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Cavalier

SOLDIERS OF CHANCE

A SERIAL IN IV PARTS—PART III

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

BILLY MOUNTAIN, a soldier of fortune, returns to New York from Honduras in his own ship after an exile of years. Lawler, a promoter of questionable enterprises, and a millionaire, expects that Mountain, who arrives under the name of Josslyn, will take a million dollars' worth of stock off his hands. But Billy has come for revenge, not stocks. Years before, Lawler robbed Billy—first of his small fortune and then of his beautiful wife, whom the plunderer soon cast adrift. Billy has worked for revenge during the years of his exile. His plans are laid. Lawler is entrapped on board the ship, and they sail for Key West with Lawler a prisoner. A strange white yacht, flying the Spanish flag, pursues them. In New York, Billy has had a strange and delightful experience with a young woman, whom he sees on the white yacht. The party reaches Truxillo with arms and ammunition for the revolutionists; Lawler is put ashore and compelled to work with natives in the mahogany swamps, and finally signs a confession of his crimes, which forever will bar him from the United States. He agrees to turn over two million dollars to the cause of the revolutionists in payment for his life, which is saved by Billy Mountain. While negotiations are in progress, Lawler escapes and joins the Federal army. He is pursued by Billy Mountain and the girl, Josephine, who apparently seeks a mysterious document in Lawler's possession. Billy is attacked by four strangers and beaten into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XII.

City of the Silver Hills.



WHEN consciousness returned Billy opened his eyes to find the face of an old man peering anxiously into his own. It was a startlingly unusual face, almost lost in a mass of long, snow-white hair and a white beard, its strangeness enhanced by a pair of dark eyes that glowed with an unnatural brilliance. Billy stared while his reason slowly collected itself, and the old man drew back from him with an audible sigh of relief.

"Good saints, but how you have been entertaining me, señor!" he exclaimed. "I had begun to think that you would never rouse yourself. It is

almost morning, and this is the first time you have opened your eyes since the robbers set upon you out under the sumac. Try this *aguardiente*. If it does not put fire into your veins, I am a *macho*—and will never taste it again."

He placed a cup to Billy's lips. The brandy quickened his senses, and he saw now that he was on a cot in a small, whitewashed room, and that the old man was sitting on a stool beside him.

"Four hours, señor—and once I thought you were dead!" continued his rescuer. "I had even planned where I would bury you, when, *hombre!*—pop go your eyes, and you are alive!"

The old man's voice was vibrant with life and good humor. He helped Billy to a sitting posture, and, lifting

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his hands to his head, in which he felt a dull and burning pain, Billy found that it was bandaged with a wet cloth.

"Four hours!" he gasped. "Morning! Then—it is too late—"

He made an effort to rise to his feet, but the other held him back.

"Not too late for breakfast, señor, if that is what you mean," he said. "As for travel—I will wager my last quart of *aguardiente* that you won't want to do that for some time. The revolution will not run off without you, and the señorita—"

Billy caught him by the arms.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"That you have been talking in your fever," chuckled the old man. "I am José Guayape, señor. You need have no fear of betraying yourself. I have lived on revolutions. I have passed through nine of them in this country, and was at the top of San Juan fighting with the Spaniards when your president charged up the hill. *Dios*, I can keep such a secret as this, and I can still fight!"

Billy stared. José chuckled again at the dismay which he saw in the other's face.

"I tell you that you need have no fear," he repeated. "I hate Barilla. I despise his government. There was a time, years ago, when I was rich, and I owned half a dozen haciendas down in the valley. I had dreams then of making Honduras what you have told me in your fever that you are going to make it. I saw rich territories less widely cultivated and more sparsely populated than they were three hundred years ago, in the days of the captains-general. I started a revolution—I started two—three, lost my haciendas, became poverty-stricken, and was at last robbed of my clothes and cast into prison. I have been in seven revolutions during the last fifteen years—and they have won nothing for Honduras. Señor, I know you are right. I fought against your country because

alone can make of us what we should be. *Dios!*"

He stood up, his eyes flashing with newly awakened fires, and Billy saw that he was a giant of a man. He raised his clenched hands as he spoke:

"I have been burning with new hope ever since I heard you talking in your fever, señor. In the hall of Congress at Tegucigalpa are the portraits of all the presidents of Honduras, and on an average they served only two and a half years out of a term of four. And only two, Sierra and Policarpo Bonilla, vacated office without a resort to force as a means to hold their places. Revolutions have killed us, señor. Ninety years ago, when news of the declaration of independence came from Spain, it took fourteen days to bring that word from Guatemala City to the capital. To-day, señor, it takes *eighteen days* to send an official letter over that journey. That is how we have progressed. You have said that we must have one last revolution, and that we must have the Americans to help us. I believe you. I have new hope. Señor, I—"

He stopped as Billy sank back on the cot.

"Pardon me, señor!" he cried. "You are sick, and I am excited. I have the broth of a fowl waiting for you. Here—"

He hastened to a table, and returned a moment later with a tin cup of broth. Billy drank part of it.

"I am glad you have told me this," he said. "You will understand—that it is necessary—for me to reach the capital—without loss of time—"

He felt dizzy again. José placed a cold towel to his head.

"It is more necessary that you keep quiet for a time, señor, or you will not go to the capital at all," he admonished.

It was an hour before Billy could stand upon his feet. José helped him out of the hut and made a comfortable seat for him in the fresh air, where he brought him a breakfast of broth and

bread. The sun was just rising, and the keen air of the morning acted upon him like a tonic.

"Is this not a glorious country?" exclaimed the old man, sweeping his arms about him. "See—down there in the valley! There is room for a million people, and there are not a thousand. We have here all the climates of the earth, the riches of all countries. And yet we are like a stagnant pool, burdened under a mass of repudiated bonds, our best families decimated by political assassination, their estates confiscated—a people traveling backward instead of forward! We are the battle-ground for Nicaragua and Guatemala—the stage on which we are playing out the tragedy which shows how poorly it is possible for a people to govern themselves. We still travel over the old trails of two and three hundred years ago. We have no cars. Our vehicles are ox-carts. We use candles and torches instead of electricity. We have no ships, almost no schools and churches—not even marriage laws. The United States can bring us all those, and ships and commerce and prosperity. I am ready to fight in a tenth revolution, *señor*, if you do not think that José Guayape has outlived his usefulness."

Billy was looking at the other.

"Guayape—Guayape—Guayape—" he repeated, and as he pronounced the name in that manner his strange acquaintance seemed to grow taller before him, and the poise of his head and shoulders was again that of a leader among men. So suddenly that he spilled what remained of the broth, Billy jumped from his seat and caught one of the other's hands in both his own.

"José Guayape!" he cried. "Are you the José Guayape who was once president, and who—whose—"

He stopped, for he saw that he had guessed the truth. The man's face for an instant grew tense with the pain of old memories, and there was an ineffable sadness in his voice when he spoke:

"Yes, *señor*, I am that José Guayape—the unfortunate creature who held the presidency for less than six months, whose three sons were lined up like cattle against the old cathedral wall and shot down before his eyes, and whose daughter—" His voice grew husky. Billy's fingers tightened about his hand.

"That is enough, Don Guayape," he said. "I know the story, and I—I thought you were dead."

"As most people do, *señor*. Only a few know that I am living. Here on the edge of this mountain, overlooking the valley where I once lived in love and happiness, I pass my existence as a hermit. I would not have revealed myself to you had I not known that you were about to strike a last great blow for Honduras."

"And you will join us?"

"Nothing could give me greater happiness."

"Our success," said Billy, "means the end of the old régime, the beginning of a new. The president will be a man who was educated at an American college and whose father was an American. His cabinet will be composed entirely of Hondurans who were educated in the United States. It will mean the making of a great American colony, through peaceful invasion, of this richest little republic in the world. Are you willing to fight for those changes?"

"I pray to God that they may come!" replied Don Guayape devoutly. "Only your race can succeed where weakened Spanish blood has failed."

Billy was no longer afraid to reveal his plans. In Don Guayape he knew that he had found a powerful ally who, returned as if from the dead, would be received with shouts of joy by the army under Loring. In half an hour they had come to an understanding. As soon as Billy left for the capital it was agreed that Don Guayape would hasten to meet Loring. Billy wrote a letter to the Englishman soon after he had breakfasted.

He had expected to be able to travel within a few hours, but when noon came the dizziness in his head again made him take to his cot. This relapse destroyed his last hope of overtaking Josephine during the day. It was a keen disappointment, but he consoled himself with the thought that he would very soon meet her in Tegucigalpa, where he was determined to follow her in spite of the hazard.

Billy did not see the anxious look that came into Don Guayape's eyes. The dizziness in his head increased, and his face began to burn. He asked for water so frequently that at last the Spaniard refused him, and gave him a fever-potion instead. During the whole of the night that followed Don Guayape did not go to bed, but sat watchfully at the sick man's side.

In the morning Billy felt a little easier. But it was the evening of the third day before he went out into the cool mountain air again. Forty-eight hours later, just as the sun was sinking behind the western mountains, Don Guayape accompanied him down to the white highway, and Billy departed for the capital.

He had lost five days, and he knew that in this time the peril of his venture had multiplied many times. Guayape had told him that at least a dozen couriers had passed over the road from Tegucigalpa. Lawler had already put President Barilla on his guard, and without doubt a swarm of spies and scouts were actively in the field. He traveled cautiously, keeping a sharp watch ahead of him.

