroke, every move, think it fine sport. But it isn't sport for amateurs, and I haven't been able to swallow beef since; feel as if I'd been on visiting terms with it. Last touch of horror, each bull having a name. Great Scott! how would it feel to be as intimate as that with sheep and chickens, so you could speak of frying Lottie for breakfast, or grilling Maud with peas for lunch? Of course, the royal bull-fight will be

wonderful—something only seen when a Spanish king marries—but I hate the thought of Pilar being there."

"Her father'll be with her," I tried to console him.

"No, he won't. His seat's in a box. Hers has been given in Tendido Number 9, a space set apart for the senoritas de la aristocracia to sit together, in smart dresses and mantillas, as if they were part of the show."

"Perhaps Monica will be there," I said quickly.

"Not she. The Duke and Duchess of Carmona and the Duke's fiancée and her mother will be in a box next the royal bride and bridegroom; Pilar heard that, and wrote me. You see, they're in high favour at Court now, and Carmona's ambition will be satisfied at last. The new Duchess is to be a lady-in-waiting, and take up her duties when the King and Queen come back from their honeymoon."

"She never will take them up as Duchess of Carmona," said I.

"Car ready," announced Ropes, who had made record time in changing an inner tube, and was panting with his exertions.

But where was San Cristóbal to-day—on this day of all others, when his services were needed? We had not gone half a mile when there came a whizz, and a grinding noise which meant a broken chain. Ropes grew pale and bit his lip. In his overpowering anxiety for me he was losing nerve.

"Never mind mending it here," I said. "Tighten up the axle, and go on with one sprocket only. We can get into the town that way, and find a machine-shop."

We did find one; but we were kept a full hour in Aranjuez; nor could we make good going afterwards as we approached the capital. The road was covered with vehicles, and packed as we neared Madrid; for every soul not bidden to the great bull-fight wished to see the favoured ones who were, and to applaud the King and Queen who by their splendid courage two days before had won double popularity.

It was almost beyond endurance to be caught in the pack, and to know that there was no way out, except to move with the throng; nevertheless, it had to be endured. And time went on.

We had hoped to run into some hole or corner as near as might be to the royal entrance of the Plaza de Toros, before the crowd began

to pour in; but an hour struck as we crept into the great sunlit plaza—four o'clock; the time appointed for the pageant to begin.

XLI

The Fifth Bull; and After

Hundreds—thousands, it seemed—of automobiles and carriages were before us; and as the Gloria was stopped by the stopping of others in front, a shout rang up to the sky, from behind the high brown walls of the bull-ring. It was the welcome which the public gave their King and his bride as they appeared in the royal box.

We were too late to intercept Carmona; for as the royalties had taken their places, he was certain to be already in his, with his fiancée by his side.

Covered with dust, burnt by the sun which had shone hotly since Manzanares, all but spent with fatigue, I leaned back in my seat. For a moment I did not hear what Dick was saying, although I was conscious that he spoke; but suddenly the meaning of his words broke in on my tired brain.

"It'll be two hours before the King and Queen leave their box and lesser folks can move," he said. "I'm not going to have you sitting here in the heat and dust."

"I must wait till they come out," I answered dully. "It's the only way."

"No, it isn't. I told you Pilar'd sent me a ticket. The card says 'sombra,' so the seat's in the shade all right, and you're going to have it."

"But you?" I said. "Pilar would never forgive me—"

"She'd never forgive me if I didn't hand it over to you. But I'll get in somehow. It can cost me fifty dollars if it likes to slip past a policeman, but I guess the price won't stop me. I don't mind if I stand up in the callijon. I'm tall enough to see all I want, and more; and if a bull jumps over the barrera, as one did at Seville the other day, my legs are long enough to save me."

Ropes was to stay with the car and wait until we came again. Before that time my fate would be decided. Nothing could keep me from meeting Monica now; and nothing should keep her from me, if she loved me. If not—if after all I had been dreaming, why, she would be the Duchess of Carmona to-morrow.

Under horses' noses, between backs and bonnets of motors, we edged our way through the dense crowd of vehicles and people massed together on the baking plain outside the bull-ring. The circle which had been cleared for royalty had filled again now, like a sandbank which has caved in upon itself; but the spectacle on the other side of those steep brown walls had begun, and the main entrance was comparatively clear.

