

THE GHOST BREAKER

CHARLES W. GODDARD
AND PAUL DICKEY

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Title: The Ghost Breaker: A Novel Based Upon the Play

Author: Charles Goddard

Paul Dickey

Release date: June 14, 2008 [eBook #25781]

Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25781

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GHOST BREAKER: A NOVEL BASED UPON THE PLAY ***

Warren—don't call me Highness!... my name is Maria

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THE GHOST BREAKER

A NOVEL BASED
UPON THE PLAY

By

CHARLES GODDARD

AND

PAUL DICKEY

Logo

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NEW YORK 1915

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I

JARVIS OF KENTUCKY

Down the winding roadway came the thunder of hoofbeats!

As the two horsemen approached through the deepening twilight a sobbing negro woman peered timidly through the doorway of the old Southern manor house. There was a call from within.

"Put out this light, Mandy," were the words of the weak voice. "Hurry, Mandy. Maybe it's the Marcums coming back."

"Yas, Cunnel; yassir." She obediently retreated, and the dim light within was suddenly extinguished.

The two riders turned in from the thoroughfare, speeding past the half-swung gate up the drive toward the broad portico. The foremost slid from his saddle before his horse had come to a stop.

"Hold her, Rusty!" And then he leaped up the steps, to dash into the dark entry.

"Who is it? Stop!"

There was no weakness of spirit in the tremulous tones from the room within.

"Dad! dad! I've come!"

"Oh, my boy! You're just in time," and the speech ended in a sigh which sent a thrill of horror through the newcomer. "Just ... in ... time!"

"Lawd be praised, Marse Warren," sobbed the negress, as she sank to her knees before the table, where she fumbled with the lamp.

"Light the lamp ... why, it's Mandy!" and the young man ran a nervous hand across his forehead as the wick caught the flame. "Dad! What's the trouble? Where's mother? Why were the lights all out?"

In the corner of the room, on an antique "settle," was stretched the form of old Colonel Jarvis of Meadow Green.

"It's the end, Warren. I stood off Yankee charges and artillery, but a sneaking hound from the hills has put the finish on it all—and sent it in a bullet through my back, without giving me the chance to fight back, as the Yanks did."

Warren Jarvis dropped to his knees beside his father. His pleasant, youthful face was drawn to mummy-like wanness. His eyes glowed with curious intensity, as they devoured the beloved features of the old man. The rays from the oil lamp cast a melancholy glow over the furniture of a bygone society, in this characteristic parlor of an old Southern mansion. But their effect upon the ghastly features of Colonel Henderson Jarvis presaged only too well the tragedy which was to come.

The aged man raised a weak arm, to encircle the shoulders of his son. His eyes closed in exhaustion, and for a full moment the lips moved without the emanation of a word.

Warren Jarvis turned toward the panic-stricken Mandy.

"Quick! What is the trouble? Where is mother? Speak up, Mandy.... I've come all the way from New York in answer to father's telegram. What's the trouble?"

Mandy became more disconsolate, and, with the hysterical sorrow of a Southern family servant, the more incapable of expression.

"Warren ... Warren, my boy!" were the words which at last came from the white lips of his father. "I am going to leave you soon.... I kept up until you arrived, for I must give the honor of the family into your keeping, before it is all over.... Are you prepared to take it up where I stand now?"

The young man nodded. He beckoned to the servant woman, with an eloquent pantomimic command, to bring his sire a drink. The girl silently obeyed, leaving the room for the moment.

"Father, I've come back from the East to do anything, everything. Tell me—what happened, and where is mother? I am frantic!" His shoulders shook as though from a chill. His face was close to his father's, as the colonel's gray eyes opened upon him.

"Your mother passed away last night—it was too much for her poor weak, aching heart, Warren," and his voice sank again to a whisper, as he added, "Your first duty will be to lay us away together, and then to avenge this double murder."

Warren Jarvis lost his worldly-wise self-control, acquired through the adventurous years since he had journeyed forth from the quaint old Kentucky home. A sob broke from his lips, and his face sank on the arm of the old aristocrat,—he was instinctively boyish in his grief, returning once more to the shelter of that paternal shoulder.

Mandy had returned with a glass of stimulant, which she held to the colonel's lips. The draught refreshed him immensely. He gently patted the shoulders of his son, and continued with firmer tones:

"There, Warren boy, pull yourself together. The doctor will be along in his buggy soon. He dressed my wound, two days ago, and he sat with your dear mother ever since she received the shock of the shooting. I sent the Marlowe girls back to their house just an hour ago to rest, because they were worn out.... Everyone has been good and tried to help, but it is no use.... Leave us alone, Mandy."

The woman stepped unsteadily through the door, her hands covering her twitching face. There she bumped into a fat, coal-black darky, he who had accompanied the son on the long ride. She drew him into the shelter of the corridor, leaving father and son together for the final confidences.

"But, father, it was all so sudden? Are you comfortable now? Where is your wound?"

Warren rose more upright on his knees. He now observed the swathings about the elder's breast, beneath the crumpled soft shirt. He caressed the shattered frame with affectionate simplicity.

"I must speak quickly, Warren, for although I suffer no more pain, Dr. Grayson told me the truth—my strength is going every hour. Your mother had been in poor health, and I had ridden down to the village to see the doctor, for a tonic for her. On the way out again, I passed Henley's poolroom, where the cheap gamblers are still running their crooked betting on the Louisville and Lexington races. Jim Marcum crossed from the front of the saloon, and I had to rein in quickly to keep from running him down. He looked up at me, with his hand on his hip. 'Trying the same old trick on me that you did with my brother Ed?' he called. I had nothing to say to Jim Marcum—you know, Warren, that old feud was over these thirty years, as far as I was concerned. I looked him in the eye, and he dropped his gaze, like a wolf which daren't stare back at you. Then I rode on. As I turned the corner, past the little church, I heard a shot and tumbled forward in the saddle."

Warren's hands clenched until the nails cut his palms.

"The cowardly hound!" he muttered.

"Just as my father was shot by Marcum's father, right after the War—in the back, Warren. The horse knew enough to stop, and I rolled down to the ground. Dr. Grayson ran down the street, carried me into the church vestibule, and dressed my back. They wanted to keep me in the parson's house—but I told them to bring me on home, for I wanted to be near your

mother. It was a mistake ... a grave mistake. For when they brought me back in the doctor's buggy and called her to the portico, she fainted, and never regained consciousness. That's all, Warren. The end came last night for her—to-night I will join her."

He opened his eyes with ghastly intensity of expression. Then, to the surprise of the younger man, he half raised himself on his elbow.

"Warren!" and the tones were almost shrill, "you must *get* Jim Marcum if it's the last act of your life. He broke the feud law when he killed a woman, as he did with the death of your mother. My dying command is that you end this old fight between our families: he is the last of his line, and you the last of yours. The feud began nearly eighty years ago. It is a different world then in that old Kentucky. I have tried to live upright, God-fearing, and had supposed that time would efface the old hatred. At least I ignored it. But Jim Marcum never forgot that your Uncle Warren had killed his father in that stand-up battle in the old tobacco warehouse; it is the curse of the Blue Grass State, this feud law. But you must carry out the vengeance, Warren. When you scotch that snake, there will be no more."

"Didn't they try to get Marcum, dad?" asked Warren slowly, trying to realize it all.

"No. He disappeared—helped by some of those touts and gamblers. They say he has gone to the mountains. But you follow him, after ... after I...." He sank back again, groaning. "God bless you, boy. When you end this bitter debt, you will have done everything in the world I ever wanted,—what a fine son you have been through all the years!"

Warren rose to his feet, and with hands clasped tensely behind him walked to the window. He heard a sound of buggy wheels and the trotting of a horse; it neared the house.

"It must be the doctor, dad. I'm glad he is here again." He turned about to look at the clear-cut face. He was horror-stricken: the eyes were closed, the hand had dropped limply, and already the fine firm mouth had opened

weakly, with a piteous weakness. He rushed forward, dropping again by the side of the couch.

A step behind him did not interrupt the soft pleadings of the tearful voice.

"Dad, dad! Won't you speak to me? You *must* hold out. The doctor has come. Dad, old daddie mine. Speak! Speak!"

The eyes opened, but there was no expression in them. The mouth closed convulsively, and as he leaned close he heard the last message: "God bless you, boy!... Take ... care ... of ... yourself."

Warren's face was buried on the bosom as it ceased to breathe. A kindly touch on his shoulder brought him to a knowledge of the doctor's presence.

"It's so good that you arrived in time, Warren," was the soft-voiced comment. "Your father passed away happy, I know—he had held himself to this life by a marvelous will-power until you came. Steady yourself now."

The doctor knelt by the couch and, with the manly tenderness of an old family friend, crossed the tired patrician hands above that valiant heart.

Warren Jarvis answered not. He walked toward the window again. He peered out into the great, black, miserable, lonely void stretching away toward the southeast. In those distant hills, beyond his vision but familiar as the landmarks of his boyhood, he knew the cowardly assassin of his parents was exulting over the cruel success.

Not a tear came to his relief. His pleasant face hardened to the rigidity of a stone image. The sinews of his athletic frame thrilled with a new emotion—the feud hatred inherited through generations of Kentucky fighters. He would have gladly given his own life for the sublime pleasure of throttling with his bare hands the scoundrel who had wiped out all that was fine and sweet in his life.

Behind him the doctor gave whispered orders to Mandy and two tearful women neighbors who had quietly slipped into the house. Warren did not

notice them in his abstraction; they respected his suffering by leaving the room without a greeting.

As he stood there the soft spring breeze fluttered the curtains of the broad parlor windows, bearing in the fragrance of the vines on the portico outside. It was all so silent and different from the brilliant social life he had left behind in New York. Warren's whole life seemed to flit past him, as he stood there now, with the impersonality of a kaleidoscope.

He remembered the early years on this beautiful Blue Grass estate of his father's ... the romantic boyhood of the South, enlivened by horseback rides, hunting trips, boating, fishing—those elemental country sports so sadly lacking in the life of the city youth, ... the faithful, admiring negro servants to whom young "Marse Warren" had been a veritable Sir Galahad—the flower of the neighborhood chivalry. Indeed, in this portion of the States still glows the tradition of the ancient knighthood: the gallantry to women, the reverence for family honor, the bravery in men, the loyalty to neighborhood, commonwealth, and nation,—in verity, the spirit of ideal citizenship.

Warren saw once more the gentle face of his mother, as she worked in her old-fashioned garden of rosemary, hollyhocks, larkspur, iris, rue, ... heard the soft dialect of quaint old ladies gossiping on the broad, shaded portico ... listened again to the laughter of neighboring judges, colonels, majors—his father's old cronies—as they good-naturedly wrangled and bantered over the battles of the War, the merits of their respective thoroughbreds, or the correct manner in which to concoct that nectarian classic of the Southland, the mint julep!

To Warren's retrospection came the vision of his departure for the famous college in the East, the joyful vacation times, and finally his decision to seek adventure far, far to the south—in Brazil, Guatemala, Panama, where he had developed his own executive caliber as a commander of men, in the great construction work on the Big Ditch.... Then came the sorrowful day when he had returned from his travels, to behold the ravages of time on his

mother's aging face and his father's stooping shoulders. Even the servants were changed, and it had been to keep a closer bond with the dear old estate that he had taken faithful Rusty Snow as his manservant when he went on to New York again to pursue his profession.

Warren's mind burrowed in the memories of the feudism of the countryside, the sole blot on its simple yet aristocratic modes. He remembered the fragmentary stories of the ancient Marcum-Jarvis quarrel ... this had cost the lives of men for three generations, in an equity of vengeful settlement based strictly on the Mosaic law of "an eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth." The Marcum family fortunes had been dissipated, those of the Jarvis clan ascending—yet still the feud continued, until the men of both families had paid for the bitterness with their lives. Now his father had been the last Jarvis to go—after a lull of many years.

The sweetness of the old memories was swept by the maelstrom of hate which surged through his heart. As a boy he hardly knew the meaning of the word—the grim looks of the kinsmen, the tear-stained face of his mother, had been little explanation—little had been said. But *now* the iron of vengeance had entered his soul; and he turned about suddenly, facing the body of the colonel.

Advancing toward the settle, he knelt by the body, even as a knight of old, to take his vows. He raised his clenched right hand.

"Father! I swear by my love for you and my mother that I will wipe out the Marcums, cost what it may. I will devote my life to settling the score Jim Marcum has made. I swear it to you, father!"

It seemed to him as though a faint smile of approbation flitted across the face despite the seal of the Great Calm. Even as he knelt there, his quick brain began to lay the plans—and then ... then he remembered what he must see upstairs! His brief moments in the old home had been so absorbed by the dying words of his sire, by the engulfing flame of hate which had burned away all the sweetness of the environment, that he had selfishly forgotten everything but his own grief.

He staggered to his feet and walked slowly from the room.

Outside the door, on an old-fashioned chair in the long corridor running from portico to kitchen, he found faithful Rusty, sobbing with his face in his hands.

"Oh, Marse Warren! Oh, Marse Warren!"

"Rusty, call Mandy," was the simple answer.

Rusty hastened to obey. The woman was assisting the two neighbors in some preparations on the floor above. She came down the stairs tremulously, catching his outstretched hand and kissing it impetuously.

"Where is *she*, Mandy?" he asked, in a stifled voice.

Mandy spoke not, but ascended the stairway, as Warren followed with bowed head. Each broad step seemed steeper than the one below. At last he raised his eyes before the doorway of his parents' bedroom. Mandy stepped aside.

Within, on a little mahogany sewing-table, burned a dozen candles in his great-grandmother's Colonial candelabra. He turned unsteadily to the right, and saw her!

"O mother, mother!..."

That was all.

II

THE BLIND PURSUIT

The sad days immediately following the double funeral were so filled with visits from relatives and old friends, legal transactions necessary for the transfer of the estate of the old colonel, a successful tobacco factor in his time, and a hundred and one other engrossments, that in the months afterward they were hazy as an unpleasant dream.

With the newly acquired calm which surprised him, Warren Jarvis left no stone unturned to ascertain, with quiet inquiries, the location of Jim Marcum.

There was no clew. The man had mounted a horse on the day of the shooting, to disappear down the dusty Kentucky road, leaving the village far behind and ignoring the possible escape by railroad. His simplicity was cunning, for the blue hills offered more avenues of disappearance than the iron roadbed of the local transportation.

Equally cunning, however, was his determined pursuer. Warren Jarvis, after burying his parents, and making the conventional round of respectful ceremonies, started again for his neglected business in New York. Here he planned to adjust his affairs, then to return to the mountain country, by a roundabout route, to begin his man-hunt, *incognito* and unsuspected.

"I'll cover every mountain trail, every valley path until I find Jim Marcum," he confided to Major Selby, his father's closest friend, as they stood on the train platform waiting for the final minute of departure. "When it happens I will let you know, Major. Until that time, good-by, and God bless you."

The train had come, and unaccompanied by Rusty Snow this time, Jarvis clambered up the steps to wave to the old Kentuckian. As the major turned away, he stroked his snowy mustache with a shrewd twinkle in his blue eyes, to soliloquize:

"I calculate the boy will make his father proud. The old feud blood runs in the Jarvis veins, and even the North can't spoil him. I wonder why Rusty didn't go along—that darky will be broken-hearted to be left behind on the old place."

But Rusty knew very well why he had been left behind!

And with all his jolly laughter, plump complacency, and characteristic African simplicity, Rusty Snow possessed an inherent faculty of subtle concentration which had served the family of Jarvis since the days when he had been a slave pickanninny.

A week or more he spent in the peaceful Southern hamlet of Meadow Green, imbibing gin and ginger "pop" in the saloons frequented by those walking bureaus of information, the negro barbers. He consorted with darky jockeys and horse-trainers—this was the center of the great thoroughbred breeding district—and everywhere he went, with glistening smiles, laughing eyes, and infectious amiability, he bore one query in his mind. Where was Jim Marcum?

The query seemed unanswerable.

Rusty confided his failure to Major Selby, who in turn sent a letter to Warren Jarvis at his New York club. There the latter was hastening his preparations for the great *trek* through the mountains. Warren had closed his office, where, profiting by his experiences in South and Central America, he had maintained a successful exporting agency: all his affairs were in hand, and that hand closed. All his outstanding investments had been hypothecated, with shrewd advantage. At last he was ready, certain that should he lose his life in the vengeful venture, his kinsfolk would be taken

care of, without legal complications: with all his inherited romanticism, Jarvis of Kentucky was a man of astuteness.

He was sitting in the grill of his club, brooding over a solitary glass, unmindful of the friendly chatter of the members about him, when a uniformed page brought him a yellow envelope. He tore open the telegram, sensing important news. It was only from Meadow Green that he received his club mail. And it was from Louisville that the message came. It was simple, and yet it left him bewildered.

"WARREN JARVIS,
Export Club, N.Y.

Coming with Marcum. Buy supplies.

RUSTY."

At first Warren smiled, then he swore, as only a chivalrous Southron can! Why should Rusty be coming with Marcum? He could not have arrested or imprisoned him. What were the supplies? Evidently this was some attempt at code which was beyond his ability to guess.

He spent the night and the next day in a perplexed mood.

A wire sent to Major Selby, inquiring as to the whereabouts of the negro, brought back the simple reply, "Missing—no one knows."

Toward evening, after much perturbation, Warren decided upon a measure of preparedness for whatever might happen. He had given up his bachelor quarters on Madison Avenue two mornings previous, in expectation of the long trip through Kentucky. One night he had spent at his club. Yet, if Marcum were coming to New York, it were best to be located in some place where he could cover his own identity without attracting attention. Such a place would naturally be a large hotel. Accordingly he registered at the Hotel Belmont under an alias. This was close to the Grand Central Station—handy for a quick departure from town, if such were necessary.

Jarvis packed two suitcases with his modest needs for the Southern trip, and donned his evening clothes for dinner at the club. Several telephone calls convinced him that Rusty had not made an appearance as yet.

When he reached the club, the big building was swarming with men of his acquaintance, yet he seemed curiously apart from them. Since his father's murder and the death of his mother, he had proceeded under what engineers call "forced draught." His nerves, like iron, had been drawn tight—to the snapping point: only some great climax of relief would disentangle the tense feelings which he now controlled with external calmness, and sub-surface tremors which warned him of an approaching catastrophe.

For an hour he sat brooding in the quiet library of the club. He had tried to eat; but all the artistry of the famous French *chef* could not conjure up an appetite. Men passed by him, glancing curiously at the usually jovial companion; the twisted, drawn expression surprised them. He tried to read a magazine; the printed lines "pied" themselves before his twitching eyes, blurring into a vision of that last bitter scene in the room with his dying father. And even the vision had faded now, to dissolve into one dull mass of color—a wavering, throbbing field of *red*!

"Mr. Warren Jarvis! Mr. Warren Jarvis!"

The page stood by the library door, calling. He sprang to his feet, brought back to a consciousness of the present with galvanic suddenness. He turned, bewildered for an instant, and then walked slowly toward the boy.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A man wants to see you, sir, down at the front door. A colored man...."

Jarvis waited for no more. He hurried down the oaken stairway, out through the vestibule, and hatless, breathless—relieved to a great extent from his tension—he caught the hand of faithful Rusty Snow.

"Lawd be praised!" murmured that jubilant henchman. "I done thought he might beat me to it!"

"What do you mean, Rusty? Why didn't you come inside?"

"Dat cop at de door wouldn't let no darky come in. I want to talk to you right away, Marse Warren. Right away quick."

Jarvis turned about, with a direction to await him.

He hurried to the coat-room, caught up his light overcoat and hat, and rushed out through the door. Rusty helped him into the garment, with fingers tremulous with joy at the renewal of this familiar and loving task.

"Come, we'll go down the side street. I've given up my apartment, and there's no place to talk but the sidewalk. What did your telegram mean, Rusty?"

"Well, sah, jest what it said. I done followed dat man all de way from Meadow Green to de Manhattan Hotel, dat's what it mean."

Jarvis stopped and, with eyes dilating, looked Rusty full in the face.

"Jim Marcum in New York? What can he be doing here?"

Rusty chuckled.

"Me—oh—my, boss, but dat's jest what I thought at fust. But now I knows. I spent all my time an' all de money I could beg offen de major tryin' to snoop aroun' dem gin-mills down home to l'arn. An' it wasn't ontel yestiddy afternoon dat I seen dis yere Marcum come galloping down on hossback, wid some poh white trash moonshiner ridin' wid 'im. Dey goes right to de depoh an' jumps offen de hosses. I wuz in Eph Black's saloon, but dar ain't nuffin missin' me. I walks over to de station agent's winder an' I sees dis Marcum wid a roll o' bills dat would choke a hoss. He buys a ticket, an' den he goes down de patform. I axes Hen Barrows, de agent, where dat man goin'. He says Noo York. Den I is satisfied. I jest walks down de track to de junction, by de water tank."

"Hurry up, Rusty. What about Marcum?" was Warren's impatient interjection.

"Wall, I sees dis yere man with 'im watchin' de platform—an' wen de train pull in, inter it Marcum goes. She alluz slows up at de sidin'—cause dere's a junction, an' so I jumps 'er, at de hind platform. Well, Marse Warren, dat man he's on de train. It's only day coaches ontel we gets to Lueyville, an' I walks from de Jim Crow car through de train just onct. Dis Marcum he don't recollect me,—I'm just a darky to him. But I sees 'im a-workin' in his seat wid som'pin dat shows he recollects you, sah."

"What was that, Rusty?"

"He was a-oilin' a gun—an' you know who dat gun is for. He'll be a-lookin' for you, Marse Warren."

"What did you do then? How did you manage to stay on the train?"

"Oh, I jest stuck dere, Marse Warren. Dis nigger has had enough 'sperience in dis world to know dat he spends all he has w'en he has it. So de day you left I takes de money you gives me for a railroad ticket, an' buys one an' puts it inside my pocket. So, I was ready for dis Marcum. I follows 'im to Lueyville, whar I telegram to you, and keeps right on 'is trail w'en he changes cars for Cincinnati. He keeps on comin' to Noo York, an' I am in de day coach all dat time. Den I follows right to de Manhattan Hotel. He ain't nebber been in Noo York befoh, because he walks all de way to de hotel instid o' takin' a taxicab. Dat man ain't no *quality*!"

Warren was lost in thought. He stopped at the next corner.

"Listen, Rusty. You did good work. I wanted to have you find him, and instead he came right to me. Now, we must end this whole thing to-night." For an instant the Kentuckian was nonplused, and instinctively turned to the old family servant with that curious trust which the native Southerner instinctively places in the "family" negro. "What shall I do now, Rusty?"

Rusty's usually big eyes narrowed to slits in which the whites were hardly visible.

"Marse Warren, jest wait for dat man. He's here, you knows it, for your life. Ef you cain't git him, *I can*. I got mah razor an' dat's a better weepoon dan any ole gun. You jest wait—an' let me do de rest."

Warren turned and started back toward the club.

"I'll be waiting at the Export Club, Rusty. If he hunts up my address on Madison Avenue, the hall boy will send him there. If he wants to see me, he already has my address—and everyone in Meadow Green knows the club as my address. Now, you go up to the rooms I have taken in the Belmont Hotel. The room number is 417—you just wait there until you hear from me. What did you mean by 'supplies' in that telegram, Rusty?"

The darky chuckled.

"Lawsee, Marse Warren, I knows dat you is a reg'lar Noo Yorker by dis time and don't carry de supplies of a gentlemen. I mean a .38-caliber! Has you got one?"

Warren smiled for the first time since their surprising meeting.

"No, I guess I have become a victim of New York. The worst weapon I have on me, Rusty, is a fountain pen—and I'm afraid Jim Marcum couldn't read the ammunition!"

Rusty looked slyly about him. They were in a dark spot on Fifth Avenue, the shop fronts deserted and not a pedestrian within a block. The darky slipped his hand into his pocket, and surreptitiously handed his master a heavy, portentous automatic which would have sent joy into the heart of a Texas Ranger. There was a vibration of honest pride in his voice as he explained:

"Dere, Marse Warren. I went widout po'k chops an' chicken all de way to Noo York jest to lay in supplies while I was waitin' betwixt trains at

Lueyville! I 'lowed you all 'd be too wrapped up in yoh troubles ter bother about dis, an' I recomembered dis here Noo York Sullivan Law w'ich makes it a crime fer a decent citerzen ter carry a gun, so dat the burglars kin work in peace. Take it, Marse Warren, an' plant every seed in de right place!"

The tears came into the eyes of the Kentuckian.

"Rusty, you're a jewel!"

"Yassir, in a ebony settin'! But, now, please git back to dat club place, an' wait fer Jim Marcum. Dat man's mind was on his bizness when I seen him in de smokin' cyar, an' he ain't thinkin' of nothin' else!"

They strolled down toward the club again. Warren gave a few parting directions and handed Rusty a roll of bills for emergency.

"Remember, Rusty, when you hear from me by any message at all, you're to come at once,—I'll just mention my first name. I'm registered at the Belmont as John Kelly of New Orleans—I couldn't hide my Southern accent. Tell them you're my valet, and show the key—I can trust you to get up to the room. If I call for you, pay the bill from that change, and don't let the grass grow under those number twelves!"

Rusty smirked happily.

"Hallelujah, Marse Warren, you'se jokin' agin—de fightin' blood of de Jarvises is bilin'—I knows de signs. Why, Marse Warren, I recollects yoh father when...."

But his master's face changed.

"Not now, Rusty. I'm thinking too much about my father. No more talk for either of us. Just action."

He turned into the side street toward the Export Club. Rusty—fresh from Kentucky psychology—doffed his cap and disappeared as Warren entered the Grecian portal.

Inside the clubhouse he found a letter awaiting him. It was scrawled in the bold, ungrammared style which might have been expected. He read it standing tensely by the doorway, as dozens of men walked in and out, little dreaming of the tragedy attached to that casual fragment of white note-paper. It was written on the stationery of the Hotel Manhattan—diagonally across the street from the hostelry where Warren had inadvertently registered for his brief stay in the city.

He read the words again and again.

"DEAR JARVIS; export Club, new York.

am visiting in New York and would like to see you and call off
our kwarrel youre fathers death was misunderstandin and were
last of our families will be at Above hotel all evenin and
tomorrow come Around when you get chance and shake hands i
Will prove I aint meant no harm.

Friend JIM MARCUM."

The Kentuckian crumpled the note in his hand, and then walked toward the fireplace of the grill. It had been weeks since any logs had been burned there, but the flakes of soot still clung to the stone casement. Warren struck a match, and a curious smile illumined his face as he ignited the paper, holding its flaming fabric between his fingers until the last half-inch had burned. He dropped the tiny fragment after lighting his cigar with its flame.

