

# **The Black Rider**

**by George Owen Baxter, 1892-1944**

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## **Chapter I**

### **Beginning the Journey.**

IF Señor Francisco Torreño had been a poor man, the bride of his son would have been put on a swift horse and carried the fifty miles to the ranch in a single day, a day of a little fatigue, perhaps, but of much merriment, much light-hearted joyousness. However, Señor Torreño was not poor. The beasts which he slaughtered every year for their hides and their tallow would have fed whole cities. Sometimes he sold those hides to English ships which had rounded the Horn and sailed far and far north up the western coast of the Americas. But he preferred to sell to the Spaniards. They did not come so often. They offered lower prices. But Torreño was a patriot. Moreover, he was above counting his pence, or even his pesos. He counted his cattle by the square league. He counted his sheep by the flocks.

To such a man it would have been impossible, it would have been ludicrous to mount the betrothed of his only son and gallop her heedlessly over the hills and through the valleys to the great house. Instead, there were preparations to be made.

The same ambassador who negotiated the marriage with the noble and rich d'Arquista family in Toledo had instructions. If the affair terminated favorably, to post to Paris out of Spain with all the speed of which horseflesh was capable, and from the same coach builder who supplied the equipages of Madame Pompadour to order a splendid carriage. About the carriage Señor Torreño mentioned every detail, except the price.

Chiefly he insisted that the exterior of the wagon should be gilded with plenty of gold leaf and that in particular the arms of the Torreño family—that is to say, an armored knight with sword in hand stamping upon a dying dragon—should appear on either side of the vehicle.

All of this was done. The sailing of the *Señorita Lucia d'Arquista* was postponed until the carriage was completed and had been shipped on a fleet-winged merchantman for the New World. And, when the lady herself arrived, she was ensconced in that enormous vehicle as in a portable house. For it was hardly less in size!

Twelve chosen horses from the estate of Torreño drew that carriage. They had been selected because they were all of a color and a size—that is to say, they were all glossy black without a single white hair to mar their coats, and their shining black hides set off the silvermounted harness with which they were decked. In the front seat, lofty as the lookout on a ship, was the driver, a functionary of importance, shouting his orders to the six postilions who, with difficulty, managed the dancing horses, for these were more accustomed to bearing saddles than pulling at collars.

In the van of the carriage rode a compact body of six men from the household of Torreño, mounted upon cream-colored steeds. Six more formed the immediate bodyguard around the coach itself. And, finally, there was a train in the rear. These were composed, last of all, of ten fierce warriors, well trained in Indian conflicts, skillful to follow trails or to take scalps, experts with musket and pistol and knife. In front of this rear guard, but still at a considerable distance from the coach, journeyed the domestics who were needed. For, at every halt, and on account of the wretched condition of the road, the carriage was sure to get into difficulties every three or four miles, and a tent was hastily pitched, and a folding cot placed in it so that the señorita might repose herself in it if she chose. There was a round dozen of these servants and, besides the animals they bestrode, there were fully twenty pack-mules which bore the necessities for the journey.

In this manner it will be seen how Torreño transformed a fifty-mile canter into a campaign. There were some three score and ten horses and mules; there were almost as many men. And the cavalcade stretched splendidly over many and many a rod of ground. There was a great jingling of little silver and golden bells. And the dust cloud flew into a great flag of flying cloud from beneath the many hoots as they mounted each hilltop, and settled in a heavy, stifling fog around them as they lurched down into every hollow. They marched eight hours a day, and their average was hardly more than two miles an hour, counting the halts, and weary, slow labor up the many slopes. Therefore it was a march of fully three days.

All of this had been foreseen by the omniscient Torreño. Accordingly, he had built three lodgings at the end of the three separate days' riding. Some flimsy structure, you would say, some fabric of wood and canvas? No, no! Such tawdry stuff was not for Torreño! He sent his 'dobe brickmakers and his builders ahead to the sites months before. He sent them not by the dozen, but by the score. They erected three spreading, solid buildings. They cleared the ground around them. They constructed commodious sleeping apartments. And the foresters of Torreño brought down from the foothills of the snowtopped Sierras young pines and firs and planted them again around the various halting places, planted them in little groups, so that they made groves of shade, for the season of her arrival was a season of summer heat. And where in the world is the sun more burningly hot than in the great West of the Americas?

Shall it be said that these immense labors strained the powers of the rich Torreño? Not in the least! For the servants of the great man he numbered by whole villages and towns—Indians who had learned to live only to labor, and to labor only for their Spanish masters. He had almost forgotten the commands he had given until, riding down to the port, he had passed through the lodges one by one and, with the view of each, the heart of Torreño had swelled with pride. For the glory of his riches had never grown strange to Don Francisco. His father had been a moneylender in Barcelona who had raised his son in abject penury and left him, at his death, a more than modest competence. Don Francisco had loaned it forth again, at a huge interest, to a certain impoverished grandee, a descendant of one of those early *conquistadores* who considered the vast West of North America as their back yard. The grandee had been unable to pay interest. In short, in a year Don Francisco foreclosed and got for the larger half of his money—a whole kingdom of land. He sailed out to explore his possessions. For days he rode across it, league after league, winding up valleys with rich bottom lands, climbing well-faced mesas, struggling over endless successions of hills.

“What will grow here?” he asked in despair.

“Grass, señor, you see!”

They pointed out to him sun-cured grasses.

“But what will eat this stuff?”

“It is the finest food in the world for either cattle or horses,” he was told.

He did not believe, at first. It was a principle with him never to believe except under the compulsion of his own eyes; but, when he extended his rides through the neighboring estates, he indeed found cattle, hordes of them—little, lean-bodied, wild-eyed creatures as fleet as antelope, as savage as tigers. They, indeed, could drink water once in three days and pick a living on the plains. So Don Francisco, half in despair, bought a quantity of them—they could be had almost for the asking—and turned them loose on his lands. He gave other attention to the bottom grounds and farmed them with care and at the end of ten years his farm land was rich, to be sure, but the cattle had multiplied by miracle until they swarmed everywhere. Each one was not worth a great deal—nothing in comparison with the sleek, grass-fed beeves which he remembered in old Spain; but they were numbered, as has been said, by the square league. They needed no care. They grew fat where goats would have starved. They multiplied like rabbits. In short, it took ten years for Don Francisco to awaken to the truth; then he got up one morning and found himself richer than his richest dreams of wealth. He went back to Spain, bought a palace in Madrid, hired a small army of servants, dazzled the eyes of the city and, as a result, got him a wife of his own choosing, high-born, magnificent, loving his money, despising him. She bore him this one son, Don Carlos, and then died of a broken heart among the arid hills of America, yearning ever for the stir and the bustle and the whispers of Madrid. In the meantime, Don Francisco grew richer and richer. He began to buy his own ships and employ his own captains to transport the hides and the tallow back to Europe. He sent expeditions northward along the coast an incredible distance into the frozen regions, and they brought back furs by the sale of which alone he could have made himself the richest man in Barcelona. But he no longer thought of

Barcelona. He thought of the world as his stage. When he thought of kingdoms and of kings, he thought of his own wide lands, and of himself in the next breath.

Such was Señor Don Francisco Torreño.

Now he had brought back from Spain another lovely girl, this time to become the wife of his son, Don Carlos. Men had told him that she was not only a d'Arquista, but that she was also the loveliest girl in all of Spain; and, although he had not believed the last, when he saw her now, swaying and tilting in the lumbering carriage like a very flower, he could not but agree that she was worthy to be a queen.

And was not that, in fact, the destiny for which he was shaping her? In the end he found that he could give her the highest compliment which it was in his power to bestow on any woman—she was worthy to be the wife of the son of Francisco Torreño!

As for Don Carlos, he was in a seventh heaven, an ecstasy of delight. He could not keep his eyes from touching on his bride to be and, every time they rested on her, he could not help smiling and twirling the ends of his little mustaches into dagger points. He went to his father.

“Ah, sir,” he said. “Where can I find words in the world to tell you of my gratitude? In all the kingdoms you have found the one lady of my heart.”

Torreño was pleased, but he would have scorned to show his pleasure.

“Bah!” he said. “You are young; therefore you are a fool. Remember that she is a woman, and every woman is a confederacy of danger in your household. When the married man locks his door, he has not closed out from his house his deadliest foe!”

“I shall not believe that there is evil in her!” said the youth. He clapped his hand upon the hilt of his rapier. He had been to Milan and to Paris to learn the proper use of that weapon and, though some parts of his education might be at fault, in sword play he had been admitted a master even by the Spaniards, who fight by rule of book like mathematicians, and even by the French who fight like dreadful angels of grace. “And,” said Don Carlos, “if another man were to suggest such a thing, I should... cut his throat!”

His father was pleased again. He loved violence in his boy, just as he loved his elegance. In all things, Don Carlos was his ideal of what a young man should be, just as he himself was what his ideal of what a man of sixty should be.

“You throat-cutters,” said Don Francisco sneeringly. “Powder and lead are the only things!”

So saying, he snatched a pistol from the holster beside his saddle and, jerking it up level with his eye, fired. he had intended to shave the long plume which fluttered from the hat of one of his postilions. as a matter-of- fact, the ball knocked the hat off the head of the poor fellow, and even grazed his skull, so that he screamed with terror and clapped both hands to the top of his head.

“Indians!” shouted the driver.

“Indians!” echoed the rear guard and the front.

Instantly they faced out and held their carbines at the ready. Don Francisco was convulsed with laughter. He rolled back and forth in his saddle and waved his pistol in the air, helpless with excess of mirth.

“Ah,” he groaned in his joy, “did you see the face of the fool, Carlos? Did you see?”

But Carlos was already at the side of the carriage, comforting his lady and assuring her that it was only a jest of his father’s. She had not uttered an outcry, but she sat stiff and straight in the carriage and looked at her fiancé with a very strange expression in her eyes—a strange, level glance that went through and through the soul of Don Carlos like the cold steel of a rapier—and out again at a twitch.

“Ah,” she said without a smile, “was that a joke? What if the man had been killed?”

“Why, there are a thousand others to take his place,” explained Don Carlos carefully.

“I see,” she said.

And that was all. But at that moment he would have given a very great deal if she had smiled even a very small smile.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Flute Player.**

IN the confusion that followed the explosion of the gun, the carriage, as a matter of course, had come to a halt. It had stopped in the center of a deep hollow where the road, pounded repeatedly by the great wheels of the carts which brought the hides down to the seaport town, had been scored with great ruts, and the surface cut away to the undercrop of rocks. Against one of these the rear wheels were wedged and, when the postilions tried to start the coach, they failed. They could not, at once, get the team to work together, partly, perhaps, because they were talking to one another—a rapid muttering running back and forth along the line of the drivers. In the meantime, Señorita Lucia stood up and beckoned to her cavalier. He was in the midst of a rapture which he was pouring forth to his father.

“She is like a bird, sir,” he was saying. “She is full of music. There is nothing about her that is not delightful!”

“Bah!” said the father, concealing his happiness as usual with a scowl. “Take care that she does not prove a sparrow-hawk, and you the sparrow!”

“When I hear her voice, my heart stops. Her eyes take hold on my soul like a strong hand. I could wish for only one thing... that she would smile more often! Do you think that she is happy? That she will be happy?”

His father turned short around in his saddle.

“Is she a fool?” he asked. “Can she not see that this is my land? And that all that we are to journey through is my land? Are not the cattle mine, the trees mine, everything but the sky itself mine? Did she not eat from silver dishes yesterday? Does she not eat from golden dishes today? And yet you ask if she is happy? Carlos, that is the question of a madman!”

“But she seems thoughtful.”

“All women,” said his father, “think while they are young. There is a need for that. They use their brains until they have caught a husband. After that, their minds go to sleep. It is better so. Rather an unfaithful wife than a thinking wife! Such creatures give a man no rest. And in our homes we should have peace!”

So said the great Torreño, and then nodded. Since he cared for the opinion of no one else in the world, he found a great delight in agreeing with himself.

It was at this moment that the son saw his lady beckoning to him. He drove in the spurs so deep, in his haste, that the tortured horse leaped straight up into the air. But as well to have striven to unseat a centaur as to dispossess this master of the saddle. Presently Don Carlos drew rein beside the coach, his horse sliding to a halt upon braced legs. But to the dismay of the gallant Don Carlos, he found that Señorita Lucia was not even looking at him. She was raising one hand as though for silence. Her head was lifted and there was an expression of perfect concentration on her face.

“Will you tell them to be quiet?” she asked him.

“Idiots!” cried he. “Fools! Will you be still? Will you be barking like wild dogs?”

He stormed up and down the line of the postilions. Each was transformed to stone, looking sullenly down upon the ground. He came back to Lucia smiling like a happy child. There was not a sound, now, except the heavy panting of the horses. The dust cloud rose and floated away on the slow wind. The sun beat steadily, burningly down upon them. It dried the sweat on the flanks of the horses as fast as it formed and left powderings of salt.

“Now,” said the girl, “you can hear it quite clearly! I thought I heard before... now I am sure!”

Don Carlos listened in turn, pointed the eye of his mind, so to speak, in the direction to which she pointed, and then he made out, very far and faint, very thin but very clear, like a star ray on a dark black night, the sound of a whistled music which floated to them through the air, now drowned by a stir of the wind, now coming again.

“That is a great flute player... that is a true musician!” said the lady.