Several times during the early part of the night he concealed himself when he heard the approaching beat of mule-hoofs or saw the approach of shadowy figures ahead. Once, soon after midnight, he made a détour over the side of a mountain to escape passing a camp, where a large fire was still burning. At dawn he secreted himself in a thick growth of dwarf pines, on the edge of the last escarpment of the range.

The sun rose, and swiftly the wonderful valley of the City of the Silver Hills unrolled itself under Billy's eyes. The limestone road, so broad here that it resembled a magnificent boulevard, glistened like snow. Below him he saw first a great red-tiled *posada*, a bridge; and then, as the sun rose higher and dispelled the valley mists, a broad panorama of farms and estates, with stone walls and cactus hedges.

Like a fairy picture slowly building itself out of a filmy cloud, the white walls, tiled roofs, and glistening towers of the ancient Spanish capital came into his vision, fifteen miles away, and in the wonderful stillness of the morning he heard the distant tolling of the old cathedral bell, pealing sonorously forth into mountain and valley the ancient triumph of old Spain—as it had done for more than two hundred and fifty years.

For a long time Billy gazed down upon the quiet and peaceful scene, wondering if any would have guessed that these plains, in their calm and sunlit glory, had run red with blood for nearly three centuries; and that the city itself, glistening like a jewel in the center of the valley, might have been called the City of Death instead of the City of the Silver Hills.

He slept most of the day, and did not continue his journey until the midnight that followed. By that time the road was deserted, and only twice was he forced to conceal himself. He was surprised at not having to evade guards on the way, and concluded that Barilla's sentinels and spies were well up toward Comayagua.

It was dawn when he reached the old Spanish bridge crossing the Rio Grande and leading into the town. He had approached it with extreme caution, following the bank of the stream, and for ten minutes he concealed himself in the shadow of one of the stone piers and watched the road ahead.

The way seemed to be clear. He advanced slowly, hugging the stone wall of the bridge, his fingers gripping the

butt of his revolver. He had come almost to the end of it, and was congratulating himself on the ease with which he was entering the city, when a figure jumped up from the shadow of the wall and cried sleepily:

"Who goes there?"

Billy stopped. A second figure popped out of the darkness, and he saw that two of Barilla's jean-clad soldiers were confronting him. His mind worked quickly.

"*Soy Americano!*" he replied boldly, advancing with a great show of confidence. "I am Señor Watts, of the Rosario Mining Company. Why do you challenge me?"

The guards were now thoroughly awake.

"*Pues, hombre*—I am glad of that!" said the one who had appeared first, lowering his carbine. "You will go with us peaceably then to be identified."

A cold chill shot through Billy.

"What?" he demanded. "To be identified! Is the capital closed against the people of the Rosario mine? You scoundrels, do you not know that the president himself is one of us, and that it is myself—Señor Watts—who pays him to treat us decently?"

"I am sorry, *señor*, but we have instructions to place all Americans under arrest until they have been identified, and we are charged that our lives will pay the forfeit if we allow one to escape us."

"If that is so," said Billy, coming up to them as if about to give up the argument, "I guess you'll have to pay the forfeit."

In the same instant he landed a terrific blow full on the other's jaw, and before the guard's companion could recover from the surprise of the attack he was looking into the muzzle of Billy's revolver.

"Up with your hands, *macho!*" he commanded. "And be quick about it!"

The second guard dropped his carbine with a clatter and thrust his arms above his head. Billy looked at the

fallen man. He lay as if dead. Stooping over him, with his revolver covering the other, he untied a stout cord that answered the purpose of a belt about his waist. Two minutes later the guard's hands were fastened behind him.

"I'd advise you to say nothing about this affair," warned Billy. "Your comrade is already recovering, and he will soon release you. If word reaches Barilla that you have been undone in this way, you will be shot. I shall see the president some time to-day; and if he asks me how I got into the town, I will tell him that I crossed the river in a boat. And let me warn you never again to stop Señor Watts. He is not a dog—and he needs no identification to pass him."

He lost no time in leaving the bridge and hurrying on into the plaza, blessing his fortune that no one had witnessed his encounter with the two sentinels who, he believed, would say nothing about the affair themselves.

Now that he was in the town, he felt comparatively safe from suspicion—at least for a time. Filling and lighting his pipe, he walked leisurely across the plaza, passed the post-office and the government telegraph-office, and buried himself amid the verdure of Morazan Park just as the low notes of a bugle sounded the reveille in the distant cuartel. He knew that soon after this the streets would be filled with life, and he hastened his steps, pausing for a moment in the shadow of the old Spanish cathedral, against whose walls the executioners of two centuries had stood their victims. He had made up his mind to go at once to Don Alcasia's house, and, if possible, to secretly disclose his presence in the town of Dolores. If he failed in this he would retreat to one of the three or four friends in town whom he was sure would give him shelter.

His determination was hastened by the grating of the huge iron bolts of the cathedral door behind him, and he turned quickly into one of the streets

that led to the higher and more fashionable residence district of the capital.

People were already beginning to show themselves at the windows and open doors of the adobe houses he passed. He heard the rattle of shutters and the sound of voices; and where the street he was pursuing entered the broad *cera* that ascended to Capitol Hill and the president's palace, he was startled by the sudden appearance of a squad of soldiers.

He turned into a narrow court to avoid being too closely observed, hurried through an unwallied patio, and came out on the next street. Ahead of him, through a break in the vista of trees, he caught the first gleams of the morning sun on the drab and rose-colored walls of the palace. The Alcasia house was close to the president's mansion, and for some distance he was compelled to expose himself in the open *cera*, which at this point was wide enough for half a dozen four-in-hands to drive abreast.

Don Alcasia's house was enclosed by a six-foot adobe wall, fortified at the top by rows of spikes; and not until Billy stood in front of the narrow iron gate opening into the patio, or inner garden, did he fully realize the perplexity of his situation.

His thought had been to bribe a servant to carry a message to Dolores, but a commotion at the top of the hill, where he saw half a dozen soldiers preceding a big gold-and-white carriage, which was followed by a similar body-guard, assured him that he had no time to lose in placing himself beyond the reach of official eyes. With an impatient execration at the unreasonable custom of the Tegucigalpas, who rise at five o'clock and sleep through a half of the twelve hours that follow, Billy followed along the side of the adobe wall until he came to the rear of the patio, where he found a second iron gate closed and bolted.

He was about to test the strength of the bolt when he heard a voice in the garden. For several minutes he lis-

tened, but it was not repeated. He recalled that Don Alcasia came into his gardens very early in the morning, and Billy checked his impulse to pound upon the gate for admittance. He knew the don's politics too well to trust himself in his power, even though Alcasia was of the opposition party in the capital.

Dolores, and she alone, could assist him in securing an immediate interview with Josephine; and he was sure that her ability to help him would be weakened, if not destroyed, by her father's knowledge of his presence.

Suddenly he heard a second voice, and it was a woman's. With Loring, he had once been a guest at a fête in the patio, and Dolores had stolen them away from the others to introduce them to an ancient caretaker and his wife, an old and shriveled-up couple who lived in a tiny house at the end of the garden, and for whom she showed a great affection.

The voices he had heard he believed to be those of the aged people, and in another moment he had drawn himself to the top of the wall. With some difficulty he climbed over the barricade of spikes and dropped behind a thick clump of rose-bushes. The voices were not more than twenty paces from him, but the thickness of the shrubbery and palms kept him from seeing the speakers. He drew nearer, parting the bushes ahead of him cautiously, until at last he found himself standing almost within arm's reach of the two old servants.

"Ho, mother!" he called softly in Spanish, speaking the word he had heard Dolores use.

They were bending over a plot of flowers and turned slowly toward him. He parted the bushes and stood revealed.

"Don't you recognize me?" he asked quickly. "Is it possible that you have forgotten Señor Loring and his friend?"

Instantly the startled faces brightened.

"Señor Loring!" quavered the old woman, clasping her bony hands in sudden excitement. "Dios! is he here? Has he come to see my mistress? Blessed be the saints if it is so, for her heart is broken with fear and waiting!"

"I have brought word from him," said Billy. "I must be given shelter quickly while you take a message to the *señorita*. It is important. It is life and death! Tell her that I am Billy Mountain, the *señor's* friend, and that I must see her. No one must know. I am trusting you because I know that you love her. Quick—I must have shelter! Conceal me in your house!"

He dove through the shrubbery ahead of them and preceded them into the little house. The old woman showed him where he might hide himself if by strange chance a visitor should come. Then she hobbled away, cackling gleefully under her breath, to carry his message to Dolores.

CHAPTER XIII.

Josephine Sends a Warning.

DELIGHTED at the success of his venture into the garden, Billy tried to check his impatience while he waited. He counted back, and found that Josephine had been in the capital for at least five days. Dolores could undoubtedly give him immediate news of her.

The beautiful young *señorita*, with her American blood and education, made it a point to lose no time in offering her friendship and social prestige to every American girl or woman who visited her home city, and he felt assured that an adorable person like Josephine would not have remained this long without a personal welcome from Loring's sweetheart.

He was conscious of a thrill of pleasure as he reflected that, in the event of the *señor's* already having become friendly a cores had in all prob-

ability mentioned Loring and himself. In another moment, however, his pleasure was dampened by the thought that Josephine probably did not know his identity, and would not have recognized his name had she heard it.