One of his friends, a Brazilian coffee merchant, addressed him in the native tongue, which Warren spoke as fluently as English.

"Ah, *señor*, you care not for your letter?"

"Oh, it's just a little invitation to a party to-night," laughed Jarvis of Kentucky. "If anyone found it on my person, he might think I kept late hours and associated with bad company. Let us have a drink to our

friendship in the club, for I may take a long journey to-night, and never see you again!"

III

IN THE ROYAL SUITE

A beautiful young woman stirred uneasily in the early slumber of the evening. Eleven floors below her, in the foyer of the Hotel Manhattan, the after-theater crowd of visitors thronged and buzzed happily. But the girl, after an unusual day of anxiety in a strange land, was ill at ease, with fitful dreams.

The Paris clock of her Highness delicately struck two musical notes upon the chimes, to indicate the half-hour; at the same instant, as though by echo and vehement confirmation, two revolver shots resounded in the corridor.

The girl shuddered as she opened her large dark eyes, sitting bolt upright in bed. She heard a slamming of doors, a growing hubbub in the usually decorous hallway outside, and her feminine curiosity almost conquered the aristocratic reserve, to impel her to rise and discover the origin of the hubbub.

She was spared the trouble, for suddenly the door of her boudoir received a vigorous thump. The lock crashed and it swung open, admitting the rays of a red electric lamp in the corridor outside. The portal swung shut with even greater promptitude, as a dark body leaped over the threshold.

"Madre de Dios!" she screamed. Then, after a gasp, "Who's there!"

The intruder backed against the door, working with the top bolt, which was still intact. She could see the vague outline by the dim glow of the moonlight which streamed into her room.

Then, as she seemed preparing for another cry, he turned toward her.

"Ssssh! Don't make any noise," he whispered vibrantly, audaciously.

The girl slipped from her bed and drew a flimsy dressing-gown about her.

"What do you want?"

"Silence!"

She had reached the lamp on the small boudoir table near the bed. She switched on the electric light. They stared at each other wide-eyed—but stirred by different feelings. Hers was the fright of a woman finding herself in the power of a strange and desperate man; his the battling alertness of a man fighting for his own life against odds.

It was Jarvis of Kentucky!

It was Jarvis of Kentucky

It was Jarvis of Kentucky

Despite his immaculate evening clothes, the blanched face, drawn mouth, and the revolver in his hand made him appear to her as the personification of that vague terror of the unfamiliar dark which all women and children know so well. He crouched there, reading the character in her haughtily tossed head and imperious eyes. The details of her beauty he ignored, remembering only three important facts: "She is young, she is frightened but has not lost control of herself." He reached forward and touched the switch of the lamp. Again the moon was the sole illumination of the room!

A voice outside in the corridor came to them.

"What's the row?"

"Somebody's shooting up the hotel!" was the reply, from another throat.

"Not a sound ... do you understand?" whispered Jarvis, as he backed toward the door again.

"What right...?" she began.

"Quiet!"

The voices in the corridor were closer now.

"Where'd he go? Look on the fire-escape."

"No use—he's on this floor, I tell you."

The girl advanced toward him, her own spirit asserting itself, as she realized that help was within calling distance. Yet she did not call!

"What is it? What do you want? What have you done?"

Warren slipped the revolver into his pocket to reassure her.

"It's all right now. I'm not going to harm you, if you will just keep quiet. Is that clear to you?"

"Is it money you want? All the money I have is on that dressing-table. Take it and go."

He shook his head, now observing the wealth of hair, the healthy, aristocratic poise of shoulders and arms, and the depths of her eyes.

"I'm not a burglar. I don't want your money."

"Well, then, what do you want?" She was beginning to be impatient.

There was a sound of rapid steps down the corridor. Jarvis sprang toward the door, his eyes still intent on hers.

"Listen ... they're coming!... They mustn't search this room—do you understand—you must put them off." He assured himself that the upper bolt

was intact and shot tightly. "I'm not what you think I am.... Is there no way out that way, through the door over there behind you?"

She shook her head.

"No, that is my maid's room."

"The fire-escape—where is that?"

"In the hall opposite."

Jarvis snapped a finger, angry at his own mistake.

"I thought that red meant it was in this room. Oh, hell!... I beg your pardon!"

A faint smile turned up the corner of the red lips, and she shrugged her shoulders ever so lightly.

"Well, you know where it is now; why don't you go?"

Jarvis shook his head with determination: it was evident that this surprised and surprising young person would be amenable to reason—he had many logical reasons at his command.

"I can't go that way—they'll be waiting in the hall," he declared, as he studied the windows and portals. "The red light in the corridor fooled me—I thought the fire-escape would get me to the floor below, where I could take an elevator down during the hubbub. There they come again."

As the odd pair stood, with bated breath, quick steps and a running fire of conversation could be heard in the hall. It was evident that the chase was getting warm.

The girl studied the pose of her curious visitor—it was not the cringing attitude of a criminal. In the lines of his well-built figure there was the unmistakable grace of a gentleman to the manor born—the fearless

confidence, despite his predicament, of a man confident of his own justification.

She was puzzled—her curiosity gradually overcoming her outraged feelings and her natural resentment against his assured usurpation of the situation.

This was a new experience for the lady of the lacy filaments and regal poise; yet it was far from unpleasant to meet such calm masculinity. She switched on the light once more, to feel a surprising satisfaction in the impersonal, unabashed honesty of those steady blue eyes.

Jarvis became conscious of a twinge in his hand, and looking down at his left hand, observed a little rivulet of blood dripping down to his finger-tips. He quickly drew his handkerchief from his pocket, as though to cover the wound before she saw it. The action and its motive did not escape the observant dark eyes. Her sex asserted itself; she advanced, nervous once more.

"You are wounded? What has really happened? You must dress that hand ..."

"I almost stopped one of the bullets—that's all. You see it was not one-sided. But I am afraid it will be, if they get me now. I don't see how the devil——" here he ran to the shaded window to peer at the twinkling street lamps far below,——"Oh, damn!"

The girl's manner froze again. She stepped back instinctively; and yet that bandaged hand compelled her eyes. She spoke slowly.

"You have evidently shot someone, and are making me shield you from justice."

Warren Jarvis shook his head, with that straightforward look which was so convincing.

"Not from justice, but from the law?"

"I thought they were the same."

His smile was bitter, as he retorted: "No, not always. There would be no justice for me at the hands of the law: justice was not accomplished by the law in all these years."

She dropped a white hand to the table by which she stood.

"Well, that is not for me to decide. I must only...."

"You must only listen—you shall decide. At least you shall listen, in order that you may forgive my intrusion, my selfishness in compromising you as I have done." He hesitated, and for the first time color came into the drawn cheeks; a softening echo was observable in her own. "If you find me guilty, when I tell you, I'll—well—I'll take that door or anything you say."

"Your presumption is ridiculous," were her words, and yet she did not call for assistance. Jarvis realized that he had at least won a foothold for his plea. And he had not given up his dogged hope.

"I wouldn't call it ridiculous—a man has a right to argue for his life."

"But," she parried, "could any decision be more unjust than mine must be, when delivered at the point of a pistol?"

Jarvis took the challenge. He laid the weapon upon the dressing-table by her side and crossed the room, leaving her between himself and the door.

"Now, my dear lady, there's nothing to prevent you from covering me, calling for help, and solving the riddle as you please. After all, what does it matter, whether the end comes to-day or to-morrow, for it would be impossible to elude the police. You don't understand, I know—but I am not flying from justice: it was a case of shoot or be shot. You will notice that only one cartridge in that revolver has been used. But, listen—they're on the right trail at last."

He noiselessly crossed to the door and listened to the renewed excitement without. There was a triple knock, and the voice of a man, evidently of authority, rang out.

"Open up here. Is there anybody in here? Open, I tell you."

Jarvis turned toward the girl, whose face reflected a dozen curious emotions as she watched him. He made his last appeal.

"It's up to you to do with me as you like," he murmured.

Her mind was made up quickly, and she pointed toward a door to the left—it led to her bath. Jarvis disappeared behind its shelter. At the same instant the door of the maid's room opened, and a chic little servant ran out chattering, clinging to her mistress' arm for protection.

"Be silent," was the cool command. The knocking continued, with more voices joining in the exhortations. The girl pointed to the door, and the silent command was obeyed. Trembling like an aspen, the little maid opened it, and the burly form of a house detective appeared at the entrance.

"Are you all right in here?" he asked, and then observing the two white-robed figures he doffed the conventional derby hat without which no professional hotel detective would seem natural. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I just came to see if you had had any trouble."

"No," replied the mistress calmly. "What is the matter?"

"Mighty sorry to trouble you, but we're looking for a party and we ain't goin' to stop till we find him. We just thought he might have beat it into this room for a getaway. If you want anything, just call us, for we'll be up and down these halls all night now."

As he shut the door, the unusual young woman waved toward it once more.

"Lock it well, Nita," she said in Spanish. "Control yourself, child. You have a chill. Go to bed again. I will not want you again until six o'clock in the

morning."

As Nita retired she hesitated before her doorway. Her sharp black eyes caught the glint of the bulky revolver upon the library table. Those same black eyes dilated, her lips moved as though for another frightened exclamation, but all she said was: "Thank you, madame! I will not bother you again until six o'clock. Good-night, madame!"

Then she closed her door.

Nita was as discreet as she was faithful, in the service of her beloved madame. And she was essentially Spanish in her appreciative grasp of a romantic situation.

IV

AN OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

The bathroom door opened slowly, with the slightest perceptible knock.

"May I come in?" was the low and meek inquiry.

"You may, and then you may go out as soon as possible," was the resolute response.

Warren's countenance was smiling again, and the smile was infectious. So curious had been this burglarizing method of escape, so unusual the imperturbable girl who had assisted him against all conventional expectations, that the horror of the last half-hour was partially dissipated. When a man meets a great crisis of his life and overcomes it, there is a queer relaxation of strained nerves,—with a woman the result would be hysteria; with a man of Warren Jarvis' type it was a self-surprising amiability and calmness.

"Would you mind bolting the door again? He might return. And thank you very much for delaying the death sentence—now I can explain."

The girl glided to the door and tested the lock. It was secure, and she turned about to return that infectious smile of the eyes, albeit grudgingly.

Warren, finally realizing that he was weak from strain, and aching in every muscle from the ordeal of the past twenty-four hours, looked appealing at the comfortable armchair.

"May I sit down for just a minute?" he pleaded. "I have not slept since the night before last. I have not rested for a fortnight."

The girl nodded. He relaxed, and dropped into a blessed position of comfort. He buried his face in his hands—how many times had he struck this same attitude since the bitter days at Meadow Green, without realizing the repetition!

For two minutes or an hour he sat there—he knew not which. His companion, with sudden renewal of consciousness of the *déshabille* of her dressing-gown, retreated to the corner of the brass bed. She sat down, to scrutinize the better this strange intruder. The moonlight which fell in pale green bars across the Bokhara beneath her slippers; the melodramatic situation which had brought them together; the unmistakable gentility of this compelling intruder of her maidenly domain; the curious collapse of his aggressiveness—all these things united to cast a sympathetic spell over her. She was foolish—to the extreme of placing herself in a ridiculous situation! She was culpable—in protecting a self-confessed butcher! She was weak—in yielding to girlish sentiment by permitting this man to shatter the conventionalities,—she who had been accustomed, throughout her twenty years of adulation and awe-inspiring respect, to a servile respect from every man, woman, and child! And, worst of all to an essentially feminine mind, she had allowed this presumptuous, calculating stranger to override her better judgment, to subjugate her resistance, without a visible tribute to the charms which had stirred the masculine souls of a continent!

And yet, in spite of—perhaps, *because of*—all these illogical, provoking, equilibrium-shattering irritants—she sat there, patiently, eagerly awaiting an explanation. Consistency, thy name is not Maidenhood!

Suddenly he looked at her.

"Do you know what a feud is?" was the curious prologue.

Her answer was apt and surprising.

"Feud? Spain is the garden of feuds."

"So is Kentucky. That's where I'm from. You're Spanish, then?"

"Yes!"

"Then you'll understand and sympathize.... Those shots you heard ended a feud which has lived through three or four generations. They brought me back to earth, to life, to a realization of things about me, after the most horrible nightmare through which I've ever passed. I know my own name now,—and I had almost forgotten it since I went back home—so short a time, so many centuries ago!"

Then Warren Jarvis told her the story; his eyes were half closed, and with his fingers clasped and intertwined beneath his square-chiseled chin he recounted the steps of the recent event with the monotone of one who chants a mechanically memorized tale. She understood at last.

"But what did he do when you went to his room in the hotel?"

"Just what I expected—in fact, what I prayed for! As the door opened he fired his revolver—and I carry the witness inside this crimson handkerchief. I had my own weapon in my coat pocket ... it's a trick I learned in Central American revolutions. I fired from my waist, burned a hole in my overcoat—and burned a hole in the heart of that murderous hound."

Suddenly he sprang to his feet and walked to the window, just as he had done back in Meadow Green so short a time before.

"Dad, dear old dad! I know you're satisfied. I let him take the first chance, and it was his last."

He was silent. The girl twisted the dressing-gown in her slender, nervous fingers. She waited for him to speak. He turned about, and dropped his hands, palm outward, as he quietly ended it all with the question: "Now, can you understand why the law would not give me justice?"

"Is he dead—are you sure?"

"I didn't wait—I came ... to ... visit you. Now are you going to drive me out?... You don't know what it is to fight single-handed against fearful odds. That's how I planned to spend my summer. To fight the endless fight alone...."

She leaned forward eagerly as she answered: "Oh, yes, I do! I know what it means.... I, too, have been fighting against fearful odds!"

Jarvis looked at her sharply.

"There is no man to fight for you?"

"No man who dares."

"Oh, God! If there had only been a woman left for me to fight for!... But with my mother gone it was simply a hopeless, desperate determination to square the score at any cost, and then cry 'Quits!' and care nothing."

She drew back, studying the outline of his agile body, as he stood silhouetted against the moonlight.

"And are you alone?"

"Alone."

"And if you're caught," there was a curious eagerness in her low voice, "it means payment with your life?"

"Yes!"

"Suppose that I decided to help you—to do more than I have done?"

Jarvis discarded his fatalism, as he caught at this loophole.

"What do you mean?"

"You have no fear of death? You are not afraid of ghosts?"

"Ghosts? Don't joke with me. I am an American."

"Yes—ghosts—they are not confined to America, or China, or Africa. I mean Spanish ghosts."

Jarvis' laugh was almost bitter, as he responded with a tense earnestness:

"After to-night I am not afraid of the living or the dead. What are you thinking about?"

After a hesitation, poignant in its baffling anxiety, she rose and walked toward him, absolutely forgetful of their curious meeting and their lack of a common ground of interest.

"If you escape from here, it will be because I helped you. We might say, I saved your life,—if what you tell me is true and if I do it from a selfish motive entirely, I am justified. I have work for you ... hard, dangerous work, and as I am frank, it may mean your life in the end. It's a chance, and you have nothing to lose."

"And if I agree?"

"You will begin by taking the ancient feudal oath of my country."

"Isn't my word enough? I'm a Kentuckian, you know."

"But I insist."

Jarvis smiled indulgently.

"Very well—I'll swear the blackest oath you can utter." His eyes twinkled.

"Let's hear it all now."

The girl drew back her shoulders haughtily. It was apparent that she took this curious idea more seriously than the prelude would suggest.

"What is your name?"

"Jarvis."

"All of it?"

"Warren Jarvis."

She raised her hands, to the Kentuckian's surprise.

"Kneel then, Warren of Jarvis!... No, not that way,—on one knee only!"

"I beg your pardon." Jarvis began to feel ridiculous, in spite of himself. But there were reasons for humoring this curious beauty. The footsteps were still audible in the hall.

"Now repeat this oath: I, Warren of Jarvis" (he followed word for word), "Señor of all the domains, fiefs, keeps, and marches of Warren of Kentucky..."

"Whew!" and he stifled a laugh as he echoed the words.

The girl continued: "Do convey to Maria Theresa, of Aragon, all my worldly titles and possessions..."

"Sounds like I were marrying her—I beg your pardon. 'Do convey to Maria Theresa, of Aragon, all my worldly titles and possessions!'"

The shade of a smile played over his features.

The girl caught his hand in hers, placed her left in both of his, and then continued: "And receive them back as vassal and retainer and to faithfully fight in my lady's cause, according to the feudal laws of Castile and Aragon!"

>—"and to faithfully fight in my lady's cause"

—"and to faithfully fight in my lady's cause"

As he finished the repetition, she added: "Arise, vassal!"

With the spirit of the ceremony, he jestingly caught her hand and kissed it, as he arose. She drew back sharply.

"That is part of the ceremony, but I meant to omit it."

Warren Jarvis laughed provokingly.

"That seemed to me the only sensible part of it—again I beg your pardon. But who on earth is this Maria Theresa of Aragon person whose hired man I have become?"

The girl drew herself up with a hauteur which could never have been imitated upon the stage. Her dark eyes glinted coldly as she replied: "I—I am her Serene Highness—Maria Theresa—Princess of Aragon!"

Jarvis looked at her, waiting for the cue to the joke. She was serious. It was all so unreal, so ridiculous—and yet back there on the floor of the room down the corridor lay Jim Marcum. This mad, sad, heart-rending, adventure must have driven him to insanity. He rubbed his brow, looked out of the window, heard the unromantic honk-honk of a piratical night-owl taxicab on the street so far below. He steadied his mental equilibrium, and looked again at the self-possessed young woman, whose regal manner was as convincing as all the other details were unconvincing. On the table lay a fortune in jewels and rings and a necklace. He had not noticed them before. He remembered the Spanish conversation which he had heard through the bathroom door. He realized from the size and elegance of the rooms that this must indeed be a regal suite in the great hotel.

And the girl's steady look never wavered.

American humor, in the presence of royalty, came to his aid in this staggering blow to his credence.

"Good-*night*! You a Princess ... and I've been ordering you around with a gun! Great Scott ... what *next*?"

V

EXIT JARVIS, LAUGHING

The Princess turned toward the door, for a step could be heard in the corridor.

"Before that official returns we must have a plan. I thought it out while you were behind the door. But, perhaps, it will be too hard a task for you."

"I'll try it. Anything to get out of here! And I would like to know what it is you want me to do for you—what about the ghost?"

"I will tell you in good time. Just now for your escape. It is getting late, and the hours are speeding past. You are in a hopeless trap here. Now, my trunk..."

"What about it?"

"I am sending it on board the *Mauretania* at six o'clock, and no one could possibly suspect."

Jarvis turned to study this curious vehicle of transportation. It was a strong, well-built piece of baggage, indeed; but to be cooped up in it, at the mercy of baggageman and truckman, hoisters and stewards—the thought was staggering.

"You're joking," he began, but she resolutely shook her wealth of hair.

"It's the only chance, and a daring one at that. I am jeopardizing my own safety by assisting you. Surely, if life is so uncertain for you at best, you cannot lose by a trial."

Jarvis stooped over it, and began lifting out the trays, to study the questionable roominess of the interior.

"What about these?" he asked, and as he spoke a locket dropped to the floor. The girl darted forward to pick it up, and Jarvis observed it for the first time. Her solicitude seemed unusual to the Kentuckian.

"Did I break something?"

"No. It's nothing. I mean, it's all right. It's just a locket. I broke it myself yesterday, on purpose. It means a great deal to me, and perhaps to you. Some day you may know the reason why ... Shall we send the trays to the steamer by messenger?"

Jarvis thought for an instant. Here was such an utterly improbable method of escape, such a strange new twirl in his whirlpool of adventure, that he had to find his bearings.

"I have it now," he explained. "You had better telephone—we must have someone we can trust implicitly."

The Princess crossed toward the desk telephone on the small table by her bed, and looked at him inquiringly.

"Ask the operator to connect you with the Hotel Belmont. That's just across the street. My room is 417. Rusty, my servant, is there. He is waiting for some word from me, as he knew the possibilities when I met Jim Marcum. He can be counted on till Judgment Day and then a few hours afterwards! Tell him to come here at once—mention my first name only, with no other explanation—that will bring him and give no other clew to an outsider. You never can tell about a telephone. But fortunately, I registered there under a different name. Try it now."

The girl had the receiver off the hook. After a short delay she was talking directly with the faithful servitor, whose trembling voice betokened his anxiety. But Rusty was too sage to ask too many questions—he had served in affairs of delicacy before this.

"Hello—is this Mr. Rusty?... Yes? Well, listen carefully. You are to come right over to the Manhattan Hotel across the street and a bellboy will be waiting for you at the desk. He is to bring you up to room 1121."

Jarvis interrupted: "Tell him to keep his mouth shut!"

The Princess balked at the colloquialism.

"And—and—don't talk to anyone ... What's that?... Oh, yes. '*Warren*.'... There, he'll be coming over immediately."

Jarvis, the executive, was now in action.

He had emptied the trunk as she was talking, tossing out fascinating feminine mysteries of lace and silks, with a nonchalance which brought a twinkle into the dark eyes. He turned again.

"Hurry, now—call up the clerk downstairs. Tell them to look out for Rusty and send him up here."

More delicate symphonies of Parisian architecture were thrown on the floor, and Warren had taken out his pocket-knife.

"Hello, hello," called the Princess. "I'm expecting a man."

"A colored man," was Warren's parenthesis.

"Yes,... a colored man ... to get some bundles. He will come right to the desk ... please send him up at once ... It is very important."

The Princess observed Jarvis' attempt to bore a hole in the side of the trunk. He was laboring diligently, until the blade snapped.

"Confound it!"

"Why are you doing that?"

"I must breathe, you know ... Now, how can I cut a hole in the blessed thing?" He scratched his forehead in a quandary.

The Princess brought him her shears from the dresser. In a few minutes he had made two openings which seemed to satisfy him, but it had been no easy task.

"What time does the boat sail?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Good. That will give Rusty time to get aboard with these trays and my baggage. Let me see, it is a quarter of six now—how quickly the dawn has slipped in!"

There was a knock on the outer door, and Jarvis again disappeared behind the bathroom portal, with instinctive caution.

At a call from the Princess, the door opened after she had slid back the upper bolt. The girl stepped back abashed at the appearance of the excited negro. Rusty rolled his eyes, suspiciously taking in the contents of the room.

"Whar's Marse Warren?" and his voice was hoarse. Jarvis stepped into view. "Lawd bless you, Marse Warren. I done thought dat Marcum got you dis time."

"Never mind what you thought. Help me wrap up these trays. We sail for Europe in two hours."

Rusty gasped, shot another big-eyed look at the beautiful girl and then at his master.

"Two hours—good Lawd!—you mean WE?"

The Princess was holding out a steamer rug in silence.

"Yes, Rusty, you and I. Here, give me a hand with this rug," and with the aid of his servant he made a quick job of the bundling. "Now, take these—with our baggage from the Belmont—to the steamship *Mauretania* of the Cunard line. Buy accommodations.... Mind, you won't see me until after we

get out to sea. You stay in your stateroom and sit tight until you hear from me."

He took out his wallet.

"You understand now? Cunard line. You can find it some way—just take a taxi, and get there as fast as you can. The clerk at the hotel will get the tickets over the telephone, and you can pay him when you settle for the whole bill, with that other money I gave you. Now, get hold of this money, and keep hold of it. No gin now, Rusty!"

He turned around, and observed the amused surprise on the face of his fair companion.

"I beg your pardon.... This is Rusty;—Rusty, this is the Princess of Aragon...."

Rusty bowed.

"Howdy do, Mrs. Princess!"

"There, that will do. Is it all clear for you now?"

"Yassir. I takes everything to the steamboat—gets accommo—accommo—wall, I knows what you means, Marse Warren, if I cain't spell it. I gets them things for us and Mrs. Princess."

The girl reddened under the beaming smile, but Jarvis quickly interceded.

"Not for the Princess; just for us two. What's the name of the boat?"

"The *Mary Tania*!"

"That'll do. Now be off, and don't get left behind."

As Rusty made his exit with the bulky bundle, the Princess smiled: "Good-by, Rusty," and he bobbed his head with a broader grin than ever as he disappeared down the corridor toward the elevator.

"Time nearly up," muttered Warren, as he took off his coat. "Pardon the disrobing—but I'll be more at ease in my shirt-sleeves. It's a stingy little room to spend three hours in. I'll lie this way, with my head toward this corner. Remember, this trunk must not go into the hold of the ship—have it marked 'Wanted' and 'This End Up.' I'll take the shears along and cut another hole from the inside if it gets too suffocating."

The girl walked to the table and picked up the revolver, which she held out.

"You'd better take this, too."

"How do you know you can trust me now?"

There was a veiled irony in her retort, although it was accompanied by a smile: "I don't. I have to take that chance. I have no other choice at this late hour."

"You must have a pretty good reason for it in the back of your head. But what about this ghost? I may never hear the sequel. At least give me some food for thought during my travels in the dark."

"Are you afraid?"

"Lord, no! I merely wanted to know. Well, I'll wait. But, now, honest Injun, as we say down in Kentucky, are you a really, sure-enough princess?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Somehow you are not quite like what I thought a princess would be.... I mean, you're different from the popular conception of a royal person. Your English is so perfect."

"I learned it in an English boarding-school."

"Your informality—for it has been put to a severe test these last few hours,—your adaptability,—you have more understanding, more sympathy, more heart."

She turned away and tilted a haughty chin.

"In that last respect, sir, you will find me quite like the popular conception."

A knocking on the door interrupted further interchanges on the peculiarities of royalty. Jarvis clambered inside the vehicle of his escape, and drew down the lid, with a farewell smile.

"Trunks, lady, for the steamer!" came the voice of the porter, as he resumed his thumping on the door panel.

"Just a minute." The Princess hurriedly bundled up the scattered garments, jumbling them upon the bed. She turned the key in the trunk and, with a quick feminine survey of the field for damaging, overlooked evidence, called to her maid.

"Nita, admit the porter."

The servant appeared with surprising promptness. The man pushed in his truck, with the obsequious manner which is a prelude to the smirking appreciation of a handsome gratuity.

"Have the other trunks gone, my good man?" queried her Serene Highness.

"Yes'm. Last night, mum."

"This trunk goes on a special wagon."

"Yes'm."

At this juncture the house detective appeared at the doorway. He stopped and looked questioningly at the broken lock. He was alert as a weasel despite his ponderous physique: he fingered it, and studied the evidence of fresh splinters. The Princess continued calmly.