Armed with the ticket engraved with the magic words “Corrida Real” over a black and white sketch of a mounted picador, I was allowed to enter. But when I had passed along a corridor and through a door which opened into a crowded tendido, I heard Dick's voice at my ear. “Only twenty-five dollars after all,” said he, “and I can sit on the steps. Grand! We're next to Tendido Number 9. I see Pilar; look—close to the end, front row.”

After the silent rooms of the old Moorish house and the little patio with its tinkling fountain, the brilliant light and colour, the confused sounds and movement, the vast size of the bull-ring struck me fiercely between the eyes, bewildering sight and sense.

Seats were valuable in the tendidos for this great day, when almost every place meant a royal favour; but we were late, and instead of moving on to search for my twelve inches of plank or stone, I was thankful to squeeze in close to the entrance. I did not see Colonel O'Donnel, and though I was close to the famous Tendido Number 9 (which must have held every eye till the royalties came), I forgot to look for Pilar in that white-and-rose garden of Spanish loveliness.

The first act of the great royal bull-fight had begun. Twenty glittering, spangled espadas marched with elastic steps into the ring, followed by the yellow-trousered picadors on their sorry horses. The three gala coaches carrying the distinguished amateur picadors and their ducal patrons who graced this marriage feast, still circled picturesquely in the arena, making a pageant of the Middle Ages. The sun blazed on nodding ostrich plumes, gold embroidered hammercloths, dazzling liveries, powdered heads, and splendid

horses in quaint harness, rich with gold and jewels. The three Dukes, owners of the coaches, had introduced the cavaliers they patronized to the King-President; the bride-Queen in her white mantilla and flowers of Spanish colours stood bowing in the glass frame of the royal box. Gaily decorated palcos, tendidos, grados, tier upon tier, half in sun, half in shadow, rose above the huge ring like so many terraced flower-beds, dazzling with the gold lace of uniforms and the bright tints of women's dresses softened by white mantillas. Over all was a fluttering of fans, like thousands of hovering butterflies; and a hum floated up loud as the humming of a million bees, to the blue dome of sky, where English and Spanish flags waved together.

Mechanically my eyes took in the splendid scene, as they searched for Monica; and finding her, for a time saw nothing else.

She was in a box near the royalties, and sat between her mother and the Duchess, with Carmona and some man whom I did not know, behind them. She was in a white dress and white mantilla, with pink and white malmaisons in her hair; and her face was pathetically pale in its frame of falling lace. In her hand was a fan with which to shut out such horrors of the fight as none but Spanish women born and bred dare trust themselves to see. My place was distant and far below; yet my eyes were keen, and it seemed to me that she looked thin and frail, though very beautiful. If for an instant, since Dick broke the news to me, I had doubted the loyalty of her heart, the sight of her sad young face would have driven doubt away. I was more than ever certain that in promising to marry Carmona she thought to save me from punishment threatened by him.

Neither he nor she guessed that I was near. But where did she believe me to be? Perhaps Carmona had said that for her sake he had let me fly danger after stabbing him in the cathedral, by hurrying back to England.

The Duke was leaning forward to speak to her. She did not look up at him, but let her eyes listlessly travel over the vast audience. I thought they lingered on Tendido Number 9, draped with flowered shawls of Andalucía, and crowded with pretty women. Suddenly she blushed, and turned away. I looked where she had looked, and knew what had brought the blood to her cheeks. Pilar, in rose colour, with a white mantilla and the orthodox malmaisons, of pink and crimson, was gazing up at the Carmona box, an imploring expression on her

face. Pilar, too, was pale and thin. I realized more and more that nearly six weeks had been struck out of my life.

Each of the three coaches had in its turn stopped under the royal box, while a ducal patron presented his cavalier to the young King and his bride; now, the ring was being cleared as the magnificent amateur picadors mounted their horses, which had been led round by squires in the quaint dress of 1630. One of four dignified alguaziles in black velvet and lace doffed his plumed hat to the King as President of the fight, asking the key of the bull's cell. Down it flashed, while the music stopped as if awed into silence, and the alguazil spurred his stallion across the arena to fling into the montera of el Buñolero, janitor of the bull cells, the key he had received.