The old woman was gone half an hour when he heard her returning. Dolores was with her. Never had he seen the girl look more charming than when she entered through the door. Her lovely face was diffused with a flush of excitement. Her dark eyes were glowing, and from the quick throbbing of her breast as she gave him both her hands, looking into his face with anxious questioning, he knew how deep were the emotions that stirred her, and that he must tell her much about Loring before he could speak of the object so close to his own heart.

"I have come from Lorry," he said, before she could speak the words of welcome that trembled on her lips. "From him I bring you the love of the happiest man on earth. He is well, and will soon be in Tegucigalpa, but under circumstances which it will take some time to explain to you. Can we talk freely here—alone? You have probably heard by this time that the country is in a state of revolution. Lorry and I are at the head of the movement, and you can understand what it means if I am caught in the capital."

The flush left the girl's face.

"We are quite safe here," she said. "I am the only one who comes to the cottage. But—the war—I do not know—"

"It was my fault," said Billy, understanding her. "Lorry wanted to confide in you in his letters, but I convinced him that it would be dangerous, as one of them might by chance fall into wrong hands. When I left he was marching on Truxillo at the head of a thousand men."

Color rushed back into the girl's cheeks, and in an instant pride and pleasure leaped into her eyes.

"Yesterday a courier brought in a message that was sent from San Pedro over the wire to Comayagua!" she cried excitedly. "Oh, I didn't know it was Lorry! He has taken Truxillo!" Billy scarce restrained a shout of joy.

"Was there other news—anything—anything from—"

"Puerto Cortez is in the hands of the revolutionists, and the Federals were preparing to fight at San Pedro Sula," added Dolores quickly. "Father says that the wires have been cut between Tegucigalpa and Comayagua, and to-day there were rumors of fighting at the old capital!"

"Hurrah!" cried Billy, trying to choke back his voice. "By this time Lorry has hit the highway. In another twenty-four hours he will be marching on the capital at the head of two thousand men! He was to strike the big road within twenty miles of Comayagua. I've got to get out of this place in a hurry and join him. Dolores, I want you to help me. I've come on a mission as vital to me as Lorry's safety is to you. It's a—great importance—to my happiness, and I haven't an hour to lose."

For half an hour he talked almost without interruption. He told her everything—the meaning of the revolution, their plans and hopes—and at last he came to his trip to New York, the meeting with Josephine, and described fully what had followed that meeting.

He kept nothing back that was in his heart, confessing to her many things that he had not spoken to Loring, and baring every detail that he had discovered of the mysterious power which Lawler held over the fate of the girl he loved.

Finally he declared the reason for his presence in the capital. To his unbounded joy he found that the girls had already become acquainted, and that Josephine had taken luncheon at the Alcasia home two days previously.

"You are not so much of a stranger to her as you suppose," said Dolores, when he had finished. Her eyes were shining like stars, and the look that was in them, as well as her words, sent a thrill through Billy. "Yesterday I was showing her some photographs, and among them was one of you and Lorry in front of the old cathedral. I saw her suddenly start when she looked at it, and I wondered at the strange look that came into her face. She asked me who you were, and when I told her, and that you were at Truxillo, I am sure that the color left her cheeks, and came back a moment later like the flush of a rose. That made me guess something, and I asked her if she knew you. She said that she had met you in New York, but that she had known you there as Captain Josslyn. Wasn't it fortunate that Lorry wrote me about some sort of an expedition you were making under that name? Of course, I told her all about it. I couldn't help it. I told her a great deal about you and Lorry, and she sat and listened with those great, beautiful blue eyes glowing at every word I uttered." Dolores laughed softly and placed a hand on Billy's arm. "You are not a stranger to her," she whispered. "I am a woman, and I know! I am glad that you have come, and I will help you."

"God bless you!" breathed Billy. "You have filled me with new hope, a—happiness that makes me want to shout. I cannot go to her. But—you—do you think she will come to me?"

"She will come to me," replied Dolores, withdrawing her hands, which he was holding in a fierce grip. "And especially if she knows that you are here," she laughed. "I am sure of that, because yesterday, when we were driving, nothing seemed to interest her so much as you. I was a little jealous. When I began to talk about Lorry the conversation always got round to you, and then there would come that wonderful look in her eye and the flush in her cheeks. And—er times—"

Dolores looked at Billy for a moment in silence, and then said: "At other times there was a look almost of terror in those same eyes. I begin to understand—now."

"I must see her soon—to-day—to-night at the latest!" exclaimed Billy, beginning to walk back and forth across the earth floor. "By Jove—" He turned suddenly toward the girl, a look of perplexity in his face. "Where is she staying?" he asked. "Is she with Lawler?"

"They are guests at the president's house," replied Dolores. "In less than a week Señor Lawler had become a favorite with Barilla. Miss Winton and Señor Costillo became official guests as soon as they arrived at the capital."

Their conversation was interrupted by the sound of a bell.

"That calls my father from the gardens when breakfast is ready," explained Dolores quickly. "This time it is meant for me. I must hasten, for he has been in an irritable mood for several days. Mother Isobel is a good cook, and she will at least keep you from going hungry. I will return to you within an hour or so. Meanwhile—"

"If you could send me writing materials," suggested Billy.

"I will. Mother Isobel will bring them."

At the door the girl paused for a moment and, smiling over her shoulder, cried back softly to him:

"I forgot to tell you, Señor Billy, that I am to take luncheon with Miss Winton at one o'clock to-day!"

In another moment she was gone, and the door closed behind her.

Never had Billy found it so difficult to begin a letter as that which he wished to send to Josephine Winton. For half an hour after Mother Isobel brought him writing materials he made wretched attempts at a beginning.

It seemed to him that everything he wished to say should come first, and he spoiled his dozen sheets of paper

before he was at last on the way to declaring what was in his heart, and why he had followed her to the capital.

As he had talked to Dolores, so now he wrote to the girl for whose love he was ready to fight, even though at the sacrifice of his life. With the frankness of a manhood—peculiarly his own, he wrote of his love for her, his hopes, his fears, and of his suspicion that it was not from choice that her fate was about to be placed in Lawler's hands.

With the bluntness of a soldier and a fighter, he told her what he knew of Lawler, and entreated her, even though she could not return the devotion which filled his heart for her, to let him help her. There was no bravado in his offer to tear Lawler from the palace and kill him, if she would but command him to do so.

At the end he urged her to grant him an interview that afternoon or night. Something of the strength and sincerity of his love breathed in every word he wrote, and when he had finished he gathered up the sheets without reading them, folded them, and was placing them in an envelope when Dolores came through the door.

His face and hands were damp with perspiration when he rose to meet her.

"I've written her a letter, Dolores," he said. "I've told her everything—just as I told it to you. Perhaps—I'm doing wrong—"

"You're not!" she interrupted him. "Not if you have told it to her as you did to me!"

He flushed at the smile in her eyes and the quiver of her lips.

"You're almost laughing," he rebuked her.

"Because I'm happy, Billy," she replied quickly. "Father told me more news of the revolution while we were at breakfast, and I've been crying because—because—I'm so glad. The whole city knows that Mr. Robert Montmorency Loring, an Englishman, and Mr. William Mountain, an American, are the commanders in chief of the uprising; and what makes me so

happy is the fact that father is really pleased with Lorry for the part he is taking. He has always said that I should never marry him. I don't mind telling you that I am going to marry Lorry just as soon as he comes for me, even if we have to run away; but I almost believe that if you win this revolution father will receive him with open arms!"

"We're going to win," Billy assured her. "But I swear that if you don't deliver this letter to-day, and arrange for me to meet Josephine some time this afternoon or to-night, I'll court-martial Lorry and have him shot as soon as I return to the army!"

Dolores pouted her pretty mouth in mock fear.

"Then I shall deliver it right away," she declared. "I won't wait until one o'clock, but will go as soon as I have dressed properly. Perhaps—"

"What?" he asked eagerly when she hesitated.

"I might bring her back with me," she suggested hopefully. "Father is going to the Rosario mines this afternoon, and we will be alone."

"Bully!" he cried. "If you can do that, Dolores—if you only can—"

"What?" she demanded in turn.

"There's nothing on earth too big for me to promise you—absolutely nothing!"

She laughed, and with the letter in her hand turned toward the door.

"Good-by," she said. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can, but don't show yourself in the garden. I have told Mother Isobel and Father Juan to let no one see you, and to do nothing but cook things for you to eat, and make you cold drinks. Breakfast is coming now!"

She darted out as Mother Isobel approached with a large covered basket, from which she proceeded to set forth a feast, including, to Billy's gratification, a whole broiled fowl and a bottle of red wine. After he had eaten a hearty breakfast the ancient Juan swung him a hammock from wall to

wall, and in a second basket brought a dozen American magazines from the house.

He settled himself comfortably in the hammock and began to read. Before he had finished the first article that he chose to peruse his eyes began to grow heavy, and when Mother Isobel came in with a pitcher of iced lemonade she found him asleep.

The weakening fever through which he had passed, followed by two nights of travel, had exhausted him to the point where excitement could no longer offset the demand of nature, and it was several hours before he awoke. He rolled from the hammock and looked at his watch. To his surprise he found that it was nearly midday. A few sharp raps at the door brought Mother Isobel into the cottage.