He gaped at her for a moment. Something that his father had said was recurring to his not over-alert brain. Indeed, this was very like the hawk which knew what duller fowl could not. How had she been able to pick up that liquid, tiny sound through the jingling, stamping, creaking, shouting of the caravan?

It made her seem tall—though she was very small. It made her eye like the eye of an eagle, though it was only of the mildest blue.

He was filled with awe, and with astonishment. He had never felt such an emotion before, not even in the presence of his father, of whom he was terribly afraid.

“Who is it?” asked the girl. “It must be a man famous in this part of the country.”

He could not tell her. He shouted to his father. But Don Francisco could not say who it might be. Neither did any of the others in the train have a guess to venture.

“I shall ride off to find him,” said Don Carlos. “I shall be back in a moment.”

“No,” said the girl. “I shall go myself.”

Among the led horses, of which there were half a dozen or more, there were two always kept saddled and ready for her in case she should choose to change from

the carriage. She had not shown the slightest inclination to leave that lumbering vehicle before. Now, therefore, everyone watched with the greatest attention, and the silent eagerness of born horsemen, while she dismounted from the coach and stood before the two horses. One was a bay, beautiful as a picture, but a useless creature except for a gift of soft gaits. The other was a roan, ugly in color, but chosen because of its rare and eager spirit, combined with perfect manners, and a mouth as sensitive as the mouth of a human being.

“Let us see,” said Don Francisco when those horses were selected for her special use, “if she can tell a horse from a horse. If she can do that, she can be happy in this wild country even if she were the bride of a beggar!”

Now he rode close up.

“There is a right one and a wrong one,” he said.

He took a ring from his finger. There was an emerald in it.

“You shall have this, my child, if you prove yourself wise!”

She gave him a steady glance, once again without a smile. Then she turned back to the others and regarded their heads.

“Not their heads only,” entreated Don Carlos, anxious that she might make a good impression upon his father. And of the two heads that of the bay was far the more beautiful. “Look at the whole body... the legs... the bone... the hard muscle, Lucia!”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I shall ride this one,” she said, and laid her hand on the nose of the roan.

There was a little shout from the whole cavalcade. For she had run the gantlet unscathed! But Don Francisco was almost scowling on her as he gave her the ring. And he muttered to his son: “A hawk! A hawk! Poor Carlos!”

Don Carlos did not quite follow the meaning that might be hidden away under this. He was too delighted by her victory. And, in another moment, she was galloping away at his side across the hills.

It was even farther than he had guessed, but the music led them across two ranges of the little rolling hills, and on the second range they saw their man seated cross-legged under a tree, with the flute at his lips and his agile fingers dancing over it.

He was a tall man with a white band of cloth around his long, black hair to keep it away from his face, and clean white trousers which extended to his heels. There was a sash around his waist. Altogether he was a romantic figure in such a setting among the olive-drab hills.

“Look!” said Don Carlos, as they drew rein.

At their approach, the musician had jumped up and whistled sharply. And at once the sheep which were feeding in that pasture land came running toward him, a rush of gray white which pooled around his feet, bleating and babbling.

The Indian, as he arose, was revealed as a tall man, slender waisted, broad shouldered—with the form of an athlete and the air of a gravely reserved thinker.

“He looks,” said the girl, “like a hero.”

“He?” said Don Carlos. “He is only an Indian.”

“He is not like the others,” she said, looking thoughtfully at her fiancé.

“The others are mere root grubbers, ditch diggers,” said the son of the lord of the land, shrugging his shoulders. “This fellow is different... yes. You can tell that



he is a Navajo by that band around his hair and his white trousers. The Navajos are different. Most of them are men. But no Navajo with an ounce of blood in his veins would be herding sheep for a white man. This man is probably an outcast, a coward, perhaps a fool, certainly a knave!"

She gave Don Carlos one look, a long one; she gave the Indian another glance, a short one.

"I don't agree with you," she said.

"Why not, Lucia?"

"Because he is a musician. That's one thing. And besides..."

"Besides what?"

"I don't know," she said, and added: "Talk to him, Carlos!"

This was pronounced so shortly that Don Carlos stared a little, for he had never in his life received commands except from his father who, after all, was a sort of deity of another order. However, when he looked to the girl, he found her smiling so frankly that he quite forgot he had received an order.

Now he reined his horse closer. The Indian had folded his hands and addressed his gaze to the distant mountains, lofty, naked rock faces, spotted richly with color all dim and blended behind a veiling mist.

"Tell me, fellow," said Don Carlos, "what is your name?"

He had asked the question, of course, in Spanish, and the Indian returned to him a dull, unintelligent stare.

"I shall ask him in Navajo," said Don Carlos to the girl. "He has probably come here only newly. Otherwise he would have understood such a simple question. These Navajos, besides, are not such fools, you know." He said to the Indian, in a broad, quick guttural: "What is your name? Quickly, because we cannot stay here. What is your name and what made you learn the flute?"

Not a whit of intelligence glimmered in the steady black eyes of the other. Don Carlos flushed.

"The oaf dares to keep silence!" he said. "I shall give him a lesson that will be written in his skin the rest of his life!"

And he raised a riding whip. At the same instant, into the hand of the Indian came a long and heavy knife. He did not hold it by the hilt, but balanced it loosely in the palm of his hand, the knife blade extending over the fingers, so that it was plain he intended to throw it, and there was something in his unmoved air which gave assurance that his weapon would not miss the target. Don Carlos, with a gasp of rage and astonishment, whirled his horse away.

"The scoundrel!" he cried. "We'll silence that flute, by heaven! Turn your face, Lucia!"

"Carlos!" she cried, riding straight between him and his intended target. "Do you mean to pistol him in cold blood?"

"Cold blood?" cried he. "I tell you, Lucia, if we did not keep these desert rats down, they would eat through our walls and knife us in our sleep. They'd swarm over the whole land. There is only one way to treat an Indian... like a mad dog!"

Her expression, for the moment, reminded him of that of the Navajo—it was the blank of one who veils a thought.

"Here comes your father," she said. "Perhaps he will speak for Señor Torreño."

Torreño, in fact, had followed the two at a slow gait, not close enough to interfere with their privacy, but at a sufficient distance to keep his eye upon them, as though he dared not risk the safety of the two human beings who meant the most to him in the world.

## Chapter III

### Taki.

HE had no sooner come up when his son explained everything that had happened in the following way:

"I asked this Indian dog for his name in Spanish and in Navajo. He dared to remain silent."

"So?" said Torreño. "A Navajo, however, is not a dog, but a man... or half a man." He said gently to the tall Indian: "*Amigo*, do you know me?"

Instantly the other made answer in perfect Spanish, smooth, closeclipped, the truest Castilian: "You are my master, señor! You are Señor Torreño."

Torreño turned to the girl with a broad grin on his face, as much as to say: "This you see is another matter when the right man speaks!"

He added to the Indian. "And now your name?"

"I am Taki, the son of..."

"That is enough. So, Taki, you have drawn a knife upon my son?"

"A knife?" said Taki blankly. "I cannot remember that!"

The girl broke into ringing laughter, a small, sweet voice in the vast silence of those hills. The music of it softened the hard heart of Torreño.

"I should have had him flayed alive," said he. "But since he has amused you, dear girl, I shall forgive him."

"Flayed alive?" murmured the girl. "Are such things possible here?"

"In this country," said Torreño, "one must be a king or a slave; and to be a king one must be a tyrant. *I*, señorita, am a tyrant, partly because it is necessary, partly because it pleases me to be one. Where I am, there is no other word, except for the sake of conversation."

He said this with a grave, sharp glance at her, which could not avoid giving the words a certain meaning. Whether she understood or not, however, could not be seen, for again her face wore an expression as grave and as unreadable as the Indian's. Torreño turned back to the culprit.

"You have drawn a knife upon my son... who is my flesh, who is me! Would you strike steel into my arm?"

"Heaven forbid, señor."

"This Don Carlos is more than my arm. He is part of my heart. He is that part of me which will live after my death. To touch him is to touch me."

He added aside to the girl: "That is rather neatly spoken, child, is it not?"

"A pretty speech," said she without emotion.

"Señor, my master," said the Indian.

"Well?" queried Torreño.

"I have a horse, señor."

"You are rich, then? But what of the horse?"

"He is mine. He is my slave."

"Ah?"

"When I whistle, he comes. When I speak, he lifts his ears. I need no bridle to control him."

"This fellow," said Torreño, "talks like a man of sense... if I could only understand what he is striking at!"

This was spoken, like the rest of his asides, in French. And the Navajo instantly answered for himself, in the purest French of Paris, where alone French was pure.

"I mean that the horse is my slave, señor."

"By the heavens!" broke out Torreño. "The fellow speaks French, also. Better French than I use myself!"

"Wait, wait!" said the girl in a hurried voice, raising her hand to stop interruptions, and staring fixedly at the Indian. "He has something more to say."

"Aye," said Torreño, nodding. "The horse is your slave."

"Because he will do these things," said the Indian, "and because he is fleetier than the horses, even, which you ride, señor..."

"What! That's a broad lie, Taki!"

At this, the other stiffened a little.

"Nevertheless," he said, "it is true! It is a fleetier horse than any of those you ride. And it is also my slave. But, señor, though I value him more than gold, it is because his speed is all for me. His strength is all mine. No other man can sit on his back! To them, he is a devil."

"You are right, Taki. That is something I can understand!"

"If he were a horse for any man to ride, I should not care. There would be a price upon him. But me he serves for love! Therefore he is priceless."

"Very well... very well! And what has this to do with the knife you drew on my son, the Señor Don Carlos Torreño? By the heavens, Taki, tell me that!"

"If a man were to take a whip to that horse of mine, señor, should I not be happy if he used his heels?"

Passion had been swelling in the face, in the throat of Torreño. Now it relaxed a little.

"I begin to understand! I begin to understand! You, Taki, will have only one master?"

"Señor, you have spoken!"

"Not even if I assign you to another by express command?"

"Not even then, señor."

"God!" thundered the Spaniard. "There is a hangman and a rope for disobedient slaves!"

"Señor," said Taki, "death is half a second; but every day of slavery is a century of hell!"

"Ten thousand devils!" said Torreño. "He talks like a fool."

"Or a philosopher," said the girl, "and still more... like a brave man!"

"But are you not," said Torreño, "at this moment in my service?"

"For another fortnight, only."

"What?"

"It is true."

"Taki, are you mad?"

"No, señor."

"I employ no man except when he is bought or hired for life."

"To me, however, you made an exception."

"In what manner? Have I ever seen you before?"

"There was a crossing of a river," said the other. "A dozen men were riding after one Indian. They shot his horse. He swam the river. They followed, swimming their horses. He killed the first man ashore with his knife, took his horse, and rode on. But the horse was tired. The others behind him gained. He was not ten minutes from death by fire, señor, when he saw you and your party and rode to you and..."

"I remember, I remember!" cried Torreño, clapping his hands together. "It is all as clear as the ringing of a bell! I remember it all! You came to us with Pedro Marva and his hired fighters raging and foaming behind you. I put in between. They were very hot, but not so hot that they did not know me. Ha?"

"They knew you, señor," said the Indian gravely.

Don Carlos was gaping at this story; but Señorita Lucia flushed and bit her lip.

"They knew me," went on Torreño, "and when I told them that they could not have the man... because his riding pleased me... they turned around and went off, cursing. However, I paid Marva for his dead man... and all was well!"

"It's true... it is very true," said the Indian.

"You paid for the life of a man? A white man?" asked the girl.

"All things have a price... in this country," said the Spaniard. She did not answer, but she looked around her on the bald, vast sweep of plain and mountain. She looked up, and there were tiny, circling dots which ruled the sky—the buzzards. And she shuddered a very little.

"But how," said the Spaniard, "are you to be in my service only a fortnight longer? I remember it all. You were to serve me until you had paid for the price of the man. And twelve hundred pesos could not be worked out in ten lives of a shepherd. How have you made the money?"

"There are more than eleven hundred pesos," said the Navajo, "already in the hands of your treasurer. He has kept the account. I have the rest to pay in soon."

"Rascal!" said the Spaniard. "You have not been in my service for six months."

"Señor, there are ways of making money, even for a poor shepherd."

"Who leaves his sheep?"

"Only at night, when a friend will come to watch them."

"Ah? Ah? You are a worker by night, Taki? And what do you find at night?"

"There was a great rider of the roads. There was a Captain Sandoval..."

"He was killed three months ago. What of him? I was away."

"There was a reward on his head."

"Of five hundred pesos. Yes."

"The reward was paid to me, señor."

"The devil fly off with me! The terrible Sandoval... and one Indian killed him? How in the name of heaven?"

The Indian turned. His hand flashed back and forward. A line of light left it and went out in the trunk of a narrow sapling, which shivered with the shock. There stood the knife, buried to the hilt in the hard wood.

"Name of heaven!" whispered Don Carlos, and touched his heart, as though just there he felt the resistless death slide in.

"Ah?" said Torreño. "It was in that way?"

"It was in that way."

"And he did not touch you?"

"His pistol bullet just touched my hair, señor."

"That accounts for five hundred pesos only."

"There was another... a friend of Sandoval. Some said it was his younger brother, and he was a greater man; there were six hundred 18 pesos on his head. That money became mine."

"Now I remember that it was said an Indian killed poor Juan Sandoval. But it was you, Taki? I am growing old... things happen on this place and I do not know of them! Still, Taki, that leaves a hundred pieces of silver. How have you saved them?"