"Vivillo is fifth bull," I said to myself, repeating Dick's words; and there, too, was his name on the programme of the fight. Pilar's favourite had still a little time to draw the breath of life, stamping in the gloom of his narrow toril. Not yet had that untamed neck of his been stung by the rosetted dart flaunting his owner's colours; and much was to happen in the arena before Vivillo's brave beauty would call for the clapping of twice thirteen thousand hands.

First, the three noble amateurs, with their long sharp javelins, must each in turn play picador with grace to please a queen-bride, and save his horse's sides from goring horns. Then, when three bulls had died according to ancient, chivalrous custom (if the cavalier's skill served), without slaughter of horses, the corrida would go on in ordinary Spanish fashion of to-day, with all its sensational moments and its tragedies, until—Vivillo's time came.

As for me, I must sit until the leave-taking of the royalties and royal guests should empty also the Carmona box. I wondered, as the first bull rushed into the ring, whether the King and Queen would still be in their places when the door should open for Vivillo, or whether their departure would rob Carmona of the spectacle of his mean revenge. I hoped it would, for I could not bear that he should see the suffering he had inflicted on Pilar for my sake, and revel in it. Still, when he went I must go too; and I felt vaguely that I ought to be near Pilar—my loyal sister Pilar—during the act which would be tragical for her.

As Dick said, there were brilliant moments in the bull-fight; and the amateurs acquitted themselves in a way to deserve the enthusiasm of the crowd. The beautiful young Queen threw a jewel to each torero who finished a bull after the javelins of the cavaliers had done their work; and when the last of the brave trio had bowed himself out of the ring, began that phase of the sport which Spaniards know and love. The blindfolded horses trotted in, ridden by professional picadors with indifferent, sullen faces; and then a stir of excitement ran from tier to tier of the audience, as a breeze blows over a wheat-field. The first part had been but a pretty play; now was coming the real thing, with the best bulls, and the best espadas of Spain.

The bride in her white mantilla looked down at her fan, and counted the gilded ivory sticks, when the first bull charged the first horse. She, the Queen of Spain, must not seem to flinch, though her English eyes had never seen such crimson sights as these. This was the national sport; she must learn to understand that when men yelled, and even women cried “Buena vara!” it was not with joy because a horse's side was torn, but because a picador had made the perfect thrust. She must seem to love what the people loved, if she wished them to love her; but not far off sat another young girl in white, who had no such compelling obligations.

Monica, warned beforehand perhaps, when she was forced to come, put up her fan whenever a bull rushed towards a horse, and would no doubt have kept it there had not her mother spoken to her more than once, peremptorily. As for Pilar, though she did not lift her fan, she seemed to see nothing, for she sat with her head bowed, only starting and looking up when the horn sounded for a new bull.

At last there was no more question as to whether the King and Queen would stay to see Vivillo play his part. The fourth bull had been dragged away dead by the team of tasselled mules, and the piercing blast, which had grown to sound tragic in my ears, summoned Vivillo, all unknowing, to his fate. And the royalties kept their seats, though the afternoon waned, and shadow—like the creeping shadow of death—darkened two-thirds of the arena.

So keen was my sympathy with Pilar that I felt my throat contract and my mouth go dry. So must it be with her at this moment which

called her brave favourite to his death; so, like mine, only faster and more thickly, must her heart be beating.

Could she, after all, bear the ordeal? Would she not turn and hurry out before the first picador drew the blood she had tried so hard to save? But no; she sat still, her eyes large, her face blanched, and one hand twisted in the folds of her lace mantilla as it rose and fell on her breast.

Before the dead was well out of the ring, and his red track sanded, the door of the toril was thrown open for the fifth bull, said never to be a coward. It was a compliment to Carmona and to Vivillo to be chosen for this position on the programme, since it has become a proverb that the pick of the corrida should be fifth on the list. It was also a compliment to Carmona that the King should wait to see how his Vivillo would die.

The buñolero sprang back as he opened the door, retiring more hastily than was his wont into the space between the barriers out of the bull's way. It was as if he, too, expected the new-comer to be something beyond the ordinary in ferocity or cunning; for Carmona's bulls, like those of the Muira breed, are famed for their terrible habit of ignoring the cloak and charging at the body of the man who holds it.

Some bulls had rushed into the arena and blindly attacked the first object which came within their dazed vision; but my heart had time to beat twice before that noble form, which I had last seen in peaceful pasture, deigned to show itself at the dark exit of the toril.