"Have it marked 'Wanted'" (and as she indicated with a jeweled finger),
"'This End up with Care.'"

The porter nodded.

"I'll put special stickers on it, mum. You'll find it in your stateroom when you get to the steamer. Is that all, mum?"

"Handle it gently, porter."

"Shure, lady and I never smashed one in me life! I'll handle it as rivirintly as if it held the relics of a saint, mum. I'm that careful in me worruk. So don't worry one little bit, mum."

As he started out with the heavy piece of luggage on his truck, the detective stopped him sternly.

"Just a minute. How did that lock get broken?"

"<i>Just a minute. How did that lock get broken?</i>"

"Just a minute. How did that lock get broken?"

The Princess felt herself changing color, yet she shrugged her shoulders as she turned away.

Nita suddenly chattered in Spanish to her, and the detective shot a sharp glance at the girl.

"What does she say?" he cried. "She knows something about it."

"She says the other porter banged the door before we came in, for it was that way when she entered to arrange my clothes. I have had my sleep interrupted all night long, and I do not care for any insolence now."

The detective looked a bit sheepish, but stuck to his inquest.

"When did you come?"

"Yesterday."

"And when do you go away?"

"We sail this morning for Europe."

"Huh," and there was a suggestion of doubt in his grunt. "The police are making an investigation in the hotel. They would like to have a look at these rooms. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. My maid will show them around."

"What time do you sail? Does this trunk go on board?"

"Yes,—I want it sent on a special wagon, for I fear we will be late. The steamer sails at nine o'clock."

The detective nodded to the porter, who brushed close by the Princess with his cargo.

"*Bon voyage!*" she said with a smile.

"What's that?" asked the detective.

"I merely called my maid. You're an unusually impertinent and inquisitive man. In my country gentlewomen are shown some degree of courtesy, even by hotel servants," she remarked icily.

The detective's ruddy face grew redder.

"Well, I dunno about your country, whatever that is. But in this country, and in this hotel there don't nothin' get by me. That's all. Come on in, boys."

Two bluecoats entered the room, gazed awkwardly about, and walked to the window to peer down at the street. Then they passed out, not without, it must be admitted, an envious glance at the collection of jewels on the table.

As the door closed behind them, her Serene Highness turned toward Nita, as she relaxed in the chair by the dressing-table.

"You may dress my hair, child. I wonder how the door was broken?"

"Ah, madame," was the guileless response. "*Quién sabe?*"

VI

OVER THE SEA AND FAR AWAY

That journey to the *Mauretania* was never to be forgotten by Warren Jarvis; and yet so weird, bruising, jumbling, and altogether horrible was it, that he could never distinctly remember its details.

With hands stretched tensely against the corners of the trunk, he warded off as best he could the shocks of the skilled baggage-breakers along the route. Again and again, an unexpected twist would bang his throbbing head against the adamantine sides, and with a wince, a sharp, in-drawn breath, he would hold himself "together" for one more bump!

The air was stifling; yet the foresight of cutting the holes gave him enough oxygen to maintain his senses. At last, after æons of suffering which reminded him of nothing so much as his initiation into the college fraternity, he felt himself being dragged up the side of the great ocean greyhound.

More jolts, more rolls and bangs, and at last, with muscles wrenched, a swollen forehead and nerves aquiver, there was rest.

"I'm in her cabin at last—and now for a graceful exit!" he told himself, with an enforced jocularly. But this was no easy task. He spent a full half-hour, working and prying with the shears against the lock which imprisoned him with indomitable force from the outside of the iron-and-leathern prison.

Upon the outer deck of the great turbiner, the Princess nervously fought her way through the great throng of voyagers and their friends. Nita was close by her side. It seemed impossible to capture a steward who was not busy with the bearing of bouquets and wine baskets. In other circumstances this

young personage would have been furious at the lack of respect which she had been educated to expect from the throngs of her own country.

But to-day her only anxiety was to find her elusive quarters for the strange cruise, to learn whether or not her new knight-errant were alive or dead from the rigors of his escape.

At last, with the aid of an extravagant *largesse*, she was conducted to her staterooms.

As she entered the parlor of her luxurious suite, the first sight which caught her eye was the trunk, inverted! The printed sign of direction, "This End up with Care," were upside down!

She gasped, and looked nervously about to note the expression upon the face of Nita. That young woman was busy studying the handsome features of the ingratiating bedroom-steward. So engrossed was she that she stumbled over the elevated sill of the door from the promenade deck.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, miss!" apologized the steward. "Did you hurt yourself? These doors are always troublesome until you get used to them. But they are necessary to keep out the water in rough weather."

The Princess was thinking only of the opportunity to open the fateful trunk.

"You don't anticipate a bad passage, steward?"

"Rather uncertain, ma'am, at this time of the year," and he busied himself adjusting the hand luggage and arranging the chairs. "But your location is good. You'll find the *Mauretania* as steady as a parish church. Here is the clothes press, ma'am, and the other rooms are off there. It's quite the finest suite on the boat, ma'am."

The steward looked about ingratiatingly, then he turned toward the door.

"If you want anything, ma'am—there is the telephone.... I'll place your trunk, if you please, ma'am!"

He started to drag the trunk to the side of the cabin, but the Princess intervened.

"That's all right; you may place it later. But you *might* fix it right side up!"

The steward turned it, as the girl breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm so sorry, ma'am. I hope the contents are not upset."

"I hope not."

"Anything else, ma'am?"

"No, not now, steward? How soon do we sail?"

"Very soon," and as he spoke there came the stentorian warning: "All ashore that's going ashore!" The call was repeated four times, and the voice died away in the distance of the long promenade deck.

With a bow, and a significant glance at the attractive maid, the steward finally dragged himself out of the attractive cabin. The Princess sank nervously into a chair.

"That is all, now, Nita. I have the key to the trunk. I will call you when I need you."

"Yes, your Highness. But, will your Highness excuse me if I am mistaken in thinking that I recognized his Excellency the Duke, your exalted cousin, among the passengers as we came up the gangplank...?"

Her Highness was distinctly startled, but she showed no trace of her emotion to the servant.

"My cousin—it is impossible. He is at Madrid, where his Majesty the King is holding Court."

"Yes, your Highness," and she went, but her inflection showed that she knew herself to be in the right. Nita was too good a servant to argue with

her betters.

"Carlos here? How could he be, I wonder?" and the Princess fumbled with her keys, until she found the right one. She opened the trunk with a trembling hand, and began to raise the cover, a quiver in her voice.

"Are you all right ... Mr. Jarvis?"

It was the voice of a nervous, frightened girl—not of a royal personage—this time.

Just then she heard a knock on the cabin door. There was no time for a response. "Quiet! Be careful!" she cautioned, *sotto voce*.

As she hurried to the door, she pulled her taut nerves together. There on the threshold was her kinsman: Nita had been right as usual, in her sharp way.

Carlos, Duke of Alva, with smiling lips and sinister eyes, greeted her with the suave courtesy which is so characteristic of his race and class. He typified the worst of the Spanish folk, even as the young girl did the best. To a keen student of physiognomy the mental attitude of the Duke of Alva would have been an open book. To Maria Theresa, loyal to family and countrymen, he was the symbol of her own strata in Spain—yet, beneath her gracious forgiveness of and enforced indifference to many things, there lurked a latent mistrust, which she had never yet defined in practical, applicable terms.

With white teeth, crisp-curling black hair, and eyes of sparkling coal-shade, the Duke of Alva bowed with that polished grace which had broken many a heart and carried him over many a stretch of thin ice, in the courtly adventuring on the Continent.

"Carlos!" exclaimed the Princess.

"Fair cousin—if I but knew you were as pleased, as you are surprised, at seeing me!" With the words he advanced and kissed her cold finger-tips with Old-World punctiliousness.

"What are you doing on the *Mauretania*? Why did you leave Spain, Carlos?"

As he shut the door he smiled, and now her intuition warned her of the cunning which lurked behind those pleasantly curving lips.

"First tell me that you are glad to see me! I have come many leagues to hear those words, Maria!"

"Why.... Why,... of course, I am always glad to see you, cousin."

He simulated a pathetic irony. "You say you are always glad to see me—and yet, I fear it is not *always* since my unfortunate quarrel with your brother. Alas, and that has hardened your heart against me."

The Duke was a suitor of the romantic school: each phrase was studied, each attitude as obviously planned as a military campaign. It was a method which had invariably succeeded, until his efforts with the Princess of Aragon. Yet, he was too satisfied with bygone results to abandon the time-tried artistries of former victories.

The Princess dropped her eyes before the undeniable questioning of his burning glances. As she looked away, he assured himself that he had scored.

"My brother ... what do you know of him, Carlos? When did you see him last? Have you been in Seguro?"

Two long whistles, and the vibration of the great steamship evidenced the beginning of the long voyage. The answer to the questions was still more pathetic in cadence.

"Ah, how I dread telling you!... I was there a few days before leaving for America. I learned, unfortunately, that despite my very friendly advice, he had been prowling about that ridiculous old castle again, in search of the mythical treasure your grandfather is supposed to have secreted there."

He laughed, and the girl instinctively shuddered with a newborn distrust. There was no mirth in the sound.

"You heard nothing more? Was he well and safe when you left the town?"

"He was as well and safe as I would consider any man who was prowling about that castle in a foolhardy way."

She wished to get rid of him: that ominous trunk might contain a dead man, for all she knew.

"How did you find me? Why did you come to America?"

"What could have brought me here but love and anxiety for you?"

She turned away impatiently and walked toward the cabin porthole.

"Oh, come, Carlos. The ship is almost in mid-stream. Let us go out on deck, for one last look at America."

"Thank you; I can do very well without it!" he retorted, as he sat down upon the trunk. "My dear Maria, why do you not desist from this silly pursuit of an imaginary treasure? What is the value of money—we are Spaniards, not shirt-sleeved, mercenary pigs of Americans! We strive for it, only to obtain the happiness and luxury which it brings. Can it bring any greater happiness than that which I have so many times laid at your feet—the love and honored name of a man who would protect and worship you? You have wonderful beauty and family rank. I have power, influence at Court, and an unconquerable ambition. Mine is the intellect to conceive, the heart to dare, and the will to complete! Think what our alliance would mean to us both.... My dear girl—there is nothing which could halt me, nothing which I could not crush!"

Had many a man made this speech he would have punctuated its termination with a clenched fist. But the scion of an intriguing aristocracy bared his teeth in a wolf-like smile as he unsheathed his sword-cane an inch or two, to snap it back into place, with a snarling smile in his drooping eyes.

However, the speech and the theatrical delivery of the gifted courtier were wasted effort. Maria Theresa of Spain was impervious to the surface sheen: she had seen true metal within the past twenty-four hours!

"Oh, Carlos—you should have been a novelist or a dramatist! I much prefer the romantic sky-line of New York harbor to your reminiscence of Don Quixote!"

The great roar of the turbine vibrated through the ship. She advanced to the cabin door, and imperiously called to him to follow.

"I insist. I need fresh air.... *We'll be gone ten minutes!*"

And grudgingly the Duke of Alva followed her, with a vicious swish of his cane at the unoffending trunk.

As the door slammed, the top of the trunk was slowly lifted, and the battered, bleeding face of Warren Jarvis might have been visible above the iron ridge of its lock bar.

Stiffly he drew himself out of the trunk, to blink in the unaccustomed light.

"O,... O.... O.... Oh! Lord!... If I only had that last baggageman by the neck!"

He bent forward and back to limber an apparently paralyzed spinal column.

"Well, I'm all here!"

He stumbled across the cabin, where he helped himself to a welcome drink of water. He tenderly caressed the bruised elbows, and breathed hard.

"I'm *most* all here!"

He looked down at his twisted, cracked patent-leather shoes.

"My feet are bent—they'll never get well!"

He sat limply down on the top of the trunk, and fumbling in his hip pocket drew forth a bent and battered cigarette case. As he struck a light to inhale a few welcome, cheering puffs, he looked about his strange surroundings with the old, unconquerable Jarvis spirit.

"A Princess—a Duke—a castle—a treasure! Well, well! But the problem is: *Where the devil do I fit in?*"

VII

THE ROMANCE OF THE CASTLE

Warren hobbled painfully to the telephone on the wall. This connected with a central switchboard from which he knew he could reach his own stateroom—provided Rusty had not failed in his trust.

"Great Scott! Suppose it is impossible to get accommodations! I'll have to ride as a stowaway in the hold, after all!" he thought.

At any rate he knew that the ten minutes were rapidly dissipating, and from what he had learned by eavesdropping through the trunk, the Duke was not the kindest person in the world for a man in such a predicament.

"Hello!" he called. "Hello, there.... Yes. I want the stateroom of Mr. Jarvis.... Yes, Warren Jarvis.... No, I don't know the number of the room.... All right."

There was a pause, and he improved the opportunity to unlimber his arms and legs, while waiting by the instrument. At last came the welcome voice with the African accents: "Yassir, hello. Who do you want?"

"Hello, Rusty!... Good boy.... Listen, come up to this stateroom, and bring me an overcoat and a scarf. Yes, and bring me a damp towel with some soap on it. Yes, and stick a comb into the coat pocket."

"Law, boss, I dunno whar you-all is?"

"That's right. Wait a minute." He opened the door to the cabin passageway, and squinted at the number plate. Back again to the telephone he continued: "Stateroom A, Promenade deck.... And bring up that big bundle in the steamer rug. Quick now."

Jarvis hung up the receiver and walked stiffly to the window, peering out at the disappearing shores.

"Well, good-by, Uncle Sam. I don't know when I'll see you again. And as for you, Miss Liberty—I don't believe there will be any of your sisters or cousins around this precious castle where Fate is taking me. I don't know which of us two is the craziest—this Duke or myself." Then, after a pause, he added, "Well, his taste is not to be sneered at; that's certain."

There was a knock at the door. Warren was uncertain as to the wisest thing to do. He called: "Go away—we're all very ill!" Then he darted for one of the side staterooms.

But the door opened slowly, and the plump physiognomy of Rusty Snow appeared. Rusty stumbled awkwardly over the elevated threshold, dropping the large bundle, landing prone on the deck.

"Wha'f-f-foh they want to build a dern fool door like that?" complained Rusty, scrambling up with a bruised shin, the tenderest spot of a negro.

His master worked feverishly, untying the trays and fitting them into the trunk from which he had tardily removed his dress coat, and the revolver. Then he smiled at Rusty.

"How in de name of Moses did you-all git on de steamboat, Marse Warren?" was his servant's next remark, as he helped on with the coat over the painful shoulders.

"I came in the trunk—and it was almost as good traveling as some of those mountain railroads back in Kentucky. Quick, hand me that towel—my face is bleeding."

A few quick movements, the use of the comb, and he looked more presentable, resembling Jarvis the clubman once again.

"Did you see any signs of the police, Rusty?"

"No, sir. Nary a sign."

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sartin, Marse Warren."

"Did you look?"

"No, sir. I cain't say as I did. I wasn't anxious to look."

The door opened, with a suddenness which caused both men to jump. It was the Princess. She smiled with relief as she saw the rehabilitation.

"How de do, Mrs. Princess?" was Rusty's polite greeting, with a bow. His formality was growing more impressive, as the acquaintance extended. Here was "quality" indeed—Rusty was a judge of "breed"!

"How do you do, Rusty?" and she laughed girlishly.

Then she turned toward her vassal. He wore a quizzical, friendly, and amusingly pathetic look. The bruises of his trip were evident upon the clear-cut features.

"I am so glad that you made it all right. But how they must have bumped and banged and wobbled and whirled you!"

"I believe I could go over Niagara Falls in a barrel now, without turning a hair."

She saw the hand—with its red wound. She winced, and reached for the hand, womanlike.

"Oh, that's dreadful. You must have it attended at once. Let me get something."

Warren stoically drew it away from the gentle touch of the white fingers.

"Oh, it's all right. The ship's surgeon will welcome a little professional exercise. I'll be the first patient, as we're not out far enough for the

seasickness practice yet."

He turned toward Rusty, who was making a mental comparison of the room with the steamboat cabins back on the Ohio River. Rusty decided that even the old *Gallia Queen*, in her palmiest days, could not have been much more resplendent than this "foreign" boat!

"You can go back and rest yourself, Rusty," suggested Jarvis. "And, listen—what's the number of the stateroom?"

"Seven-twenty-nine, sir."

"How did you get the tickets, in my name? I was registered differently at the other hotel."

"Oh, I jest told 'em dey was for Mr. R. Snow, a rich Southern gentleman. When I gits down here, I tells Mr. Snow has decided to send his repersentative! Den I had de name changed—dat's all, Marse Warren."

Maria Theresa smiled again, and Rusty accepted it as a supreme compliment.

"You are a diplomat, Rusty," she said.

"No, lady—I mean, Mrs. Princess.... I'm a Republican," and Rusty started for the door.

"Go lock yourself in there, and don't talk to anyone. Remember you are deaf and dumb. Understand, deaf and dumb!"

"Yassir—dumb's de word!"

As the door closed behind him, the girl turned toward Jarvis, a troubled cloud overshadowing her pleasant features.

"There is something I must tell you ... my cousin, the Duke of Alva, is on board of the *Mauretania*."

He smiled whimsically as he replied, "Yes, and he professes to love you devotedly."

She flushed furiously, and looked at the pattern of the rug.

"You overheard?"

"I underheard. The trunk was not my idea but yours, you know.... You're afraid of that man, too. What's the trouble? He's very sure of himself, isn't he?"

The girl hesitated, and then replied almost timidly:

"Carlos is very powerful.... I may be driven into his hands."

"You mean he may make you marry him?"

"Yes ... if you fail," and she cast an apprehensive glance toward the door to the promenade deck.

"If I fail," and Warren was dumbfounded, even after the unreal scenes which had prologued this situation. "If *I* fail. What do you mean? Wait a minute—let me get my bearings: things are coming too fast and furious for my poor intelligence.... I—you—the Duke—how do I fit in?"

The girl tried to regain her composure.

"You mustn't ask now: take things for granted until we can explain them together, alone. He may come in any minute. I can tell you before we get to the castle."

Warren lost his patience.

"I think I should know about this castle nonsense now. I admit you saved me from the police last night—although undoubtedly they may be on board the ship now, for we have not passed the three-mile limit yet. Can't you be frank with me, in spite of that ridiculous oath of allegiance which I took?"

"It was not ridiculous, Mr. Jarvis. It was in life-and-death earnestness. I would not have felt that I could truly trust you unless you had gone through that. Remember, I am a product of a different civilization from your own: I am still superstitious, if you please to term it so, in the Old-World sense. I speak your language, and indeed think in it with you. But back in the inner shrine of my being I am a Spanish woman, true to my heredity. You are essentially an American—droll, well-balanced, cynical—and oblivious to any other national psychology than your own."

The girl's earnestness was droll.

"I am a bit hard and unsympathetic," agreed Warren softly. "I did not mean to be so. You and I came into each other's lives in a wild unreal way which an outsider would hardly believe possible. The truest thing in real life is its melodramatic, unbelievable unrealism. That's where the novelists, the poets, and the play-makers have a terrific handicap against them. Things which happen every day would be ridiculed in print. The great rule of actual existence is: 'It *can't* be possible, but it *is*!' But, while we have time, tell me my cues, for I share your opinion of the Duke of Alva. I would never nominate him for President!"

The girl wrung her hands nervously—the first signs he had seen of a spiritual weakening.

"I am completely in the dark," added Jarvis; "I'm just a plain man, not a mindreader. Let's get down to brass tacks!"

She did not understand the local idiom. But she realized that at last she had found a sympathetic confessor.

"I hardly know where to begin. It seems absurd—in this pleasant day-lit stateroom—to talk of ghosts. But the fact is that my family castle is haunted."

Jarvis was lighting another cigarette from the battered silver case; he burned his fingers, as he studied her, in surprise. Then he laughed provokingly. "So

I gathered from your amiable cousin. What kind of specters? Of the Hamlet variety or the old maid brand?"

She answered very seriously.

"Call it anything you like. But my castle is haunted, just the same. This is absolutely a case of facts, which mean so much to me that I would not exaggerate *now*! My grandfather was one of the wealthiest nobles in Spain. When he died my father went to take possession of the family estates in Seguro. The little town—as you count populations in America—was buzzing with weird stories of uncanny things and supernatural happenings in the old castle on the hill. It was deserted, after centuries of loyal occupancy. All the retainers had deserted their posts and fled. All told of a weird, horrible thing in armor which stalked the ancestral halls at night—of agonized groans, clanking chains, infernal fumes of sulphur—you know how ghost stories run?"

"I know the ghost stories, and most of the people who tell them run because of their own yellow streaks!" retorted Warren. "But, go on, your Highness. It's fascinating—I haven't heard a good 'hant' yarn since old Mammy Chloe died, back at Meadow Green."

She pouted, for his cynicism struck home. Yet was she earnest, and again she endeavored to impress him.

"Laugh, sir, as much as you please. My father laughed the same way. He called them silly, ignorant peasant tales. He said he would show them that it was now the twentieth century, and teach them how foolish were their fears."

She hesitated. Her dark eyes burned as she continued slowly: "He went there, Mr. Jarvis. He went there! He was never seen again!"

The Kentuckian leaned forward, engrossed.

"What happened?"

"No one knows. He disappeared—vanished utterly, without the slightest clew. Grandfather's treasure was never found!"

"Oh, what treasure?" Jarvis was almost rude in his impatient interest.

"The fortune he left. You know, grandfather converted all his wealth into Spanish gold to finance a Spanish colonization scheme in the West Indies. It amounted to about a million dollars in your American money."

Warren whistled, and twisted his intertwined fingers about an elevated knee—whose ache had been forgotten.

"That's a ripping good yarn. When did all this happen?"

"Fifteen years ago. Since then, two other men disappeared in the same horrible manner as my father did. Not a trace of their leaving: it is so horrible that it makes my heart creep to tell it. And yet you scoff!"

"I'm sorry," he said penitently. "But what's the latest news from the trenches?"

"Now the Duke tells me that my brother has entered the fatal castle ... you see that daring runs in the blood! Up to a week ago he had sent me a cable every day. Everything was well until Sunday. Then his messages stopped. All this week there has not been a word, not even answering my cables!"

Warren digested this in silence for a moment.

"Why did your Highness leave Spain, knowing all this?"

"Well, Mr. Jarvis, a part of the legend tells that my grandfather had drawn a secret map showing exactly where his treasure was located. It was not safe to let the public know where wealth was located, fifteen years ago, in Spain."

"From the extremely businesslike devotion of that ghost, it doesn't seem that conditions have improved in the district of your exalted estates!"

"Oh, Mr. Jarvis, can't you be serious? I learned from an old letter to my grandmother, from her husband the Prince, that this plan had been hidden in the back-clasp of a locket containing her miniature. Without letting my brother know of the secret, for fear that he would foolishly tell it, I engaged a secret-service man from Paris to look the matter up. When my grandparents died, much of the estate was sold—for the Spanish-American War had wrought havoc with the family income. That locket had been sold to an American collector, and I came to America just in time to save it from being sold to some museum. I pawned my mother's jewels to buy it. That was the locket which dropped from the trunk, in my bedroom last night."

"And you have the locket?"

"Yes—but not my brother!"

"Ah, then, my particular chore as vassal to this haunted family is to find your brother and solve the mystery? In other words, you want me to put this infernal, tin-plated, panhandling ghost out of his misery?"

"Yes ... Mr. Jarvis!" and the Princess was more humble than he had noticed her during the hours of their acquaintance. "Are you frightened by the ghost?"

"You asked that question before. Where I came from only negroes and poor whites fear the departed spirits. Perhaps this spirit is not as departed as circumstances would indicate. But, how about the Duke? What is his interest in the ghost?"

"He fears it, too. He has begged me to stay away from the wretched castle altogether. If it were not for my brother's future, and the fortune of the family—his family, and perhaps ... my family ... some day ... I would shun the place. We are not completely destitute, you know!"

Jarvis studied the luxurious furnishings of the cabin, the jewels and aristocratic modishness of the girl's attire, and nodded.

"I imagine you're not! But this high, exalted, and altogether superior cousin of yours is far from being a fool. He will want to know how, where, why you met me. And what he doesn't know, contrary to the usual theory, is apt to interfere with his sleep. Beware, your Highness, of men who cannot sleep o'night—they think altogether too shrewdly!"

The girl was worried.

"He will ask dreadful questions. I know him, Mr. Jarvis!"

"So do I. Will you tell him you have made of me a ... perfectly good vassal?"

"I think not—just yet," and there was a shyness in her manner.

Jarvis looked adown his nose, and there was a smile on the firm lips below it!

"By the way, Mrs. Princess—as Rusty so beautifully phrases it—just how should a vassal, a fine A-number-One vassal, address his liege-lady and the owner of his soul? What is the *au fait* procedure in this case? You know I am only an ignorant pig of an American!"

She hesitated, embarrassed, and then answered: "Highness—is correct!"

"Highness! I had imagined so—incidentally we were introduced by Fate on the eleventh floor, as I recollect. Tell me, Highness: a vassal doesn't amount to much, does he? I always considered him a piker!"

She was mystified. These phrases had not been in the curriculum of the exclusively proper English boarding-school.

"A piker—a soldier who carries a pike?"

"No, just a pawn in this human game of chess—along with the queens, and kings, and castles—and knights!... But I have known of a pawn saving a game, in the hands of an expert. By the way, and apropos of nothing-whatever-at-all, could a good, hard-working, reliable, moral, union-labeled

vassal work his way up to a good job—such as a Duke or a Lord, or something like that?"

She caught the drift of his quizzical humor, and retorted in kind.

"You're an ambitious vassal. Such men have occasionally lost their heads—literally speaking. I'm afraid you wouldn't be content with anything less than a kingship."

The Kentuckian spoke with meaning behind his jest.

"A king—a prince—or a bandit!"

"A bandit—why a bandit? That is essentially Spanish!"

Jarvis lit another cigarette.

"A king could command—a prince might request—a bandit generally seizes!"

"What?" and the woman emerged from the hauteur of the royal personality.

"That which a vassal can only admire!"

VIII

THE NEW PROFESSION

A knock on the door brought them both back to—the deck of the *Mauretania*, with terra firma not so far distant below!

"There he is now," she whispered nervously. "Who shall I say you are? And what?"

"Oh, any old thing—Warren, Mr. Warren. Leave the classification to me. Self-identification is an American trait!"

She crossed the cabin, and after a timid pause opened the door.

"Come in," she murmured.

"Ah, I'm intruding," exclaimed Carlos, Duke of Alva, with an intonation which expressed an invitation for Warren Jarvis to make a graceful exit.