"You have slept a long time, señor," she said. "I have a letter for you, but the *señorita* warned me not to awaken you. They have gone driving out over the Comayagua road."

She was fumbling in her dress, and after a moment gave him a sealed envelope. It bore no inscription—no word to tell him who it was from, and yet the touch of it in his fingers sent through him a thrill that was not entirely of pleasure.

He had not expected a letter. His mind leaped to sudden conclusions as he opened it. If Josephine had decided to meet his advances with favor and grant him an interview, he believed that she would have sent word to him through Dolores. If she wished to decline his services she would do so in the only polite form possible—through the medium of a personal note. He turned his back to Mother Isobel as he read. The first lines brought a glad cry to his lips.

Josephine had written:

When Dolores brought me your letter this morning it seemed to me that all at once a ray of light had come into a life which a few minutes before had been nothing but darkness. To say I look upon you with indifference would be a piece of dissimulation which I do not think that deco-

rum requires under the present circumstances. Our acquaintance has been brief and unusual. And yet I do not scruple to confess that your sensations when we met that night were not alone your own, but mine as well. In saying this I permit myself a frankness which no woman would employ under ordinary conditions, and were it not that your own letter and your actions of that night breathe a sincerity which I cannot disbelieve, I would destroy my hand sooner than write these words. In many ways you have guessed the truth. I am one of the unhappiest creatures in the world. I am in the power of a man from whom I fear that no other human power can free me. He did not lie to you. I am to be his wife. Nothing can save me now. My last hope is gone. I cannot tell even you why this is, and still, even in my hopelessness, something impels me to grant you the interview which you desire. Knowing that you cannot come to me, Dolores has arranged for me to be with her a short time this evening. Until then, guard yourself carefully, for I tremble at the peril you have placed yourself in to serve one who, no matter how tenderly her heart may feel for another, must refuse to surrender herself from the power of the man who has wronged you and the whole world so terribly.

JOSEPHINE WINTON.

No anchorite in the ecstasy of his devotion ever looked upon a relic with greater happiness than that with which Billy read this proof of Josephine's regard for him. He read the letter over again, and its frankness, its sweet womanliness, the confession that it seemed scarcely more than to whisper to him, and yet in such a way that he was made speechless with the joy of it, blinded him for a time to the hopelessness and despair of the one who had written it.

And even when he began to comprehend that other spirit of the letter, it only brought a smile to his lips and a deeper glow into his eyes. Josephine had accepted his love. He repeated softly her words—"no matter how tenderly her heart may feel for another"—and it seemed as though they meant the dawning of a new and glorious life for him.

He stood with the letter in his hand, filled with a splendid elation as he thought of what it was in his power to

do. That night Joséphine would know how helpless Lawler was—how utterly he could destroy him when the hour came.

A low cough made him turn to Mother Isobel, whom he had forgotten.

"You have brought me splendid news, mother," he said to her in Spanish. "Did the *señorita* say when she would return?"

"They were to drive out the old highway to one of Don Alcasia's haciendas, *señor*. I doubt if they will be back for several hours. Are you ready for dinner?"

"Yes," said Billy.

After he had dined Billy tried to pass the time away by reading. The afternoon wore on with excruciating slowness. It was nearly five o'clock when he saw Dolores approaching through the garden. He almost welcomed her in his arms when she came through the door.

"Read it," he entreated, thrusting the letter into her hand before she could speak.

Dolores ran quickly through the letter, and returned it to him with shining eyes.

"That's nothing," she said, much to his astonishment. "You should have seen her, Billy, when she read your letter. Perhaps I'm a traitor," she added, plucking him by the sleeve; "but you should have seen her face, her eyes, and heard her voice, Billy. And then—" She hesitated, as though not quite sure that she should make this confession to him. "And then—she suddenly threw her arms around me—and cried!"

"Cried?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Yes, and when she looked up her eyes were shining beautifully, and then she grew so white and haggard all at once that I thought she was ill. I am glad for you. And yet—I am afraid—"

"Of Lawler," interrupted Billy, with a happy laugh. "Dolores, you little goose, don't you know who's coming to town? Do you think that Law-

ler, or any other man, can get away with a combination like Bobby Montmorency Loring and Billy Mountain?"

"No!" she cried proudly. "You'll win! I am sure of that!"

The tinkling of a bell interrupted them.

"Mother Isobel's signal!" she exclaimed quickly. "Father has probably returned from Rosario. Good-by."

She slipped out into the garden and he watched her through the window. A little later Mother Isobel brought in his supper. Hardly had she placed it on the table when Dolores ran through the door. The girl spoke a few low words to the old woman, who immediately left the cottage. Dolores's face was pale when she turned to Billy.

"Señor Costillo just came to me from Josephine," she said, clasping her hands at her breast. "Here's a note, Billy. It—it tells you—"

She stopped, and Billy tore it open. He recognized Josephine's writing.

He read:

If you care for me—if you have in your heart that loyalty and love for me which you have declared, I beg that you will serve me by leaving the city without delay. I returned this afternoon to find myself practically placed under guard. Barilla has learned of the fight on the bridge, and the description that the men gave of you has convinced Lawler that you are in the city, or have been here. By morning every street and road will be watched. You must escape to-night. My own fate is to be sealed a little more quickly because of Lawler's suspicions, and my only hope now is that you may leave the capital in safety.

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"You know what is in this?" he asked.

"Yes, I know."

"Can you reach Josephine within the next hour?"

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"Then, go to her," said Billy. He led her to the door. "Go to her as quickly as you can. Tell her this—"

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He closed the door behind her and went back to the table. He ate no supper. But he took his automatic from his pocket, wiped it free of dust, and waited.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Tryst.

IT was nine o'clock when Dolores returned. Billy was standing in the edge of the garden when he heard the gate open. He recognized the approaching footsteps as those of a woman, and came out from the dark shadow of a clump of palms to meet her.

"Is it you, Dolores?" he called softly as she came near.

"Yes."

She was at his side in a moment. In the light of the stars he could see her face, half concealed under a mantilla.

It was white and tense.

"I have been to her," she said, placing an uneasy hand on his arm. "She has promised to make another effort to see you to-morrow night. There is a change in her, Billy. She is like death. And—"

Her hand gripped his arm with a fierceness that alarmed him.

"Billy, they have sent Señor Costillo away—under a guard! Josephine told me she is to marry Lawler—"

Her voice trembled, and suddenly Billy thrust back the lace mantilla from her face.

"Of course," he said, "we know that."

"But here in the capital," she insisted. "Barilla himself, in honor of Lawler, has set the wedding day for the Thursday following the mask-ball at the palace."

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"Yes."

She was at his side in a moment. In the light of the stars he could see her face, half concealed under a mantilla. It was white and tense.

"I have been to her," she said, placing an uneasy hand on his arm. "She has promised to make another effort to see you to-morrow night. There is a change in her, Billy. She is like death. And—"

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"But here in the capital," she insisted. "Barilla himself, in honor of Lawler, has set the wedding day for the Thursday following the mask-ball at the palace."

In the darkness Billy clenched his hands.

"Good Heaven," he gasped, "is it

possible that Lawler has the power to force such a thing as this upon her here in a strange city—a strange country—out of reach of his friends?"

"Barilla is his friend," interrupted the girl, "and that means he is more powerful here than in his own country. He not only brought the government information of your plans, but he is rich, and Barilla loves him for that."

"Barilla is not a scoundrel," said Billy, looking straight at her in the starlight. "You have always called him a good man here in the capital in spite of his reactionary ideas. If you or Josephine should go to him—"

Dolores clasped her hands in despair.

"I suggested that, Billy, and the look that came into Josephine's eyes frightened me. 'If you do that,' she said—'if you go to the president and succeed in stopping my marriage with this man you will destroy my last desire to go on living.' I would have thought she was mad, but her voice was terribly calm. I dared not question her after that. Her last words to me were, 'Tell him I will come to-morrow night if it is in my power to do so; but that the price I ask for my effort, if I should fail, is that he shall leave the city by midnight.'"

"Sometimes the friend who lies is the only friend who is true," quoth Billy, half to himself. "Yes, I'll go if she fails to meet me; but it will be in the direction of the palace, and not toward the bridge of Comayagua. Have you heard anything more from the country?"

"Nothing," replied Dolores. "Several couriers have come in; but no news has been given to the city. General Wollfender is at the head of the army."

"No news to the public means that there are nothing but government defeats to report," decided Billy. "Do you know what Wollfender is doing with the army?"

"We were turned back this morning when we drove out the highway.

They are throwing up breastworks six or seven miles from town."

"Glory be!" cried Billy, stifling his excitement. "Do you know what that means, Dolores? Lorry is on his way to the capital! There will be fighting soon, and—" He walked back and forth in front of her, and she saw the struggle in his face. "I can't remain here much longer," he said, after a moment. "If she doesn't come to-morrow night I must go to her. I will find a way. If we could only take the city before—before next Thursday—"

"I am afraid that it wouldn't do any good, Billy."

Dolores's voice betrayed her own hopelessness.

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I am afraid that it wouldn't."

She held out her hand to him.

"Good night, Billy."

All that night Billy passed in the sweet air of the starlit garden. With dawn he entered the cottage. Dolores came to him twice during the day, and a third time early in the evening. This time she brought the news he had waited for.

"They are coming," she announced.