It was as if Vivillo wished to prove how he scorned the puny prick of that fish-hook dart hidden by a rosette of green and purple ribbon, supreme indifference to the strange scene which burst upon eyes accustomed for long to darkness, and haughty superiority to thirst and hunger which irritated weaker animals to frenzy. No one, seeing the great bull stand with his head up, questioning, surprised, could have mistaken his attitude for cowardice. There was something ominous, even terrible, in his pause; and it gave the waiting audience time to appreciate the magnificence of his proportions, the length and dagger-keenness of his horns, the rippling of the muscles under the brown satin of his skin, in the great chest and lean flanks.

“This is not a bull,—it is a mountain,” shouted a voice; and other voices praised Vivillo's perfections, so soon to vanish off the earth. “Grandly armed!” “He would face a battalion!” “Let Fuentes look out for himself!”

For Fuentes, best espada left in Spain, bravest fighter of bulls according to the classic methods, was to give Vivillo the death stroke, when picadores and banderilleros had done with him.

The yells of the vast multitude in an instant changed the bull's proud astonishment to fury. He seemed to realize that this new world, so different from the old sweet, green one, was a world of enemies, every soul against him, and he was ready to fight them all to the death. He neither pawed the sand nor bellowed, for these are puerile betrayals of temper to which the noblest bulls do not descend. Like a tornado he swept across the ring, killed a horse with a single thrust, sent the picador crashing against the barrera; and quick as a wild cat, strong as an African lion, wheeled to lift another animal and its rider on his horns. Half the length of the arena he trotted, upholding both, whilst the audience rose to him and yelled admiration of his savage strength.

“This is like the good old days. You don't see such a bull in ten thousand,” men said to each other, as Vivillo flung the dead horse on the sand, tumbling the picador over the barrera into the callijon, and raced off gamely to a third duel.

When he had killed three horses (knowing no distinction between their innocence and man's cruelty, after his shoulders had felt the lance) he was apparently as fresh as when he left the toril. At this stage of the death drama most bulls would be breathing hard; but though the brown velvet of Vivillo's neck was stained dark crimson, neither fatigue nor pain made his strong heart labour.

More horses were given him, to die as others had died, all save one, which the bull refused to touch because it was of the colour he knew and was friendly with at home. It was led at last unscathed; but Vivillo had now six horses to his credit, and his popularity with the audience had already risen far beyond that of his predecessors. Still, his activity, instead of diminishing, seemed to grow with the rising fever of his fury.

In ordinary cases the trumpet would now have sounded for the second act, dismissing the picadors and summoning the banderilleros; but Vivillo in his present condition was too formidable a foe to be teased by the bravest with barbed, beribboned darts; and "Caballos—caballos!" was the cry.

Four more sacrificial beasts were brought, and he dealt with all, so nearly goring one picador that an espada, dashing to the rescue, was raced to the barrier, and had his stocking crimsoned as he vaulted over it.

Vivillo's list of victims had now swelled to ten, and though he had accepted thirty-three varas, or thrusts of the lance, his great shoulders scarcely shuddered under the red rain of his blood. Still, the first act could not be further prolonged. The sharp, cruel blast of the cornet gave the signal for the second to begin.

Dick and I had not spoken, and I dared not look towards Pilar. As the crowd shouted an imperious demand for the great Fuentes to come into the ring as banderillero, it seemed to me that centuries were swept away by their wild voices; that this was not the bull-ring of Madrid, but the Coliseum of Rome.

Vivillo waited, his head up, undaunted; and though his face and attitude were menacing, the brown eyes, set wide apart, were radiantly innocent. He seemed a creature made up of nature's best, a product of blue sky, sweet meadow, and pure air; of his kind, perfection. Did he think now of his old home in the rich pasture-land, and the tinkle of the friendly cabestros' bells? If he did, the home-sick thought did not make him fear to face what was to come. Never once had he followed the example of two or three among his predecessors, and turned towards the shut door of the toril as if for refuge. Always he had faced the enemy; and now he rushed to play with his horns for the glittering banderillas which waited for his shoulders.

Fuentes was consenting to the wish of the public, but two ordinary banderilleros were to precede him. The famous matador, who was afterwards to kill this most popular bull of the day, would plant the last pair of the six.