"There are the dice, señor."

"A head hunter, a gambler..." began Don Carlos.

"And a musician," said the girl. "In what way did you learn to play the flute, Taki?"

"Señor Arreto, a great Spaniard, came to fight against my people. I was wounded and captured. But in the fighting he watched me and thought I was worth keeping... as a slave. He took me back to Europe with him. It was amusing, señorita, to see the poor Indian learn to dance, to play the flute, to bow and to talk like a real man. So I was taught. I went with him among fine people. When people talked of his journeys, he pointed to me. It proved that he was a great hunter. Imagine, señorita, a hunter come back from India with a tamed tiger in his company to follow at his heels like a dog!"

This ironical speech was so delivered that neither Torreño nor his rather dull son quite caught the point of it, but the girl smiled faintly.

"And so you learned to play the flute?"

"Yes, señorita. My day was divided in three parts. There was the fencing master, the dancing master, the music master. In the afternoons I was taken forth and shown to the people. Everyone wished to hear me play the flute. Now and then a brave lady who was not too proud, permitted me to dance with her. And twice bravos were hired to fight with me and prove what I had learned from the fencing masters."

"And...?"

"I killed them both, señorita."

"Then what followed?"

"When Señor Arreto died, he gave me my liberty. I took my little money and bought a certain fine horse which I had seen. The price was low, because the horse was a tiger and would not be tamed. But I, who had been tamed, understood how to manage him. With that horse I returned to this country."

"One instant, Taki," broke in Don Carlos, raising his hand and delighted to make a point. "If you are a master of the sword, why would you hunt your head... with a knife?"

"The teeth which God gives us," said the Indian, bowing, "are better than false ones for eating, señor."

“What do you think of him?” asked Torreño of the girl.

“He is enchanting!” she whispered back.

“An enchanting liar!” he said. “There never was an Indian in the world who could manage a weapon so formal as a sword. Shall I prove it?”

“If it can be done!”

“Ride back,” said Torreño to his son, “and bring two foils. Quickly.”

There was no need for the last word. All commands of Torreño implied the necessity for speed, and Don Carlos was instantly rushing back at the full flight of his horse toward that waiting caravan.

The girl drew closer to Torreño.

“For the little time that remains for him to serve you,” she said, “let me have this man for a servant!”

“He will not be alive in ten minutes,” said Torreño. “You will see that he handles the sword like a fool. And when that happens, I intend to shoot that liar down like the dog that he is. No Indian can kill a white, even a villainous white, and remain a good Indian!”

She grew pale, started to speak; then changed her mind and said simply: “But if he fences well?”

“That is impossible!”

“But?”

“Then he is yours, but give the dog a muzzle!”

## Chapter IV

### A Wager that Taki Wins.

DON CARLOS came back at full speed, as he had gone, and he brought with him two foils in their scabbards, with leather covers over the hilts. Torreño took them, unbuckled the flaps which secured the hilts, and drew forth the blades. One by one, he whipped them through the air until they sang.

“Most people,” he said to the girl, “use for their foils dull iron things, or poor steel that bends to nothing after a strong touch or two. But these are of the finest old Spanish steel, specially made for my boy in order that he might have exercise.”

Her face lighted a little. “You love to fence, then, señor?”

“I? Love it? The devil take it. One good broad sword is worth a dozen such great darning needles, I say, or a saber at least. I have seen a Pole use a saber that it would have done your eyes good to watch him, but this stamping and parading and retreating and advancing and sweating, and bowing and scraping... bah! It makes me laugh to see it! When one good pistol bullet would put an end to it all!”

The light which had flickered into her eyes went out again.

“Here, Carlos,” he said to his son. “Take one of these.”

“For what, sir?” asked the son.

“Taki says that he’s a fencer. If he can touch you... well, he is! If he cannot... he is a dead Indian!”

He drew out a huge horse pistol as he spoke and flourished it.

"Do you hear me, Taki?"

"Yes."

"Do you agree?"

"It is to see if I have lied about the fencing lessons," said the Navajo. "It is very just!"

"*Señor!*" cried the girl. "You do not mean it!"

"Peace, Lucia," said Torreño, bending his brows upon her. "Peace, child. Do not question the workings of my mind. You are a bright little thing, Lucia. But do not trot your wits over the same trail that I follow. For that is dangerous, and I would not abide it. I live alone, my girl. I live alone, I promise you. I open my purposes to whom I please. And to those who do not please me, I keep them closed. And so... for that!"

The girl had turned white. But she kept her eyes on the ground, while poor Don Carlos looked upon her in an agony, aching to comfort her or to speak a word to her, but not daring to move or to speak. He merely accepted the foil from the hand of his father and automatically stood on guard.

"Now, let me see," said Torreño, with a serene brow, as if he had already forgotten the manner in which he had trod roughshod over the girl, "let me see you work for your life, Taki, for your life. Liars are usually interesting people... but not when they're Indians. A truthful Indian or a dead one is my motto. Come! Engage!"

The blades crossed as he spoke, and Don Carlos, impatient to have the dirty work over with, with a curl of fine disdain on his lip as he faced his humble opponent, put the other's blade sharply aside and, continuing his point in the same motion, lunged full home. That is to say, he drove straight at the heart of the Indian, and the latter opposed no guard, yet managed to escape the button of the Spaniard by a supple bending of his body.

"You see?" said Torreño to the girl. "The fool knows nothing of the sword. The knife is as far as his brute heart can aspire."

"He is a musician, señor," said the girl. "This ring you have given me against... his service to me... that he wins!"

The other gaped at her. "Win, Lucia? Win? Are you mad? No, he is as good as dead already!"

"Nevertheless," she said, "though I ask your pardon for denying you, he is a fine fencer. See!"

Don Carlos, angered by the first lack of fortune, pressed hotly in, following lunge with thrust and thrust with lunge. But the Indian, still parrying only a little, escaped the point still by constantly retreating and by the deftness of his footwork.

"Any fool can run away from trouble," said Don Francisco. "Taki, Taki, I wish to see fencing, not a foot race. Stand to him..."

He had not finished off his oath at his leisure when Taki stopped, indeed seemed to flick aside the blade of Don Carlos, and instantly dipped his own blade at Don Carlos. Then he leaped back and lowered his foil.

"A touch!" cried the girl. "He has won!"

"Seven thousand devils!" groaned Torreño. "Carlos... idiot... have you allowed him...?"

"I hardly felt it... I am sure it was not a touch," panted Don Carlos.

"It could not have been a touch!"

"I saw his foil bend as the button touched you, Carlos," said the girl coldly.

"He did not feel it... I did not see it!" exclaimed the tyrant. "It was not a touch! Engage!"

Don Carlos made a strange gesture to the girl, as though disclaiming this lack of sportsmanship. Then he hurried to cross swords with Taki. The latter showed not the slightest disappointment or excitement. But he was a little more gravely watchful as he engaged. Neither was Don Carlos so impetuous. He had been foolishly hasty before. He summoned all of his care at this moment, and he was not only the product of the finest teaching in the world, but he was a credit to that teaching.

But to the amazement of them all, Taki now stood his ground without flinching, putting aside the lunges and the thrusts of Don Carlos with the most consummate ease and at the same time, so fluid were his own movements, that he was able to talk, slowly, but without panting.

"I am forbidden to retreat, señor," he said to Don Carlos. "Therefore you will forgive me if I stand my ground for an instant before you. As for the last touch, it was upon your belt, and it was for that reason that you did not feel it, I have no doubt. The next time, with ten thousand pardons, I shall try to lodge the button against your throat... against the hollow of your throat, señor, if I can be so fortunate, for the sake of making that touch an unmistakable one! You will forgive me for it, señor?"

"Why, curse you," said Don Carlos through his teeth as he worked, "that time will never come!"

"Look!" said the girl. "Look!"

It was, indeed, a strange sight to watch the Indian. A slight wind had come up and blew his long hair back from his head, showing that lean face to greater advantage. And there was still the same quiet, thoughtful expression in his eyes. His head canted a little to one side, as though his opponent were at a distance. His look was rather that of a gunner than a swordsman. Only, from time to time, his foil was a wall of the most solid steel against which the assaults of Don Carlos clashed noisily but could not break through.

Then: "Señor, a thousand, ten thousand pardons, as they say in Paris. But... there is a necessity."

And he attacked. For an instant Don Carlos bore up against the attack like a swimmer against a turning tide. Then he was borne back while his father shouted in a rage.

"Is this the result of the money I have spent on you? Oh, fool! Oh, dolt! I wish to heaven that the Indian's point was unbated! I wish it were through your heart! I have a lump, a clod for a son! Oh, what a shame this is to me! It is an Indian, not a gentleman who stands before you, Carlos! Are you sleeping? And if..."

His voice broke off short. The button of the Navajo at that instant lodged against the throat of Carlos with such force that the strong blade of the foil doubled up like a supple switch in his hand. Carlos dropped his sword, caught at his throat, and then sank gasping to the ground.

It was Taki who raised him first. But he received across the body a slashing stroke from the riding whip of Torreño, who instantly flung himself from his horse and caught his son in his arms.



“Carlos!” he cried. “Is it well with you? You are not hurt? I shall kill him if your skin is so much as broken! If...”

Carlos recovered speech with a groan.

“He is the finest fencer in the world. Father, this is no Indian. Or else he is a devil disguised!” He added: “Let him alone. Don’t harm him. I had rather know that last trick than have a million pesos!”

“You have had the finest blades in Milan and Paris to teach you. You come home to me to take lessons from a Navajo? You have my flesh and my blood in you. Otherwise, Carlos, I should call you a fool outright. Lucia, that man is yours!”

He mounted his horse and rode furiously away.

“He will never forgive me!” said Don Carlos sadly, still fingering his throat. “As for you, Taki,” he said, turning a black scowl upon the Indian, “I’ll teach you to curse this day!”

The Indian smiled. And there was more scorn in that smile than in a torrent of wordy abuse. Don Carlos stormed like a leashed dog.

“You redskinned snake,” he cried.

“Señor,” said the Indian, “I belong now to the lady; and as her servant I dare not submit to such words. Our swords were bated, señor. But I have a second knife which is not.”

“Carlos,” said the girl, “don’t speak with him again. Taki, you must leave the sheep where they are. You must follow us. You have a horse which you love too much to keep far away from you. Where is it now?”

“Waiting, señorita.”

“Bring, it then.”

He whistled high and shrill as the scream of a hawk; and then, as they waited, they heard a rush of hoofs, and a shining bay stallion whipped into view. He came up with the wind and the sun rippling in his mane and in his tail. At the side of Taki he paused, tossing up his head and snorting at the strangers.

“Saddle and bridle him,” said the girl, “if you can. He is a glorious thing, Taki. I have never seen such a beauty... not in the king’s stables!”

“He is saddled,” said Taki, throwing a blanket over the back of the stallion and securing it with a single cinch. And, fastening a light halter of thin rawhide over his head: “He is bridled,” he added.

“Then come after us,” said the girl. “You have a fortnight of service remaining, Taki. That fortnight belongs to me!”

## **Chapter V**

### **Beginning a Fortnight of Service.**

THE apartment of Lucia in the rest house, which the cavalcade reached, was like that in which she had spent her first night after leaving the ship, except that it was, perhaps, a little more complete. She herself went about restlessly examining everything. But she said not a word. It was her aunt, the pale and patient lady

who had chaperoned her niece to this far land, who broke forth into eulogy and into wonder.

“It is like a scene from some biblical story, Lucia,” she declared, “illustrated in the concrete! What a wonderful and strange country this is!”

“A wonderful and strange Francisco Torreño,” said the girl without emotion.

Her own chambers consisted of a large room at a corner of the house, with two small, deep windows cut through each wall; in those casement recesses were small climbing vines whose roots extended to the outside of the wall, where they were sunk in pots of rich, wet soil. There were chairs and couches, crudely made but cushioned to softness and everywhere—on chairs, on couches, on the floor beneath their feet—were fine sheepskins washed to a dazzling whiteness, and combed until they were light as a mist before the face of the moon. To the side of this chamber in one direction were two small bedchambers, each well-nigh filled with gigantic four-posters, one for Lucia and one for her aunt, Anna d’Arquista. On the other side of her reception room were two other apartments to correspond with the sleeping rooms. One was the bath; the other was a small chapel. In the making of the bath alone a very world of labor had been expended, for in digging the foundation for the house, the builders had struck a solid rock, dark green like sea water. This had been chiseled out to an appropriate depth and little steps cut in the side, so that the lady Lucia might walk down into her bath. The remainder of the floor of the bathroom was paved with great slabs of red limestone, soft and yet porous, delicate to the touch of a bared foot. And there was a red sandstone bench made of three large pieces of stone, roughly shaped but with a polished sitting surface. Into this room the servants were now bringing the heated water—an endless chain of dark-faced Indian women with earthen jars of water poised on their shoulders pacing gracefully in, each with a white flash of the eye as she passed the Señorita Lucia d’Arquista, seeing in her, indeed, the future empress who would control their destinies.

There are few who do not care to make their first impression an agreeable one, particularly to those who are socially their inferiors. But the señorita was one of the few. If there were kindness, gentleness in her heart, she carefully disguised it. If she looked at that passing line, it was in a detached, impersonal manner, as one might look at a painting.