"They?" he repeated.

"Yes, Josephine—and Lawler."

"Lawler!"

His astonishment bereft him of speech.

"It was the only way," she explained, "and it is turning out splendidly. Father is interested in the Rosario mines. They want new capital, and he is going to make a strong effort to interest Mr. Law—I mean that man Lawler. They will drink and smoke. Josephine and I will come into the garden."

"But if they should come into the garden—talk and smoke out here?"

Dolores laughed softly.

"There are too many papers and plans and other things to show Lawler. Father has been going over them for half an hour. He asked me to see that

the lamps were bright and clean, and filled with oil."

"Good!" exclaimed Billy. "Dolores, you're a trump! If it wasn't for Josephine, I'd go back and choke Lorry and marry you myself! To-night, and it is now"—he looked at his watch—"six o'clock!"

"We expect them at eight," said Dolores. "You will hear us when we come from the house. Wait near the palms at the farther side of the garden."

Left alone, Billy found himself in a curious state of mental excitement. Every nerve in his body ran riot with an emotion which he found it impossible to control. He tried to smoke a cigar, and ended by throwing it away.

His pipe gave him a little satisfaction. How different were his feelings from that other night, when he had turned to find Josephine leveling a revolver at his breast! Then he was cool, self-possessed, smiling. Now he felt that he was trembling.

Before this Billy had not noticed that the room was uncomfortably small, or that there was not enough air in it. He went to the door, and opened it cautiously. Then he slipped out into the settling gloom, and with a few low words to Mother Isobel, who was sitting near the door, hurried through the shrubbery and dwarf trees of the patio to the palm garden.

The clear air of the mountains that shut in the valley entered his lungs like sharp wine. From a distance there came the subdued sounds of the city, the roll of a carriage on the back cerra, the tap, tap, tap of a mule's hoofs, the last toning peals of the cathedral-bell tolling the hour of seven—and then, from a greater distance, the faint, thrilling note of a bugle far out on the plain.

Over the wall, in the adjoining patio, a song-bird began to sing, and suddenly Billy felt rise in him the desire to give freedom to his voice, to add something of his own happiness to the murmuring sound of the night.

He could not remember when he had felt this way before. He was thrilled by a sense of danger. The hopelessness of Josephine's words seemed to ring in his ears. He realized his present helplessness—how completely he was at the mercy of his enemies if he disclosed himself. What would that mercy be? A quick death!—they would at least not subject him to torture.

And yet in the face of these things he was overwhelmingly happy. To-night, to-morrow, the next day, he might have to fight—and if it came to fighting he would probably die. But before then he would see Josephine, and the whole reason for his existence was centered in that anticipation now. He looked at his watch, and almost counted the seconds between seven o'clock and half past.

A quarter of eight! Neglectful of Dolores's warning to remain concealed amid the palms, he began walking up and down one of the narrow paths, trying to find words for that moment when Josephine would come to him through the starlight.

He was stopped short by a sound from the direction of the house. The door had opened. He heard it close. It was half an hour too early for the girls, and he hurried back to the palms, believing that Señor Alcasia was coming into the garden. Then he heard a laugh, a little too loud to be natural—Dolores's signal to him! They were coming! He heard their quick steps on the gravel-path, then Dolores's voice, and he waited, his heart beating tumultuously as they drew nearer.

He looked straight down the path that led to the palms, and a moment later a single figure turned into it and came slowly toward him. In an instant, before she had seen him, he had recognized Josephine.

She was only a few steps away, and he saw her with the starlight shining in her hair and face, and her slender form poised motionless for a moment as she searched for him. In a dozen

steps he was at her side. Her greeting was in her eyes. What was revealed to him there, glowing softly through the space that separated them, added to the quickening beat of his heart.

But there was something in the way she gave him her hands—something in the fine poise of her head and in the gentle confession of her eyes—that quieted the strong impulse that for a moment had moved him.

"I am glad you have come," he said, and he found that in these simple words he had said more than he might have put in many. "I am glad. You know why. And you—are not sorry?"

"No," she said unhesitatingly; "I am not sorry." She drew her hands gently away as she spoke, and he saw a wistful smile tremble for a moment on her lips. "I could not be that."

"Thank God!" he breathed fervently. "I have wanted to hear that from your own lips—that you are not sorry I love you, and that I have followed you, and am going to fight for you. Josephine—little girl—that night—in the office—I made a mistake. I know now that you might have freed yourself if I had, let you enter the safe. But—I have been selfish. I am glad that I stopped you. For it brought you to me—brought you into a life that I know now was desolate and hopeless until you came. And that hopelessness will become madness if you leave me, if you go out of my life, as you have said that you must. If you"—he struggled with the words—"if you—care for me—I will fight—fight hard. Nothing can stand between us."

Her face seemed to grow haggard as she listened to him, and she put out her hands to him again, and when he took them they were cold and shivering.

"You cannot understand," she said, her voice as strange as the pallor in her face. "I am sorry for you—if it is going to hurt you—so much. But there is no hope—none—none—"

"You care for me?" he persisted. "Tell me that. You care?"

He scarcely heard the whispered words on her lips.

"Yes, I care."

For a few moments he did not move. He did not speak. Their eyes met, and a choking sob rose in her throat.

"And yet—you say—there is no hope," he said, and there was a tremble of joy in his voice. "No hope! Good Heaven, you might as well tell me that the sun will never shine again! I would sooner believe that!"

She made a strong effort to reply to him calmly, and drew her hands from him again.

"It is only just that I should confide in you as much as I can in any living soul," she said. "And that is not much. This man—this—this man I am to marry—holds me in a power that nothing can break. It is worse than death! If death would free me I would choose it. A word from him and my fate becomes a torture even greater than life will be as—his wife. And so I am sacrificing myself to save a greater sacrifice. What that other would be I cannot tell you. Until a few days ago I still had hope. If I could have secured certain papers—I would have been saved."

A groan burst from Billy's lips, and for a moment he buried his face in his hands.

"The papers in the safe!" he choked.

"If you had only told me—then—"

Her hand fell upon his arm.

"It was my fault," she whispered.

"It was my fault, Billy!" He thrilled as she spoke his name. "I should have told you—then," she went on. "But I was frightened. I feared that if I told you—you—would tell him, and then my last hope would be gone! It was my fault!"

His eyes were blazing with sudden excitement when he raised his head.

"The papers—they will save you?"

"Yes. But they are beyond reach now. In New York Lawler's secretary told me that he had left the city, and that his private papers had been sent to Key West. I followed them there.

I followed you to Truxillo, and a little later told Lawler that I had discovered his destination by chance, and had come for the excitement of the trip. Mr. Castillo is a—a—good friend, and I had made several trips on his yacht. Lawler knew that, but his suspicions were aroused. Knowing that I could not refuse his command, he insisted that I accompany him to Tegucigalpa. We followed the gunboat that took him to Puerto Cortez. Our plan was to secure the papers on the road to the capital. But there was some trouble with the engines—and we were delayed. We lost our last opportunity, for we could not overtake him on the road. I had been in Tegucigalpa several days before I learned that he had guessed the truth. He taunted me, laughed in my face, and said that from Puerto Cortez he had returned the papers to New York, with instructions that if no word was received from him within six weeks they were to be opened, and given—given—"

She stopped, her hands clutching at her throat.

"That—that—is—all—"

She stood looking at Billy, catching her breath as she saw the change in his face. He had drawn a step back. He seemed to have grown taller. In the starlight she saw the gleam of his teeth as he smiled at her, and in his eyes there was something that held her wonder-struck, and quick sobs rose in her breath. She had never seen a man like this. He was holding out his arms to her.

"Josephine, my darling, is that all?" he said. "Come!"

She stood swaying for a moment, like a reed stirred by a breath of air, staring at him speechlessly and not quite comprehendingly; and then, as she looked upon the boundless strength and faith of the man who was standing before her in the white starlight, she obeyed his summons like a child and crept into his arms, and lay her head, sobbing, against his breast.

"You are frightened, dear," he

whispered; "but they can't hurt you now. No one in the world can hurt you now," and he drew her still closer and crushed his face down against hers, whispering his words of love and faith until her arms crept up about his shoulders and clung tightly to him, while behind them the nightingale burst into a fresh melody of song.

CHAPTER XV.

The President's Ball.

IN those wonderful moments of ecstasy, with Josephine's heart beating against his own, her arms clinging to him, her sweet lips surrendering to his kisses, it seemed to Billy as though the whole world must be filled with the nightingale's song. After a moment he lifted her face, and it was wet with tears. Her blue eyes were filled with the beauty of the stars, and the long lashes fell slowly, like shimmering curtains damp with dew, over the paradise they had revealed to him in that upward glance. But in that same instant her arms slipped from his shoulders. He felt her body suddenly grow tense, and she pushed her hands against his breast to free herself from his arms. She flung back her head, and her face was as white as the film of lace at her throat.

"Oh, you don't understand—you don't understand!" she moaned. "I have done wrong—I have forgotten—and this is madness! You must let me go! Please—please—let me go—"

"It is not madness!" he cried, almost fiercely, still holding her in his arms. "Josephine, I will not let you take back what you have given me tonight. You are mine, and I will fight for you to the last drop of blood in my body. I know what you would say. I can see it in your eyes. But it makes no difference to me now. A thousand Lawlers cannot take you from me. Do you hear? A thousand Lawlers can't do it now! I do not try to guess the strange influence that chains you to

him. I shall not urge you to have greater faith in me and tell me what it is. But I shall not give you up. You are mine—mine—and you must tell me that to-night—now—before I let you go!”