The first man, sparkling in satin and silver, lifted on high his two barb-tipped sticks, gaily ornamented with tinsel paper, and called

Vivillo from a distance. His mocking voice infuriated the bull, who rushed upon him; then, as he swayed lightly aside, it was all he could do to save himself from the great animal's sudden, swift turn, without placing either of his banderillas. Again and again the play was repeated, but the audience were saying that Vivillo was becoming crafty as Shylock. At last one gay-coloured stick—"half a pair"—hung from Vivillo's shoulders; twice and three times the attempt was made before the "pair" was complete; and the second banderillero succeeded no better. But as Fuentes entered the ring, condescending to play at the game of which he was once master, there went up a roar of applause. Fuentes never failed; and that trick of his—planting both feet on a handkerchief, nor deigning to move save for a swaying of the body while planting the two barbs—was famous, a sight worth seeing when the bull was even half as good as this. But for once even Fuentes' brilliant tactics were at a loss. Vivillo had brains, and used them. He used his eyes, too, before charging, which not one out of five hundred bulls can do; and if Fuentes played with him, he played also, a game whose zest came from a hint of pressing danger. Once it seemed that Vivillo would be over the barrera, in the callijon, and there was a stampede of all the onlookers there. Again he threatened to demolish the wooden barrier with his horns, and there was a wilder scramble than before. But the banderillas were planted at last, and the blood on Vivillo's brown shoulders lay like a crimson cloak. The great round of applause was as much for the bull as for the banderillero; and every face in the audience was tense with excitement as the horn sounded for the death scene. With such a king of the arena anything might happen. It was well that a master like Fuentes was the espada who would deal with him, or he might deal with the espada.

And so it was to end in the usual tragedy, and after a few more brilliant moments of play the brave heart of the beast must feel the sword. I had known, of course, that it must be so, and yet until now it had not seemed a cold certainty. Perhaps I had vaguely hoped that Vivillo would vault the barrera, and refuse to be coaxed back again; but, even if he had, he could not have saved himself, and might have had to die some death less glorious than by the espada's blade.

Fuentes was bowing under the royal box, asking the King-President's gracious permission to kill Vivillo as so noble a bull

should be killed. Then, sword and red muleta in hand, he went to meet Vivillo, an alert look on his face; for this was no common res, but a brave and wary foeman, most worthy of his steel.

The deep silence of the thirteen thousand spectators was as great a compliment as could be paid to man or bull, and Fuentes knew it. He knew that the audience expected such play, before the death stroke, as had not been seen in Spain for years, and he did not mean to disappoint them. Still marvellously fresh, considering his doughty feats and loss of blood, Vivillo showed no distress. But he had become visibly thoughtful, as if realizing at last that this was no wild sport, but the end of all things.

Fuentes waved off his men—"fuera gente," knowing that this sign of serene courage would thrill thirteen thousand hearts, already warm for him, and adjusted his red muleta to the small, spiked stick which secured it. Then, graceful as a wave which rears its crest to breaking-point, he moved towards the bull, wary yet defiant.

Vivillo, as if to prove the power and fulness of his lungs, bellowed for the first time since he had entered the arena, as he hurled his dark body upon the torero, his huge head down. The muleta met his horns and smothered them, to be swept up and away, while Fuentes stood motionless, smiling. But to the agitation of the audience, instead of following the muleta's scarlet wave, Vivillo halted with horns lowered to gore, and charged the man.

Lightly Fuentes stepped aside, tempting the bull again with the muleta; but Vivillo would have none of it. Then came such give and take between man's skill and brute's ferocious cunning that the audience lost all self-consciousness in watching.

Nearer and nearer Fuentes and Vivillo drew to the barrier. Now they were close to Tendido Number 9, and mechanically I lifted my eyes from the arena to find Pilar. She was no longer to be seen there, and I thought that she had fled before the death. But as Vivillo made a lunge which all but caught Fuentes, a door in the barrier flashed open, flashed shut, and a girl stood in the ring.

It was Pilar in her white dress and lace mantilla. She had left her seat, gone down alone to the entrance of the tendido, had waited her chance, and slipped into the arena. But she could hide no longer. At sight of the girl's figure, white against the dark red barrier, a wild,

warning shout went up. Two or three of Fuentes' cuadrillo ran towards her, but with a passionate gesture she motioned them off, holding out her arms to the royal box.