"Not at all," blankly observed Jarvis. "I've just been discussing my professional task at the castle; as a member of the family you can give me some good working material."

"I don't understand," spluttered Carlos, taken aback.

"Pardon me, cousin. This is Mr. Warren, of America, who has consented to help me. My cousin, the Duke of Alva." She walked behind the two men, comparing them keenly: the deadly parallel column was not at all unfavorable to the insouciant Kentuckian.

"Glad to know you," volunteered Jarvis. "Have a cigarette?"

"I never smoke in the presence of ladies," retorted the Duke. Then with a patronizing air he added: "I am honored to meet you, sir, if you are in my royal cousin's employ. So, you are interested in the castle?"

"Oh, not so much in the castle as in the ghost. I'll attend to him."

"And is that your regular profession?"

"You are a good guesser, my dear Duke. That is my business—solving mysteries—locking up family skeletons—chasing spooks and putting salt on their tails. We have a professional name for it in the United States."

"And what is that, sir?" asked Carlos, uncertain whether to be affronted or to draw out this strange bird to a confidence. A quick glance at his cousin's immobile face gave him no hint.

Jarvis continued amiably.

"We are living in an age of specialists. You have doubtless heard of Farley the Strike Breaker, of Roosevelt the Trust Breaker. I forgot to bring my business cards with me; but if I may be so immodest as to tell the truth, I am known from Bowling Green to the Golden Gate as Warren the Ghost Breaker!"

"*I am known from Bowling Green to the Golden Gate, as Warren the Ghost Breaker*"

"I am known from Bowling Green to the Golden Gate, as Warren the Ghost Breaker"

This astounding news fairly took the Duke off his feet. He mentally clawed the air for his equilibrium.

"*Madre de Dios!*" ejaculated the Duke, dropping his sword-cane. As he recovered from his astonishment, the Princess interceded: "I am so glad you came. I promised the Ghost Breaker that you would join us shortly. You will be able to tell him, so much better than I, of all the strange circumstances. I have only given him a rough outline of what happened up to the time I left my brother on his way to the castle."

Carlos sank into a chair, irritated at the American's disinterested lack of courtesy: Jarvis had not even risen from his seat on the trunk. Somehow or other Carlos despised that trunk!

"I will be delighted to throw any possible light on the mystery of the castle. But first let us leave your brother in peace, to let me know why you came to America?"

Maria Theresa drew the locket from her reticule.

"This is what brought me."

"May I see it?" and the Duke held out his hand, ingratiatingly. "What a charming old antique!"

"No, Carlos. Rather you may see the locket, but not the memorandum in the back."

The Duke registered an expression of polite surprise.

"Memorandum?"

"Yes," and the Princess removed a small bit of paper from the ivory back, swinging it forward to her cousin's hand, on the long silver chain. The nobleman's dark face assumed a ruddier hue, as he caught the trinket in fingers which Jarvis noticed were trembling in tell-tale manner. Jarvis watched the two of them in silence.

"It's a curious old piece of work. And you came all the way to New York to get it?"

"Yes."

"You were fortunate to find it so soon."

"I knew where to find it, Carlos; yet I was almost too late. Think of it, after that dear old family heirloom had lain in an antique shop for nearly ten years—suddenly there came two inquiries for it in a day, two beside my own. The first was from a distinguished-looking gentleman who had called early in the morning, describing it roughly to the old man, urging him to hunt for it. It took an hour to find it—and I happened to come in at the end of the hour. I doubled the offer of a museum collector, and trebled that of the distinguished-looking gentleman. I secured it."

Here, the Princess shot a sharp look into the half-closed eyes of the Duke.

"Who do you suppose could have wanted that locket but myself, Carlos?"

"I suppose," and it was the assumed indifference of a cornered schemer, "it has already occurred to you that I am the 'distinguished-looking gentleman.' Has it, cousin?"

The girl's curiosity piqued her.

"But how did you learn about the memorandum, Carlos?"

"I didn't, cousin. I had not the slightest suspicion that the locket contained an important secret; I doubt it now. I was merely following my pet hobby, in addition to a little family sentiment. I wanted to recover some of those precious heirlooms which had been scattered to the four winds."

"When did you know that this one had been scattered to New York,—on your last visit to the boulevards of Paris?" And Jarvis' smile was as ingenuous as that of a babe of two.

The Duke of Alva scowled. There seemed something uncanny in the sharpness of this American; but he prided himself upon the power of diplomacy.

"I have seldom been in Paris: they are not so much interested in antiques as in very lively moderns, Mr. Ghost Breaker!... But there, you interrupted my thought! You would be surprised to see the collection which I have already rescued, and which, Maria, will some day be yours. You Americans are not noted as really astute collectors, Mr. Jarvis."

"Well, our collectors who don't worry over millions are frequently stung by clever counterfeits. But we laboring men, who must devote all our time to our work, are usually able to tell imitations from the real thing. We are not impressed by 'four-flushing,' your Excellency!"

The Duke scowled at Warren, vainly attempting to divine the meaning of the Yankee slang. But the Kentuckian was impatient: he knew that debates were seldom as productive as labor in a workshop, when it came down to fundamentals.

Carlos was impatiently interrupted.

"Well, so much for the treasure—let's hear about the ghost. Of course I'm *certain* that there's no connection between the two, in such an aristocratic land as Spain, which scoffs at the American pursuit of the miserable, despised dollar.... What's your private opinion of this ghost? Is he a real, dependable, hell-bent spook, deserving all this press stuff which has been given to him? I've had so much experience with spirits—being a native Kentuckian—that they must be 100-proof to interest me!... Do you really put any stock in ghosts, Duke?"

"Yes, Mr. Warren, I am convinced that there are such things. This world is filled with evidences of the supernatural."

"Then you honestly believe this castle is haunted?"

"I know it!" And the Duke's black eyes sparkled with an intensity which had its effect even upon the cynical Warren Jarvis.

"So you think this ghost is dangerous to encounter—that it is the cause of the mysterious deaths and disappearances in the old castle?"

"I do, Mr. Warren!"

Jarvis whistled meditatively. The Duke looked disgusted; this was so absolutely against all rules of his own conduct with women.

"Well, what do you know about *that*?"

Warren was again silent. The Duke was tabulating his own material and preparing his next charge of ammunition.

"*Ghost* is a broad term, your Excellency. There are fifty-seven varieties of them, just like good pickles. They're equally bad for the digestion. What is your particular conception of this particular ghost?"

The Duke answered impatiently.

"There are certain occult forces in this world, Mr. Warren, that science cannot classify or fathom. Some of them are at work in that castle, manifesting their weird powers. A priest might call them demons or fiends—a psychologist might term them, perhaps, returned spirits.... I can't say; but I have been there, and heard their curious warnings and manifestations. There is something definable there, in the periphery of those ancient ruins. A malignant spiritual force lurks within that mediæval stronghold. While it haunts those musty halls it is madness for any man to expose himself there."

"You could write a good book on it, Duke," observed Jarvis irreverently. "Have you ever seen this ghost?"

"My brother has," interrupted Maria Theresa impetuously. "Twice, to my knowledge, before I left Seguro. So had my father and the others who disappeared from human ken!"

"Good Lord!" and there was a touch of the mock-heroic in the Kentuckian's voice, which escaped his companions.

"According to the family tradition," continued the Princess, "no one has ever seen it three times, and lived to tell the story."

"How do you connect this gentlemanly spook with the treasure, your Excellency?" burst in Jarvis, with a swift look of interrogation which discomfited the nobleman.

"Spook? Treasure? I see no connection. What do you mean?"

"Oh, there is always money when the ghost walks," was the mysterious reply of the American, wasted on the untheatrical Spaniards. "That is the first premise upon which a reliable scientific Ghost Breaker begins his task of investigation."

"I don't know what your experience may have been, Mr. Warren. You are evidently a brave man, but you have yet to encounter a ghost like this supernatural spirit. Things are different in the Old World!"

Warren Jarvis sniffed.

"Huh! Brave? It takes no bravery to fight a coward—that is what the ghost is. It's a coward like every other stealthy, sneaking spirit, afraid to show itself by daylight, in the glare of the sun. I can tell you now that men are not half so afraid of spirits as the spirits are afraid of men. If you face the supernatural, it is more than half beaten to a frazzle, before the fight begins. In my professional career I have learned that ghosts, horse thieves, and peevish wildcats can all be tamed by the same little charm."

The Princess was mystified.

"Charm? What do you mean—a relic?"

The Duke leaned forward, his eyes sparkling with interest.

"What is it?"

"I'd hate to tell you," responded Warren Jarvis. "It's part of my system."

And he forthwith drew out the revolver, caressing it with an unmistakable confidence.

"I had been hoping, Mr. Warren," remarked the Duke, "that you had some subtle method worthy of handling this problem, and justifying the reputation for such work which you say you maintain through America. You evidently propose to meet the forces of the supernatural with firearms.... I may as well tell you that this specter has been shot at before without the slightest effect."

The Kentuckian smiled gently.

"Quite likely, your Excellency. I have seen rifle-fire that had not the slightest effect on a wildcat for the simple reason that the firing was wilder than the cat!"

The Duke of Alva bestowed a pitying glance upon the weapon and its owner.

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Warren. You will find that the ghost is more real than the treasure."

The Princess arose indignantly. She interrupted, with feminine betrayal of her own hand.

"But the treasure is real, Carlos. Would I have crossed the ocean for this locket unless I knew?"

Carlos looked at her sharply.

"I know I am right, now, Carlos. With the memorandum which I found inside the old locket, anyone, a total stranger, could walk right up to the very stone that hides it."

There was a meaning tone in Jarvis' voice, as he added: "A pretty dangerous paper to have around—look out that somebody else doesn't get there ahead of you."

The Duke shot back a quick answer to the message between the words: "Yes, it is a dangerous paper—if it leads anyone into the castle."

"Well, despite the danger and the threats of—the ghost—I'd go a long way for the fun of unraveling a good mystery with a little spice of danger thrown in."

The Duke scowled, and then with a peculiar emphasis on his words drew a newspaper from the breast pocket of his coat.

"You needn't have taken such a long trip, Mr. Warren. You are leaving behind you, in New York, a very interesting and unusual mystery. The papers are full of the story to-day.... It will interest you too, cousin. You were stopping at the Manhattan Hotel last night, I believe?"

"Yes," said the girl indifferently; but she and Jarvis exchanged eloquent glances.

The Duke was reading with unusual interest, it seemed to Jarvis.

"Why, no..." he began. "I was so wrapped up in my baggage that I really didn't have the time nor inclination to bother with the scandal of the day. Tell us about it?"

The nobleman began to read:

"Pistol duel in Manhattan Hotel.... Colonel James Marcum, a wealthy and prominent Kentucky sportsman, nearly met death at an early hour this morning in a revolver battle in his hotel room..."

He glanced down the column and continued:

"Even at a late hour the police had no clew to the identity of his assailant, except the remarkable fact that the person is still hiding somewhere in the hotel..."

The Kentuckian interrupted:

"The villain is probably a long way from the hotel by this time if he knows what's what!"

"But they say he couldn't have gotten out without being seen," continued the Duke, still studying the printed column.

"Oh, that's the theory of the reporters. They'd lose their jobs if they ever told the real truth in a criminal case," remarked Jarvis coolly. "Don't believe what the papers say—unless it's nice and about yourself!"

"Well, Mr. Ghost Breaker, what is your own opinion? You are an expert in these matters," insisted the Duke. "This affair interests me."

Jarvis was more than nonchalant.

"He might have escaped in a thousand ways. But such work is not in my line: that's 'gum-shoe' stuff—for plain common or garden detectives."

Nita entered the cabin, and Maria Theresa arose uncertainly.

"I'll call you when I need you, Nita." There was some hidden portent in her tone which Jarvis failed to divine. He decided that discretion was the better part of valor. He rose, and walked toward the door to the promenade deck.

"We are keeping you from getting settled, I fear," he declared. "So, if you'll excuse me at this time, I'll hope to see you at luncheon.... And as for you, Duke, it's a great pleasure to meet your Excellency."

Carlos bowed with military grace.

"Thank you, Mr. Warren. I find you most interesting. I shall be glad to hear more of your remarkable profession. Good-morning, sir."

The Kentuckian turned away.

As Warren reached the deck door there was a knock upon the portal to the cabin passage.

Nita followed him, and then turned to open the second entrance. Two pompous, red-cheeked, red-necked individuals stepped forward, without so much as a "by-your-leave!"

The first one spoke, reading from a smudgy memorandum book.

"You are Miss M. T. Ar-r-ragan?"

The Princess acquiesced.

"You was at the Hotel Manhattan last night?"

"Yes."

"The lock on your bedroom door was broken?"

"Yes?"

The speaker jerked back the left lapel of his coat, displaying a silver badge with great satisfaction.

"I am from headquarters, madame, and I have orders to clear up one or two little matters connected with that affair at the hotel last night."

The speaker glared at them suspiciously.

The chivalry of Spain asserted itself. The Duke stepped forward with spirit, gripping the cane as though it were a cavalry saber.

"Orders—orders—what orders? To break into this lady's private cabin? What headquarters?"

"It seems to me, bo, that you're in a lady's private cabin yourself. I'm from police headquarters, bo!"

"Do you know whom you are addressing, fellow?"

"Say, nix on this *fellow* stuff. That'll be about all from you."

Maria Theresa interceded with her winsome grace and irresistible smile.

"Yes, Carlos, let me attend to the matter. Won't you come into the cabin, gentlemen, and be seated?"

The two detectives beamed, their bosoms heaved with pride at this unexpected recognition of their importance. They entered, waving away the steward and closing the cabin door behind them.

"We're just been discussing that mystery, Inspector!" observed Jarvis, coming nearer and taking his seat upon the trunk once more. This irritated the Duke, who added: "You are, I take it, one of the 'gum shoes'?"

Jarvis turned toward Maria Theresa, disregarding all properties due to the presence of the aristocracy, and yielded to that nervous twitching of the left eye which expresses such manifold meaning with such minimum of sound!

The detective whirled about, from his scrutiny of the cabin, walking toward the Duke. He fairly howled in the surprised nobleman's face:

"Gum shoe! Say, are you trying to kid me?"

The Duke replied with asperity:

"Well, sir. You are speaking rather loudly. I presume that I have offended you?"

"You presume! I should say you do. That's a hot one. Who are you, anyway?"

"I am Carlos, Hernando y Calderos, Duke of Alva. I have other titles, but they would hardly interest you."

The detective glared at him malevolently, mimicking the crisp enunciation of the nobleman.

"But you interest me, sweetie. Dook of Alver—and then some, eh? Ain't that just too cutey-cutey for any use? Say, I'm used to these dooks and counts—I've been around Peacock Alley at the Waldorf too long not to know 'em by their checkered pants and them canes! Say, Dook! If you was the Archbishop of Canterbury I'd run yer in and take yer ashore, if yer give me any more of yer lip."

Jarvis, bumping his heels against the trunk, smiled with diabolical enjoyment in the face of his Excellency!

IX

CHECKMATE THE FIRST

The detective glared at the nobleman, with fingers obviously itching for action. He sucked his teeth contemptuously, and then turned his back squarely upon the noble countenance. Over his face spread the beatific smile which strong, rough men deem overpowering with a member of the weaker sex.

"As you was saying, lady, before we was so impolitely interrupted, you was in the hotel when this gunplay went on. Did you hear it?"

"Yes, sir, I heard two shots."

"Did you hear anything else?"

"Yes, indeed. I heard a great many people running up and down the corridor, outside my door."

The detective scribbled away in his notebook. Jarvis winked again at the Princess, over the doughty shoulders which were backed toward him. The Duke caught the wink, and pondered over it.

"Did anyone come in your room, miss?"

"Yes. My maid was frightened, poor child. She came in, and begged me to protect her."

"Ah-ha! A-hum! And how did your lock get broken?"

"It was broken when we came to the room. I was foolish not to complain to the management at once, for I might have been robbed by some sneak-thief. I explained all that at the hotel."

"Um ... All right. What about the colored man who came to your room afterwards and carried away a large bundle?"

The Duke's eyes were sparkling now. He was biding his chance to intervene. Jarvis watched him without the flicker of an eyelash.

"That was my servant," explained the Princess, easily. "I sent for him, because I had made a number of purchases too late to get them into my trunk. They are here unopened; you may examine them if you wish."

The detective waved aside the offer: he was nothing if not gallant—if the questioned one were fair enough!

"Oh, that's all right. But what do you know about this, miss?"

He produced a pocket-knife, and walked toward her slowly, examining it with care. The Duke of Alva leaned over his shoulder with absorbed interest.

"This knife has the initial '*W*.' How about it?"

The girl reached forward, with a graceful hand.

"Oh, I'm so glad you found it! Thank you for bringing it to me."

"Then it's yours? Who is this party '*W*'? Your name is Aragon, I believe."

The Princess laughed.

"I am Maria Theresa of Aragon, you see."

"I don't see. Where does the '*W*' come in? I know how to spell, you know, even if I'm only a bull." And he glared pugnaciously at the duke.

"Why ... it isn't '*W*'—can't you understand? You're holding it upside down. It is '*M*'—standing for my first name: Maria Theresa."

The detective grudgingly handed her the trinket. He looked into his memorandum book again, chewing the end of his pencil.

"Now, there's just one more thing, Miss..."

Carlos could control himself no longer. He caught the officer's arm in a feverish grip, which was as promptly thrown off.

"You will pardon me, but I wish to inform you that this man's name is Warren..." he began.

The detective spun about, and protruded his heavy chin at the Duke.

"Say, who's running this 'Third Degree'—you or me?"

The Duke tried to temporize.

"But, my dear man..."

"Say, cull, I ain't your dear man. Cut that guff—don't dearie me. I'm a big rough fellow, but I've got some gumption. You get out of here."

He gave him a thoroughly plebeian push toward the door.

"Yes, Carlos, do go. Leave us to attend to this matter. These gentlemen are so kind and so sympathetic. I am sure we can finish this better without you."

"I merely wished to point out..."

"You point *him* out, Jim," ordered the first detective to his assistant. "You hear what the lady says. This is her cabin."

The second official caught the aristocrat with a rude grasp of the velvet coat-collar and shook him as one would a child. The Duke's teeth chattered.

"Out yer goes, and if yer butts in again I'll fan yer. Beat it! Do yer hear? Do yer get me? Skibooch!"

The Duke tried to regain his equilibrium before braving the publicity of the saloon. His voice trembled with passion, as he retorted: "An infernal outrage! I'll report this to his Majesty, the King."

The first detective looked at the jocular Warren Jarvis, who published his third wink, this time in the direction of the big sleuth.

"King! Huh! Roosevelt wasn't elected! Did yer get that, Jim? Well, what do you know about that?"

Jarvis leaned forward, with a sibilant whisper of secrecy:

"Sssh! Gentlemen. Don't be disturbed. He is quite harmless. You heard him raving about a king? He suffers from pernicious megalomania. That's all—nothing more. He has grandiose ideas."

Jim coughed apologetically as his superior officer blinked.

"What does them words mean, Jim?"

"Wheels—bats in his belfry—just plain nutty, Mike."

"You mean he is crazy, mister?"

Jarvis nodded.

"Yes, he is at times. But don't be cross with him, for he has a beautiful nature, except when the ravages of the disease are upon him. You know, he doesn't even like *me* when he has a spell like this. But he's not at all dangerous. It is just necessary to humor him—he's not to blame—it's the way he was raised."

"Then you're looking out for him?" and the detective looked furtively toward the door, as he reassured himself by fumbling with the revolver in his own hip-pocket.

"Yes, that's my job."

The big sleuth shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry I had to be rough with him, like that, miss. But you seen as well as I did that he was gumming the game. Why, with some boob detectives that I know, a feller like that might queer the crowd of you—making it look as though you was implicated." He looked into the ubiquitous notebook. "One question more. How do you account for the blood on the knob of the door—from the *inside*, too?"

The girl was honestly surprised this time.

"Blood on my door? Why—I——?"

"I can explain that, Inspector."

"Go ahead, then, Doctor."

"Do you mind?" and the Kentuckian turned politely toward the girl. She shook her head, wondering what could be in his mind.

"You see, that colored man—the one you were talking about—brought the bundle there. He tied it up and, cutting the string carelessly, broke the blade of the knife and cut his hand. That was it, wasn't it? You see the long blade snapped off near the handle."

The detective nodded—not completely convinced.

"Where is this colored man now?" was his question.

It seemed to Maria Theresa that they were getting hopelessly into the toils. She was discouraged, as she glanced at the imperturbable Jarvis. He nodded ever so slightly, and she caught her cue.

"He is in stateroom 729," she said.

"All right. I'll look at him. 729? Thanks, miss. You know, this ain't personal at all. I'm just taking the chief's orders. I'm sorry to bother you."

He walked toward the door with the dignified flat-footed gait which distinguishes the Manhattan sleuth and all others in the world.

"Good-by, miss. Watch that maniac, do! He looks like a bad actor to me."

They were gone, and Maria Theresa sank into a chair weakly. Jarvis energetically sprang to the telephone.

"Hello! Give me room 729."

After a pause he continued: "Hello, hello, hello, Rusty! Yes, Rusty. Damn it all, answer me, do you hear me?"

There was another pause, and the girl began to lose her control again.

"Yes, I know I told you to keep mum, but I'm telling you to talk now." Jarvis knew that every second was precious. "Do just what I tell you and do it quick. Take your knife and cut your left hand.... What?... No, don't cut it off, you damn fool. Just enough to make it bleed a little, and then tie it up with a handkerchief.... Never mind ... That's none of your business! Remember don't answer questions! You're deaf and dumb again."

He hung up the receiver and turned toward the Princess with a newborn laugh.

"By George, blood will tell! You're game. You certainly handled the detective with European statecraft. Then your cousin Carlos broke in at the psychological moment to scatter their gum-shoe wits. It was beautiful comedy."

"Now they believe him crazy!" she answered. "How will that turn out?"

"Nothing could be better. They won't believe a word he says. He'll be crazy before he gets through with it. Could you handle him all right now?"

She nodded abstractedly. She was looking at his hand, which had gone without attention all this time, and which had been adroitly snuggled inside his pocket during the visit of the New York detectives.

"Yes. You must hurry and have your hand dressed before it develops into something serious."

"All right. The ship's surgeon will dress it, with collodion so that you can't even see that it's hurt.... Crazy! Hum! That's funny!" And he left by the door to the promenade deck, with a merry laugh which showed how the nervous strain had lightened, after all these solitary, bitter hours.

There was a knocking on the entry from the saloon, and at her word it opened. The Duke entered, glaring savagely.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"Well—I'm waiting!" he exclaimed.

"Waiting for what, Carlos?"

"For some explanation of all this deceit. Who is this man Warren? Alone with you here in your cabin!"

She raised her eyebrows in beautiful surprise, as she asked:

"Must I tell you all over again? He is a professional ghost breaker, just as he said."

"How did you find such a creature?"

"I met him quite by accident. I knew at once that he was a man in a thousand."

"What do you know about him, Maria?"

"Why ... that he is as well known in America as you are in Spain."

The Duke sniffed.

"Indeed! Well, he will be better known when I turn him over to the police. He will get much of that free advertising which Americans love so well."

"Why, Carlos, what do you mean?"

"I think you know what I mean," and there was a threat in his manner. Just then the large detective thrust his red face into the door.

"It's all right, miss. We're going ashore now in the pilot boat. But you should have told us that your nigger was a dummy!"

Here was the last chance for the Duke. He grasped it, hurrying toward the door.

"One moment, gentlemen, one moment!" and he laughed in Maria's face, confident of his success. "If this person is famous, these gentlemen should know him.... Do you know Warren, the Ghost Breaker?"

"The what?" asked the detective.

"The Ghost Breaker!"

Both men now entered the room, grinning at each other.

"He's off his trolleys again, Jim," said the big fellow to the other.

Jarvis stepped in through the deck door.

"Is this man Warren, the famous Ghost Breaker? This man right here!"

"The guy's dippy all right, cull," remarked the nearest sleuth to Jarvis, who nodded most seriously.

"Agree with anything he says. You know!" he muttered.

The Duke was beside himself with rage.

"Answer my question! Is this man Warren the Ghost Breaker?"

"Aw, Dook, old top, that's all right. Don't worry about it!... Sure he's a ghost breaker, ain't he, Jim?"

"Best bet you know," replied obliging Jim. "He's the prince of all ghost breakers!"

The Duke smote his breast furiously, while the detectives smiled sympathetically into Jarvis' serious face.

"*Sacristi!* Am I Carlos Hernando, Duke of Alva, to be mocked at by two grinning bull-necked scullions?"

"Whatever you say goes, Dook!" amiably replied the first detective.

A ship's officer appeared on the promenade deck and called through the open door at them.

"Hurry up, if you're going ashore with the pilot, officers."

The two men bowed with their best imitation of gallantry, to the Princess Maria Theresa of Aragon. Nita, standing in the vestibule, sent a melting glance at the faithful Jim, who stumbled over the treacherous cabin threshold.

The superior of the two shook hands pompously with Jarvis, whose left hand was still in his pocket.

"Be kind to the little rascal, Doc. He might not get such good treatment from them Scotland Yard bulls, on the other side. They don't understand human nature like us fellers—they ain't got no education over there. Good-by, Doc! Don't let your foot slip!"

He turned toward the Duke, as he passed through the door.

"You're all right, Dook, old boy, if you do have fits! Ghost Breaker—ha, ha!"

Carlos started toward the other door, with a bound.

"It's not too late. I'll see the captain."

Jarvis, sitting on the trunk, whistled with typical American lack of reverence. As the nobleman turned about, he found himself looking into the barrel of the revolver. A quizzical smile played about the firm lines of the Kentuckian's mouth.

"Don't be in too big a hurry, your Excellency. The captain is apt to be busy just now. And besides, he may not believe in ghosts!"

X

A WAGER WITH THE DUKE

What a curious sea voyage!

The Duke's attempt to warn the captain of the nature of this one particular passenger never eventualized. When the *Mauretania* had finally left behind all sight of America, Jarvis relaxed his severity.

"You may enjoy yourself, Excellency," he said, as he put away the revolver. "But I would like to speak to you alone. As the representative of the Princess, on a most important mission, I am compelled to look after her interests in a definite manner."

He faced the girl meaningly.

"Will you excuse us for a moment's interchange of pleasantries?"

She nodded, and retired to her bedroom with Nita.

"What do you want, you scoundrel? I know that you are an impostor—a make-believe, and worse!"