His voice was swift and passionate. His eyes blazed with the force of the tremendous fighting energies that were rising in him, and Josephine Winton looked at him, white-faced and silent, her hands against his breast, no longer fighting for her freedom.

One of his hands rose to her head and stroked her shining hair. The battle-light faded out of his eyes, and she saw in them now only the tenderness of the great love that for a few moments had filled him with the passion of the fighter. Like a flood that could no longer be held back, hope, faith in him, love for this man who was ready to fight the whole world for her, rushed upon and overwhelmed her. He saw the change, and gently he took her face in his hands and raised it to the starlight, so that he could look into her eyes.

“You love me?” he whispered.

“Yes.”

“And if it was not for—this thing—in your life—you would come to me forever—and ever?”

“Yes.”

“Then you belong to me!” he cried joyously, his face shining with triumph. “In a few days I will be master of the capital—the most powerful man in Honduras! And then—Josephine—don’t you understand what it means? Lawler will be in my power. Nothing can save him.”

He felt her shiver.

“It will be too late,” she said in a faint, cold voice. “The president’s ball—is to-morrow night. Two days later—I must marry Lawler.”

Like the shock of an explosion came the unexpected opening and closing of a door at the end of the patio. The sound was followed by men’s voices. Billy recognized Lawler’s wheezing laugh. He laughed softly in reply, and

for a moment held Josephine’s head close against his breast, her face turned up to his.

“That day will never come,” he said. There was no excitement in his voice. “You will never marry Lawler: I swear it. You must see me again to-night if you can—”

The voices were coming nearer.

Quick footsteps sounded on the gravel-path, and Dolores came running toward them between the rows of palms.

“You will come back?” he urged.

“Yes—yes—if I can!”

He bent and kissed her quivering lips, and when he freed her Dolores stood as white as a lily between the palms, her arms reaching out to Josephine.

“We must go! They are coming down this path!” she warned. “Billy, hide yourself among the palms! Oh, hurry—”

He dropped back into the deep shadow of the foliage as the girls turned to meet Don Alcasia and Lawler. Before they were out of sight he heard Dolores laughing and talking in her effort to cover Josephine’s excitement, and a moment later the two men joined them.

He could distinguish Lawler’s voice, and gritted his teeth. The voices receded. He could still hear Dolores’s laughter, and he was sure she had taken possession of Lawler and was piloting him ahead of Josephine and her father. He stepped out into the path, wondering what could have induced the Spaniard and his guest to follow the girls into the garden.

Had they come out to smoke a cigar before getting down to the matter of the mines? He prayed this was so, for in that case Dolores and Josephine would be able to rejoin him a little later. But the four did not stop in the patio. He heard them climbing the steps to the broad veranda that overlooked the garden. They did not pause there, but passed into the house.

A heaviness which Billy could not explain settled upon him. It seemed to

him that there was something almost ominous in this interruption. He judged that Lawler and Dolores’s father had not been in the garden five minutes. They had come out to find the girls. In other words, Lawler was afraid to lose his hold of Josephine—even for half an hour!

He hurried along the path, sheltering himself in the shadow of the shrubbery, until he came to the veranda. One of the low windows was open, and, without hesitation, he drew himself over the stone parapet and listened. They had passed to the front of the house. He could not hear the men, but Dolores’s voice came to him faintly. For five minutes he crouched beside the window.

Then he heard the slam of the door opening on the *cera*. Scarce half a minute had gone when he heard some one running quickly through the house, and he leaped over the parapet and concealed himself near the steps. Dolores appeared on the veranda. He could see that she was excited. She hesitated, her hands pressed to her breast. Then she ran down the steps and was passing him when he called to her.

“Come to the cottage, Billy!” she cried in a low voice. “I want to see you there!”

She was waiting for him when he came through the shrubbery.

“He has taken her back to the palace!” she exclaimed. “Oh, Billy, *he knows!*”

“Knows—what?”

“*Something!*” she gasped wildly. “He can’t know that you were in the garden, Billy; but he knows *something!* I am afraid that you are no longer safe here! Josephine had a chance to tell me that as we were going through the house. She was frightened. He mistrusts—if he doesn’t know. I heard him apologize to father for his haste. He said that he would surely invest a large sum in the Rosario mines, but that he had an important engagement at the palace at eight-

thirty—something he had not anticipated earlier in the evening, when he had promised to come with Josephine and spend the evening with us. He was lying. I could see it in Josephine’s face. Something aroused his suspicion after he came into our house—after we had joined you in the garden. Billy—Billy—”

He could see the throb of her bare throat.

“Billy—I wonder—if he saw—your picture? I forgot to put it away. It was on the table—the picture I showed Josephine—you and Lorry—in front of the cathedral!”

“It’s there—now?” he demanded.

“Yes. I saw it when I came out.”

“Thank Heaven!” exclaimed Billy, with a deep breath of relief. “You must destroy it, Dolores. Lawler will tell Barilla. If he finds the picture here it will bring suspicion upon your house, and perhaps more. Lorry and I are the leaders of the revolution, and according to all precedents we will be shot to death if caught. You dare not betray yourselves as our friends. If Barilla should find *me* here—”

He hesitated. Her face was very white.

“I understand,” she said. “It would mean—something terrible—for my father.”

“Yes. I must go to-night. I will hide somewhere—in the lower quarters of the town.”

She looked at him, startled.

“You have seen Josephine—and now—now—you must leave the city,” she urged. “You can do no good here. You must escape. Return with the army, and then—”

“I have made my plans, Dolores,” he interrupted her calmly. “I have made them in the last ten minutes. Place yourself in Josephine’s place—and mine. I cannot hurry the army. If it does not take the city by Thursday—Dolores—don’t you see what it means? Lorry will lose no time. But if he fails—if he is defeated—I must be here, to make a last fight for Joseph-

ine. I have determined what I shall do. If the army fails to appear, the wedding-day must be postponed in some way. If we fail in that, there is one other thing left for me to do."

"And that—" Dolores questioned faintly.

"Kill Lawler!"

She caught his arm with a frightened cry.

"Billy—you don't mean that?"

"Yes," he said, his eyes blue and steely in the starlight. "For Josephine I will kill Lawler!"

"But she has said that will only make her fate more terrible," argued the girl.

"It will at least give me a fighting chance," he replied as calmly as before. "I have made up my mind. If all other things fail, I will kill Lawler."

"Billy, you don't know what you are saying! It would be madness. It would mean your own death."

"Possibly," he admitted.

He did not expect the change that came into her voice and face.

"Billy," she quivered, "I—I believe I'd like to have Lorry say that—if I were in Josephine's place. Perhaps it doesn't sound like a woman, but I know I'd want him to fight for me—if it was necessary. I'd want him to do anything—anything—to save me from a fate like that! And you—"

He gazed wonderingly into her face.

"I'll help you," she said, looking at him steadily.

"You're the bravest little partner that ever lived!" he exclaimed joyously. "Without you I would be lost. With you I am going to win. One of us must see Josephine again. It is almost necessary that it should be me. If I cannot, it must be you. She must act with us. Tell her what I have determined to do, and that nothing on earth will alter my determination. She must in some way delay the wedding-day. Lawler cannot use physical force with her. He will wait, if she insists. Three or four days more and Loring will be outside the city. Every road

and path will be closed, and Josephine can then openly defy him, for no courier will be able to get through our lines with the mysterious message she fears he will send to New York. Once Lawler is in my power, I will torture him inch by inch until he recalls those fatal papers. If I could tell her this with my own lips, I know that she would understand. I must see her again!"

"I will try to arrange another meeting for to-morrow," said Dolores. She betrayed uneasiness as she looked back toward the house. "You must not leave this place, Billy. Mother Isobel, Juan, and I will all be on the watch, and warn you in time if any one comes. Under the house there is an old well. It is only about ten feet deep, and dry. Drop into that if you get a warning. It is straight back from the third window. If you hear the door slam hard—run—run and hide!"

"I understand," he said. "During the night I will keep close to the veranda."

The girl turned and hurried back to the house, calling in a low voice for Mother Isobel to follow her. A little later the old woman returned.

"She has told me, *señor*," she said. "To-night Juan will watch, close to the *cera*. Also, if you should hear the patio gate slam, it is the signal that all is not well."

Billy nodded.

Most of that night he passed in wakefulness near the veranda. An hour before dawn Juan spread out a blanket far back under the house, and Billy, after eating the breakfast Mother Isobel had prepared for him, crawled into his dark seclusion.

"You may safely sleep here, *señor*," said Juan.

He did not intend to sleep, but his night of wakefulness foredoomed his best intentions. It was Juan who aroused him hours later. He was shaking him by the shoulder when Billy opened his eyes.

"Dios, how he sleeps!" he heard the

old man grumble. "The army could march over his head and he would not know it. *Señor!*"

Billy sat up.

"The *señorita's* father is away and she is waiting for you at the cottage," said Juan.

Billy crawled out into the light of day. The sun was straight overhead. He dived into the bushes, brushed himself off, and half a minute later presented himself before Dolores in the cottage. Juan and Mother Isobel had gone to guard the patio gate and the house.