“Pardon, pardon for Vivillo, the brave bull!” she cried. And I knew now that this was what she had meant from the first. If Vivillo were brave, if he won the respect of the King and the crowd by supreme strength and courage, she had hoped to save him as other bulls had been saved from time to time, since, in earliest days, Spain had followed Roman customs. I had read of those pardoned bulls and heard of them from my father—one hero, may be, in ten years. For this she had come; for this she had sat watching Vivillo's blood flow, waiting until he had proved himself so brave that thirteen thousand voices might join hers in asking the bull's life of the King-President.

At sound of his name, cried in those dear, familiar tones as if calling him from across the valley of death, Vivillo raised his head, turned his back for the first time upon the enemy, and bounded towards the girl. Horrified, the audience shrieked at her, at him, waving their hands, throwing hats into the ring in front of the bull as if to distract him from a helpless victim. But they need not have feared. His sides heaving under their mantle of blood, Vivillo's rush subsided to a trot, as in the home-pasture far away. Half-blinded with fury as he had been a moment ago, the kind young face and voice loved by him since he was a calf at his mother's side brought Vivillo back to himself. Hope must have quickened in his heart as he heard that call, which in old days had meant choice food and sweet caresses. It was the call of life, and he answered it with gratitude.

IT WAS THE CALL OF LIFE, AND HE ANSWERED IT WITH GRATITUDE

How the men yelled, and the women laughed and cried as the great bull laid his armed head against the pale girl's arm! How they clapped when he ate something which she held to him in her hand, and how they shouted to the King—“Pardon—pardon for this brave bull. Pardon for El Vivillo!”

Dick was at her side now. He must have leaped the barrier; but I did not see him until he was there, and the Cherub close behind him. Fuentes was under the royal box, asking if the prayer for the bull's life were to be heard; and, amid tumultuous cheering, pardon was

granted, with the jewel he should have won by giving Vivillo death instead of life. The bull was saved. Panting, he stood by Pilar's side, his blood staining the creamy whiteness of her mantilla. Even when the tame cabestro came, with tinkling bell, to entice Vivillo away, she could hardly bear to leave him, though she well knew that he was safe; that his wounds would be skilfully tended; that he would be restored to health, and that, in very shame (when the story was made known), Carmona must surrender the bull to her.

But the King and Queen were on their feet bowing to the crowd, their relatives and guests standing behind them. The Queen turned and murmured to the King, who spoke to someone I could not see, and an equerry hurried out of the box. A moment later the Duke of Carmona, his mother, Lady Vale-Avon, and Monica were entering the royal box. Evidently the Queen's wish had been to make some introduction. All chatted together for a minute, looking down at the ring, which Vivillo was just leaving with the big, brindled cabestro. Probably the King was congratulating Carmona on the bull given by him to the Corrida Real. Then, having bowed once more to their enthusiastic subjects, the royalties prepared to leave the box before the next bull should come into the ring.

I knew that Monica, with Carmona and the others, would follow in the train of the King and Queen, that they would go out at the royal entrance, and that I must be near if I would have my last chance with the girl. But it was a misfortune that she should be with the royalties, because, since the catastrophe of two days ago, the police of Madrid were taking extra precautions for the safety of their sovereign and his bride. The ground outside the royal entrance had been kept clear of the populace when they went in, and would be again when they went out. A haggard, hollow-eyed wretch such as I was now would be instantly suspected and ordered back.

Yet Monica was to be married to-morrow, and then it would be for ever too late. Somehow I must get close enough to speak with her, even if the words I had to say were cut short by a bullet.

Many people were leaving, though more than half the audience remained, and I had to fight my way through a crowd that had not my reasons for haste. Perhaps a look at my face made them give me room, for sooner than I dared hope I was out of the bull-ring, and pushing through the dense pack of people who had assembled to see

the royalties and their guests drive away. I had reached the outside rank, when I saw Carmona's automobile coming into place behind the royal carriages and motor-cars. Someone had been sent to fetch it here from the other entrance; and the Duke of Carmona would be a figure of importance in the eyes of all Madrid.

Civil guards and police were busy keeping the crowd in order, with warning gestures pressing rank upon rank back upon one another.

I made no effort to separate myself from the mass, for neither the King nor Queen nor Carmona had yet come in sight; and I was waiting. But suddenly shouts of “Viva el Rey—Viva la Reina!” broke out and swelled.