And each of the serving women went on with downcast glance fixed upon the brown heels of the one who went before. And the bath was gradually filled, each earthen jar discharging a crystal stream of heated water into the bath where it was turned instantly into pale green.

Last of all came two young girls, olive-skinned, solemn-eyed, graceful as young trees in a wind as they walked, strong as panthers, beautiful as evening. They passed into the room of the bath. They took from small, wooden boxes handfuls of a powder which they dropped into the quivering surface of the water; instantly a delicate fragrance stole through the chambers, not to be identified, languorously sweet as the perfume which a warm and lazy spring wind gathers from a whole field of mingled wild flowers. Then they came back before Lucia. They were sent by the master, they said, and they were to prepare the señorita for the bath, if it was her pleasure.

She spoke not to them but to her aunt in quick French: "You see, madame, that one does not live in this country; one is to be carried through life by slaves!"

She turned her back and went to the door of the little chapel.

"Hush, Lucia!" said Anna d'Arquista in the same language. "Hush, child. One cannot tell what ears will hear you."

"Ah, yes," said the girl, without turning to answer, "you feel it, also. Even the empty air has ears and is spying on us! But look, madame, how this man who does not know a prayer has fitted up a chapel for me!"

It was complete. There was a jeweled crucifix. There was a little gilded Madonna holding a child whose tiny hand was raised to teach. There was a tall, pointed window filled with stained glass beyond price. On the floor before the Madonna was the skin of a great mountain lion. A strange prayer rug!

Anna d'Arquista came to look.

"All this," she said, "for a single night's resting place! What a miracle of wealth, what a king this Torreño is! And who knows, Lucia? There may be a religious reverence in his heart, also!"

"A religious fiddlesticks," said Lucia. "If a man has jewels, he shows them, does he not? All that he cares for in this place is the cost of making it. Look in the bath! How many hand strokes to make it... for this one evening only, perhaps!"

"It is wonderful, Lucia."

"Aye," said the girl, turning suddenly and throwing out her hands, "and beautiful, too! If one may be a queen, even over barbarians, why not?"

She went toward her bedroom and the two attendants followed, with stony faces. And poor Anna d'Arquista sank into a chair and laid her head in her hands, and wept. For she loved her niece with all her heart, having mothered her, or tried to, for ten years. But where was all this swelling discontent in the girl pointing? To disaster, she felt, but disaster of what sort she hardly knew. It was a wretched business, she felt, and had always felt since the moment Lucia had been sold to this stranger from a strange land, sold not because the head of the d'Arquista family lacked money or lacked power, but because he was avaricious of more.

A curtain had been drawn across the bedroom door. Behind it she could hear voices—that of Lucia, like a small crystal bell, and then the soft, husky tones of the half-breed girls. They came out. The masks of stone had fallen from the attendants. They were smiling. Their happy eyes watched over their mistress as she walked a little before them, wrapped in a robe of blue silk, delicately brocaded. They entered the bath, the curtain was drawn; and then out to Anna d'Arquista floated noises of splashing water, and laughter sweet as the singing of birds—laughter from three throats!

Oh, to be young, thought Anna d'Arquista. What a miracle! What a miracle of grace and gracious power!

And to be beautiful! What virtue of a saint could balance against that gift? Aye, what could be surer of heaven itself, in the end? She pressed her cold thin hands over her heart, because the ache in it made her faint.

Then, stealthily, she slipped into the chapel. She kneeled on the tawny lion skin. She rested her forehead against the altar of red limestone, and she prayed, or tried to pray. Afterward, she went back into the room, but time had hurried past her more quickly than she knew. That bath was ended; Lucia had been

dressed; all the weariness of the day had been smoothed from her face; her eyes were filled with a reckless light.

"Find Taki," she said. "Send him to me."

They were gone instantly, hurrying to the door; then, as it closed behind them, the scurry of their running feet was faintly heard as they raced, to be first in filling this command of their new mistress.

"They are sweet children," said Lucia.

Such a child to speak with love and with pity of children! And yet, to be sure, there was always something old in her niece. There was always a power of knowledge which made even Anna d'Arquista feel sometimes like a foolish infant.

Another step came to the door and a hand knocked once.

"That is Taki," said the girl, her face brightening. "You have heard me tell about him. You have not seen him yet. When he comes in, watch his steps. They are like a tiger's! As swift, as strong, as noiseless. He is a dreadful creature, Aunt Anna!"

She called: "Come!"

The door opened; Taki glided in before them. There he stood in front of the closed door, his arms folded across his breast, his eyes upon the floor submissively—but it was the submission of a trained lion which passes through attitudes that have no meaning in its heart.

"Look!" Lucia whispered. "He is magnificent, is he not?"

"And terrible," breathed the other.

He seemed larger, indeed, than he had before. Among the open hills he fitted more easily into the picture. Here he seemed inches taller, stronger. Where his arms were folded, the muscles bulged beneath the sleeves of his shirt.

"You have come quickly, Taki," she said.

"I have been waiting," he said.

"You knew that I would send?"

"Yes, mistress."

She paused a moment, thoughtfully.

"That word, Taki," she said, "comes awkwardly from you, I think."

"I have been a free man... mistress," he said.

"Do you think that my service will be very hard?" she asked him.

"Ah," he said, with a stern smile touching his lips, "even to be the slave of a man is a knife in the heart of a slave!"

She started at this.

"I think," she said to Anna d'Arquista, "that the rascal is impertinent!"

"Hush! Peace!" gasped out Anna d'Arquista. "If you rouse him, he will murder us both, crash through the wall, and escape!"

Lucia d'Arquista laughed, but she shivered, also, and seemed to find that thrill of dread not unpleasant.

"And to serve a woman, any woman," she said, "is infinitely worse than to serve the worst of men?"

He remained silent.

"Did you hear me, Taki?"

He said at last: "Why should I speak when your answer is already in your own mind?"

And his eyes, for the first time, flashed up from the floor and looked into her own, not with a fleeting glance, but steadily, quietly.

## Chapter VI

### Lucia's Servant Interviewed.

IT made the lady frown; then it made her flush. As for Aunt Anna, she was covered with terror.

"You are terribly unwise, my dear!" she whispered to her niece.

But Lucia merely waved such fears aside with a graceful gesture.

"You don't understand," she said. "And I think that I do... a little."

This rather mysterious speech there was no time to explain.

"How long," said Lucia, "were you in Europe?"

"A year and two months, madame."

"A year and two months?" echoed Lucia.

Then she leaned back in her chair and began to smile like one who has solved a difficulty. She nodded at him again.

"One can easily see," she said, "how you could afford to spend so long a time on your studies."

He regarded her rather anxiously, but did not speak.

"A year and two months," said Lucia, "completed your liberal education. Well, well, it is delightful to hear of such natural talents! There are some men who labor all their lives to learn how to fence, and even then they succeed only poorly. I remember that my father, even when he was quite an old man, used to spend an hour every day with the professor. He still takes fencing lessons twice a week! And I have a brother who has dreamed of nothing since he was a boy except to manage a rapier. But you, Taki, in the course of a year and two months, have reached such a point of skill that neither my father nor my brother could compare with you. I have seen them; I am sure that Señor Don Carlos Torreño fences as well as they do. And indeed, Don Carlos has made it the greatest work of his life... his fencing, I mean! It shows a very real and a very rare talent, Taki, that you have been able to learn so much in a short year and two months. You must have practiced very hard constantly!"

He was still watching her with a shade of anxiety; but he answered: "I was constantly at work, señorita."

"But I forget! I forget! In that time you had also your lessons in dancing, in which I suppose you progressed as well as you did in fencing? Perhaps... even better?"

"I became a very stupid and very poor dancer, señorita."

She laughed at him. "Will you tell me that when you confess that the ladies would dance with you?"

"They were curious, señorita, to see the poor barbarian act like a civilized man."

“Nonsense,” she exclaimed, with the surety of absolute knowledge. “No woman would make herself appear ridiculous for the sake of curiosity. Not in such circles.”

His face was covered instantly with his habitual mask.

“However, the dancing and the fencing is not all. By no means. There is the singular purity of your French, Taki. Most strange that one should pick up so perfect an accent in a single year. I, for instance, have worked half my life like a slave to learn that language. And still, any child could excel me! Indeed, Taki, you are very apt. You shame my father, my brother, Don Carlos, and me; you excel us so very far, Taki.”

He answered neither word nor look but still stared past her with a sort of bland indifference.

“But I have forgotten the most important thing of all!” she exclaimed, “and the surest proof that you are a genius, Taki. You were able to master the flute in a single year... master it to a perfect smoothness. In a single year... that difficult instrument. In a single year, Taki, to become a master flute player, a dangerous and polished fencer, a dancer of grace at least; in a single year you have equipped yourself also with the very French of Paris. What additional study was there required to add Spanish to that list, for I see that you speak it with great precision. And,” she added with a sudden change of voice, and speaking in excellent English: “What other languages are you a master of beside your own Navajo?”

“Of none, señorita” he answered, and then caught himself and bit his lip.

“You answer me in Spanish,” she said, “but you understand the question I put in English.”

“When I was a boy,” said Taki, “I knew a trader who was from the colony of Virginia. I learned English from him.”

She merely smiled, her eyes bright and hard as she examined him.

“Admirable, Taki,” she said. “In all things you are excellent, in all things! Perhaps when you were a boy you also knew a missionary who taught you French, a generous soldier who instructed you in fencing, a kind Spaniard who schooled you in Spanish grammar, and some dapper dancing master who went among the Navajos to teach them ballroom steps in their spare moments! So you had received the basis of your knowledge and the year in Paris was merely to add the perfect finish to what you already knew!”

He did not reply, standing tall and stiff before her. There was no trace of emotion in him, except that the muscles of his folded arms swelled and rippled.

“That is all,” she said. “You may go now!”

He vanished instantly.

“Lucia, Lucia!” said her aunt. “I would never have dreamed of it. But you seemed to have proved that he has told us a great series of lies! Of course in one year he never could have accomplished what he claims.”

Lucia was walking up and down the room, a faint smile on her lips. She did not answer at once.

“But the first thing is to tell Señor Torreño!” said Anna d’Arquista.

“Do you know what the señor would do?” asked the girl.

“Punish him, of course.”

“Punish him by stripping him naked, giving him a start of a hundred paces, and then loosing the hounds after him! I heard him tell how he occasionally disciplines unfaithful servants.”

“He is a stern man, indeed!” said the elderly lady.

“If he were not so rich, he would not be called merely stern!”

“Lucia, what are you saying?”

“What I think.”

“Oh, my dear, how dreadful!”

“To say what I think?”

“No, but I mean...”

“That I should not think? Yes, that is right. I should close my eyes. I should learn how to smile blindly. That would be the best, of course. It is sinful to see that he who is to be my father-in-law is brutal, savage, conceited, narrow.”

“Lucia!”

“And it is a greater sin to guess that the gallant Don Carlos is a mere fool!”

“Ah, Lucia, God forgive me for listening to you! Child, child, what are you saying?”

“Nothing, nothing, of course! Nothing that should be remembered. I am preparing myself to be blind and deaf the rest of my life.”

She added sharply: “Because of this marriage, how many new estates will my father be able to buy, Aunt Anna? Can you guess that?”

Aunt Anna turned gray with horror and with dread. And her niece turned the subject.

“No,” she said, “I shall give poor Taki a better start than Señor Torreño would give him. By this time the bay stallion has whipped him away toward the mountains faster than any wolf could run! Well, I trust that he rides well and fast and far. He is a strange man, Aunt Anna. Did you see the shadow over those black eyes of his when I showed him that I understood? Not a muscle of his face changed... except once!”

“Ah, Lucia, he may do some terrible thing if you do not warn the Señor Torreño. I fear that this Taki has come with us for some purpose that is not good... now that he is gone, I begin to be terribly afraid of him. When he was here, well, it was as though the skin of the mountain lion had come to life and the great beast lay crouched in the chapel, watching us with burning eyes. Chills and shudders went through me while Taki was in the room, here!”

“And through me,” said the girl; but she smiled.

“What will you do now?”

“Wait another five minutes.”

“And then? Tell the señor?”

Lucia, instead of answering, dropped into a chair and began to study the changing light through the windows. The sky beyond was turning to a deeper blue as the sunset time came nearer. The minutes passed with Aunt Anna turning in her mind all that her niece had actually said and all that she had inferred. She dared not carry what she guessed to an actual conclusion. All that she knew was that her mind was full of confusion and dread of what would come of this unhappy marriage. Lucia rose presently.

“It is time,” she said. “He should be two leagues away by this time. If he is not”

There was a little bronze bell standing on a polished table in the corner of the room. She struck it with the padded mallet which lay beside it, and one of her two attendants appeared at once.

"Find Taki," she commanded.

In two minutes the messenger appeared again.

"He is here," she said. "Shall I bring him in?"

"He is here?" breathed the girl.

"In the patio."

She slipped to the window and looked out. There stood Taki, the ruddy light from the west in his face, his expression as woodenly impassive as ever.

"Tell him," she said, "to wait there."

The servant bowed and left.

"Oh, Lucia?" breathed the other.

"I have told him that I know he is a liar," said Lucia. "And since he dares to stay... what Torreño does to him is on his own head. But what can his purpose be in remaining? What is in his barbarous mind, Aunt Anna?"

"God alone can read their thoughts... these solemn Indians!" said Anna d'Arquista. "Perhaps he intends to murder us all while we're asleep and carry... our scalps... ah! You must send to Señor Torreño at once!"