"Take it easy, Duke. I'm really not too enthusiastic over you. But this Colt revolver is not a make-believe. I am only going to bother your aristocratic memory with this one little idea—that if there is any reporting to the captain or ship's officers, to interfere with my services as Ghost Breaker for the royal house of Aragon, there is going to be a nice band concert in the public square of your native town—and the special number on the programme will be the 'Dead March from Saul,' with pretty black crêpe on the ducal doorknob! Do you catch my meaning?"

"You Yankee pig!"

"I'm not a Yankee—I'm a Johnny Reb, by birth and education. But both Yankees and Rebels acquired a reputation for marksmanship about fifty years ago." The jest died out of his voice. "One whimper from you, damn you, and I'll shoot you as I would a mad dog!"

There was such a savage rasp in that mellow Southern voice that the Duke instinctively dodged backward, as though expecting the first volley.

"We shall see what we shall see!" were his final words. "And if I see you about the cabin of my cousin again,—well, perhaps the officers of this ship may take a hand."

Warren pursed his lips into an ironical grin.

"You know, a member of my profession doesn't take a solemn oath to wait until the remains are resting in pieces: it might not be a difficult task to take up an avocation as well as a vocation. I wonder if I couldn't be a pretty good Ghost Maker? Think it over."

Jarvis, with a simple word of good-bye to the Princess, returned to his own cabin, where he lost himself in slumber. The tortures of his trunk trip were still with him, in aching muscles and strained ligaments.

The girl wondered what had become of him, for it was not until late in the evening that he telephoned to her at the suite.

She was on the deck, listening to the orchestra concert. Nita responded at the 'phone. Jarvis surprised the girl by a voluble discourse in Spanish. He had mastered it in his tropical travels. It was to come in as a life-saving accomplishment before the end of the adventure.

"Tell me, Nita. Have you good eyes?" he curiously inquired.

"Ah, señor, so I am told," was the ingenuous reply.

"Well, in that sense I have my doubts about their goodness ... but what I want you to do, for the sake of your Princess and her brother, is to keep those black eyes eternally watchful. I am expecting some curious tricks from one we know. Let her know what you see—and she will tell me. Remember—keep looking, listening all the time."

Nita promised, and Warren repaired to the lounge, where he observed the Duke nursing his ill-humor over a lonesome absinthe *frappé*.

Warren did not seek companionship either, upon this journey. He knew too many men in the ranks of the international traders, to dare risk recognition. The great roadway between New York and the European ports has now become a veritable promenade, thronged with travelers: it is no longer a lonely passage.

The great steamship was crowded on this trip, Rusty being in good luck to obtain a stateroom relinquished just before sailing time. With nearly two thousand people on board, it was a floating town—and more than once in the crowded decks and saloons he caught glimpses of men he knew in club, college, or business. He would invariably beat a precipitate retreat. His daily procedure was hermit-like. With the exception of an early morning stroll, alone, on the promenade deck, he took no more chances after that first morning. His meals were served in his stateroom. From the splendid library of the ship he secured ample reading material to while away the time.

At night he spent an hour in walking with the Princess—and they were wonderful moments. Each evening he seemed to grow better acquainted with this unusual woman—finding beneath the surface of courtly reserve a depth of feeling, a breadth of humanity which would hardly have been believable from her calm, almost indifferent manner.

Her education in an English school had internationalized her—her wide knowledge of books, in all the literatures of Europe, her familiarity with the best of art, poetry, the drama and music—had made of her a delightful, ever surprising traveling companion.

The girl was interested in everything American. She plied him with questions about the city, the country, the customs. Her brief stay in New York had been all too limited—her curiosity was only whetted by the brief survey of externals which is all that a stranger may get, without the guidance of an initiate.

To her, America represented a great new universe, teeming with vitality. Compared with the mediævalism of her own country, the modernity of the States was a wonderful poetic drama of ideals, accomplishment, and goals worth while.

"What do you think of titles, Mr. Jarvis?" asked the girl, one evening. "When you made your recessional into the Middle Ages by taking the feudal oath to me, you were flippant, almost sarcastic: yet by my standards, I could not feel that any man could defend my interests with propriety unless he were of my own people—so, you were adopted with more seriousness than you supposed."

Jarvis flicked a cigarette into the swirling waters far beneath them, as he answered.

"Titles do not appeal to Americans, as a general thing. To the simpler folk, they represent the yoke of the ancient Lion whose mane was cropped in 1776. To the broader folk, they are no more than the marks of family: although I must confess that your worthy cousin would create much fluttering of hearts and waving of ivory fans around Newport and Lennox, —where American hearts, of a sort, and American fortunes of questionable worth are bartered for a tin-plated coronet. But that's the revenge of the Great God of Misfits."

He turned toward her, resting his hand upon the rail.

"You are no different physically, mentally, socially from many of the Southern, Northern, and Western girls I have met in my own country. You are dependent upon the fashions, to bring your charms to the utmost

effectiveness." The Princess blushed in the dark. "But, differing from many of them, you do succeed!" he added.

"You are just as human as the fine girls I have met back home—your titled classes correspond with the fine old families of the United States—and we have the advantage over you that by our own endeavor we can change the titles, by our own efforts, without waiting for the death of our loved ones."

His mind turned to his own mother, to whom his successes had been a source of increasing happiness.

"I was only a little knight back home in Kentucky—when I was a tiny chap. As I went into the world, and fought the battles, and won some (after losing more), to my dad and the mother I became a prince.... And the great thing about being a prince—to your family—in a republic, as compared with being a prince in a monarchy, is that a chap must keep on making good in the job, or he'll fail of election, just in the years when he wants it most!

"To tell you the truth, your Highness, America is crowded with 'wealthy families,' 'socially prominent,' 'old Colonial families,' two or three million *Mayflower* blossoms, and similar Philistines! There are hundreds of clever people who make good annual incomes in our country with their ingenuity in connecting the Joneses and the Browns and the Smiths with Richard the Lion-Heart and Bill the Conqueror, by marriage. In my native State, Kentucky, there are enough majors, colonels, and generals to officer the armies of Europe—and as for judges!... There are enough badges, fraternity pins, cockades, and association medals to keep second-hand jewelers busy for their lifetimes! My countrymen are the most passionate collectors of heraldic certificates and genealogical maps in the world. The instinct for decoration is prevalent—the more obscure the family, the more plentiful the framed diplomas of aristocratic origin on the walls!"

The Princess was unable to follow the cynicism of the speech, but a growing admiration for Jarvis' analytical powers led her to put confidence in his opinions.

"And what harm does it do?" he concluded. "They are titles of universal brotherhood, and peace breeds more American colonels and majors than an international Armageddon. And it is all in the game!"

"And then, you do not have such a disgust for titles and the marks of good family, after all?"

She was almost eager in her inquisition of the vassal.

"Your Serene Highness has no cause for worry: although you will doubtless never need care for any American opinion" (and Warren studied her face, as the fine silhouette was illumined by the nearby deck light), "for in my country a princess is recognized whether she wear ermine robes, or a calico shirtwaist and a ragged skirt. You see,—a republic is at least well illuminated. We're not afraid of the light!... However, I imagine that your title will be changed before another year, and in that case you will have no cause for curiosity!"

The girl's eyes burned as she questioned him.

"What do you mean, Mr. Jarvis? For a vassal, you are decidedly presumptuous. You need not come to court again until you are summoned. Good-night."

And then she turned, as Jarvis maintained a discreet silence, walking rapidly toward the promenade door of her suite. He bade her good-night, without response.

Jarvis remembered an old verse of the greatest balladist of the century:

*"For Julia O'Grady and the Colonel's lady,
Were both the same, under the skin—
And I learned about women from 'er!"*

Maria Theresa was not in a mood to see Jarvis for two more days. Instead of trying to win her forgiveness for a wrong—he had not committed—he stuck the closer to his stateroom, where, with the solicitous attention of Rusty, he lived a drone-like and peaceful existence, poring over books. They were not fiction or philosophy—the Kentuckian's interest was in Baedeker and other books on Spain. With the same application which had carried him over the thin ice of college examinations, he had grasped a valuable understanding of the customs and peculiarities of Spain. He gave especial attention to the railroad maps, for Warren was not trusting too implicitly to the permanent humility of the Duke.

That worthy was passing a most disagreeable voyage.

He was naturally of an irascible, dictatorial temperament—accustomed to flattery and adulation. On this return trip to the Continent, the ship's list comprised Americans for the most part. They were in little humor to cajole the swarthy, sarcastic, and unsociable Spaniard. Their minds were too full of the pleasures of the months to come, of plans and frolics in contemplation, to sacrifice their time to this dour personage.

The Duke endeavored to mellow his own discomfort at Maria Theresa's coldness with numerous visits to the grill. The result was a morning "grouch," an afternoon headache, and a twilight bitterness which kept him permanently aloof from all companionship.

On two occasions he had observed Warren in earnest and apparently friendly conversation with the captain and first officer. He was not aware that it was intended for his own benefit—and that nothing more intimate than the weather was under discussion. But it presaged a prompt information to the "Ghost Breaker" in case he registered his complaint. The Duke's methods of warfare were not of the gallant-charge-against-

intrenchments variety. He specialized in the executive ability which directs the activities of other men; and so he bided his time.

The fifth evening out from New York harbor—they were due some time the following day in the Mersey, dependent largely upon the tide and weather—he could stand no longer the evident growth of friendliness between his cousin and her "employed" assistant.

Maria Theresa had forgiven the Kentuckian for his jest—without the formality of an apology, because she was a woman. She had once more yielded to her loneliness, and walked the wind-swept promenade deck to discuss their common subjects.

As Jarvis bade her good-night and stepped into the shadow of the deck, he observed the aristocrat knocking angrily upon the cabin door.

"Let me in, Maria," cried the Duke, in Castilian. "I must talk to you, for your own good."

"I suppose that means my bad," muttered Jarvis. "I'll just smoke another cigarette in the neighborhood, to see how things go."

The Duke was admitted—his conversation in the parlor of the suite seemed to last for half an hour. At last the door opened, and he reappeared. He was talking excitedly at the doorway.

"What I have said to you, I would say before him, were he not skulking in his cabin, afraid of justice. He is a pig of a poltroon!" cried his Excellency. "I wish he were here now, and I would tell it to his face."

The girl replied calmly—so quietly indeed that Jarvis could not distinguish the words.

But he stepped forward, and laid a hand upon the nobleman's arm. Carlos jumped nervously, as though bitten by a snake.

"Here I am, your Excellency. Let's hear what it is you have to say?"

The other swallowed his choler, speaking with difficulty.

"I ... I ... cannot speak on the deck of the ship!" he exclaimed.

"Then come into my cabin again," said the Princess with pardonable asperity. "You may tell Mr. Jarvis your opinion of him now."

Jarvis gave the Duke an ungentle shove, with the result that the troublesome door threshold again intercepted to demonstrate the laws of gravity. The Duke sprawled most unromantically upon the deck inside. He scrambled to his feet, muttering Spanish oaths.

"Dog! If you were my equal socially I would challenge you!" he spluttered.

"If you were my equal physically I would punch your head," was the apt reply of the American. "Now, let's hear this opinion which you were so anxious to tell to my face."

There was a humorous twinkle in the dark eyes of the Princess, and Warren observed, down the passageway to the private stateroom, the smiling face of Nita, the maid.

"Well, Mr. Warren ... I ... merely ... said that I know you to be what you Yankees call a humbug! For some purposes of your own—perhaps to attempt a theft of this imaginary fortune, you are trying to get to Seguro ... However," and at the quiet interest on the face of Jarvis he was emboldened to make his statements more emphatic, "I have my doubts about your honesty in the whole matter."

"And that means what, your Excellency?"

"I don't believe you even intend to risk the chances in Spain. You have duped my cousin, a helpless, innocent girl—ignorant of the sharp ways of American adventurers. You have secured a free passage on this ship, and doubtless an advance payment, to engage you. I would wager anything that you will never see Spain, in this case."

Jarvis smiled ingratiatingly.

"You are a clever student of character. Such men make good gamblers. How much are you willing to wager on this little affair? How much will you bet that I do not appear in Spain?"

The Duke of Alva bit his lip. He had lost too much in recent gamings to afford greater risks just now. But he was a sportsman—particularly did he wish to impress his kinswoman.

"I will wager a thousand pounds of English money,—five thousand dollars in your American rags,—that you will not appear at Seguro in time to help the Princess."

"That's a great deal of money, especially for a hard-working business man like myself," answered Warren. "What are the exact stipulations of this wager? I might borrow the money from the Princess, as an advance payment for breaking the ghost?"

Carlos sneered exultantly.

"Yes, you might borrow it but there is not so much ready money around Seguro. My terms, if you care to know them, are these: I wager the thousand pounds that you will not be at Seguro three nights from to-morrow—the time when we will arrive, according to the train schedule. However, why should I waste talk, with a man, on a bet which is not for tradesmen but for gentlemen?"

"Who would hold the stakes?"

The Duke smiled, and waved a gallant hand toward his cousin.

"Who better than my kinswoman, the Princess of Aragon?"

"Who better?" echoed Jarvis.

He was fumbling with his waistcoat, his back to the Princess and her cousin. Suddenly with a jerk, he brought forth a leather money belt which

had been tightly bound about his body, diagonally over one and under another shoulder. The Duke's eyes protruded. Jarvis dropped the treasure "chest" upon the table, while even the Princess evidenced her surprise. Opening the little pockets, which joined each other along its entire length, he began to pile up gold pieces.

"I believe I have the amount handy, your Excellency!" he remarked amiably. "May I trouble you to invite you to produce the money for your own side of the bet? We have a vulgar custom among us in America, of requesting the other man to either 'put up or shut up.'"

It happened that this cash had been carefully drawn from his resources before the eventful last evening at the club. Jarvis had prepared himself for all exigencies: he had not imagined that the first use would be a reversal to the ancient custom of his ancestors in the Blue Grass State,—a bet upon a race. But blood will tell, and here he was in the time-honored custom of the family!

The Duke had not seen so much cash since his last ill-fated pilgrimage to Monte Carlo. He was staggered. But the musical laugh of the Princess brought back the haughty *savoir faire* for which he was noted!

"Ah ... well ... I understand you, sir," he stammered, with improving volubility. "Very good. As the Duke of Alva, it is not necessary for me to produce the exact cash on the spot. The word of a Spanish nobleman is as good as his bond. It is a wager, and the terms stand."

His black eyes studied the pile of gold coins with sparkling interest.

"Very good,—twice in the same place. The word of a Kentuckian is as good as his bond. I agreed to let the Princess be the stakeholder—she may hold your word, and my money-belt. Your Serene Highness—will you do me the honor?"

And he turned toward the blushing girl, as he handed over the treasure. The insult was not lost on the Duke. But, as Jarvis reached for his hat, he could

not resist a final slap!

"Good-night, your Highness. I advise you to be very careful with the lock on the door. The ship lands to-morrow evening, and some villain may break into your stateroom, rob you of the Duke's word of honor and sell it to some enterprising Liverpool pawnbroker. Pleasant dreams! I hope to welcome you to Seguro, your Excellency. Don't spend the five thousand until you get there—remember, the home industries need encouragement."

And he walked out to the promenade deck. The Duke looked at his cousin, flushed a swarthy red at the cynical laugh on her pretty face. Then he, too, hurried out—through the saloon passage. He was anxious to get to his own stateroom to think things over.

XI

WHEN THE SHIP COMES IN

Back in his stateroom Warren was poring with renewed interest over the time-tables between Liverpool, London, Paris, and Madrid. Seguro was on the main line from the French capital to the principal one of Spain.

As he made various penciled memoranda upon a page of his leather notebook, the telephone bell tinkled.

He answered and heard the voice of the Princess.

"Can you see me at once,—on the promenade deck, by my door?"

"Yes. Good-by."

In a few moments he was talking to her in the dark; all the lights of her suite were out. The girl was very nervous.

"I have a paper which Nita found upon the floor—it was crumpled and must have fallen from the pocket of my cousin when he fell. I want to give you back that belt, Mr. Jarvis: for I have heard before of some of the wager-debts of Carlos. It is safer with you. Let me know what you think about this paper, and tell me to-morrow morning. We are due in port late in the evening, you know."

"I will. There may be something in which I wish your help, as well, your Highness. I have made up my mind to reach Seguro before the Duke—for many reasons."

The girl caught his hand impetuously.

"You don't fear for your life before you get there, do you?" she asked softly. "I want you to help me in my castle. That is our bargain—but I know you better than I did when we met in New York. I don't want you to run too big a risk for me until the great trial comes. Do be careful, now."

A thrill sent the Kentuckian's head reeling for an instant at the unexpected touch of those warm, electric fingers. Then he caught himself.

"Your vassal is still ambitious for promotion. But he will not fight the windmills of Spain on an old mule like Don Quixote. He prefers modern methods—such as dynamite, and other pleasant little novelties."

He pressed her hand with a returning warmth, slipped the belt about him, and started down the promenade deck again. Something prompted him to step into the black shadow of a companionway as a figure crossed beneath an electric overhead lamp far forward on the deck.

He waited.

The figure approached noiselessly.

It was the Duke! He was wearing slippers, with felt soles apparently, for his steps caused no sound. Jarvis watched him with a strange misgiving—a fear not for himself. Yet he deemed it wiser to wait for developments.

Up and down the deck paced the nervous, noiseless figure. At last the Duke returned and disappeared from view, through the door by which he had entered the Kentuckian's view.

"I wonder what that meant?" thought Jarvis. "Perhaps he is having a fight with his conscience—just as I have been doing."

And he watched the speeding waves, racing past the great vessel as it seemed—for so steady was the swift advance of the ship that it seemed they were on dry land, rather than the boundless expanse of the depths.

"Here I am—after all my education, all the work of years, to advance myself, running away from my own country—an escaped gun-man, just like an East Side thug."

In the comfortable calm of the shipboard life, with unfamiliar scenes, away from the reminders of his tragedy at Meadow Green, it did not now seem a fine thing that he had done.

Man is not normally a destroyer of his own kind—and his fine instincts were asserting themselves. Yet, after all, despite his vow to his father, this had been actual self-defense.

The other had fired the first shot: he had planned to trap him with a decoy, and in the end it was survival of the fittest.

These thoughts had been frequently in his mind, but he had resolutely driven them from him. Now they were nearing another port, a great commercial cross-ways of the travel world. Here again he was coming within the grasp of the law.

He was not too certain that all had been given up, in that questioning pursuit of the Princess and her party. That broken door lock might yet admit the hand of legal vengeance.

"And that Duke? He'll try to earn that five thousand dollars surely enough now. Well, I'd better be worrying over my own future instead of the dead past. They've said 'let the dead past bury itself, and don't climb the graveyard fence.' That's good logic. But I'd better be looking toward some of the fences ahead. I wonder what is on the paper?"

He returned to his stateroom, where Rusty was dozing in a chair, waiting for the good-night instructions.

Jarvis sat down and studied the fragment. He sat bolt upright, at first with rage and then a growing amusement.

"Look here, Rusty. This Duke is trying to put one over on me," he declared, waking his servant.

"Huh? What's dat, Marse Warren?" and Rusty rubbed his eyes drowsily.

"Do you see what this paper is?"

"Looks like a telegram letter, boss."

"That's a wireless blank, Rusty. It has never been sent. It is the first draft. See—the words are crossed out here, and a sentence changed there. The person who wrote this message tried to save money, by cutting it down, just as we, back home, waste a dollar's worth of time, trying to shorten a telegraph message into ten words. Isn't that reasonable?"

"Yassir. But what does it mean? I don't read no sich langwidge."

Jarvis smiled.

"It's in Spanish. It's addressed to Scotland Yard, in London."

"What's dat? Is it some schoolhouse lot?"

"It's detective headquarters, Rusty. And it is about me."

"About you-all!" Rusty was wide awake by this time, in all truth. He had an instinctive suspicion of anything connected with brass buttons and detectives.

"Yes. It warns Scotland Yard that a man named Warren, on this steamship, is wanted by the New York police, and that I should be arrested before the passengers can leave."

"Who signed dat mizzable contraption?"

"It isn't signed, Rusty. The only person who writes Spanish and who could be so deeply interested in my wickedness is that high and mighty relative of

the Princess. He wrote it in Spanish so the wireless operator probably wouldn't notice or understand the message."

"Well, Marse Warren, dis is a ship—dey alluz has ropes. Can't you climb overboard when she is hitched to de wharfboat?"

Jarvis was thinking rapidly. He looked at his watch.

"The detectives will come on with the pilot boat, Rusty, which I understand meets the *Mauretania* about eight or ten miles offshore. There won't be any chance on the wharfboat. But that gives me a good idea—however, it doesn't seem right to make the Duke of Alva waste his hard-earned coin on wireless messages. There's no free list with Marconi, you know."

Jarvis was walking up and down the stateroom nervously by this time.

"Rusty, in my suitcase is an old suit of clothes which I put in to use, if I had to jump the town on account of Marcum. I thought I might go to the mountains when I went over to the Belmont Hotel. Now, get it out, and those old tennis shoes, and that cap."

"Whaffor, Marse Warren?" The big whites of his eyes were rolling—an indication that Rusty Snow's mind was not as much at ease as usual. "You ain't gonta do nothin' dangerous, is you, Marse Warren? Remember you-all is de oney one left in de fam'ly an' you's got to look after yohself."

Warren placed a kindly hand on the negro's shoulder.

"Rusty, I remember that once when Meadow Green got too small for you, years ago, you started out with a minstrel show—'The Darktown Merrymakers,' they called it."

This leap over the chasm of years was too much for Rusty.

"Yassir," he agreed, after recovering from his surprise. "But, I had to walk back home."

"The thing I want to know, Rusty, is whether you learned how to act when you were with that troupe. Did you?"

"Did I? Marse Warren, dere wasn't no *amotion* dat wasn't developed in me on dat trip—I started off laughin' and came back like a weepin' angel."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Jarvis. "That's splendid. Now, Rusty, I want to have you do some more play-acting—only turn it around. This time I want you to go away weeping, and we'll come back laughing!"

Rusty was actually offended.

"Ah, Marse Warren. You's pickin' on de ole nigger. Dat was w'en I was a young an' sassy coon. No moh actin' fer mine."

"That's just what you've got to do, Rusty. Obey orders or walk back to New York!"

Rusty blinked and grumbled to himself. Then, as usual, he acquiesced with that famous grin.

"Oh, Marse Warren, I'm game fer anything dat you is. What is de play?"

"I think we can call this one 'Why Dukes Leave Home,' Rusty. Now, you get busy with those clothes, and pack up the suitcases again, so they won't be missed. I'm going on the boat deck, over us, for a little walk and some thinking."

Jarvis was gone for about fifteen minutes. Rusty was beginning to get nervous by the time he had returned. His hands and face were sooty.

"Where you-all been, Marse Warren? Climbin' up on de smokestack?"

"No, just investigating things. Now, after I write this note I will tell you about your acting and give you a rehearsal. I haven't any time to lose, Rusty."

Warren wrote very carefully, tearing the paper up several times and throwing the fragments through the open porthole, for this was an outside stateroom. At last he had finished it.

He smiled over it more than once, finally sealed it, and laid it carefully in the center of the little folding writing-desk, where it was in plain view from the door.

Then he began to disrobe, changing to the rough old suit and the tennis shoes. He dispensed with undergarments and hose.

"Now, Rusty, I want you to go down to the steward of the second cabin and tell him you are very hungry. Get some good sliced meat, some biscuits, and some fruit. Wrap it up in paper—I know it's late, but there's always someone on watch in the pantry. A little American money will go a long way with these British stewards. Hurry back."

As soon as Rusty was out of the room, Jarvis wrapped the money-belt firmly about his body, under the flannel shirt. He placed some gold coins in a handkerchief, which he tied into a knot. Then he slipped out to the promenade deck, walking along its deserted length to the room of the Princess. He tapped on the window of the parlor of the suite until the door opened slightly.

Nita's frightened voice came to him. He answered reassuringly.

"It is Warren. I want to speak to the Princess."

The maid hurried back, and brought her mistress. Warren spoke to her in a whisper.

"I understand the treachery," he said. "Have no fear. I will meet you at Seguro when you arrive. Be surprised at nothing—and take care of Rusty, if he needs it. I intend winning that five thousand dollars even if the Duke's note goes to protest! Good-by!"

She felt his warm, strong hand clasping hers. A great dread came over her—an unusual sensation it was. Yet she said nothing, for some strange reason inexplicable to herself.

She passed a sleepless night.

Next morning the news spread over the ship like wildfire that a first cabin passenger was missing!

All his belongings were in order; his clothes hung up carefully in the wardrobe, just as he had undressed, assisted by his faithful valet.

And that poor unfortunate—how he sobbed and beat his portly bosom over the grief which was racking the loyal African heart. The Duke of Alva went to the captain to inquire about the terrible affair.

"Yes, sir. He is gone. A pleasant, courteous fellow, too. Always minded his own business, never complained. It's too bad. Too bad. And that letter he left—it nearly broke my heart—and I'm a gruff old sea-dog, and have seen many a tragedy in my years as a master!"

The captain wiped his eye with the back of his hand.

The Duke fingered his cane nervously.

"But the note, sir. What did that say? As the cousin of her exalted Highness, Princess Maria Theresa of Aragon, I insist on knowing about this strange person. He was in my cousin's employ. She is entitled to know what sort of a person he was."

The captain glared angrily at the Duke.

"I am the commander of this vessel, sir. On the high sea, I am in supreme control, and know how to run the *Mauretania* without advice from a bloody Spanish popinjay! I will turn that letter over to the authorities when we land." The captain spluttered indignantly.

"They will meet the boat as the pilot comes on board. I sent them a wireless!" cried the Duke.

"How dare you go over my head, in any matter of discipline on this vessel?" cried the raging commander. "What do you mean by such a thing? I am the one to warn."

The Duke was embarrassed, for he felt the helplessness of his position before this legalized tyrant of the deep.

"I've a mind to think all was not well with this unfortunate young man, from the tone of his letter before he jumped overboard. Not a thing was missing from his wardrobe, but the pajamas he wore—when he ran out on the deck. At least, we find no clothes missing! I'll have something to say to Scotland Yard myself!"

"But the man threatened to shoot me if I spoke to you or any of the officers about him. Now that he is dead I don't fear him."

"Huh!" snorted the captain. "You look about the type of man who wouldn't fear the dead. But what about ghosts, young man! What about *ghosts*? Did you stop to think of ghosts after people are dead?"

This perfectly innocent question of the seafaring, superstitious mind had a curious effect upon the nobleman.