Dolores's first words stunned him.

"I was turned away from the palace," she said, her dark eyes flashing and her head thrown back proudly. "It is the first time I can remember this happening to a member of our house. I was told that in the present unsettled condition of the country it was deemed advisable to allow no communication between those at the palace and outside visitors. It was a lame excuse to keep me away from Josephine. Barilla strengthened it a little by sending word that after the masked ball to-night only people on important business would be admitted to the grounds. It's the old thing—the president's precaution against assassination in time of revolution. But why should he fear me?"

She had spoken swiftly, angrily, and her little hands were clenched at her side.

"It's because of Josephine—and Lawler," she went on. "Lawler saw the picture. I don't doubt it now. He told Barilla. Josephine will be kept a prisoner until she is married to Lawler!"

Billy was looking at her steadily.

"Will Josephine be at the masked ball to-night?" he asked, not taking his eyes from her.

"Yes."

She saw what his question meant before he had spoken more. It was in his eyes.

"You don't mean—" she gasped.

"That I am going to the ball—yes!" he exclaimed, beginning to walk back and forth a little excitedly. "We'll beat 'em at their own game, Dolores! The guests always arrive in mask, and they don't unmask until midnight. Before then I'll find Josephine. Dolores, everything depends on you again. I need a costume and a card to admit me."

"I can get the first," she said. "There is an old friar's costume in the house that has not been worn for years. But—the card—"

She puckered her forehead. Then, suddenly, she brightened.

"Father doesn't care to go. I will feign illness, and he will remain at home with me. If he should ask about the card, I will lie, and tell him that it is lost. But I don't think that he will say anything about it. He dislikes Barilla, and will be glad of an excuse to stay away—even though it is illness."

"No wonder Lorry told me to come to you!" he cried warmly. "Do you know, Dolores, I'm beginning to see what it is that men really worship and reverence in women: It's strength—and cleverness. The women of the other sort merely love—for a time. I believe a strong man despises a woman coward almost as much as a man coward. If Josephine had been that—if she had accepted her fate with that lamblike meekness which some would have us believe is womanhood—well, she wouldn't be Josephine, would she? And you—"

She flushed under the honest admiration in his eyes.

"Dolores, with such women as you and Josephine at our sides, Lorry and I can pound success out of mountains with our naked fists!"

Her eyes were misty with tenderness as he spoke Loring's name in this way.

"And women love men because they're strong and clever, too, Billy. They don't care so very much for looks. So you don't want to forget to be clever. How are you going to find Josephine at the ball?"

The point of her smiling shot brought a look of perplexity into his face.

"By Jove, that's so!" he exclaimed. "But you can tell me, Dolores—you can tell me how she's going to dress?"

"I can't Billy. She will wear one of the costumes kept for guests at the palace. But I know that she is going to wear a big red rose in her hair; and as her hair is gold-brown—"

"I'll know her!" declared Billy. "You're sure she will wear the rose?"

"Quite certain. I was to wear the same—a means of mutual identification, you know. If it should happen that by any accident she is not wearing the rose—well, I doubt if there will be any other hair like hers in the ballroom."

"I will have no trouble in recognizing her," repeated Billy. "Of course, she will enter the ballroom in the president's suite—"

"Of course she will not," broke in Dolores. "The president and his family, with the members of the cabinet, will not be masked, and will appear on the dais alone."

"Lawler will know the costume she is to wear?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And he will just as surely lead her in the first or second march!"

"Now you are becoming really brilliant, Billy."

"I could pick Lawler out from among ten thousand," he exclaimed jubilantly. Then he added: "We must get the latest news from the army, if we can, Dolores. The people at the mines undoubtedly know something of Loring's movements. Question your father."

A little later Dolores left him. She did not return again until late in the afternoon. All that she could learn was that there had been fighting near Comayagua. No word of victory or defeat for the federal forces had arrived, but couriers were expected every hour.

After supper Billy put on his cos-

tume. Mother Isobel had brought him word that *Señorita Dolores* was in the house, "ill with fever and a headache." It was eight o'clock when Juan came to him and said that the way was clear through the patio gate. Billy lost no time in passing from the garden to the *cera*. Fifteen minutes later a soldier stopped him at the huge iron gate opening into the walled gardens of the palace, and looked at his ticket.

"You may pass, *señor*," he said, returning the ticket, and Billy walked coolly between two files of soldiers.

The grounds leading up to the palace were a starry embankment of light. Hundreds of Oriental lanterns were glowing between the trees and among the shrubbery, and triple rows of them made a blazing path to the doors of the mansion. Billy loitered on his way up the slope.

He knew that if an eye of suspicion were thrown upon him, it would be when he gave the card bearing Don Alcasia's name to the officers at the door, and he planned to gain admittance when several others were also presenting their cards. His ruse could not have worked out more to his satisfaction. A group of guests overtook him, and he passed in with them.

A dozen soldiers of the president's guard made an aisle to the grand stairway leading to the upper hall. Most of the guests had preceded him, and when he reached the top a throng of men and women were passing from the robing-room and making their entry into the great ballroom.

He fell in with them, his eyes already eagerly scanning the figures about him, as the palace band began crashing out a Sousa march. He entered the ballroom, dazzled for a moment by the riot of color and life that met his eyes. The gleaming white of the walls and columns, the rich brilliance of the draperies, the thousand points of light studding the arched ceiling and spangling the walls, the vividly attired guests massed in groups and circling in the promenade, made up a

scene that held him spellbound in admiration.

The crash of the band suddenly stopped. The murmur of voices, of low laughter, the swish of silken skirts, the rippling of subdued life and movement filled the immense hall. He threaded his way through the groups, scanning every figure he passed for some distinguishing sign that would reveal Josephine to him. He searched the black-and-yellow costume of a gipsy, and met her dark eyes flashing with laughter through her mask.

He followed the all-concealing folds of dominoes—black, pink, and scarlet; looked under the conical hat and scarlet ribbons of a pierrot; scrutinized the black net gown, crescent moon, and silver stars of "Evening"—drew near to graceful peasant girls of Andalusia and haughty ladies of old Castile.

Twice he promenaded the length of the hall without discovering Josephine. Then his eyes followed the men in search of Lawler. Once he thought that he had found his man in the black and flowing robes of Columbus.

A moment later he found he was mistaken. A short man in the slashed sleeves and plumed hat of Del Cano rubbed his elbow, but it was not Lawler. He crowded among *Don Quijotes*, Spanish muleteers, ruffled and embroidered toreadors, but no fat and ponderous body such as Lawler's rewarded his search.

He began to grow nervous; and then, with a suddenness that startled him, a hush fell upon the assemblage.

President Barilla, dressed in simple evening clothes, had already made his appearance when Billy turned his eyes to the curtained and velvet-carpeted dais at the upper end of the hall. He stood bowing and smiling, with his wife at his side, while behind them thronged his suite of cabinet ministers, army officers in full dress, and the representatives of foreign governments in the capital.

None of them was masked, and Billy was relieved when he saw that

Lawler and Josephine were not among them. If they had been there, unmasked, he knew that he would have found it difficult to approach Josephine.

Barilla was speaking a few words of welcome. Billy was so far back that he could not hear distinctly, and he slightly moved his position. His eyes came in range of the big arched door opening into the outer corridor, and his heart gave a tremendous jump. Standing there, the full length of the hall from him, was a short, fat figure, with the ruddy face, scraggy hair, and thick paunch of *Sancho Panza*. Close beside him was a tall, girlish figure in shimmering pale-blue silk, and from under his monk's cowl Billy uttered an exclamation of joy.

Barilla had ceased speaking. The orchestra concealed behind the palms in the gallery broke into the wailing notes of "L'Estudiantina," and at this signal the assemblage became suddenly a sea of life, and broke into the slow movement of the waltz.

Billy had no mind for a partner and dropped back to the edge of the promenade. For a few moments he had lost the figures in the arched doorway; but he caught sight of *Sancho Panza* now, waltzing with the girl in pale-blue silk. He knew that he had found Lawler, and his face flushed excitedly under his mask as he followed the movements of the girl.

Suddenly they disappeared in a laughing crush of dancers. When they reappeared they were close to him. Lawler's partner was dressed as *Marguerite*. Her face was concealed under a mask of the same color as her gown, and from the bottom of the mask a filmy lace fall floated to her bosom, covering her mouth and throat. A net of white lace covered her head. But she did not wear a rose.

They drew nearer, and then for a moment they were free of the other dancers, and passed him scarcely a dozen paces away. For the first time he caught a glimpse of *Marguerite's* back, and every drop of blood in his

body was fired with joy. A long, shining braid of gold-brown hair fell from under the lace head-dress, and he almost cried out Josephine's name.

He chose a partner for the next dance, his head afire with eagerness. For the third dance he almost succeeded in reaching Josephine; but a tall Toreador beat him out by a dozen seconds. He was determined that the fourth dance should be his, and when the orchestra finished the encore of the third number he moved swiftly toward the group where he had last seen Josephine.

She was already surrounded by half a dozen admirers, and Billy saw *Sancho Panza* coming across the hall. He knew there was no time to lose if he won out this time, and he thrust himself in boldly between two courtiers and took advantage of his churchly prestige to place a hand on Josephine's arm.