"Yet," murmured the girl, "what a dull place this would be with the wild man gone! What a dull place. Hush! What is that?"

A thin thread of whistling, carrying a weird strain of music, floated into the room from the court. Anna d'Arquista hurried to the window and saw Taki, the Indian, sitting on a low stone bench with the flute at his lips.

"Do you hear? Do you hear?" asked Lucia in great excitement.

"It is beautifully played... yes!"

"But the words... the words!"

"What are they?"

"It is an old Scotch ballad. Listen!"

She began to sing:

*"Ye highlands and ye lowlands.  
Oh, where hae ye been?  
They hae slain the Earl of Murray  
And they laid him on the green.  
"Now wae be to ye, Huntly,  
And wharefore did ye sae?  
I bade ye bring him wi' you  
And forbade ye him to slay!"*

There the music of the flute stopped.

"It is his message! It is his message!" breathed the girl.

"Lucia, what under heaven do you mean? What message in the playing of a flute?"

"But the words of the old song, Aunt Anna! Don't you see? He puts himself in my hands!"

"Lucia, go instantly to Señor Torreño!"



“Not for a million pesos!”

“Then I...”

“Aunt Anna, if you betray him, I shall never forgive you. Never!”

## Chapter VII

### Guadalmo.

IN the meantime, as the dusk settled, there began through the house a great bustle. Servants ran here and there. Beyond the court, men were seen putting up tents. Everywhere were voices of command, and scurrying feet. It would have been a simple thing for Lucia to call her maids and ask her question of them. But she preferred to go to the window and speak through it to the Indian. He rose and came before her instantly.

“Someone has come, Taki. Run and learn who it is.”

“It is the Señor Hernandez Guadalmo. He has come to take shelter here with my master.”

“How could you know all of this, Taki, without leaving this little court?”

“No man other than Señor Guadalmo would travel with so great a train. Besides, I have heard them speak his name as they ran about.”

“He is some great man, then, traveling with such a train?”

“He is a friend of the governor. He has monopolies. He is very rich.”

“Does he not carry his own tents then?”

“Those are his tents they are putting up yonder. But Señor Guadalmo prefers to sleep behind strong walls, señorita.”

“Why is that? Is he afraid of the night air?”

Taki smiled a little, a very little—more with his eyes than with his lips.

“The night air is sometimes very bad. Men go to sleep strong and very well. They are dead when they waken.”

“Taki! Is there some frightful plague here in California?”

“Yes, señorita.”

“What are the symptoms of it?”

“The instant they are seen, the man is already dead.”

“You speak of the men. Does it never touch the women?”

“Rarely, señorita.”

“This is very strange. What are the symptoms, then?”

“They are different,” said Taki. “Sometimes the man who was strong and well goes to sleep and is found in the morning with a great cut across his throat. Sometimes there is no outward mark, but his body is swollen...”

“Do you mean throat-cutting and poison, Taki?”

“But the symptom that is usually found,” said Taki, without answering her less obliquely, “is the handle of a knife standing over the man’s breast, with the blade fixed in his heart.”

She frowned at him seriously. “It is a murderous country, then? Why?”

“The law is far away.”

“And this Guadalmo is very much afraid?”

“Very, señorita”

“Is he a coward?”

“He is a famous fighter... a very brave man. In Spain his name was famous.”

“Guadalmo, the duelist! Is it he?”

“It is, señorita!”

“I have heard that he feared nothing... not even God, or the devil.”

“There was a time when he did not. He would ride alone a thousand miles.”

“What changed him?”

“There is one man who follows him. Five times he has tried to get the life of Señor Guadalmo. And five times he has nearly succeeded. Therefore, Señor Guadalmo has surrounded himself with great warriors. They would sooner get out their swords than take off their hats. They had rather fight than eat. These men protect him.”

“Who is this man who follows Guadalmo?”

“No one can tell. It is a mystery. Some people say that it is the devil himself who has come for Señor Guadalmo, because no man would dare to face him.”

“That is nonsense!”

“There are others who believe that it is merely the brother of a man Señor Guadalmo killed.”

“Tell me of that.”

“A hundred long marches to the East, señorita, there are many cities.”

“The English colonies. I know.”

“A trader came from them. He was called John Gidden. He had a ship which he commanded, and he traded here for hides. Señor Guadalmo and he dined together one day, and quarreled over some little thing. But when the wine had died in them, Señor Guadalmo sent for Gidden and told him he was sorry and asked him to come to his house. Señor Gidden came. In the night they quarreled again. They fought, and with swords. Señor Gidden was killed.”

“If it was fair fight, Taki...”

“It was fair fight, señorita. This Señor Gidden was one who lived by the sea. He had strong hands and a fearless heart. But the only weapons he knew were a cutlass and a pistol. A rapier was strange to him. However, he fought Señor Guadalmo, the great duelist, with a rapier. Therefore, being a fool, he was killed.”

“That has an ugly sound, Taki.”

“If he had not been a fool, he would have fought with a cutlass or with a saber.”

“Perhaps he was not allowed?”

Taki made a gesture.

“As for that, I cannot tell. But he was killed; and afterward a letter came to Señor Guadalmo from the brother of this Señor Gidden, saying that he was coming to find Guadalmo and to kill him. And, after that, five times a masked man has set on Señor Guadalmo, as I have said, and five times Señor Guadalmo’s life has been saved by a miracle. Therefore, he loves strong walls around him when he sleeps at night, and he has come this evening to beg a shelter from Señor Torreño.”

“This is a strange story, Taki. However, I wish also to tell you that it has given me a thought. You are a fighting man, Taki.”

"I, señorita? Among the Navajos I was a chief and a warrior. But the poor Indian is a child among the white men. His hand may be strong, but his wits are weak."

She chuckled. "However," she said, "since there is this plague in the land, I feel that I need a guard and, while you are with me, you must be my protector, Taki."

"The señorita has commanded," said Taki, his eye as blank as ever.

"I pray to the Great Spirit that my hand may be strong for her."

"You speak sadly, Taki."

"Ah," said Taki, "how can the guard of fighting men help us when there are other dangers which fighting men cannot face?"

"That sounds like a riddle. What dangers, Taki?"

"I have spoken too much," said Taki. "I am not the guard who can help the señorita."

"What guard should I have, then?"

"A father confessor," said the Indian calmly.

"A priest! And what would he do for me?"

"He would listen to the troubles which are in your heart, señorita!"

She had almost invited the blow but, when it came, it shocked her. She stiffened a little and drew back from the window.

"Your tongue," she said, "runs faster than your horse!"

At that he made her a ceremonious bow. Certainly the lessons of the dancing master had not been entirely thrown away upon Taki. As for the girl, she did not pause to wonder over his grace but she turned in anger to her Aunt Anna and saw, from her grave, sad face, that she had overheard everything.

"I shall go instantly to Señor Torreño," said the girl, "and tell him what I suspect of Taki."

Aunt Anna d'Arquista merely shook her head.

"I think you will not, Lucia," she said. "I pray God may rule us for the best!"

She seemed so close to tears that Lucia dared not speak again, the moment. She stormed into her room and there she flung herself down on her bed. Her face was burning. And cold little pangs of shame shot through her heart.

She had thought that she controlled her tragedy so well that not a human being in the world could ever have guessed at it. But here was a wild Indian who had looked through her at a glance and, in a moment, had read all her secrets. She wanted to destroy him utterly. And yet, after a time, she found herself sitting up, musing, and almost smiling.

"He is a clever rascal," said the girl to herself. "And if I were in a great need, he could help me!"

She was called for the night meal after this, and met the guest, Guadalmo. He was a tall, wide-shouldered man of about forty, with a grim face and a gray head that might have been ten years older; but his body was still young and supple—the body of the professional duelist. He bore traces of his encounters—a ragged scar in his right cheek and another which crossed one eye and kept it half closed so that he bore, continually, a quizzical, penetrating expression. He had donned his most magnificent clothes for this occasion. He wore, above all, old-fashioned lace cuffs and a great lace collar worth a fortune in skill and labor. It made an odd setting for his forbidding features.

He was a courtly man as well as a warrior, however. And he entertained the girl with talk of Paris and the French court, full of little cuts and thrusts of gossip. He was one of those who can speak with an easy familiarity of the great men of the world and seem to bring their presences into the room. Don Carlos listened to him, agape with delight.

"Tomorrow," said Don Carlos, "I shall beg five minutes of your time to teach me some clever thrust. I have been shamed by an Indian today, with the foils. I must have some revenge on him!"

Guadalmo raised his brows. "An Indian," he said, "who fences?"

"The skill of a fiend incarnate," said Torreño, breaking in. "I should give a great deal to see you cross blades with him, señor!"

Señor Guadalmo smiled.

"For Indians," he said, "I keep a whip... and bullets. I advise you, my dear friends, to do the same."

Here a door behind Guadalmo swung silently open, but he knew it by the soft sighing of the draft, and leaped violently to his feet, setting all the dishes on the table in a great jangle. He had a pistol in his hand as he whirled, but he saw behind him only an empty threshold, dimly lighted.

"Señor! Señor!" cried the host. "One would think that you feared the Black Rider even in the midst of my household!"

"Set a man to watch the door," asked Guadalmo, reseating himself, but still with a pale face. "I have a profound respect for your household and your management of it, Señor Torreño. But when one has to do with the devil... one needs caution... caution... and again, caution!"

The effect of that fright was still ghastly in his face, but with an inward struggle he forced a smile to his lips again.

He took up a glass of white wine in which the imaged light of a candle flame was trembling; and the tremor, the girl noted, was not in the flame of the candle, but in the hand of Guadalmo. She observed and she wondered. And when a breath of air through the open window set the draperies behind her shivering and whispering, she trembled in turn, as though the ghost of the Black Rider were behind her chair!

## **Chapter VIII**

### **The Black Rider.**

WHO is the Black Rider? It was the commanding question in the mind of the girl when she went out into the patio beneath the stars with the others. From the little white tent city around the main house, all the retainers of Don Francisco were waxing merry and raising songs from time to time and, at the end of each day's work, the followers of the worthy don received due portions of that colorless brandy which the Mexican Indian loves and which burns the brain of the white man like a blue flame. But even their singing was subdued, for Don Francisco hated all loud noise except that of his own strong voice.

Obviously no questions about the Black Rider could be asked while Señor Guadalmo was himself present; but after an uneasy moment he bade the rest good night and withdrew to his appointed quarters for sleep; so he said. But during an interval which followed, they could hear the stir of men.

"Guadalmo is filling the house with his guards," said Torreño. "Look! Even under his window!"

They saw two stalwarts, each with sword and carbine, take post beneath the windows of Guadalmo's room. There they remained, huge black specters.

"I have an idea!" said the girl. "The Black Rider is one of Señor Guadalmo's men with a grudge against him!"

Torreño chuckled in the bottom of his thick throat.

"My dear," he said, "that is child's talk. You do not know Guadalmo and his men! He has picked up the neatest set of murderers that ever wore sword and pistol since the beginning of time! There is not a one of them that does not owe his escape from the gallows to his master. They live by him; they would be hung except for him and his influence with the governor. They know it and they would fight for him as for themselves. He is their safety; he is their charm against death! Those two men yonder... I can tell the one by the feather in his hat, the other by the limp in his walk. The tall man used to cut throats in Naples; Guadalmo smuggled him aboard his ship and made off with him. The other was a soldier in the Low Countries, a gambler who made up for his losses on the highway. He fled to Guadalmo also. So they are here. They will watch over him more tenderly than they will watch over their own souls!"

"But this Black Rider, has he never appeared except to Señor Guadalmo?"

"Some dozen times," said Don Carlos. "He knows, it appears, whenever some solitary traveler sets out with a large sum of money. Then the Black Rider appears. Usually he sweeps up from behind on a horse swifter than the wind, it is said. The animal is sheathed in a light caparison of black silk. There is a hood of thin black silk covering the Rider, too. That is how he gets his name. He stops his man, takes his purse, and is gone. Sometimes they were brave and resisted, at the first. A bullet in the leg or through the shoulder always ended the fight. The Black Rider does not kill. He does not have to. He can see in the dark, it seems, and he shoots with such a nice aim that he could kill a bat on the wing at midnight!"

That was all the explanation she received concerning the Black Rider. After his first few captures, the mere terror of his presence had proved enough to paralyze all resistance. Men were benumbed with fear when he approached.

At last Lucia stood up to go to her room; and, as she turned, it seemed to her that there was a movement in the far corner of the patio.

"In the name of heaven, Señor Torreño!" she breathed.

The shadow stirred. A man stood upright.

"Carlos... fool... your pistol!" growled out Torreño.

"It is I... Taki!" said the shadow.

"Tie the red-face to a post and have him whipped!" commanded Torreño. "Have you turned into a spy, Taki?"

"It is the command of the señorita," said the Indian. "I am to stay close to her to protect her in case of harm."

“Seven thousand devils!” thundered the other. “Am I not guard enough for her, and in my own house? Lucia, what madness is this?”

“Only Señor Torreño,” she said, “because he was given to me, and I did not know what other work to give him.”

“Well,” said Torreño, “you must not be afraid of the ghosts you make with your own hands. But for half of a second, I looked at him and thought... the Black Rider!”

“Is the Black Rider so large a man?”

“Larger, it is said. A very giant! A span taller than this Taki of yours. Good night!”