"*Carramba!*" he muttered between his teeth, and turned away with a white face. "I wonder what could have been in that letter?"

And the captain glowered at him as he walked nervously down the companionway to his lonely stateroom, to brood in a state of miserable apprehension.

Toward dinner-time the pilot boat was sighted. Several men clambered on board, as well as that official. They sought the captain, and then visited the Princess. Carlos took good care to be in her suite when they came.

Rusty, weeping as though his heart were broken, detailed the sad conversation which he had held the preceding night with his unfortunate employer.

"Poh Marse Warren! Ah'll nebber see 'im again—until de time for de ghost!"

At this speech Maria Theresa observed a nervous twitching about the mouth of her noble kinsman.

Then Rusty became so incoherent in his sorrow that they could get no satisfaction out of him. They studied the circumstances of the case and made their notes, with frequent whispered conferences. Next to Rusty, the Duke was the most unhappy person present, although the Princess showed the strain of her uneasiness.

After the men completed the first quizzing, they repaired once more to Warren's stateroom to seek for other papers.

When they had been gone a minute or so, Carlos waved Nita out of the room. That young person could look otherwise than melting with her black eyes when occasion demanded. This glance was of the sparkling kind which would kill!

"Tell me, my dear Maria Theresa," began Carlos, after some stammering, "did you inform the detectives about the money-belt which he gave to you?"

"Naturally not. That was his affair, and the property passed out of his possession when I became stakeholder, according to the laws of wagers, did it not?"

"Ah, yes. You are a brilliant girl. And a logical one, too. Well, give it to me, then, as the affair is settled. I have several debts which I would like to pay as we pass through London."

The Princess' eyes blazed but her voice was smooth.

"So, my cousin, you claim your wager thus promptly. Are you aware that it would look bad for you if the detectives knew you had bet this enormous sum—and now were the gainer because of his disappearance? Tell me, Carlos, do you know any more than the rest of us about the Ghost Breaker?"

The man rose to his feet, his knees wavering, and then with a supreme effort he steadied himself against the back of the chair. His eyes were distended and the handsome mouth sagging.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he cried appealingly—all nonchalance and scorn now missing from his mien, "You don't mean to say that *you*—my blood relative—the woman I adore, could *believe such a thing?*"

The girl looked away. He could not see the ironical smile on the scarlet lips.

"Carlos, I have said no such thing. But wouldn't it be better to wait until we reach Seguro—as a matter of sportsmanship? Our family has had the reputation of being honorable, even in games and wagers. I am nervous, Carlos. This has upset me more than you can believe. I will never mention the wager again, until you bring up the subject."

And she retired to her stateroom, where Nita dressed the soft dark hair with her accustomed skill—and a smile concealed with difficulty.

The search was ended. The Scotland Yard men scoured all the cabins, from steerage up; they even quizzed the engineers, the stokers, the cooks, the multitude of men and passengers. No clew could alter the sad deduction which they had drawn.

"Well, Captain," said the detective in charge of the case, "it's a sad affair. But he's better off. We'll take this letter to headquarters, sir, with your written report of the circumstances. What will be done about the negro servant?"

The captain shook his head.

"Poor fellow, he is heartbroken. The Princess has very kindly offered to take him into her service. The letter asked that all the baggage, clothes, and personal property in the stateroom be given as a farewell gift to the faithful fellow. If you have no objection I will let him take the luggage along, when he leaves the ship with the party of her Highness."

And that is how it was, that evening, that out through the dismal drizzle of an interminably long day Rusty Snow marched down the dock, carrying Warren Jarvis' luggage and two satchels of the Princess of Aragon—another loyal retainer in her service.

It was a curious ending to an unusual voyage.

And Carlos, Duke of Alva, breathed a sigh of relief as he passed the last dock policeman, to assist his cousin into a waiting taxicab. They were to take the night train for London.

XII

WELCOME TO SEGURO!

The Princess and her party were delayed in Liverpool by the queries of the authorities just long enough to make them miss connections with the boat train at London. The trip had been carefully planned; this one provoking delay cost them another close connection at the station in Paris.

"Confound it," declared the Duke of Alva; "after all this long trip it seems to take us longer still to get back to Seguro. Maledictions on that miserable American pig. He brought bad luck from start to finish."

His cousin's face had not its usual color, but now a rosy tint flushed up for a moment as she answered sharply.

"I will not permit you to speak so of the man who at least volunteered to risk his life for me and for my brother. He proved himself more the gentleman, Carlos, than you—with all the boasted advantage which we believe accompanies a title."

The Duke was silent, morose and uncertain himself, for the remainder of the tiresome ride.

Rusty was humble as ever, but there was an expectant look in his rotund face. He inquired many times as to the exact time for the arrival of the train at San Fernandez, the nearest railroad station to Seguro.

From here the party would travel by motor to the old estate of the Princess and her family. It was a twenty-five-mile ride. The country through which the train was passing grew rougher with every mile.

After irritating delays and interminable waits at stations—for train service in Spain is the worst in Europe—San Fernandez was reached. Here they were compelled to wait in the semi-modern hotel until an automobile could be obtained. The long ride was begun, over rough roads, no roads at all, and through mud-holes which seemed relics of the Flood.

"This makes me think of de Arkansaw Traveler," muttered Rusty, but his reminiscence was unappreciated by his tired companions.

A blow-out, delay with the mending of the tire, and the fall of darkness wore out what spirits were left among the four voyagers. At last the little town was reached, and the machine was compelled to stop on the outskirts of the village, by the old post-road house, where a sleepy soldier was guarding the road for some government purposes.

As the lights of the car threw their garish glare upon the portico of the dilapidated structure, a man in English clothes, carrying a small satchel, stepped out and ran down toward the machine.

"Hoopey!" howled Rusty Snow, with such sudden gusto as to frighten his companions. The Duke stood up, trembling: he could not believe his eyes. Even Nita drew back with a scream of horror, which turned into dumfounded happiness as the unmistakable features of Warren Jarvis appeared in the bright glow.

"The Ghost Breaker!" exclaimed the Duke.

The Princess merely held out her hands, with a happy warmth which Jarvis could feel through her gloves.

"How did you spring out of the earth, just here?" she cried.

"Well, I got to the town a bit late. The old carry-all that brought me broke down three miles back and I stumbled along, knowing this was the only road which could bring you. I stopped here for something to eat—and the place is so old that not even the townspeople come there any more.... The food was older than the town."

He tossed his grip to Rusty, and turned toward the Duke.

"It strikes me that I won my bet, your Excellency!"

"Where did you come from? We thought you were drowned at sea."

"I *was* nearly drowned when I slid down a rope, outside the ship and flopped into the harbor as she lay at the dock. After hiding under the cover of a lifeboat for twelve hours, I was so stiff that my quarter-mile swim was the hardest job I ever did. On shore I bought new clothes, and took the first train. Q.E.D."

"How did you get here ahead of us?" asked the Princess, still misbelieving her senses. "I knew you would make it—but how so fast?"

"I had a good day's start of you—even without this automobile. But let's get on up to that castle of yours, for I want to finish up my job and get back to America."

The Duke had been watching the expression of the American, trying in vain to fathom the mystery.

"This has been a wretched hoax—you have all been in league to trick me!" he began.

But Jarvis interrupted menacingly.

"Now, listen. No whining. I stood for a good deal—I knew about that wireless, and I guess tricks can be played both ways. May I ride with your chauffeur, your Highness?"

She nodded, and, the obstruction in the road removed, they journeyed on, slowly but more or less surely, toward the distant castle.

"We will stop at old Pedro's inn to-night, for I am frantic to hear of my brother," she said as they advanced. Carlos was too deep in thought to speak again.

And up at that same inn the usual nightly round of mediæval revelry was going on. This ancient structure, indeterminate in age and style of architecture, was built upon uneven ground. To save expense and trouble, in the distant days of its inception, it had been built upon two levels, without the excavating for foundations. Time and the weather had warped and twisted the old wooden floors and beams so that by this date it had numerous levels. Yet the remaining furniture was of substantial oak, and here and there could be seen evidence of the expenditure, in days long past, of good Spanish gold.

Asleep, with his head on the square table by the fireplace, was Pedro, the old proprietor. Two villagers sat at another table in the side of the big room playing cards, with wordy arguments about their winnings and losses.

A young woman of perhaps twenty-three, dark-skinned, dark-eyed and dark-tressed, crossed the floor from an adjoining room, to answer a knock at the door.

From the room she had left came the sound of singing and mandolines.

"Hello, Vardos—any more news?" she asked of the peasant who entered the portal bearing a basket of food.

"Still no word or sign of the Prince," he said apologetically, avoiding her scornful look. "Here's yesterday's basket untouched as usual."

"And you left to-day's basket at the castle gate?" she asked sharply.

"Yes, this is the fifteenth night," he replied, looking back at the door.

"You haven't given up hope yet?"

The man shook his head sadly.

"I gave up hope when he went in. I waited to-night until dark before I came away from the moat."

"Once to-night I thought I saw a light in the tower, Vardos."

"If you did, Señorita Dolores, it was an unblessed flame." He sank into a chair weakly. "Once when I called to-night a wail came back to me. It sounded like a sigh of the damned. It may have been only the wind through the grated window. But it chilled my heart."

"You are a silly coward," retorted Dolores. "But what then, Vardos?"

"When I called the second time something moved in the turret of the keep, and my soul was joyful. Then, with a harsh cry, a black ugly bird flew from the turret, straight toward where the sun had set.... On my left, mind you, the sinister side,—the left—the left!"

The castanets and music in the other room grew louder.

"Oh, if the good Princess were only here!" moaned the girl. "She could help. She could do something."

"She's on her way," he told her hopelessly, "but what can she do—what can anyone do, with the imps of darkness all about her?"

"She would go straight into that castle after her brother. Ah, she is a great lady, with a great heart. Then will the villagers have it said that they let their own Princess go in alone, as they did their Prince?"

"God forbid that it should come to that!" muttered the Prince's retainer, as he handed her the basket. "Good-night, señorita."

As he started for the door the girl called after him.

"Will you go again to-morrow, Vardos?"

"Yes, señorita. I will go forever, until I know for sure that it is useless. Good-night."

His words as he passed through the old portal were drowned by the cheering and applause which followed some especial favorite who had ended a song.

Dolores looked sadly at the basket, the tears streaming down her face. She lifted the napkin, showing the simple but nourishing food which had been untouched by the missing Prince. She crossed herself, with a whispered prayer for his safety, crossing the room to the ancient pantry.

The dreams of Pedro were rudely interrupted. The big door suddenly opened to admit a character very different from the weaklings who made his tavern their rendezvous. He was dark-skinned as the rest of the crew, red-faced as old Pedro (from the same faithful indulgence in vintages), not younger than forty, yet aggressive, vibrating with physical power, elasticity, and an overweening insolence. His manner of approach—and he entered this tavern with the same studied grace with which he swaggered into half a hundred others—seemed to indicate that he delighted in disorganizing and terrorizing whatever he might find established and orderly—wherever he might find it!

Beholding the somnolent proprietor, he advanced quietly to the middle of the big room. Then, with malicious enjoyment of the effect, he banged his riding-crop violently upon the table, close to the tavern keeper's ear.

"Hey, you Pedro!" he roared. "Wake up, you blockhead—wake up, I say!"

There was only a response of snores.

"You, Pedro, attention! What's the matter here? Where are you? Wake up and stop your dreaming!"

At this the startled landlord leaped to his feet, bowing through force of habit.

"Ah, Señor Robledo! One thousand pardons!" he gasped timorously. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"You're a wretch of a tavern keeper," and the newcomer advanced upon the unhappy Pedro as though about to slay him for his drowsiness.

"Yes, señor! You are always right." The man humbly endeavored to collect his wits. "How may I serve your lordship?"

The bully swaggered, puffed his cheeks, and feeling that his host was finally awake to the seriousness of the situation, he cried out once more: "My horse stands outside by the post. He has been hard ridden, for I have come on an important mission. Varlet, go out and wash his mouth, dry him down, and don't give him water until he has cooled off. Are you finally awake, you idiotic Pedro?"

The tavern keeper gulped fearsomely, and bowed his most fetching bow, without result.

"My horse is almost dead on his legs. Be kind to him. I've had a hard ride over these miserable province roads. As for me—I want a flask of ... well ... of something decent. I know that's not in your line. Step lively now; and mind you, draw it from your private cask. My temper is no better than it should be, to-night."

The old man bowed and started to leave the big room.

The blustering guest howled at him once more, punctuating his remarks with the butt of the whip.

"Where's your daughter?"

The old man trembled and bowed once more.

"I'll call her," Pedro said apologetically. "She'll be right here, sir."

He went to the door at the right, and shouted quaveringly: "Dolores! Dolores! Dolores!... There, señor, she will come at once."

"And, Pedro—if that rat-infested larder of yours is empty, get it filled before the Duke arrives," added Robledo. "Yes ... the Duke. He is coming to-night. Don't stand and stare, but hurry up and see to my horse."

"Yes, señor!... Yes, yes!"

And he tottered away on his errands.

Dolores had entered in response to the call. At first she did not observe the newcomer, whose back was toward her.

"Yes, father," she began. "Why do you wish me?"

"Dolores," Robledo turned toward her impatiently. "Did you not know I had come?"

"Oh, it's you?" and there was a scornful sniff from the girl.

"Well, well, can't you say you're glad to see me?"

The jade was hard to impress, where others showed abjection before the terrorist.

"I can, but I won't. Where's my father?"

"Never mind your father—I want to talk to you."

"Is it so, Señor Robledo? Well, you won't in that tone."

He intercepted her in the center of the room, catching her wrist and turning her about to face him.

"What do you want to say to me?"

"You little devil!... Come here, don't try to get away." The girl was tugging to release herself. "What's come over you these days? You are about as fond and sweet-tempered as a tigress. Anyone would think that you didn't care for me at all. What have I done, Dolores?"

"It is what you have not done. For fifteen days your Prince has been in need of you, and you have not had the courage to go to him. Let go my wrist."

Don Robledo laughed, yet with a quaver in his voice, for there was a depth of passion here, intensified by the spirited resistance of the girl.

"Who's the little spitfire trying to tear to pieces now?"

"You!" she snapped back. "Don Robledo—sword-fighter—toreador—fire-eater—hero of a hundred duels!... You—Don Robledo—*coward!*"

He clumsily chuckled her under the chin.

"I asked you to-day," she continued, as she threw his hand away from her face, "I begged you to go into the castle and rescue your Prince. I ask you now to answer the signal that I just saw in the tower window, where he can see our lights. Perhaps he has burned something, a scrap of paper, in the hope that some of you, his retainers, would notice it and come to his assistance. But—he doesn't know what a pack of cowards you all are, or he would have saved his matches. So, it's Don Robledo—*coward!*"

The big man snarled.

"Coward—never a coward in a fair fight in the open, and I'll meet the best man that walks the earth." Here he faced the inquisitive and thoroughly awed villagers. "Any two or three!"

He banged the table with his riding-crop to punctuate the emphasis.

"I don't ask you to kill one or two or three of these poor whimpering sheep of Seguro. I ask you to dare something, at risk to yourself. To go to the aid of your Prince.... There isn't a man among you—who *dares!* *Dios!* How I could love *such a man!*"

They had not heard the thrum of the motors on the roadway outside. The door opened, and the first of the party to enter was the Duke. He walked quietly into the room, overhearing the words of Dolores.

"A pretty little speech!" he observed sarcastically.

"Your Excellency!" cried Robledo, taking off his hat. "Welcome back to Seguro."

"Yes, I am well come to Seguro."

The natives doffed their hats, and like Pedro bowed and howled in the time-honored peasant way.

"The Duke! The Duke!"

"Pedro, go out and help the Princess and her servants with the luggage. I want to speak to you alone, Robledo. Hurry, while the others are delayed with that execrable car. I walked a hundred yards to get here first."

He turned toward Dolores with a scowl.

"Those are charming sentiments for your fellow-townsmen, whose healthy common sense prevents them from rushing to a fool's death. Still, all fools are not dead yet. One of them will be here to-night. And you, señorita, will doubtless be pleased to look over him, as he has come all the way from America for the privilege of entering the castle and playing your hero."

Dolores looked at Robledo, as she parried:

"And did her Highness have to go all the way to America to find him?"

"Yes, indeed. He's from America, where all the fools come from!"

And the villagers joined in a merry chorus of intelligent laughter!

XIII

"GENTLEMEN, A MAN!"

Dolores had hurried upstairs, where she well knew there was a tiny attic in the rambling old building which acted as an excellent whispering gallery. Every word spoken in the larger room below could be heard from this vantage. She was no sooner secreted there than she heard the voice of the Duke.

"You received my telegram sent to San Fernandez?"

"Yes, Excellency. Antonio brought it over with the mail-bags."

"What about the Prince?"

"Ah, Excellency ... why ask? The same news as before. This stupid Vardos has been taking food to the castle every day, but he is too frightened to venture into the miserable old pile of stones. It is most droll, your Excellency."

"Well then, Robledo, I am satisfied as far as that goes. But you have work before you of a new character."

The swordsman struck a chair with his riding-crop. It seemed a favorite stage effect with him; the Duke was not slow in catching its significance.

"Just forget these little affectations, my good man," he said haughtily. "None of this blustering around me. I know that you do your work well, and at other times there is much to be desired. Now, in this case, you have a

dangerous man to combat. And the combat must be final, no matter how difficult."

"How is he dangerous?" and there was a new note in Robledo's blustering voice.

"Unless he is stopped he may cause trouble for the traditions of Seguro. He is crafty as a *contrabandisto*, cunning as the snakes of the Pyrenees! He has been brought here by my cousin the Princess to make some special investigations." He laughed, with that cruel, mirthless inflection so characteristic. "She should have left that to me—and she will be sorry ere it is all over. This man has thwarted me twice already. Coming over on the steamer from America the scoundrel disappeared from the ship most remarkably, just when I had all arranged to put him into duress in Liverpool. I have yet to learn the secret of it. He must be discouraged ... you understand, Robledo?"

"Excellency, I can assure you that the Yankee pig will be convinced, in a language which he will understand, that his presence in the castle to-night is quite unnecessary. Have you any particular instructions?"

The Duke shook his head and grimaced suggestively.

"Any way you please, Robledo. You understand my general ideas on such subjects. Means are of no consequence to a born statesman. Results are the only permanent things in this world. However—I warn you. Don't underestimate your man. He will shoot; I imagine that he can shoot quickly and without a tremor."

"Ha, ha! Good opposition. I welcome such an antagonist—these fat-brained peasants about here are too simple to stimulate me to good work. I have been growing dull and commonplace—I am almost out of training, as they call it in the bull-ring."

"Come then, and I will give Pedro some money to buy drinks for the stupid dolts,—they can drink my health: it is none of the best these days, Robledo.

My American trip was wearing. It is a wretched, unromantic hole—not a country, just a great mob of people."

"I can well believe your Excellency. This way, sir."

They returned to the big room of the tavern, and Dolores retired from the temporary confessional box. Her face showed mixed emotions—but predominating over any other influence was the great desire to serve the rulers of her family. Curiously loyal are these humble peasants of the inland Latin districts. Their lives follow the monotonous example of the generations before them: as their grandsires, their fathers were tradesmen of a certain calling, so do they follow the strata, contented to exist with the conventional beginning, moderately happy middle era, and inevitably stupid ending of their lives.

It is this which is so pleasing to the European aristocrats: no matter how bankrupt, incompetent, disreputable, the class theory which is recognized by the masses is, "Once a gentleman, always a gentleman."

It is inconceivable upon the Continent for a peasant's or even a tradesman's son or daughter to aspire to a higher level than that of the family. Exceptions to the rule are looked upon with distrust by superiors as well as the lowly equals: too much ambition is a temptation to the gods which is hardly respectable.

There is a smug contentment, then, in the feudal countries which is the surest bulwark of the "divine right of kings"—and courtiers! A pleasantly distended belly, a mellow thrill from cheap wine, a certainty about the repetition of regular meals and drinks, with enough clothes and shelter to maintain relative positions with the neighbors—this year, next year, and twenty years from now ... these things are the mess of pottage for which the Esaus of the kingdoms and principalities sell their birthrights and their souls!

Vardos—for instance—bodyservant and sole military retainer of a princely line which for generation after generation had considered itself in

humiliating straits unless there were at least a thousand lances at beck and call—old Vardos had been thrown into a mental maelstrom by the sudden change in the lifelong existence. Sure of his meals and a modicum of money for occasional visits to taprooms, he was now placed in a position of responsibility, one where executive and aggressiveness were demanded. Here old Vardos failed, because he was a peasant true to his type. The poor fellow had struggled with his grief these fifteen days—now he felt, with a helpless aching of the faithful heart, that he must have been in a sense responsible for the death of his master. He had pleaded with the young Prince not to enter the accursed place.

Insanity and suicide though it seemed to be to him, he could not help it. That was bad enough—but with the prospect of the beautiful Princess going into the place as well: life had become a horrible thing to him.

He sought the wayside shrine down the crooked village street. He threw himself upon his knees before it, vowing candles to every saint who had granted petty favors to him in the past!

He faced the great cathedral, rearing its pale crest in the dim light from the stars, vast and exalted above the miserable squalor of those whose ancestors had created its grandeur with their inspired devotion. He told the Holy Family and the saints, with tear-choked voice, the quandary of his noble master, and begged that, though they should never grant him another request, somehow, somewhere, they find and bring a gallant adventurer who could turn defeat into victory, one more willing and competent than himself, to die!

And the answer to this prayer was unburdening his own soul with semi-religious phrases, in a Kentucky accent, addressed with unwonted and even picturesque fluency at the stumbling, stodgy Rusty Snow, who trudged along loaded with luggage and an insatiate hatred of this "cussed foreign joint," as he labeled it to himself.

The Princess and her maid had, at Jarvis' suggestion, left them with the automobile in its latest quagmire, to reach the shelter of the inn. So it was

that, as her vassal and his vassal struggled with the luggage in the dark, she reached the portal of the house of Pedro.

Robledo was hearkening carefully to certain careful instructions from the Duke of Alva, nodding with a smile of malicious portent at the final words.

"I will not fall short of my former reputation, your Excellency," declared the Don. "When a man reaches my time of life, after a success in the bull-ring as toreador, in the army as a duelist, and in the private retinue of so distinguished a nobleman as yourself, he has a certain pride in his ability.... Indeed, I regret that I must waste my talents upon a stupid pig of a Yankee."

Shaking his head, Carlos drew out his purse.

"The man is no idiot, unfortunately. He has completely won the confidence of the Princess, despite his obvious trickeries. Now, however, I would like to attend to a few little tasks of cleaning up after that miserable trip."

Pedro was approaching them subserviently, a humble, bobbing head betokening his anxiety to please the fine folk.

"Anything else, your Excellency?" he stammered, overcome with the pomp and majesty of the situation.

"Here, my good man, take this coin and have the brave lads in the taproom drink to my health and that of her Exalted Highness, the Princess Maria Theresa."

With studied carelessness, he dropped the coin upon the floor, and Pedro chased the rolling golden disk with surprising agility.

"Then bring me up some hot water, soap, and towels. You may prepare a hasty supper, as well—but let it be fit for a gentleman to eat!"

"Yes, yes! Your Excellency!" and Pedro nearly brought back his rheumatic spell by the renewed bobbing of the stiff old back, as he retreated to the barroom.

He returned promptly after breaking the gladsome tidings of the treat, and led the nobleman up the stairway, as a chorus of cheers rang out from the alcoholic ward.

"The Duke! The Duke! His Excellency the Duke of Alva!"

Robledo walked to the door, with his characteristic swashbuckler rhythm, and stirred them up to more enthusiasm.

"Louder, you beggars, or I'll give you something to yell about—louder, I say!"

Dolores had slipped through the doorway, facing the road.

Suddenly she danced in through the entry again, happy and exultant.

"Her Highness has come, father. Her Highness!"

Old Pedro stumbled toward the balcony and peered over at her querulously.

"Father, father!"

"What is it, Dolores?"

"Her Highness, the Princess!"

The old man bustled down the stairs, trembling with added excitement, just as Maria Theresa and Nita were bowed into the tavern by a villager who had accompanied them from the delayed machine.

The peasants trooped into the room from the tap, howling with mediæval enthusiasm.

"Your Gracious Highness does my humble inn great honor," began Pedro, as his local guests imitated the clumsy courtesy with varying ability.

"Thank you, Pedro," replied the Princess graciously as one would address a polite child.

She held out her hand to Dolores, who kissed it reverently, with a bow and a bend of the knee.

"Your Highness, we are poorly prepared for this great favor, ill prepared indeed," apologized Dolores. "Your exalted cousin gave us but short warning of your coming. Our humble tavern is hardly fitting for a great lady."

"My child, any place to remove the dust of travel will do for me." She turned toward the villager at the door. "Tell my chauffeur that when he repairs the car I shall want it kept in readiness to use again."

Nita advanced anxiously.

"Your Highness is not thinking of going to the castle to-night, surely?" Her voice was politely remonstrative, with a note of apprehensiveness for the welfare of her mistress.

"But I must have news," declared the young woman impatiently. "I am frantic with worry, and the things which José has told me. Come to a room, Nita."

"Ah, your Highness, you are too brave, too determined. You are all worn out with this long trip. Better to wait until daylight, if I may be so bold as to suggest to your ladyship. You are all unstrung just now."

Maria Theresa did indeed show the strain of the nerve-racking trip, but she valiantly shook her head.

"Show me up, Dolores. When Mr. Warren, my representative, arrives inform him that I will be down very soon. Come, Nita, for I know that your hands can rest me, with their skillful massage," and she spoke wearily.

Pedro stepped forward, bowing.

"Allow me the honor, your Highness. I have the finest chamber in the tavern prepared for you—a fire to take the night chill from the largest

bedroom."

She started up the steps, followed by her maid and the old man, still risking a strained back with his excited bows.

Again she turned to Dolores, with a strange nervousness, to say: "Do not forget to explain to Mr. Warren. He may think I have left the tavern. I will see him soon."

"I will give your commands to the Señor Americano, your Highness," promised the black-eyed Dolores, with a heightened color.

Then the Princess disappeared across the end of the balcony. Dolores walked to the doorway, and discerned two figures approaching with a strange slowness.

"Is this the inn?" cried a voice, with a slight foreign accent in the Spanish.

"Yes, yes, señor. Come in, señor, we are expecting you," replied the girl.

The villagers were still grouped about the door to the taproom. Dolores stepped back, as Warren Jarvis and Rusty Snow entered the big front hallway, and blinked in the unaccustomed glare of light.