"My daughter," he said in a low voice, "will you honor a poor old Franciscan friar with your beauty and youth in the next dance?" He bowed so that his black cowl almost touched her face, and in that same breath he uttered in a low, swift voice, intended for her alone, "Josephine."

He felt her start under his touch, and said, loud enough for the others to hear:

"*Marguerite*, fate has broken your heart, but with this black frock I bring you hope and cheer." He turned to the cavaliers: "Gentlemen, this once I take precedence over chivalry and the sword."

Josephine's hand trembled on his arm as he led her away. He could feel the throbbing of her body. No word came from her lips. He carried her into the thickest of the promenade, and then he whispered:

"Josephine, do you know me?"

His name came to him in a choking breath that was next to a sob.

"Billy—"

Her hand clutched his arm. He could hear her frightened breath under

her mask. He could talk to her now without fear.

"Dolores helped me," he explained. "I came with Don Alcasia's card. To-night we must come to an understanding—you and I. Did you think that I would leave you to your fate—to Lawler?" He laughed softly, his voice vibrant with joy, as he felt the gentle pressure of her hand on his arm. "I am going to fight for you—and you must help. To-night I have come to tell you that, to make our plans together. We will outwit Lawler. It will be easy. But you must work with me!"

"Billy—Billy—if they discover you here—"

"Barilla will have me shot," he said coolly. "To save me you must save yourself, Josephine. I love you that much. If we fail you go to your fate—I to mine. But we will not fail."

The orchestra began to play, and they swung out among the dancers. Before the waltz was over Billy had told her everything, how he planned to get Lawler in his power, and how all depended on her delaying the day set for the wedding until Loring's army had closed every road and trail leading from the city.

He impressed upon her the importance of the confessions he had already wrung from Lawler, and described how utterly hopeless the millionaire's situation would be if Tegucigalpa was captured. It would be easy to secure the papers from him then, for he would pay any price to escape the fate he had in store for him.

His enthusiasm, his masterful confidence, flooded Josephine's eyes with hope, and she promised to put off Lawler, even in the face of his threats. As she told Billy this her fingers tightened on his arm, and through the mask he saw a light in her eyes that he had never seen there before.

"If the papers are destroyed—I will be free," she whispered. "But—Billy—Billy—you wouldn't want me—if you knew—"

"I will never know unless you want me to," he replied quickly. "All I want in this world is you, Josephine; and all I want to know is what I know now—that you are the purest, sweetest woman in the world, and that whatever has happened to place you in his power has made you dearer to me because of the suffering it has brought upon you. You cannot tell me that you have done any wrong, for I would not believe you."

He heard her breath break in a low sob.

"God bless you—for that—Billy!" he heard her say as the orchestra stopped.

Not more than half a dozen steps away *Sancho Panza* was coming toward them.

"Lawler is coming!" he cried softly. "Keep the third dance after this for me!"

He bowed slightly, and moved away as Lawler came up. He went out into the long open-air gallery, which Loring had once called the hanging garden of the palace; and, concealing himself behind a mass of palms, pushed back the uncomfortably warm cowl from his head and raised his mask. Never had the fresh air seemed so good to him. His blood was at fever-heat. Every pulse beat with joy and triumph.

Confident that Josephine would play her part, even to openly defying Lawler's wishes, he made up his mind that he would make his escape from the capital before morning. He would not sleep or rest until he had reached Loring and the army, and after that not an unnecessary hour would be lost in making the attack on Tegucigalpa. He figured that Loring could not be many miles from the capital now, for, no matter how the fighting had gone with General Garcias at Comayagua, Loring would not change the plans they had made.

At the most, Loring could not be more than forty miles away; perhaps not more than thirty—or even twenty. He would leave immediately after his

next dance with Josephine, when he would tell her what he was going to do.

He returned to the ballroom, and at the appointed time approached Josephine. To his surprise he saw Lawler standing a short distance away, watching him. Josephine's first words did not reassure him.

"He asked me why I was nervous, and why my hands trembled," she greeted him, turning her back to Lawler so that he could not see that she was speaking. "I tried to be calm, Billy. But I couldn't. Billy, I wish you would go—now."

"After this dance," he replied, looking away from her. "Come. Take my arm. After the waltz has started we will slip out into the gallery."

When they had crossed the hall Billy saw that Lawler was still following them with his eyes. When he looked a second time Lawler had disappeared.

Watching his opportunity, Billy guided his partner through a maze of dancers, and succeeded in reaching the gallery, quite confident that their movements had not been observed. The space behind the palms, where he had stood a few minutes before, was unoccupied when he led Josephine to it. Again he threw back his black cowl and mask, and with trembling fingers Josephine raised her own mask. Her lovely face was flushed and her eyes shone with happiness and hope. She turned her lips up to Billy, and for a few moments he crushed her close against his breast, and kissed the tender eyes and mouth that were surrendered to him wholly now. As he held her there, looking into the beautiful face that quivered and flushed against him, he told her he was going to leave the city that night, and again he urged upon her the necessity of defying Lawler, even though the revolutionary army was at first defeated.

She was about to reply when a movement of a palm drew her eyes. In that moment Billy saw her face frozen in sudden horror, and a choking cry rose to her lips. He whirled about.

Three paces away stood Lawler. He was unmasked. His fleshy face was livid with rage, and yet with that rage there was mingled the ferocity of a terrible triumph. But it was not Lawler that sent the cold chill to Billy's heart. Close behind him stood four of the president's guard, and behind the guard stood Barilla, president of the republic. He saw all this in an instant, and his coolness did not forsake him.

In a voice that Lawler could not hear he said to Josephine: "Whatever happens, *don't fail to play your part!*"

Even as he spoke, the friar's frock dropped from his shoulders, and he leaped upon Lawler and sent him crashing back among the palms. Barilla uttered a shrill command, and naked sabers glittered in the hands of the soldiers. Behind him Billy heard the sharp click of guns. He knew that he was surrounded and that a moment's hesitation would be fatal.

With the click of the guns at his

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

TWO DAYS

By John Maynard Waite

YESTERDAY the sun was shining,
The sky a canopy of blue;
The wild rose bloomed in all the meadow
In deference to you.
The redbird piped his sweetest greeting
As here and there he hopped and flew
About my humble little cottage
In deference to you.

To-day the sun is hidden from me,
Gray clouds have blotted out the blue,
The wild rose droops its head in sorrow
Because of you.
The redbird has no greeting for me;
My cottage e'en is dreary, too,
As 'neath its roof a heart is breaking
Because of you.

back he had drawn his automatic revolver, and a blaze of fire streamed in the faces of the four who stood with drawn sabers. Two of the soldiers crumpled down in their tracks, and Billy sprang to the parapet. It was a sheer drop of twenty feet, but he took the jump as though it had been four.

Fortunately, he landed in a thick mass of shrubbery. In an instant he was on his feet, and darted into the open. For a moment his eyes were turned to the balcony, and he saw that one of the soldiers, quicker than the rest, was leveling a carbine at him. It was impossible to miss at that distance, and he was about to fling himself to the ground in a despairing effort to escape the shot when a second figure threw itself upon the soldier.

It was Josephine!

He heard her crying out to him as the shot from the carbine flew high over his head.

"Run, Billy! Run—run—run!"

THE MAN IN THE WELL*

A SERIAL IN III PARTS—PART III

BY PIERRE SALES

Translated by FLORENCE CREWE-JONES

Translator of "The Red Nights of Paris," "The Whisper from the Tomb," "The Man Without a Face," etc.

CHAPTER VII.

The Villa.



R. HARCOURT looked as red as a ripe tomato as he trotted up and down the green lawn which stretches before the European Hotel in Calcutta.

He had just given his head-waiter his order for dinner, and was thinking of it with no little satisfaction.

He looked up at two travelers about to enter the hotel.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed; "if that isn't Jacques Velizay!"

"Hello, Mr. Harcourt!" cried Jacques. "This season I have come earlier than usual, because my friend here, Paul Merseins, happened to be coming by this boat. I thought I would come along and show him some of the sights before I get down to business. Let me introduce you, Paul. This is Mr. Harcourt, the most genial hotel proprietor in India."

"Glad to see you here, sir," said Harcourt, stretching out his fat, chubby hand. "You've arrived just in time for dinner, sir. We have an excellent menu this evening."

He led the way into the hotel and called a servant, who showed the guests to two adjoining rooms.

"Now for John J. Smith," said Jacques.

"I shall have to ask Harcourt about him, but it is difficult to get him to talk. The only time his tongue is unloosed is when he is eating."

"Let us hope that he has not heard of the murder."

"We'll know that before we have finished dinner."

The police had been too late in preventing the two men from crossing the frontier. They had missed the steamer, but had managed to get passage on a trading vessel and had gone up the Suez, and later had caught the English boat direct to Calcutta.

Mr. Harcourt was sitting down to his dinner when the two friends entered the dining-room.

"Won't you sit down with us?" asked Jacques. "It is so long since we have had a talk. And, by the way, I have not forgotten to bring over that *fine champagne* that you are so fond of."

Harcourt beamed and drank off at a gulp the glass of beer that was before him.

"You'll get the barrel to-morrow, but I've got a bottle with me now, so we'll open it to-night."

When the dessert was placed on the table, Jacques poured out the *fine champagne*.

"Here's to you, Mr. Harcourt," he said, lifting his glass.

"That's good," said Harcourt.

* This story began in The Cavalier for April 19.