Don Carlos went with her to the door of her room; Taki was three paces to the rear.

“Dear Lucia,” he said, as they paused there, “now that you have seen my father and his country, do you think that you can be happy among us and our rude people?”

She looked up to him with a little twisted smile. “Ah, Carlos,” she said, “I should be afraid to say no to the son of Don Francisco!”

And she hurried on into the room with Anna d’Arquista. Don Carlos turned to speak to Taki, but that man of the silent foot had already disappeared. There was no definite quarters assigned to the Indian. He was left to shift for himself, and the place he had chosen was in a nook behind a hedge. There, from a blanket roll, he provided himself with what he wanted, which was chiefly a mask of black silk, fitting closely over his face, a pistol, and a rapier. Provided with these, he made his way back toward the house, moving swiftly but with caution and going, wherever possible, in the gloom beneath the trees, for the moon was up, now, and the open places were silvered with faint light. He came to the wall of the big, squat house and moved around it until a form loomed in front of him.

A short-barreled musket was instantly thrust against his breast. Yet the voice of the guard was muffled, for fear lest he needlessly disturb the slumber of his master.

“Who is this?” he asked.

“I am the new man.”

“I know of no new man.”

The footfalls of the other sentinel, who kept guard around the corner of the wall, paused at the end of his beat. In a moment he would be back and in view of them. Taki drew in his breath and tensed his muscles.

“I have ridden all afternoon up from the harbor.”

“Ah?”

“You are Giovanni?”

“Yes.”

“I have brought you a message.”

“From whom?”

“Naples.”

“*Diablo!*” breathed the other. “Are you from Naples?”

And he lowered the muzzle of his gun a trifle. In that instant Taki struck the other with bone-crushing force on the base of the jaw, and he slumped gently forward on his face. Taki stepped over him.

"Giovanni?" he heard the other guard murmur as he approached the corner of the wall.

And then the second man turned the corner and came full against Taki. He had no time to cry out. The left hand of the Indian, like a steel-clawed panther's foot, was fixed instantly on his throat. And as his breath stopped, he snatched a knife from his belt. But Taki struck with the hilt of his rapier, and the guard turned limp in his grip.

After that, in a single minute of swift work, as one familiar with such things, he gagged them with their own garments and bound them back to back. Then he flattened himself against the wall and looked around him.

All was quiet in the house; only from the distance came an amiable, musical hum of voices from the tents; a reassuring sound of men at peace with one another and with the world. And Taki's teeth glinted white as he smiled at the moon. Then he turned, adjusted the silken mask, laid a hand on the sill of the open window, and drew himself softly into the room.

Señor Don Hernandez Guadalmo slept but lightly; and even that silken smooth entrance of the Indian's had roused him. Now, as Taki turned from the window, he faced Guadalmo, who was sitting bolt upright in his bed, but so paralyzed with nightmare horror that he could not move his hand. Before he recovered, he had clapped a pistol to his head.

"Don Hernandez, son of a dog," he said, "for the sixth time we have met."

"God receive my soul!" murmured the wretched man.

"The devil will receive it," said the other. "But not from this room. You must step out with me, señor!"

"If you have murder to do, do it here! But first, let me see your face!"

"Before you die, you shall see it, I promise. And if I fail, you may use your discretion upon me. Here, Señor Guadalmo, is your favorite sword. I make free to borrow it. Now, step before me through that window. If you cry out, if you attempt to run, I send a bullet through your back... or an ounce of lead to mingle with your brains, my friend!"

"What reward is there in the end?"

"A chance to fight with me fairly, point to point, sword to sword, and die like a murderer, as you deserve, but also like a gentleman."

Guadalmo fairly trembled with joy. "Is it true?"

"On the honor of one whose faith has never been broken."

"I go as to a feast!" said the duelist. He paused only to draw on a few garments. Then he slipped through the window before Taki and was rejoined by him on the ground.

"The guards?" he queried in a whisper.

Taki pointed to a tangled heap of shadow at the corner of the wall.

"They will not notice your going, señor."

"You have confederates who have done this?"

"Confederates? Yes, my two hands. Walk straight ahead, señor. I shall remain just half a pace behind you."

"My friend, the Black Rider," said Guadalmo, "this promises to be a notable and happy night."

And he walked straight forward down the slope and into the hollow beneath.

## Chapter IX

### Flashing Blades.

"HERE," said the Indian, "we will be very comfortable."

Guadalmo paused. He found himself in a little level-bottomed clearing surrounded by the squat forms of oak trees, each with a dim, black pattern printed beneath it on the brown grass.

The moon was bright. A cool sea wind stirred across the hollow and brought to it the indescribable freshness of salt water. And from the highlands came the additional scent of the evergreens.

Guadalmo cast off the light cloak from his shoulders.

"I am ready, señor," he said.

"Your sword," replied the other, and presented it to him by tossing it lightly through the air. Guadalmo caught it with considerable dexterity and made the blade whistle in the air.

"Now God be praised. Señor, the Black Rider," he said, "I see that I have to do with a gentleman and not with a cutthroat."

"Be assured, friend," said the Indian dryly, "that if I were a throat cutter, yours would have been slashed at our first meeting. This is to be a fair fight with equal weapons."

"However, you still carry a pistol at your belt."

The Indian tossed that weapon behind him and into the shrubbery.

"We are now even forces."

There was a ring of joy in the throat of Guadalmo.

"Fool," he said, "you are no better than a dead man! If you dare to stand up to me for ten breaths, I promise you a swift road to heaven. But as for equal forces... if I am hard-pressed, I have only to shout, and a dozen men will come for me."

Taki started, then shook his head as though to reassure himself.

"I have thought of that, of course," he said calmly, "but I think that I know you too well. For you had rather die, Guadalmo, than have men know that you cried out for help against a single man!"

"Come, come!" exclaimed the Spaniard. "The time flies. If the bound guards are found and I am missed, there will be a noise at once!"

"That is true. Señor, on guard!"

Their blades whipped up in a formal salute; continuing the same motion, Guadalmo passed on into a murderous lunge. Only a backward stroke saved Taki from that treacherous move.

"Ah, murderer!" he breathed. "This is your beginning!"

"Save your breath for your work. You shall have plenty of it!" said Guadalmo, and attacked instantly.

He came in with the reckless abandon of one accustomed to looking upon his narrow rapier as a secure wall of steel against his enemy's point. And the blade of



Taki met his with a continual harsh clattering. Neither would give back. They pressed on to half sword length.

“Ha!” cried the Spaniard through his teeth, and delivered an upward thrust at the throat against which there seemed no possible ward.

But Taki found one. With his bare hand he knocked aside the darting weapon. He stepped in with the same movement and crushed Guadalmo against his breast. The hug of the bear could not have been more paralyzing.

“I am a dead man! God receive me!” gasped out Guadalmo as the point of the shortened sword appeared at his throat.

“With that stroke, señor,” said Taki, “you killed Antonio Cadoral in Padua. Tonight it has failed you. What else have you left?”

He cast the helpless man away.

“Breathe again, Guadalmo,” he said. “Now, señor, your utmost skill.”

“Devil!” groaned Guadalmo. “You have only a minute to live!”

And he attacked not recklessly, but with the utmost deadliness of finesse, working as though a picture were being drawn by the point of his weapon. It became a play of double lightning, the two blades flashing in the moonshine.

But the minute passed and Taki still lived, and without giving ground. He began to talk again as they worked, as one who held his task lightly.

“Señor Guadalmo, there is a grove near Toledo where a gallant gentleman, Juan Jaratta, met you without seconds. You killed him with foul play... a sudden thrust when by mutual agreement you had lowered your swords to take a breath.”

“It is false!” snarled out Guadalmo. “Besides, there was no human eye near to take note of such a thing.”

“I, however, was nearby, and watched.”

“You are the devil, then!”

“As you please. But beware, Guadalmo! For the sake of Jaratta, I am about to touch you over the heart!”

“I defy you!”

The rapier in the hand of Taki darted out as the hummingbird darts toward the deep mouth of a flower—and as the hummingbird stops dead in mid flight and then shoots forward again, a mere flash of rainbow color and sheen, so the blade of Taki paused and drove beneath the parry of Guadalmo and the keen point pricked him on the breast.

“Damnation!” gasped out Guadalmo, and quickly leaped backward with all his power.

He began to perspire with the weakness not of exhaustion, but of despair and fear.

“We have only begun,” said Taki. “There was in Nice, on a time, a young gentleman from the American colonies of England. He had loaned you money, Guadalmo, and when your time came to repay it, you found a quarrel with him and met him outside the city on a broad green lawn. There were great flowers planted around the lawn. As the dawn grew clear, you could see their colors... golden-yellow, bronze, and deepest scarlet. Do you remember?”

“If I remember, you shall soon forget. So!”

“A good thrust,” said Taki, putting the stroke aside with a flick of his own blade. “And a favorite in Bologna. With it, in fact, you killed the poor gentleman. And, for his sake, another touch above the heart...”

Who can escape the leap of the lightning? Señor Guadalmo was tense with dreadful anxiety, and yet he could not avoid the sudden flash of Taki’s sword. And again there was a bee sting in the flesh above his heart. He felt a little warm trickle of blood run down inside his shirt—warm blood over a body that had turned to ice.

He gave ground. He looked wildly up the slope above the trees, where the roofs of the house of Torreño were faintly visible. There was succor, in ample scope, so near, so near! He thought of turning and fleeing toward it, but as he watched the tigerish smoothness of the advance of Taki, he knew that he would be overtaken in a single leap. There was no escape that way. He thought of crying out—but before the sound had left his lips, the inescapable mischief which played so brightly in the hand of the tall man would be buried in his heart! And the cold perspiration streamed down the face of Guadalmo. His body was dank with it.

“There are still others,” said Taki. “You have covered your way with killings, damnable murders made legal. You have picked quarrels with young men who had scarcely left their fencing masters after a month of practice. But above all, there was one man who had never held a straight sword in his life. He was an honest sailor, Guadalmo. An honest man, do you hear me? A breath of his was worth more than your eternal soul. He was a kind, bluff man. All who knew him, loved him. He had behind him a young wife and two small children. Ah, Guadalmo, my friend, what a devil it would have taken to murder that honorable man? And yet there was such a demon in the world. There was such a murder done. All honorable! He was challenged and met with rapiers. He was forced to fight, he thought, to defend his honor. His honor against a rat, a snake, a wolf! Think of it, Señor Guadalmo. Can you conceive it?”

“Are you done?” snarled out Guadalmo, perceiving that the end was near. “Are you done whining? Yes, I killed him. And you are his brother? Hear me, friend. When the steel went through him, he screamed like a woman!”

Taki groaned. “He screamed with agony of sorrow because he thought of his wife and his family... with bewilderment that such a tiny needle of a weapon should have taken his life... but never with pain or with fear. For he was a lion, Señor Guadalmo! And it is for his sake that I am about to touch you for the third time, and this time, you are to die! Think of him, and how he lay in your patio, panting and gasping. He had messages which he begged you to send to his wife. He would forgive you, pray for you, if you would send them. Did you send them, Guadalmo? Did you send them? A word, only, to his widow or his orphans?”

“Bah!” gasped out the Spaniard, and lunged with all his force.

It was attacking a will-o'-the-wisp. He closed again with a shout of despair. Then a limber hand of steel closed around his sword. He felt a wrench that twisted his wrist far to one side. Out of his wet fingers the sword was drawn, and flipped high into the air, spinning over and over, brilliant against the moon, in its fall. And Guadalmo followed it with eyes of horror and of bewilderment.

He looked down at the leveled blade of his opponent. And then, from the rear of the clearing, a pistol spoke, a bullet hummed past and thudded heavily against the body of an oak tree, and into the open ran three men. There was a wild cry of

rage from Taki. He leaped at Guadalmo with a final lunge, but the latter fell groveling upon the ground and missed death by a fraction of a second. Over him leaped Taki—no time for a second stroke.

Another bound brought him among the shadows of the trees—and he was gone, with a final volley whirring about him.

And, in the meantime, it seemed that a hundred voices had suddenly begun to shout at the same time, before him and behind him.

There was no pursuit on the part of the valiants, however. They did not care to follow the tiger into his lair among the crowded trees; they preferred to make a close guard around Guadalmo and shout for help. So Taki paused to drop the rapier into a shallow bed of leaves. He snatched the black mask from his face.

Just before him a body of six men broke in among the trees.

“Who is there?” they shouted to him.

“Taki,” he said. And he joined in the hunt.

## **Chapter X**

### **Trapped.**

IT was a matter not to be mentioned in the presence of Señor Torreño. It was well enough if some rascally brigand dared to hold up passersby upon the great highway. But when they ventured into his very presence and there committed their villainies, it was high time that an end were put to these proceedings. Señor Torreño ordered his entire household to mount. He left at the house a mere guard of half a dozen men. With the rest, he scoured the country. And, conspicuous among the foremost riders was Taki, the Navajo, who distinguished himself by being the only man of the party who thought he saw a fugitive vanishing among the hills. However, they could not trace the vision of Taki, and therefore they eventually turned back to the house, gloomy and disgruntled. The lips of Torreño flowed curses faster than a well gives forth water. He damned the entire world in general and the Black Rider in particular. He began again with the Black Rider and went backward, damning the entire world. He would burn the entire region of California to a crisp, but in the end he would have this reckless manhunter who ventured upon his kill in the very lair of the Torreño himself!