They were both burdened with suitcases, and two of the Princess' hatboxes. These they dropped unceremoniously on the floor, with sighs of relief.

"We're here, Rusty, with both feet!"

"Yassir," and the negro groaned with exhaustion, "and I'd jest as lieve be back in Meadow Green. Dis don't look very scrumptious for a Mrs. Princessess' plantation house."

"This is no castle, Rusty. This is only the halfway house."

Dolores could not understand their low conversation in English—and Afro-Americanese! But she had studied the clear features, the nonchalant bearing

of the tall American. She turned toward the sheep-like, staring villagers, and with an eloquent wave of her hand she cried out resonantly:

"Gentlemen—*a man!*"

"<i>Gentlemen—a man</i>"

"*Gentlemen—a man*"

Jarvis was lighting his cigarette, and he laughed, with a side-remark to his valet:

"Rusty, as the Indians said to Columbus: 'We're discovered!'" He turned toward the girl. "Did you by any chance address me, fair señorita?"

"I'm calling the attention of these valiant gentlemen of Seguro to the only man with spirit and bravery enough to enter the haunted castle," she declared.

"How did you know?" and his eyes widened with surprise. This was a queer place.

"All Seguro knows by this time, señor."

At these words, Don Robledo swaggered in through the door from the bar. He pushed the villagers aside with contemptuous roughness. He even thrust the girl out of his way as she tried to detain him. He laughed insultingly into the bland face of Jarvis.

"So, you are the *brave* American, are you?" he cried, surveying Jarvis, with hands on hips and stocky legs well spread.

"<i>So, you are the brave American, are you?</i>"

"*So, you are the brave American, are you?*"

Jarvis puffed cigarette smoke at him and answered with ingenuous modesty.

"I'm *an* American. And here" (he waved his hand to Rusty, who saluted with divination of the tenor of the interchange) "I present to your notice another American. In fact, we're both Americans!"

"And you both want to die?" cried Don Robledo, drawing a stiff forefinger suggestively across his brawny throat. Rusty was reading the pantomime with perfect understanding. He made a wry face and rolled his eyes at Jarvis, who responded with a droll wink.

"Well, now that you mention it, I'm in no hurry about it. I'm not at all anxious on the subject."

He sat down in one of the carved chairs and continued to puff his cigarette with provoking amiability.

Robledo leaned forward toward him and snarled:

"You had better keep out of the castle then. It has a fatal climate."

Warren laughed, and flicked the ashes of the cigarette upon the sleeve of his interviewer.

"Oh, you mean the castle ghost—this old rummy who can't sleep in his grave of nights? Ha, ha! I'm not afraid of a little trifle like that, señor."

Robledo stepped back threateningly, and yet with hesitation caused by the perplexing simplicity of this foreigner.

"No?... Well, señorita, we gentlemen of Seguro will gladly drink to your American hero! Here, lads, is a toast to the maddest fool that ever came to Spain!"

He turned contemptuously on his heel, with military precision. Then he chuckled Dolores under the chin with a leer, to have his hand indignantly pushed aside. As the girl glared at him with a flash of hatred in her eyes, he stalked into the taproom, followed by the ready toppers.

"Pile these bags on the table, Rusty," ordered Warren, as he smiled winningly at the girl.

"Yassir. We kin use 'em for one of these yere barracadies, if we has to."

"It looks as though we're booked for a warm reception in Seguro, Rusty. Doesn't it?"

Rusty rolled those chalky optics, with an expression of mingled drollery, apprehension, and confidence in his master's ability to lead the battle. It is wonderful how much expression can be condensed into a darky's eyes!

"Yassir. It's some tropical, dat's shore. But, you-all ain't no cold-storage rooster yohself, Marse Warren. A little Kaintucky ammanition might make some echoes 'round dis confabulation."

From the taproom came loud howls of derision from the associated village sports of Seguro.

"That ward heeler seems to be making a campaign speech, Rusty. He may be making a few promises that he can't fulfill after he gets elected," observed the Kentuckian, with pursed lips. "Listen to them holler!"

Rusty looked over his shoulder, while Dolores studied these two types with girlish curiosity, as they chattered in their alien tongue. She had never seen a man unafraid of Don Robledo but his distinguished Excellency, the Duke, before. It gave her a new thrill.

"He's a mighty nice man, he is. Mighty nice, Marse Warren. He's almos' too nice, ain't he?"

Warren shook his head, with a serious look on the usually laughing face.

"No, Rusty, not too nice—yet! He'll be a lot nicer before he's ten years older. I think his education has been neglected. You and I must begin to keep school around this township. There's nothing so nice as education,

especially when the school-teacher has a nice long rattan concealed up his sleeve!"

XIV

MORE OBSTACLES

Dolores approached the Kentuckian politely, yet eagerly.

"Pardon, señor, but I have a message for you from her Highness."

"What is it?"

"She instructed me to tell you that she would see you very soon."

"Thanks, señorita. And may I ask—who was the cheerful, frolicsome individual who flattered me with that polite toast? Is he one of the royal family, taking a little vacation in this neighborhood?"

The girl reddened, then laughed.

"No, señor. He is well known in this part of our country. His name is Don Robledo."

Warren lit another cigarette, and studied her attractive face with the gallant interest of a Southerner, who is always prone to admire beauty. She was embarrassed, yet pleased, under the unmistakable scrutiny.

"Don Robledo. He seems to be well acquainted with you, señorita. Is he one of the family?"

"No, but he wishes to be!" she snapped out. "And he shall never be until he changes his manners and...."

"And his face? I don't really care for his face. If I were a girl I would never leave home and mother for that face. But of course, that's none of my

business."

He stopped for an instant to absorb the rowdy racket from the taproom.

"Either he's a wonderful spender or he has unlimited credit with the bar cashier. Maybe he eats his checks ... it has been done. But I don't like that name. It sounds dangerous—and yet it doesn't seem to mean much, after all, to me."

The girl looked at him earnestly.

"It may mean much before you reach the castle. More than you suspect, señor—you have been the subject of much serious talk in this tavern before you were ever seen here."

"And how was that? I'm really a very unimportant person, you know."

"Let me tell you something, while I have the opportunity. You are in great danger here. Señor, I wish to help you. I have tried for weeks to stir up some manhood in the hearts of these cowardly sheep in Seguro. The Prince has been missing for days, since he went into that castle. I want to save my beloved Princess from the same fate which I fear overtook him when he braved the horrors of that castle. It is a place of Satan, señor."

The American smiled at her, as he asked:

"Now, do you really believe in all that superstitious trash, my good girl? You look intelligent."

The girl crossed herself piously.

"Have we not been taught by the priest, of the fiends who haunt the earth and wreck human happiness? How can I say such things could not happen, for the sins of bygone people? Not that I would think anything but love and respect for the Prince and his wonderful sister, her Highness! But, señor, I feel the same as do the other dwellers of Seguro."

"And how is that?"

"I feel that strange things have gone on in that castle. Even a great gentleman like the Duke says so. Surely if educated noblemen put faith in such things, we simple folk are not far wrong to believe what we are taught. But still..."

"Yes, there you are, my good girl. You have a 'but still'—and that means a doubt. The doubts of the world have been the foundation stones of modern freedom—it was the doubts of the old farmers and traders back in America which threw off the yoke of the old kingdom, and made a great free country. If you have a doubt you may be saved. As for the Duke—the only god he pays allegiance to is himself—and he's not been so sure of that divinity during these last iconoclastic ten days."

"I don't understand, Señor Warren?" she replied, in bewilderment.

"Of course you don't, or you wouldn't be kow-towing to this royalty stuff, and you would hand a bottle to that Don Roughhouse or whatever his name is, right on his classic brow, with a classic smash. You ought to see how an American girl would treat one of these big bullies! Well, what about my danger? It never worries me when I know where and when and how to expect it. Whatever you tell will be absolutely our secret."

Dolores looked at Rusty, who was struggling with a cigarette—he was more accustomed to Pittsburgh stogies, but his motto in life was based on the famous advice concerning Roman imitation!

"How about the Señor Moor, señor? May you trust him?" she asked nervously.

"Rusty is no Moor—he's an Afro-Methodist, my girl. He can't understand Spanish anyway, even though he's the best little guesser this side of the Ohio River. But I'd trust Rusty with my life. Go ahead with the danger signals."

She heard a footfall on the balcony above them.

"Let me pretend to read your palm, señor. I know we are being watched."

"All right, read away—my palm will show you that after this trip through Spain my clothesline needs washing. But, what's the fortune of the castle?"

It was the old Jarvis, now—blithesome, devil-may-worry, shrewd, and recovered completely, through the change of scene and a certain new interest in life which the reader may have already divined.

The girl led him away from beneath the balcony, to the side of the big fireplace. She took up his hand and examined it carefully.

Nor did her shrewd eyes miss the face on the balcony,—that of the Duke of Alva! She exaggerated her studious examination, and then in a low tone proceeded with the explanation of the lines of fate and life.

"Every one of these breaks in your lifeline shows a moment when you stood face to face with death. Ah, señor, in all my experience I have never seen such an adventurous palm.... You have stood elbow to elbow with death, and yet those little squares about the breaks show a guiding spirit of protection."

"*Ah, señor, in all my experience I have never seen such an adventurous palm....*"

"Ah, señor, in all my experience I have never seen such an adventurous palm...."

Warren was beginning to be bored. Yet something in the girl's furtive glances toward the balcony, which did not miss his own sharp eyes, convinced him that she was endeavoring to get a message to him.

She continued, her own hand trembling unmistakably.

"Ah, Señor Americano, there is one break which has not yet been reached by the line of time. The protecting square of your guardian saint is not perfect there, as with the others."

The Kentuckian laughed incredulously.

"Oh, I guess I can build up a square when the time comes and let the break take care of itself."

"But the time is now," and her voice was tremulously low.

"Now—what do you mean, now?"

She nodded her head, and with half-closed eyes gazed at the fireplace significantly.

"And are the fortune-teller's eyes so brilliant and so keen that they can light up the future and behold the day and the hour?" queried Jarvis.

"Not my eyes, señor," and her voice died down to a whisper, "but my ears."

The step of the Duke was upon the resonant stairs.

"In all my experience I have seen but one hand like yours, señor,—it speaks of danger; and that hand belongs to Don Robledo, to Don Robledo!"

The nobleman's voice cut short the séance. There was a warning note in it.

"Well, Dolores, and why are you not attending her Highness? You know the house, and she needs assistance."

"Pardon, señor." She stepped back and courtesied to Carlos, who came down the stairs, advancing toward Warren. "I will go at once, your Excellency."

"Good-by, señorita; I'll take good care of the little square. Thanks for your occult wisdom," were Warren's smiling words, as he looked at the Duke.

"Well, Mr. Warren. Looking into the future?"

"Yes, Duke, and the immediate future promises to be very interesting. That little fortune-teller has occult powers, indeed. A dark man is to cross my path soon."

Carlos had crossed the room to a position from where he could look into the taproom. He seemed to be satisfied with what he saw there. He turned toward the American.

"Do you believe in such foolery, Mr. Warren? I had thought you too intelligent to believe in superstitious things like fortune-reading."

"I like to believe some of these things on this occasion, for I hope it means someone I very much want to meet."

The Duke now approached him very earnestly.

"Mr. Warren, I feel a certain responsibility for her Highness, and all that pertains to my cousin. The prospect of your death to-night is most uncomfortable, when it can be so easily avoided by your own common sense. I seriously advise your waiting until the morning."

"So, you don't think I'll come back?"

"I think that if you go to the castle to-night, you take your life in your own hands."

Warren opened and shut his sinewy fingers, and laughed back: "I've got a pretty good grip."

"Look here," put in the nobleman. "You Americans are noted as being shrewd traders. You get dollar for dollar when you bargain—and generally a few extra dollars. You are not going to give your life away for nothing, are you?"

"Oh, it is not worth very much," retorted Jarvis. "The deal was made on a bargain day. My life happened to be a little below par, and a good customer came along."

There was a comprehensive sparkle in the dark Spanish eyes, to meet the twinkle in the firm blue ones.

"Ah, I begin to see a light. Well, Mr. Warren, I am willing to release you from your offer and the bargain and meet your terms now."

"Your Excellency, I am overwhelmed at the generosity, but the price was paid, the receipt given, and the bookkeeper has closed up the office. I'm on the job, and I'm certainly going to stay."

The Duke snarled, as he inquired: "I suppose that means that you are foolish enough to keep faith with her Highness?"

"Yes."

"I never saw a man quite so anxious to be killed, Mr. Jarvis; but such is sometimes the case where, as it has been said: 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.'"

Jarvis laughed provokingly.

"I'd rather be an energetic fool than an angel with cold feet."

"I don't understand you, sir."

"Well, I understand you, your Excellency."

The Duke turned toward the fireplace.

"I am sorry for you," he remarked.

Jarvis walked over close to the nobleman and looked him straight in the eyes, as he spoke with unusual meaning vibrant in his voice.

"Your Excellency, your sympathy, your offer, and your advice are all declined, without thanks.... I once saw a gambler lay down four aces,—just think of it, four fat aces. He looked the dealer straight in the eye, as I am doing now with you. Then he said, 'The play ain't natural.'... Now, you have tried to have me arrested on the steamer, then you tipped off Scotland Yard and, for all I know, the Paris police, too. You have tried to block me every way you could, and you're a regular little prize blocker. Suddenly you

express the utmost anxiety as to what's going to happen to me in the castle. You generously offer to buy me off. You advise me, with tears in your eyes, to stay away and save my life. Shall I take the bait—hook, line, and sinker? Duke, 'the play ain't natural'!"

The nobleman clenched his fists in anger.

"You have intruded into a matter which you neither understand nor appreciate. If, as you say, the play seems unnatural, then throw down your cards and stay out of the game."

"Oh, no, no, no!" and Jarvis' voice again had that provokingly teasing tone in it. "I'll just stay right in the game and play my hand out—and watch every deal."

He turned toward Rusty.

"Come along, and let's see if we can find the landlord. We'll have a look at our rooms," he said. "Hurry, Rusty—don't go to sleep—the bedrooms are upstairs."

Rusty was very thoughtful as he picked up the bags and began to follow. The Duke watched the two with sidelong glances. Both characters were mysteries to him—so different, nonchalant, and unaffected by this serious task. Europeans would have taken the case at least with greater seriousness.

"What's the matter with you, Rusty? In love?"

The negro was lost in a deep study, as he sniffed the air in a thoughtful, absent-minded fashion.

"Marse Warren, I'd like to find a piece of chicken!"

"Great Scott! What put that into your head?"

"Oh, lawsee, Marse Warren, I'se powerful hungry! It ain't human to be so hungry!"

"What—again?"

"No, sir; it's de same old hunger. No matter how fast de train go I jes' cain't leave it behin'. Oh my, if I on'y had some po'k chops an' a little real gin!"

Jarvis started on toward the steps.

"Well, you come on now, Rusty—you don't eat a thing until we finish this job."

Rusty shook his head despairingly.

"Good Lawd, does I have to wait ontel you is dead—before I kin eat my vittles?"

He followed his master across the room, just as the Princess came to the balcony and started down the stairs.

"Well, Mr. Warren," added the Duke, "all Seguro will be buzzing with your ghost-hunt to-night. The whole town will sit up to hear the outcome."

The Kentuckian turned to look at the speaker.

"And where are you going to hear the returns of the battle, your Excellency?"

"Unfortunately, I must leave at once—I have an urgent summons from Madrid."

Jarvis shook his head in mock sorrow.

"That's too bad, sure enough. I'm sorry we're to lose the inspiration of your company. Won't you even be around at the finish? Surely, you take that much interest in the little breaking party, your Excellency."

"I am sorry, Mr. Warren, but I must go," answered the nobleman, writhing under the sarcasm, but never losing the smooth control of his words and studied reserve.

"Well, I call that a doggoned shame!" and Jarvis started again for the stairs.

The beautiful girl was just coming down, and the Duke's eyes came together in an angry squint as he saw the warmth of the glance which she bestowed upon the American.

"Here, Pedro,—this is Mr. Warren and his man. Attend to his wants."

"Yes, your Highness," and Pedro once more strained the faithful spine with a series of gutta-percha bows. "This way, sirs, to your rooms," and he led them up the stairs.

Jarvis turned on the step and faced her.

"Your Highness, I would like to have a couple of good horses, and two lanterns. I don't want to let any grass grow under my feet on the trip to the castle to-night."

She gave the order to Pedro, and he promised to bring the required objects with sturdy steeds.

"Ah, Mr. Warren, looking for an honest man, like old Socrates?" inquired the Duke of Alva.

"<i>Ah, Mr. Warren, looking for an honest man, like old Socrates?</i>"

"Ah, Mr. Warren, looking for an honest man, like old Socrates?"

"Not in this neck of the woods, your Excellency!" and Jarvis disappeared in the balcony entrance to the old line of bedrooms.

Maria Theresa turned anxiously to her cousin.

"Carlos, what news of my brother? Have you heard anything yet?"

"Not a thing, Maria. I am very sorry."

"And yet I heard you say that you were leaving for Madrid?" she questioned.

"Yes. The message is from his Gracious Majesty the King. You know how important a summons that is."

"But why must you go so soon? Why not wait overnight at Pedro's tavern, here?"

"Ah, my dear cousin, you know how long the ride before I connect with the railroad to Madrid."

The girl wrung her hands, nervous at last, and her appealing eyes would have softened a gentler heart than that of the steely Carlos.

"But, Carlos, my brother—your princely cousin—may be dying, he may be dead. Here am I alone with no kinsman at my side if you leave."

The Duke protested, dramatically.

"Maria, I must obey my King!"

"To leave me, after all your protestations! You have not the time nor courage to stay and help me in this hour."

Carlos laughed bitterly, pointing toward the distant room of Warren's.

"What need of me, my dear? You have this marvel of Sir Galahads, the Ghost Breaker!"

She dropped her head and answered slowly, "So, that is your excuse?"

He caught eagerly at what he deemed his opportunity. He snatched her hand, although it was as promptly pulled away.

"I make no excuses, my dear Maria. I need none. But you know the truth—that Yankee adventurer stands between you and me. He is of the common herd,—you and I of the bluest blood in Spain. Send him away, now—to-

night, and I will do anything for you. I will postpone my journey to the King, at any sacrifice of displeasure. I'll send one of my men into the castle to find your brother."

She turned scornfully toward him, her eyes flashing.

"Yes—you will send one of your men—but you are not brave enough to go there yourself. Yet you ask me to send away this man, who of all of you is the only one willing to sacrifice his life for me?"

Carlos snapped his tapering fingers angrily, as he clutched his sword-cane. His swarthy face was chalky under the stress of the emotion, as he replied savagely:

"If he stays, I go!"

"Very well; then, Carlos—you force me to make a choice. I choose a real man."

Carlos caught her by the arm.

"You are too interested in this worthless pretender, Maria! I love you myself, and with the keenness of love I have watched you follow him with your eyes, have seen the growing warmth in your voice—all through those days on the ocean, aboard the *Mauretania*. I warn you—royal princesses must aim higher than the common herd."

"Go, Carlos Hernando! It is I who am the superior—I the one to abjure!"

Jarvis was sauntering down the steps, and he was greeted by a confused look in the girl's eyes. Carlos took his hat and coat from the table. Maliciously he hoped that the American had been eavesdropping, for thus he might be encouraged to presumption—and the Duke was certain that of all women in the world the least susceptible to presumption was his haughty kinswoman.

"Well, Maria, you are sending him to his death—and as for you, Mr. Ghost Breaker, I wish you success, when you beard the specter in his den!"

With mock dignity at first, Jarvis's voice grew more menacing as he completed the words of retort:

"Thanks, your Gracious Excellency!... I'll do my best to tie a can to the specter's tail—and the can will be loaded with fireworks!"

As he left, Warren turned with a cheery grin, to face Maria.

"We must start at once, Mr. Warren," she urged, "for any moment may be my brother's last."

"Courage! If your brother is there, I'll find him. You must be patient and remain here, where you are safe,—try to rest up from that blood-curdling trip from Paris."

"But, Mr. Warren, I cannot rest or even sit still until I know what has become of him. I shall go mad if I am left alone!"

The womanly tears began to stream down her face. They melted a hitherto calm portion of Warren Jarvis' heart.

"Now, my dear child," and he paused timidly, as though to learn whether or not the familiarity had offended her. Instead, she looked up through the long wet lashes with anything but an angry glance. "My dear child, I must insist on one condition."

"What's that?"

"Let me go ahead and look over the ground. I will signal when it is safe to follow. I have reasons of my own for wanting to get there without losing a minute; otherwise, I would wait until to-morrow, to look it over by daylight and lay my own trap. But I will surely let you know if I have found him."

"How can you signal, Mr. Warren Jarvis? We have no telephones in Seguro." Jarvis walked over toward the old paneled window.

"With a light. See over here—there is the castle; you can of course see it through the window. I was asking all sorts of questions of old Pedro when he was in my room. He knows every foot of that land, even if he has been afraid to go near it for fifteen years or so."

"Well, what will you do?"

"Just as Paul Revere's friend did in the early days in my country: I'll put a light somewhere in one of those towers, and you can see it from this room or through one of the windows upstairs here. It will shine in an hour at the most. You won't have long to wait!"

"But if it does not shine?" and she paled at the thought.

"I'll be too busy swapping lead for brimstone with Mr. Spook to stop and hang a lantern!"

XV

MYSTERIOUS INFLUENCES

The Princess of Aragon gazed into the republican eyes of the Kentuckian with a glowing fire which was contrary to all rules and conventions of the divine right of kings. No common man should have been given such a glimpse of empire; but, in justice to the magic of such glances which come once from the eyes of every good woman, for some good man, in each lifetime, it must be acknowledged that their potent wizardry turns the commonplace, even the tawdry surroundings of a thousand million everyday lives, into dazzling kingdoms of love.

Warren Jarvis felt the thrill, and he lost his humorous poise: the heart-breaking seriousness of it all now came to his realization. How he wanted to draw her to him, forgetting all the differences in nativity, the social and political conditions which separated them so insufferably!

Back in New York she had been to him as any other sweet, well-bred girl; but here, in the Land of the Middle Ages, there were centuries between them.

He wished to touch her hand, and yet so deep was his reverence—not for her family position, but for her own proud poise of soul—that he stifled his desire and dropped his eyes, ashamed of his own weakness!

The girl divined his thoughts better than he realized.

She had stepped upon the low platform at the base of the stairs, and thus her face was on a level with his.

"Oh, Mr. Jarvis—you are brave, so brave! I never can tell you how you have sustained me, in my fears and grief. I can never let you realize how gallant I believe you to be for what you are doing to-night for my sake."

Jarvis shook his head in deprecation.

"Are we not merely honest traders, your Highness? We made a compact, risking your life at the start to save mine. Now, is the completion—when I find your brother and solve the mystery of the fortune, I will know that our account is squared. Then, I may be—*human!*"

Her eyes dropped before his own ardent answer, and she turned to the stairs.

"I must go get the memorandum and the locket."

"Yes, of course? Where is it? You should have guarded that well."

"It is safe in my room, Mr. Jarvis,—I won't be long," and up the steps she fled as though trying to escape from her own heart, in some strange, new, yet not unpleasant panic.

"Rusty! Oh, Rusty!" called Warren. "Bring down my hat and coat, and the extra tinware."

The voice of the negro answered, choked and muffled in a mystifying way.

"Yassir! Yassir!"

"What are you doing up there? Hurry; we're starting."

"Yassir!"

Jarvis turned and walked toward the window, looking up at the dismal silhouette of the ancient castle. The moon had risen, on the edge of the horizon, and already the place was beginning to look ghostlike with the pale iridescence.

"I wouldn't change places," he soliloquized between efforts to light a fresh cigarette, "with that darned old spook ... that she thinks is in that castle ... for all the gold that she thinks is in that cussed old castle ... and all the rest of the motheaten castles in Spain!"

Rusty came down the stairs, his jaws working, and his cheeks puffing vigorously.

Jarvis spun around nervously at the sound. He was keyed up this evening, despite the humorous resolution which had straightened the lines of that amiable mouth.

"What have you been doing, Rusty? What's in your mouth?" he demanded impatiently.

"Yassir ... I mean, no, sir! I was jest slippin' a little snack dat young lady bring up to me. I was so hungry I could jest feel my stommick slippin' through my suspenders an' climbin' up my backbone on de other side.... Um, yum—an' some Spanish po'k-chop, at dat!"

He rolled his eyes in ecstasy and licked his lips.

"But it warn't near enough!"

Just then Jarvis heard a scream, from the elevation of the balcony. The Princess was calling, frantically.

"Mr. ... Warren ... Mr. Warren Jarvis!"

He darted toward the steps, and met her half-way up them, as she ran down, her face ghastly with fear.

"What is it? Tell me?"

"Oh ... Mr. Warren...."

"Yes, yes!"

"The locket...."

"The locket is gone?"

"Yes," and this was very weak.

"And the memorandum?"

"Gone, too!" she gasped.

Jarvis called to Rusty, interrupting the finish of the running meal.

"Quick, Rusty—the horses!"

"The hosses, boss? whar is dey?"

"Outside! Go get the girths tight. Have you got that extra supply of cannon?"

"Yassir! I'll go. I got enough to fight de Spanish War over agin. An' dis time I'm goin' up San Juan Hill myself."

"Shut up, and get out—do what I tell you."

He turned to her nervously, but the battle-light was in the blue eyes this time.

"Your Highness," and she stopped on the step above, "I've struck the first trail of the spook that is haunting your castle; he made a mistake by poaching on other preserves!"

The girl ran her hand through her hair, excitedly, bewildered.

"What do you mean?"

"Have you any idea of who could take it?"

"Why—no! I hid it in the corner of my grip, and was sure no one could find it."

Jarvis laughed grimly.

"Your castle ghost is no slouch at finding things. He is no ignoramus, either, for he must be able to read and write and understand geography to get any good out of that memorandum. Does it give the exact details of the treasure trove?"

"As plain as ABC!" she answered.

"You think...?"

"Yes, I've been thinking ever since you first told me the story. Now I'm going to load my revolver with those thoughts, and earn the title of my profession. Time is everything. I take the northern road, don't I?"

"Yes, and the second turn to the right, through a broken wall."

"Yes, you've told me all this a dozen times before. But it's life and death, and I want to make sure. What then?"

"That road leads to the postern gate at the top of the hill," she added.

The outer door had opened softly.

Its position, sheltered under the long sweep of the old balcony, was out of their immediate view.