They were coming. Now they were at the door. I caught sight of Carmona, exceedingly handsome in the joy of his great triumph. The King paused at the door, and, seeing Carmona near by, flung him a kindly last word, with a smile. Carmona stepped forward, hat in hand. Monica, with her mother and the Duchess, came to a stop close behind.

My moment had come. I sprang out from the crowd, and had taken three steps towards her, when two civil guards had me by the shoulders. At the same instant I heard Dick's voice, and knew that he had found his way after me, true as always, guessing what I would try to do.

The sudden movement and buzz in the group round me caught Monica's attention. She looked, and gave a little cry as our eyes met across the sunlit, open space. Out came her hands, and for an instant I thought she would have run to me; but her mother's quick eyes had identified the man between the civil guards, and she seized Monica by the arm.

“Get back,” said one of the civil guards angrily. “No one is allowed to go nearer to the King.”

“I must speak to those ladies,” I said, shaking one shoulder free.

“Another step, and you'll spend your night between prison walls,” muttered the guard, furious that there should be a scene under the eyes of royalty.

But now the eyes of royalty were upon me, and there was recognition in them. The King held up his hand imperatively.

“Let that gentleman go,” he said. “He is a friend of mine. Señores, I am glad to see you again. Have you come to congratulate me on my marriage?”

The guards stepped back; and the King's question was a command. He said “Señores”; therefore he was speaking to Dick as well as to me. I walked towards him as he stood ready to greet us; and now Dick, who had kept behind in the crowd, was at my side.

Carmona's face grew scarlet, then yellow-pale.

“I beg your Majesty's forgiveness,” he said, “but you cannot know what I know of this man, or you would not receive him. This may be another horrible plot; for he is the Marqués de Casa Triana, suspected of throwing a bomb in Barcelona some years ago, who not only has broken his parole and come secretly to Spain, but has been following you about from place to place in his motor-car, and—”

The King burst out laughing, in his boyish way.

“All the better for me if he has, since he has continually found the way to do me some good turn. If it hadn't been for him and his motor-car I'm not sure that I would be here—and happy—to-day.” He held out his hand to me. “So you are the Marqués de Casa Triana,” he said. “And that was why you wouldn't tell me your name, when your friend let me know I had one more thing to thank you for besides those I knew—on the day of the brigands?”

He smiled at Dick, who presumed on his notice.

“Your Majesty,” he ventured, “may I mention the name of the man who employed those brigands, not to injure you, but one he had already injured—Casa Triana himself? Well, it's the Duke of Carmona; and when the brigands failed, he tried having Casa Triana knocked on the head and shut up in a house of his at Granada, so that he could marry the girl who was engaged to my friend. You can ask Lady Monica Vale, sir, if I'm not telling you the truth—as far as she knows it.”

The King, without answering, turned his eyes on Monica.

“It is true, sir, that we were engaged,” she replied to the question in his look. “I love him still, and only promised to marry the Duke because he said, if I did, he would save Ramón from imprisonment—and worse. He told me he had helped Ramón to get out of Spain to England, when he was on the point of being arrested

for—something that happened in Seville. Now I know it wasn't true;—that he—lied, and that he's been horribly treacherous to Ramón, as well as to me. I'll not keep my promise to him to-morrow, or ever."

"This seems a strange story," said the King. "I must hear it at length, later. But you shall not marry against your wish. You shall marry the man you love; we will see to that, whether Carmona can clear himself or not. As for my friend Casa Triana, I owe him a triple debt. Part of it I can repay by giving him certain estates in the South which I believe I've been—keeping in trust for him. Part I can never repay; and part—well, if I can give him a bride who loves him, perhaps he will consider himself repaid?"

"I thank your Majesty a thousand times," I said.

Monica looked at me. She was very pale; but there was heaven in her eyes.

"Viva el Rey!" shouted Dick; and the crowd, though they had not heard or understood what passed, took up the cry with all their hearts—

"Viva el Rey!"

THE END

1.

Love and oranges How similar are they. For however sweet their taste, They are always a little bitter. Leonard Williams' Translation.

THE END

The Car of Destiny

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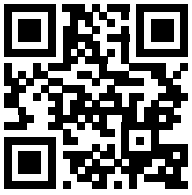

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