The story of Guadalmo was simple and clear. He had been wakened from sleep by having a cord thrown around his body. Therefore, he awakened helpless. He was forced to dress in haste and climb down through the window, and so was taken to the hollow where he was eventually found. There he was about to be murdered, but he had managed to excite the pride of the Black Rider sufficiently to make the outlaw begin a single-handed duel in the course of which he was about to spit the Black Rider like a chicken, and so put an end to that sinister public plague, when they were broken in upon by fools who thought they were running to the rescue. It made no difference that the rescuers, according to what their eyes had told them, vowed that they did not notice any sword in the hand of Guadalmo. They were not believed to have seen what was before them. For,

though it was conceivable that the great Guadalmo might be conquered in fight, it was notably ridiculous to conceive that he had been so overmastered that he was actually disarmed!

Señor Guadalmo, however, made light of the whole matter when they sat together to break their fast in the morning, after the futile manhunt had ended.

“Now that I have seen this ghost face to face, and noted the color of his eyes,” said Guadalmo, “I assure you that there will soon be an end to him. Oh, fool, fool, fool that I was!”

He struck his palm across his forehead and sighed.

“What is wrong, Guadalmo?” asked his host.

“When I think that I might have put this monster out of the world with a mere touch... and that I allowed him to live! Alas, Torreño, I am covered with shame and with fury.”

“Tell us, Guadalmo.”

“No, no! It sickens me to think of it! Fool, fool that I was!”

“We must hear it, señor”

“It was in this manner. We had closed. We were at hardly more than half sword distance. I threw him off balance with a strong parry and at the same instant I closed on him and took him by the throat. The dog lost heart at once. He dropped his sword and fell on his knees and babbled out a prayer for mercy! Mercy has ever been my besetting sin. I could not kill that wild beast even when I had him in that position.”

Lady Anna d’Arquista fairly trembled with admiration. To think that at the same table with her sat a man who had been able to crush the famous Black Rider to his knees was enough to make her shudder. She said to her niece: “Did you ever see such a gallant and noble gentleman, Lucia?”

Lucia wasn’t always graceful in her manners. Now she grunted as a man might have done, and a very rough man at that.

“He has a sick look,” she said.

“Guadalmo?”

“He has had troubles enough to last him out the month,” said the girl, nodding her head sagely.

“Of course, to be wakened by that fiend...”

“A poor weak devil!” scoffed the girl. “Our great Guadalmo takes him by the throat and makes the devil beg!”

“You do not believe?”

“Of course I believe,” said Lucia, yawning a little. “I believe anything that is amusing! There is little enough, at that!”

She could not be moved from this position. Guadalmo finished his recital in the midst of a silence which was a greater tribute than applause. He promised, however, that when he had a little spare time on his hands, he would hunt down this wretched road-haunter, this Black Rider, and cut him to shreds the very next time they encountered.

Here Lucia spoke aloud: “The next time, señor ” she said, “will surely be the last. It will be the seventh. And that number is surely fatal, is it not?”

To the surprise of everyone, Señor Guadalmo turned white and his face was glistening with perspiration.

"I pray heaven, señorita," he said in a shaken voice, "that you are not a prophet."

"Ah, ah!" cried Lucia. "I mean, of course, that the meeting will be fatal for him... for the Black Rider!"

It was too late to give the thought that turn in the mind of Guadalmo. He seemed stricken. He sat bowed in his chair, his head in his hand.

He said over and over: "There is a sort of fate in it, is there not? I meet him again and again... I alone. Six times he has encountered me... six times the breath of the devil has fanned my cheek. But all this is only a warning. The seventh time the devil will gather me in!"

He removed from the table presently and went from the room. All remained in an uneasy silence for a moment behind him, and at length Torreño himself murmured: "Who would have believed this of the great Guadalmo?"

His steward came in at that moment. He was full of excitement. He reported that, in a shallow bed of leaves in the forest, not far from the very spot where Señor Guadalmo had been found in close fight with the marauder, one of the peons had stumbled into a hidden sword and got a shrewd cut in the leg for his discovery. It was given to the steward, who instantly gave it, of course, to the master of the house. Could it be, by any chance, the weapon of the Black Rider, which had fallen from his hand? Torreño took the rapier and held it at arm's length.

"That is a rapier worthy of a gentleman, not a brigand," he said.

"I'll swear that the Black Rider would rather have parted with so much flesh nearest his heart than to have lost this weapon. At least, we have one of the feathers of the crow, which is more than all the other hunters for him can say. But what if he comes back for it?"

Here there followed an impressive little silence, and into it ran the sound of a far-off flute:

*"Ye highlands and ye lowlands,  
Oh, where hae ye been?  
They hae slain the Earl of Murray  
And hae laid him on the green.  
"Now wae be to thee, Huntly,  
And wharefore did ye sae?  
I bade ye bring him wi you  
And forbade ye him to slay."*

Then Señor Torreño stood up. He sent for Guadalmo. He sent for half a dozen other of his most trusted men—and then changed his mind and took with him the same number of Guadalmo's practiced fighters.

"This hand to hand fighting and this dueling," he said, "is all very well. But I prefer a net which is sure of catching the bird."

The wounded servant limped along to show them the way; it was a perfect place. Low shrubbery enclosed a little hollow, and in that pool of leaves, stirred by only the strongest winds, the rapier had been found. Guadalmo and the rest instantly

took cover among the shrubs. In the meantime orders were sent back for the rest of the train to be busy preparing the coach and packing up for the journey.

If the Black Rider were nearby, watching, he might venture down even now to secure his lost weapon!

But nothing came near them except the sound of the flute of Taki, the Navajo, as he wandered casually among the trees. He appeared, presently, from among them. He came to the pool of the dead leaves and scuffed through it. He turned, still with the flute at his lips, and went shuffling through the leaves again.

Then he stopped, lowered the flute, and frowned. Presently he leaned over and slipped his hand among the leaves. It seemed, indeed, as though he were searching for something. And what he wanted was not there! He dropped to his knees, then, and pocketing the flute, he was busy with both hands.

Suddenly the voice of Guadalmo rang loudly as he started up.

“Take him, my friends! This is the man we want!”

They started out of the shrubbery like six bloodhounds. Instantly they closed around the tall form of the Indian. He was still a head above the tallest man. He made no resistance. He merely looked about him in a bewildered fashion as they laid hands upon him. Torreño came storming from his place. The Black Rider was a man of wit and invention, a dashing, clever fellow. This was no more than a red Indian and could not be the man.

“He has come here to hunt... for what?” asked Guadalmo. “For his lost sword, of course. Besides, I have heard his voice; I have seen his height and his form. It is the man, Torreño. My life on it! Another thing... give me hot water and a little scrubbing and you will see some of the red come from that skin! None but a white man could handle a sword as he handles his! I’ll go a step farther, my friends. I’ll give him a name... which is Gidden!”

So much surety turned the scales at once.

“Bring him instantly to the house,” said Torreño. “We’ll have a try with water at his hide.”

“There is no need, señor,” said the prisoner calmly. “I freely confess that I am Richard Gidden!”

Señor Guadalmo began to laugh. The lines of trouble disappeared from his face. Years of age seemed to have been stripped from him.

“Taki,” he said, “would have given the hounds a run, but Richard Gidden will be found worthy of hanging. Is it not so, Torreño?”

## **Chapter XI**

### **The Chase.**

TO this question, the master of those lands did not immediately return an answer. He looked about him with a vacant eye of thought over the brown hills and the dark patches of oak groves here and there, studded with a scattering of cattle. Then he turned to Guadalmo.

"This man is worthy of death," he said at length. "That is clear. He confesses it himself. Now, my friend, when I see a white man I am ready to give him a white man's death. But when I see a redskin, an Indian's death is a better thing for him. His skin is red. He calls himself Richard Gidden. It is an odd name. He is known to me only as Taki. And as Taki I swear he shall die!"

"And how?" asked Guadalmo, falling in readily enough with the viewpoint of the other. "For my part, I say, tie his hands behind his back and send a few ounce bullets through his head. That will make an end of him. However, there may be better ways. What way, Señor Torreño?"

"The dogs!" said Torreño. "I have traveled without them for this time only. But you have them with you constantly. The dogs, Guadalmo, and a fifty-pace start for him!"

"Señor Guadalmo," broke in Richard Gidden, "your life has been in my hands, and I have spared it. Remember!"

"My life in your hands?" snarled out the Spaniard. "You lie, you rat! Besides, my pack need a blooding. They have grown dull on the trail! The dogs, Torreño, the dogs! An Indian's death for a redskin."

And the first man to echo that cry among the followers of Señor Guadalmo was none other than Giovanni of Naples, with a bruised patch at the base of his jaw and a fury of rage in his heart. It was taken up; it swept to the house; it reached the ears even of the lady, Lucia. She could not understand, at first, but when she did, she went straight to Don Carlos. He was about to hurry to the manhunt, with gaiety in his face.

"Carlos," she said with a sort of stern eagerness, "if you wish my love and my respect, stop this hideous thing. He is a man, Carlos, not a beast. And they tell me he is a white man. God in heaven knows that I guessed that before I had heard him speak three words. For the sake of your soul... for my sake, Carlos, stop this hunt! And if..."

Her voice was broken short by a loud clamor of deep-voiced hounds. She beckoned him away and turned to the house with her head bowed, her hands pressed over her ears. Don Carlos left her like a frightened boy who has seen a mystery. It had never occurred to him that it was wrong to hunt Indians with dogs. He had done it. His father had enjoyed that same wild sport. What there was in it of sin he could not see. And for the fact that the man was white, it was obvious that since he had chosen the disguise of a redskin, an Indian's death was only ironically proper to him. And yet, seeing the horror in the face of the girl, he comprehended dimly that there was both a crime and a sin here. Most of all, he was afraid of her. He would have faced anything rather than incur her displeasure. He would have faced his very father. And, a moment later, he did so.

The hounds were out, and Torreño was discussing their merits rather than the merits of the work which was before them. The admirable Señor Guadalmo had in person brought this pack from Germany. The base of their blood was the boar hound. But having been trained by the skillful hand of Guadalmo, they were soon accustomed to course far nobler game. Huge of shoulder and quarter, with great, square, muzzled heads and brows wrinkled with lion-like sagacity and fierceness, they possessed, in addition, long limbs and the tucked-up bellies of greyhounds which were token of their speed. There were a dozen in the original pack. Seven

remained, but they were like seven tigers in ferocity and cunning. Already they sensed work to their liking, and raged on the leashes. Two servants held each dog—and each dog was worth the price of two peons! The entire household was gathered to watch the chase. It was now that Don Carlos encountered his father.

“Señor,” he said, “for the grace of heaven, do not hunt this man with the dogs!”

His father turned slowly upon him. He had been touched to the very core of the heart with rage by the invasion of his house the night before. Now he saw some chance to let loose the gathering thunder of his anger.

“The grace of heaven? The grace of heaven?” he echoed. “What do you know of the grace of heaven, boy?”

Don Carlos was stricken. He retreated a pace. His voice trembled a little as he added: “It is not I who ask, Father,” he said. “It is Lucia!”

“It is Lucia!” mocked Torreño, putting a semi-awe into his own tones. “It is the peerless lady, Lucia. Now, boy, hear me and understand me. I have paid a price for that girl. And may my soul roast if the price was not high! There is one way she may make me a return for my money... and that is to be an obedient daughter. But as for what she wishes... damnation, Carlos, am I to be ruled by the whims of a girl and a fool? Am I to be ruled? I?”

His voice had raised at the end. Don Carlos was fairly quaking with fear.

Yet still he remembered the face of Lucia and so he persisted for a moment.

“Alas, sir,” he said. “If you had seen her as I saw her, when she begged me to...”

“Begged?” said Torreño, breaking strongly in. “That is good! Teach her to beg. She is too apt to demand. As for this business, she knows nothing about it. A woman’s gentleness would fill this land with red devils in a month. It is one of my servants, Carlos, who dared to enter my house and raised a hand against a guest of Francisco Torreño! I will see him torn to shreds! Do you hear me?”

“I hear you,” said Don Carlos submissively.

“As for the girl, your wife to be,” continued Torreño, a little appeased by the frightened face of his son, “she may weep today, frown tomorrow, and sulk the next day. Then give her a ring... a horse... or some other trinket. And she will forget. Here is time to learn a great thing in the management of women, my lad. Let them feel the whip now and then... the whip, Carlos!”

He rubbed his hands together and laughed loudly.

“Now, friends!” he called to the others. “Is all prepared? Look to the cinches of my saddle, Juan. Mind his heels, fool! Señor Guadalgo, this will be sport!”

“Unless he runs away from the dogs,” said Guadalgo with a discontented face. “The surest way is a bullet through the head. Let the dogs have him afterward, if you choose!”

He added in thunder: “Bring out Taki! Bring him out! Place him here!”

Fifty not over-long strides he advanced before the leashed pack and marked the spot by driving his heel into the ground. To that place they led out Richard Gidden, half naked. There was no doubt about the true color of his skin now. All his body had been dyed copper, but only about the face and hands had the stain been carefully renewed. The rest of him was many a shade lighter, and across his shoulders the white seemed fairly shining through.

He came forth with a firm step. He regarded the beasts who were to hunt him. He watched the mounting of the riders. Then he turned his glance before him, as



though selecting the best course for his race. He was rather like an athlete contending for a great prize than one about to struggle hopelessly for life.