They had been speaking in rapid English, but the man who slouched noiselessly through the entrance, toward the arch under the stairs, surmised the gist of the conversation.

He drew a revolver, well hidden in the shadow, and waited.

"I understand. I have my bearings, too."

Warren stepped down, to the level of the floor.

"Wait," said Maria Theresa softly. "This little cross—it is a token which I wish my knight to wear in the tourney—to-night!"

She slipped the golden chain, and the simple religious emblem, over his head and about his neck, with a movement which was a wireless touchless caress.

"Only for to-night?" asked the Kentuckian, as he looked squarely into the crimson face above him;—how the roses and lilies played hide-and-seek beneath the soft skin of those clear features!

"You may never see to-morrow," she murmured, and she drew up the cross, from its pendent position, pressing it to her red lips with reverence.

The American spirit cried out within for honest self-expression.

"Then, if I never see to-morrow, forgive me for telling you to-night that I love you."

She would have spoken, but he raised his hand for silence.

Beneath the archway the shadowed figure drew nearer, slipping into the sharp angle behind the stairs.

"Do not rebuke me to-night—wait until to-morrow—if to-morrow ever comes!"

He paused, and still she was silent—except for the soft music of her breathing—that regal bosom so close to his own upturned face!

"And now your humble vassal goes forth in his liege-lady's name and cause, and, while all Seguro waits, Ghost and Ghost Breaker shall stalk those haunted, melancholy halls!"

Again they looked into each other's eyes.

"Your Highness, within the hour I shall hang the signal of victory within the window of the castle!"

He carried her hand to his lips, even as he had done on the memorable night so far across the waters. But this time the fingers were burning, and the slim

flower of a hand was not drawn away!

"God be with you!" she answered softly, and crossed herself. The Kentuckian watched her silently, a thousand mad thoughts whirling behind the calm and resolute brow. She slowly ascended the stairs and returned to her room.

He murmured tenderly under his breath:

"Highness ... Highness ... now, I understand how titles fit!"

A new noise came to his ears, and he listened without a tremor or movement of his body.

It was the click of a revolver cock!

The Kentuckian knew this sound too well to be deceived. Slowly he turned about, toward the large table on which stood the solitary oil lamp of the room.

He began to unfold his overcoat, which had been hanging over his left arm. Then he started whistling the first rippling bars of that good old Southern battle-song "Dixie."

Slowly he walked toward the lamp, apparently examining his overcoat.

The man drew out from the shelter of the arch, and the revolver was pointed straight at his back.

Suddenly the overcoat flew from the American's hands, covering and extinguishing the glass lamp, which fell with a crash in the darkness.

There was a portentous pause—it seemed hours; its length was the bare fraction of a second.

Two shots rang out, and scurrying feet were the only indication of life within the room. Another shot sent its tongue of blood-thirsty flame into the black void. There was a groan of anguish.

Then footsteps advanced to the door.

The cheery tune of "Dixie" was continued in the moonlight!

XVI

AS IN DAYS OF OLD

"Rusty! You lazy coon! Get on that horse of yours and hike along to the castle. See—the moon is helping us!"

"Yassir. I was jest finishin' another hunk of po'k-chops dat I forgot an' put in my pocket. Won't you have a bite?"

"No. I want to eat up something worse than pork to-night," and Jarvis swung into the saddle with the lithe skill acquired from childhood days on the backs of Blue-Grass thoroughbreds.

"What was dat gun-play, Marse Warren?" asked Rusty, after he had calculated that they had ridden a respectful distance for inquiries. Rusty had a certain inherited pride!

Jarvis laughed, and the dull glow of his cigarette tip was discernible.

"Oh, Rusty, why worry over history? Leave that sort of thing to these 'spigotties'—that's all they have to think about over here. It was just a question of being 'pinked' or 'pinkin' a certain gentleman who was working beyond union hours."

"Huh!" snorted Rusty. "I'll bet de razor I has in my jeans dat he was moh red dan pink when you-all got finished wid dat cannon o' yourn, Marse Warren. It runs in de fambly ter shoot straight!"

"Well, Rusty, let's ride straight for a while. We must go up this road to the turn."

They passed dark cottages, and finally reached the fateful angle of the road. Rusty groaned apprehensively.

"Say, Marse Warren, I wouldn't mind dis all in de meanest moonshine district in Kaintuck, but I don't like for to ride in dis yere foreign district. W'y didn't you-all pick out some place w'ere dey speaks human talk, instead of dis on-Christian lingo? It don't seem releegious to me, Marse Warren."

"Rusty, I'm beginning to think you've got a yellow streak in you, with all this talk about objections. You used to have a name for not even being afraid of your weight in wildcats," said Warren.

Rusty nodded, as he clung tightly to the saddle, on the increasingly rough trail.

"Marse Warren, dat was right. But wildcats is purty heavy, an' you-all can hit 'em with a shotgun. De trouble wid ghosts is dat dey don't weigh nuffin!"

"Lookout, Rusty. Here's a brook," and suddenly Jarvis' horse stumbled to its feet, after sliding down a sharp declivity which had been hidden by the shadows of the big moonlit trees. Rusty was not so fortunate,—he was rolled off despite his efforts, to receive a ducking.

Then did his teeth have reason to chatter, as he mounted again to follow his master up the declivity with dripping clothes.

"Whaffor dey want a crick like dat just below de doors of a castle, Marse Warren?" he complained.

"That's how they got their water supply—I wouldn't be surprised if the old place weren't built right on top of that spring. You know when this place was built they didn't have any faucets or taps in these old places.—Except on the heads!"

They mounted higher, ever higher, swinging on their saddlebows the unlighted, antique lanterns. Rusty was unmistakably becoming more and

more nervous.

The road took a sharp turn to the right now, and they clattered over the wooden bridge of the moat.

They faced the great doorway of the old castle now. In the moonlight it was an eerie sight indeed. The castle stood on a broad rocky shelf. A cold wind swept over the mountain top, rattling the naked branches near by the dismal walls.

"Ooooh!"

"What's that?" grunted Rusty in terror.

"Just the wind trying to get out through those barred windows up there, you fool."

"Laws-a-massy, I don't blame it fer gittin' out. I wish I wasn't goin' in."

A lone cloud took this occasion to cover the moon, and the shadow darkened the outlines of the sinister structure. The castle, so Warren had judged on his trip up the hill, must have been built in the period of the Spanish Moors. Later, perhaps when the Moors had been driven out of the country, two dismal wings, several towers and turrets had been added, reminding one of the castles on the Rhine cliffs.

The face of the structure, which Jarvis scanned quickly, was about two hundred feet long and maybe sixty feet high—with two stanch square towers at either end.

Thin slits in the walls and two round windows high up appeared to the mind of the Kentuckian (humorous in the face of the unknown danger) as "architectural bungholes." On either side of the great arched door jutted a turret, slit with many smaller openings and possessing castellated tops.

As they rumbled over the planking of the open drawbridge Rusty's chattering teeth were audible to the rider close at his side, and Jarvis

muttered angrily, drawing up his horse by the gate which led to the inner courtyard.

"If you're still too much of a coward to go on, you can ride back, Rusty. This is the first time you've ever failed me in a time of danger."

The negro remonstrated nervously.

"I'm not skeered—Marse Warren, I'm jes' gittin' straight hair fer de fust time in my life. I'm goin' wid you. I'ze jes' mighty onhappy."

A doorway somewhere swung shut with an iron clang. Rusty's nerves were stronger now. He breathed hard but said nothing.

"They used to hitch their horses here, I suppose," said Jarvis, as he slid from the saddle. The moonlight gave them a better illumination by this time. He hitched his horse, and Rusty followed his example with trembling fingers.

"Now, light the lamps. My, but those lamps would sell for a fortune in a Fourth Avenue antique shop!"

Rusty obeyed silently.

Then followed the most horrible experience of Rusty's life, in what seemed an endless exploration. They trod along weirdly echoing corridors, through spacious chambers, where ancient tapestries hung from the walls, while strange *débris* lay about amidst the curious carved furniture. Everything was covered by a pall of dust. Squealing and scurrying, the shining eyes and ghastly noises betrayed the presence of myriad rats.

"What can they find to live on?" wondered Warren.

From the high battlements they peered into the valley, and could see a few faint lights in the distant inn. Warren felt sure that one of those lights was in the room of her Highness.

They explored the bedchambers of the lords and ladies of the castle, the little pigeonholes in which the men-at-arms must have slept. Strange subtle

odors met them like an actual presence as they peered into dungeons, stone chambers, and horrid vaults.

"I don't even see why a ghost would want ter hang around dis misserable place, Marse Warren," ventured Rusty, as for the second time they entered the largest room of all, within the central keep.

"We've been here before, Rusty," replied Warren, sitting down for a moment on an old bench. Rusty looked around with rolling eyes.

Suddenly Jarvis jumped up and sniffed.

"Yes, and someone else has been here before. Do you smell that, Rusty?"

"Marse Warren, I'm so skeered dat I can't smell nuthin',—I can' see nuthin', hear nuthin'—except dem moans and yowls in all dose powerful big rooms we was in."

"The room's full of smoke and the smell of oil." Jarvis walked about, to make certain. "Somebody's been carrying a smoky lantern. We're getting warmer with that ghost."

A dull thud came to their ears, from far within the building. Rusty jumped like a frightened fawn.

"Good godelmity! What's dat?"

Jarvis quietly walked across the room, to peer into the big stone fireplace.

"Oh, Marse Warren, I want to go home!"

Rusty had turned about, and his eyes took in two figures of ancient armor at the top of the broad half-flight of stairs, on a balcony daïs. He sank upon his knees and bobbed his head to the floor in obeisance.

"What's the matter?" and Jarvis whirled about, with revolver drawn. His own nerves were beginning to get too taut, with the tension exaggerated by the superstition and fright of the negro.

"Look! Look! Look at dem big black boogies standin' dere, Marse Warren. See 'em standin' dere?"

Jarvis laughed and put his gun into his side pocket.

"They're the same black things that scared you before, don't you remember?"

"Oh, I'm so skeered, boss, dat I can't remember nuthin' at all."

"Get up on your pins—they're nothing but old suits of armor, and you're liable to get some moonlight through you, Rusty, if there's another rear-end collision like that. You've been treading on my heels every step I take, and when I stop you bump into me."

"But Marse Warren," pleaded the frightened darky, "I'm powerful 'fraid I might lose you!"

"A fine chance," snorted Jarvis, looking about. "Well, Rusty, we've been through this old place pretty thoroughly, and not a sign of a soul—unless they pound or carry a smoky lantern. It's a clew, Rusty, it's a clew. We'll stick right here until we find out. This is the best room of the castle, and the ghost may prefer it."

Jarvis crossed to the fireplace again, and striking a match, held it into the opening. Its flicker indicated a good draught.

"There, Rusty," he said. "It's a good chance for a fire. The chimney's clear. Now break up that lopsided, rickety table there and make a fire. You won't feel half so scared with a good blaze behind you."

He turned toward the half-flight of stairs, with a studious expression as he mentally measured the heights and thickness of the walls and ceiling.

"I'll scout around a bit, Rusty."

"Don't you do scoutin' outsiden dis room."

Rusty crossed to the fireplace, with the pieces of easily-smashed table legs, and began to light the fire.

"This was probably the banquet hall, Rusty."

"Yes, and say, Marse Warren, when we-all goin' ter eat?"

"When we get through with this job." He turned thoughtfully toward the big windows on the south of the room, and mused aloud: "That's the way through the two long rooms to the postern gate. Umm."

"That's where that black thing followed me."

"Yes, and a black thing followed me, walking on my heels every step I took. I couldn't see where I was stepping."

"That goes to the armory."

"I seen eyes in dere and a cold grimy, green smell in dere. Ain't dat where dat broad-faced bird flew at me, an' I slipped down de stairs?"

"Don't you know an owl, Rusty? That's all it was."

Jarvis was walking across the room to another door. Rusty was close behind him, following by habit now.

"I wonder if that door is...."

He did not finish the sentence! His foot had touched a swiveled rock, so delicately balanced that he had noiselessly fallen half through the large opening in the rock floor when Rusty caught him by the collar and under the arm.

<i>Rusty caught him by the arm</i>

Rusty caught him by the arm

"Here, I'm holding on now better, Rusty. Give me your hand." They both tugged, and he was soon safe, peering into the black opening together.

"That was a close call. Give me that lantern, Rusty!"

He dropped an old pewter cup, left on a side table, down the opening. There was a delayed, faint splash.

"Lord!—water and a long drop. No wonder people disappear in this castle. Great Scott! What if her brother fell in there? Rusty, whatever happens, keep clear of this. Get me a burned stick, and I'll mark a cross on it, so we can tell—it makes me nervous to see that open mouth of death gaping for us. If you step on this you'll never see Kentucky again, for sure."

Rusty obeyed.

"Did you hear that groan, Marse Warren?"

"Groan—that's the wind!... There it is again—it does sound like a moan."

"Ough!" and Rusty's teeth chattered in perfect rhythm with his shaking knees. "Ough!"

"Shut up! Listen ... I guess it's the wind, at that. But this place is getting on our nerves all right."

Rusty controlled his teeth enough to talk now.

"Marse Warren, dat warn't no wind. Ah hope to die if dat warn't a shore 'nuff human groan." He turned and looked toward the big oil portrait of an ancient Spanish hidalgo over the fireplace. "An' I wants to tell you somepin else. Has you ever been in church or somew'ere an' all of a suddent a feelin' comes over you dat dere's someone's eyes a-starin' at de back of your haid ... you jest knowed it—until you couldn't stand it no longer, an' jest had to turn 'round an' see who it was?"

"Yes, Rusty, I've had that. Why?"

"Dat's jest de way I feel now. Like dem eyes in dat picture was a-lookin right through me. Like he'd like to step right outen de frame. Or dem two boogie battleship men would like to jump right down on me," and he pointed toward the two suits of armor on the landing above.

"It's been a good many hundred years since those boys jumped. But listen—there's someone running as sure as you're alive, Rusty."

It was unmistakable. The steps came nearer and nearer, and then came a repetition of that dull thud in a distant room.

"I want to go home," moaned Rusty.

Jarvis had drawn his revolver again, and he was standing close to the stairs.

"Great Scott, Rusty! The man with the smoky lantern has been up these stairs. There are oil drippings, still fresh."

"You-all ain't going up, is you?" pleaded Rusty.

"Not at all. Because this Mr. Ghost or some of his spooky friends are probably waiting at the top of the stairs with a long gun, and I'm no book hero."

"Suppose it might be dat dere Mrs. Princess'es brother?"

"Well, he might blow my head off because he doesn't know what I came here for, and if it's someone else they'd blow it off because they do know why I'm here. There's somebody trying to scare us, Rusty. They're probably watching every move we make.... That's where that pounding comes from—why don't they shoot?... They're trying to scare us as they did the poor boobs down in the village."

Rusty crossed toward the fireplace. He picked up an old mallet and chisel from the mantel, which was brighter now from the fire. He cried out in surprise:

"Look yere, Marse Warren. Look yere!"

He handed the tools over to the astounded Jarvis. "I found 'em on dat mantelpiece!"

Jarvis ran to the mantelpiece and clambered up on a chair, holding the lantern close to the wall.

"Good boy, Rusty! These are the Ghost's tools, all right. Someone was working in this room—but we've beaten him to it.... Mortar on the floor ... mortar on the mantle!... Look here at these stones. That's where he was working, Rusty, and we've beaten him to it."

He stopped, and both of them turned simultaneously to look at the big picture of the historical Spaniard. Rusty had drawn his own revolver, with Jarvis doing the same by a curious instinct.

"Did you feel dat, too, Marse Warren?" asked the frightened negro.

Jarvis said nothing. He went to the picture and, lighting a match, passed it all around the frame, examining it, without the discovery of a suspicious thing. He turned away, then faced it once more as he backed toward the low balustrade of the steps over which stood one of the suits of armor.

"By George, that's weird. You could feel that just as plain...."

Rusty was still looking with fascination at the picture.

"It sure is, Marse Warren, it sure is...." He turned slowly, facing Warren Jarvis. He had just time for one piercing howl—a veritable high-pitched scream:

"My Gawd, look out!"

XVII

CONCLUSION

Rusty had dived under the table.

The great sword of the armored figure was swinging swiftly up in air, and Jarvis leaped with all the sinewy strength of his young manhood.

It was none too soon.

The great Damascus blade struck fire from the stone balustrade where he sat a second before.

Jarvis spun about, and his automatic barked. With the instinct of the born fighting man he fired for the heart: this was his error.

The bullets spattered off the angle-braced breastplate.

Down the steps came the horrid figure, raising the great sword again. The leaden shower did not halt the clanging monster, as the iron-clad advanced.

He remembered now that Rusty had two more revolvers—but Rusty was scuttling on hands and knees for the shelter of the turret entrance across the room.

In desperation Jarvis threw his revolver at the head of the assailant! It was a futile pebble toss.

The weapon clattered against the metal vizor and bounced off, as the weird assailant ran within striking distance. For the first time in his life came the

sensation of helplessness in a fight. There was a numbing feeling of horror as he recoiled before this thing.

His back touched the stone wall, just as the quick figure made a forward step and struck again. The sword rang out against the rock, but the hand that held that weapon knew how to wield it with determination.

Jarvis had dropped to his knees, and imitated Rusty's escape, until he was out of reach. He might have grappled—but the thought came too late. He saw the ancient weapons on the wall—there was a great poleax.

This was the instrument made for the man-at-arms to withstand the noble knight in the days of old. He whirled it on high as the other came toward him. The double-edged sword rose high to parry the stroke, and the sharp weapon clove through the rotten wood helve: Time had disarmed the American again.

A deep-chested laugh came from the human "battleship."

Warren laughed back—in the face of death: the old Jarvis fighting laugh was a tradition in Kentucky.

His next weapon was a chair. With this as a guard he managed to swing the sword with a clever parry. He gave the metal breastplate a vigorous high kick. From the helmet there came a muffled "Oooof!" Here was one "point" for the modern!

<i>His next weapon was a chair</i>

His next weapon was a chair

Thus they dodged and feinted, striking, whirling, while the Kentuckian planned his campaign.

Little by little he drew his implacable opponent toward the charcoal cross-mark on the floor. The great sword rose high—he feigned weakness and dropped his chair. Then, as the toreador dodges the mad onslaught of the maddened bull, he leaped aside and the sword struck the ground.

Before it could be raised, he swung from his side position, with the heavy antique chair, against the vizor. The equilibrium of the armored man was none too stable, as he missed his stroke—and his head went back. Again the Kentuckian charged, this time with a barehanded clinch, the chair dropped.

Around the metal waist his arms went and he forced the other back but half a foot.

It was enough!

"*Santa Madre!*" came from the helmet, as the figure stumbled through the opening trap-stone.

There was a scream, which suddenly ended at highest pitch—a splash ... then *silence*.

Jarvis staggered back, with dilated eyes upon the fatal hole—he wiped the cold beads off his clammy brow, and staggered toward the table for support.

Rusty's head came out from the shelter of the stone coping—and he smiled an ashen imitation of amusement.

"Whar's yoh friend, Marse Warren?"

Jarvis' head was low upon his breast, as he answered quietly: "Water—and a long drop! There's a real ghost due to haunt castle now, Rusty."

"I knowed them battleship boogies was spooks!"

Warren picked up the great sword which had fallen by the trap as the man went through. He walked up the stairs.

"Oh, Marse Warren, don't!"

"What's the matter?" and he snarled it. "Do I scare you?"

"You can't scare me—I'm scared already!"

Jarvis made a fencing feint at the other figure. There was no response; again he tried. Then he rushed it, and knocked the armor over.

"I guess he's genuine—and harmless."

"Oh, Marse Warren, you'se got gall, shore. I'll jest finish dis battleship—so he won't jump no moh." He had grabbed the armor and started toward the trapdoor. "I'm goin' to sink him in de harbor!"

"Don't do that—it takes a thief to catch a thief. I'll make a ghost out of you, Rusty. Come here."

Objecting, timorous, and still overcome with his native superstition, Rusty was nevertheless forced to don the armor—a sad misfit he was, at that.

"Somebody was working in this room, Rusty. It's a cinch that the treasure was here. It's a cinch that we interrupted, and it's still in its little safe-deposit vault. It's a greater cinch that if we go out he'll come back. I want to have you stand up there where the other battleship was, and watch. You'll be as safe as a church in this. No one would think of looking for one of us in this armor—so when he starts to work, whoever he is, you just yell and yell your best."

"Gawd, Marse Warren, I could yell loud 'nuff for 'em to hear me back in Kaintucky."

"You give me your best yell, and I'll nail him."

"Ef you don't nail him, he'll nail me."

"Keep cool—that's all."

"I'm cool now—I'm ketchin' cold." And he sneezed.

"If you sneeze again, I'm going to use a gun on you. Here, give me one of those two guns you have. And whatever you do, don't sneeze. I'm catching cold myself here—anyone would in this musty old hole."

He pocketed the weapon and ordered Rusty to his place.

There came another sound—a repetition of the earlier faint sound. He turned quickly, and Princess Maria Theresa of Aragon rushed into the room, followed by Dolores.

"Thank God you are safe, Mr. Warren! I heard the shooting, down in the other court of the castle."

"Where have you been? Why didn't you wait for my signal? The hour is not over yet."

"We've been wandering through this dreadful place an eternity—trying to find you, calling everywhere, so that we could reach you before it was too late—before something happened that had always happened before!"

Dolores had seated herself at the side table, and her face was buried in her hands. She was sobbing.

"Too late? What do you mean? This is madness for you to take this risk."

The girl, forgetting royalty and convention, caught his hand in both of hers, and a light of joy came into her eyes.

"My brother is safe, thank God! He is on his way to the King to get soldiers to search the castle."

"Where has he been? How do you know?"

"He was imprisoned in this castle—since the day he entered. To-night he tried to signal, but could not. Your bullet went straight home, Mr. Warren, and Robledo is dying. He has confessed all to the holy father. I must go back, for I promised to be with him at the end."

"The end ..." and Jarvis' voice grew husky, he understood by now the tears of Dolores. He turned toward her gently. "I'm so sorry—you and he—I might have—oh, what a terrible shame!"

The girl crossed herself, with the stoic calmness of her religion, as she rose to face him.

"It is better so. He sinned—grievously, many times, señor. My Prince is safe ... my Princess is safe. And you are safe—you, the bravest man in Seguro."

Maria Theresa turned toward the door, where stood a man whom Jarvis had not espied before. "Take her back to the inn, Maximo, as quietly as possible. Then send the chauffeur for me again as soon as he can come up the rough road."

"But, your Highness, you must go back as well—it is dangerous for you to remain here. I have found the clues for which you went to America. Let me finish the job."

"No, I will stay with you."

He caught her hands, and looked down into the dark eyes, so wondrously upturned to his.

"You must come by the fire, and get warm.... Here, sit in this chair. You have been frightened to death, prowling through this horrid place.... Your hands are icy.... There, there! Go on and cry—forget that you're a Princess and be a real girl. Cry all you want! That's fine!"

He took off his coat and wrapped it around her shoulders as she sat by the flaming remnants of the old table.

He turned about and beckoned to Rusty, who with a revolver in hand, his courage restored in a way by the turn of events, disappeared from view. Jarvis gently placed a hand upon the heaving shoulder.

"I'll round up this spook to-night for good and all. Then the vassal's task is done. His fate is in your hands, Highness; what's to become of him?... Don't send me away. I loved you from the first—not like a vassal either—and will always love you.

"I know I'm just a plain American citizen ... and a *man*. All the man in me cries out, 'I love you!' Don't send me away."

"You must go. You must leave Spain, for your life would never be safe here: you know what feuds are, and you have started one."

Just then an audible, unmistakable, common-place sneeze interrupted this most wonderful of all conversations.

Jarvis looked about. The sneeze was in the room.

"Rusty, are you outside?"

"Yassir. But don't keep me here long, 'kase I'ze freezing to death."

"Did you sneeze?"

"No, sir; but I calc'late I'll have to befoh long."

"Don't move, your Highness—I've found the Ghost at last!"

He walked toward the suspicious picture, and pointed the revolver at it.

"There is somebody in that picture. Come out or I'll shoot. Quick now!"

There was no response.

He sent a bullet, carefully aimed at the upper lefthand corner, where he planned that it would do no harm.

There was a response.

"Don't shoot!"

>"<i>Don't shoot!</i>"

"Don't shoot!"

And the canvas opened neatly, to permit the elegant but dusty figure of Carlos Hernando, Duke of Alva, to step to the mantelpiece and leap clumsily to the floor.

The Princess had sprung to her feet.

"Your Excellency, you are a long way from Madrid!"

The Duke, brushing off his sleeves, snarled back: "You fool, you've stepped right into the trap. I knew you were after the treasure."

"Oh, no, your man-at-arms did that, and if you try to lie yourself out of this ... if it weren't for your cousin, I'd blow your damned head off! Then I'd throw you down after the other poor devil—you've got a lot of souls to answer for. See here, give me that locket—no, give her that locket, or by the living God, I'll break your ... Come on now!"

"Carlos!" and the girl held out a stiff arm. The Duke fumbled in an inner pocket, and dropped the memorandum into her hand.

"I told you all ghosts were cowards."

The Duke looked insolently into Jarvis' face, yet there was an undisguised admiration for the stanch nerves of his opponent. At heart, despite his criminal, conceited weaknesses, the Duke had thoroughbred blood beating and pulsing through the veins.

"You play a good game, Mr. Warren.... Are all Americans like you?"

"They all play the game in Kentucky," snapped Jarvis.

"And I thought all Americans were fools." He crossed to the door. "I think, my dear Maria, that for the sake of the family name it would do my health

good to take a trip to Monte Carlo and the Riviera—even Egypt might help. Mr. Warren, take her advice and return to Kentucky."

He walked up the steps and smiled back with his cynical appreciation of the situation, a mediæval sport to the end, as Jarvis realized.

"Hey, Rusty, you just follow that Duke as well as you did me. See him out of the castle and on his way rejoicing. And don't let your finger slip on that revolver."

"Yassir—wid pleasure, sir."

The footsteps died away, and Jarvis looked at the Princess.

She smiled back at him.

"What kind of a place is Kentucky?"

"God's country, lady.... Must I go back alone, your Highness?"

She put her hands upon the tired shoulders, and looked up with the ineffable look which passeth all understanding, except between the one man and the one woman. She held her lips up to him!

"Warren—don't call me Highness!... my name is Maria!"

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GHOST
BREAKER: A NOVEL BASED UPON THE PLAY ***

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