“Cast him loose!” commanded Torreño. “Stand fast, Taki, until you hear the word. Stand fast, or we send a dozen bullets through you. Now, lads, with the dogs...”

The guards, who had surrounded the prisoner, now gave back in haste to open a channel through which the dogs might run at their prey. But by this time they were in a frenzy of eagerness. They reared to a man’s height as they strained at the leashes.

“Unleash!” cried Torreño. “Halloo! Away!”

A horn blew; the dogs leaped off, giving tongue; and Richard Gidden whirled to flee. But, as he whirled, he whistled once, a long, shrill note that cut through the air like the scream of a bagpipe. Then he fled down the slope toward the nearest hollow.

For fifty yards, with the fear of death winging his feet, he gained on the flying dogs, for the boar hound, after all, is a stout but clumsy runner.

For a hundred yards he held them even. Then they began to gain steadily and surely. They crossed the hollow. They sped up the slope beyond with the hillside giving back their deep voices in thunder. They topped the first hill and lunged down into the gentle valley beyond. And now they were straining forward closer and closer to his heels. The leaders began to slaver. The note of the baying rose sharper and shorter as toward the kill. And the horsemen who swept at an easy canter in the rear shouted encouragement. Torreño was strangled with laughter; Señor Guadalmo, like a madman in his joy, yelled to the hounds and brandished his fist above his head.

By the time they reached the next hollow they would pull down the fugitive, beyond doubt. The morning sun shone on his limbs, burnished with perspiration; his body swayed, now, with the agony of his labor, and his head was flagging back with exhaustion.

And then a red flash left the thicket to the left, and a red bay stallion flaunted across the open straight at the fugitive. It was Guadalmo who first understood the meaning of the thing.

“Torreño!” he screamed. “Look! Look! His horse! Once on the back of that red devil, he is gone like the wind! Ride down the hounds. Get to him! Pistols and swords, my friends, if you love me! If he escapes today, we are but murdered men tomorrow!”

They heard him with a shout of rage, gave their horses the spur, and instantly they were among the pack and rushing fast upon the runner. But though they rode hard and recklessly down that slope like true cavaliers, their speed was nothing compared with the unburdened stallion. He came like a loose lightning flash, down the slope and into the hollow. Straight beside Taki he rushed, and swerving there, with hardly abated gallop, they saw the fugitive fling himself at the bay, grapple the mane with one hand, take a long, winged leap as he was jerked forward by the running horse, and then rebound upward to his back.

But he was not yet free. The pursuit came hot behind him, and now their guns were out. But heavy horse pistols fired from the backs of running horses strike a target by chance rather than by skill. A dozen bullets combed the air about him as

he lay flat on the back of the horse. But he guided the stallion by the touch of his hand to the left. Twenty paces before the pursuit he reached the next grove of oaks. And the voice of Guadalmo was a moan of desperation.

Through the open grove they pushed, bringing blood with every stroke of their spurs. The pack of boar hounds strained far, far to the rear now, setting up what seemed a foolish clamor. As well might they try to catch the wind as to overtake this fugitive. He was work for their masters. Too much work, indeed, even for them. For when they gained the open again, the red bay was racing over the next hilltop, and when they reached the next hilltop, he was entering a broken copse of oak in the hollow.

For another ten minutes they labored with curses and whip and spurs; but at the end of that time Richard Gidden had vanished from among the hills! The chase halted. All were silent. Torreño's brow was black as a thundercloud. The lips of Guadalmo were twitching in a passion which he dared not release in words for fear lest words alone would not suffice him. But the eye which he turned upon Torreño was the very soul of eloquence.

So they came back toward the house. The dogs followed on through the hills unregarded. Later, servants would pursue them a weary distance and bring them in once more. But they would bring no consolation to Torreño or to Guadalmo. Those captains rode with faces averted from one another and so regained their quarters. And the view of them as they came in with failure printed on their brows brought joy to one person only—and that was the Señorita Lucia. Anna d'Arquista had come running to her and found her in prayer at the foot of the altar in her little private chapel—passionate prayer, with her face pressed against the cold stone. She rose and ran to the window, and looking out, she cried: "God has heard me! God has heard me!"

## **Chapter XII**

### **Lucia Faces the Master.**

THE son, Señor Don Carlos Torreño, had enjoyed the race after Taki—or Richard Gidden, to give him his true name—as much as any man. But when the red stallion appeared and swept the fugitive away to safety, he was the dreariest of all the party who turned back toward the house—with the single exception of Señor Guadalmo. The duelist was thinking of death; Don Carlos was thinking of his lady; it would have been hard to say which of the two had the colder heart.

But, in the meantime, there was the bustle of starting on that day's journey, and during that time he was able to avoid the eye of Lucia. And when the carriage was lumbering along the road, at last, he was spared a face-to-face encounter with the girl again. For Hernandez Guadalmo had found it necessary to change direction in which he was traveling and had decided to accompany the cavalcade of Torrefio. There was no doubt in the minds of the others that he was moved by fear of Richard Gidden. But such an opinion could not, of course, be shown. The

important thing was to make the celebrated Guadalmo welcome, and for that purpose both the elder and the younger Torrefio rode at his side.

It was a gloomy day's journey, and, at the close of it, when they reached the third rest house of Torreño, built for the comfort and for the honor of Lucia d'Arquista, Don Carlos realized by something in the glance which she cast upon him that the interview had been postponed—not dulled by the delay!

And she had hardly gone to her chambers when one of her serving maids came to him. She wished to see him, and at once. And poor Don Carlos girded up the loins of his resolution and prepared for trouble. It came almost the instant he was before her.

She sat beneath a window of her room with the dust of her journey still upon her clothes, tapping at the big stone flags upon the floor with a tapered riding whip. And while he talked, her glance went continually from the floor to his face to the floor; and every time she looked at him, he felt as though he had been struck by the lithe body of the whip itself!

"Carlos," she said, "this morning I begged a small favor of you, which was the life of a slave."

He sought his first refuge behind a quibble.

"It was no slave, after all," he said, "but a white man... Richard Gidden. I could have saved a hundred, a thousand Indians, Lucia. But this fellow, Gidden..."

"What had he done?"

Don Carlos waxed warm with a simulated heat.

"You must remember, Lucia! He invaded my father's house, struck down his servants, took away a guest from his chamber..."

"Tush!" said Lucia d'Arquista. "He came for a professional fighter... a man who murders according to a legal form... Hernandez Guadalmo. He is notorious! He bound two of the servants of that cutthroat. He entered the room of Guadalmo. Did he stab the villain to the heart to revenge the death of his murdered brother? No, no, Carlos. Like a gallant fellow, he took Guadalmo out from the house to a little distance; no matter what Guadalmo says, I know the truth and you have guessed it, too, and so have all the others. He challenged Guadalmo to a fair fight. And before the fight was ended, in came your father's men and saved Guadalmo. That is the only crime against Taki... I mean Richard Gidden. I asked that you save this man, Carlos!"

He bit his lip. He was ashamed of his own fear of her.

"Such a man does not need saving," he said with an attempt at lightness. "He saved himself, you see."

"He saved himself from the dogs," said the girl, her anger trembling in her voice now. "Oh, God, that such a thing should be! An honest Christian man hunted with dogs! To be torn to pieces like a wild beast."

"But he was not!" protested Carlos. "He was saved, Lucia. Surely you know that."

"Saved by you?" she asked bitterly.

"Lucia, hear reason..."

"I wish to hear much reason. I wish to know, Carlos, why I needed to beg such a favor of you. Why were you not already working with all your might because you

loathed such barbarism? Why were you not? Or was it because he had beaten you in a play of foils? Or in your heart, were you not hungering to see that manhunt?"

When the truth is told about us, it carries with it a sting that pierces through our utmost complacency. Don Carlos had been shaken already. Now he was crimson, and panting as he spoke.

"I could not stir my father. I talked until he was in a furious anger. I could not budge him from his purpose, Lucia!"

"Ah," she said, "if I had been a man, I should have taken my stand at the side of poor Richard Gidden. If the hounds were loosed at him, they should have taken me also!"

He threw out his hands in a gesture of wonder. "After all, he is the Black Rider... he is a highway robber, Lucia. You forget!"

"I forget nothing. What justice could he have in this country except from his own strength? He came here to revenge his brother. He fell into trouble. He was saved by your father... by accident, I may say. He went into slavery and took to the highway to repay a debt. Was that not like an honest man? He has repaid the debt. Now he is free to turn his hand to Guadalmo. But you catch him and hunt him with dogs! Ah, it sickens me, Carlos! I only wondered if you would truly try to justify it. And I have heard you."

She turned her back on him and stared out the window. Don Carlos hesitated, turned two or three sentences in his mind, and then decided that the words would not do. He wanted, above all, to have the free blue sky above his head, and he fled at once. He had scarcely left the house when he encountered the last person he wished to meet—his father. Torreño stopped him.

"You have the face of a sick man, Carlos," he said.

"It is nothing," stammered Carlos.

"You are white; you are dripping with perspiration. What is it?"

"Nothing," said Carlos.

"Fool!" thundered Torreño. "Will you attempt to hide from me?"

The son surrendered on the spot. That ringing voice went through him like a sword.

"It is Lucia," he said faintly. "She is in a fury because of Gidden and the dogs."

"She is in a fury?" repeated Torreño. "She has complained to you?"

Don Carlos sighed and shook his head.

"I shall go to her myself," said Torreño.

Don Carlos caught his arm with an exclamation. "She is not herself... she does not know what she says!" he pleaded.

"I shall bring her to herself," said the father roughly and, shaking himself loose, he went to the door of Lucia's chamber. She herself opened it to him. He stalked in and threw himself unceremoniously into a chair. She remained standing, looking calmly down at him. Her very calmness enraged him the more. For he loved to inspire fear.

"You have been talking with Carlos," he said sternly.

"He has gone tattling, I see."

"He has answered his father's questions, as a respectful son should."

"I have no doubt, señor, that he is a perfect son."

"You are scornful, Lucia. Now you must understand that in this country all is not done as it is done in Spain. In a rough land rough ways are needed."

"I think I understand. Men are hunted instead of boars. Why, señor? Because they are more helpless?"

Torreño writhed in his chair. His voice doubled its volume.

"What I order," he said, smiting his hands together, "is never questioned."

"Do you choose to be obeyed through fear only?" she asked him.

"Obedience is what I demand. The cause of it does not matter."

"Señor, I am as yet a free person. If I marry, I shall swear obedience to your son." And she smiled. The smile maddened Torreño.

"Have a care, girl!" he cried to her. "That marriage has not yet taken place. If you return to Spain unwed..."

"You threaten with a sword which has no point, Señor Torreño," she said. "I, also, have been thinking of Spain."

That answer brought Torreño stiffly out of his chair. He stared at her, bewildered. It came suddenly home to him that this was not mere sham—that this girl could indeed contemplate a petty life in old Spain rather than become the queen of the Torreño estate. It staggered him. It shamed him.

"Is that in your brain?" he said. "However, Lucia, you are not a free agent. The marriage has been contracted for. It shall be celebrated if I have to drag you to the altar with my own hands. And when the ceremony is ended, we shall see if you have not two masters instead of one. That is a thing which we shall see!"

He strode to the door and then turned back to her.

"To those who give me obedience, girl," he said, "I am gentle as a lamb. To those who cross me, I am a lion. Lucia, beware!"

With this, he left her, and she heard the beat of his heels and the jingling of his spurs as he went down the corridor. She went into the next room and found Anna d'Arquista crouched on a bench in the corner with a stricken face.

"You have heard everything?" asked Lucia.

"He spoke so loudly..."

"Oh, I am glad that you have heard. That doesn't matter. You see, Aunt Anna, that I have fallen into the hands of hunters. If I cross this frog-faced devil, I suppose that he would set the dogs on me?" She began to laugh, savagely, without mirth.

"Lucia, poor child," moaned the spinster, "I have had a foreboding of evil to come. Let us pray God to bring you happiness in spite of all!"

"It is time to think and to plan," said Lucia. "It is time to remember that I am a d'Arquista. It is time to wish that I were a man!"

## **Chapter XIII**

### **The Seventh Encounter!**

PRUDENCE held some sway in even Francisco Torreño, however, and after supper he walked with the girl in the outer garden where they could hear the

steady roar of distant water through a ravine, a sullen noise which seemed to come from the quivering ground beneath their feet.

“Now, Lucia,” he said, “while we are alone, and without anger, let us talk over everything and admit that we have made mistakes... both of us. I was wrong in treating you as if you were without a brain and a will of your own. You were wrong in saying that you did not wish to marry Carlos. Shall we begin by admitting these things?”

“Señor Torreño,” said the girl, “there is no need for sorrow. We have seen the truth about one another. You, señor, have no room on all of your lands for more than one person... and that is yourself, of course. I have the same need of room, señor. We could never be happy near one another.”

Torreño felt the blind rage swell in his heart. But he controlled himself. He even managed to smile.

“You are still angry,” he said. “Young people remain angry longer than old ones do. Because anger is a childish passion, do you see? But, Lucia, how could your wishes conflict with mine? What is there which we mutually could desire? Will you have rich clothes and many of them? Whatever is made in China or Flanders and all the lands between is yours! Are you fond of jewels? I already have caskets heaped with them... trays piled deep as your fingers can clutch! But if you wish more, you shall have more. Are you a lover of hunting! The finest English runners shall be brought half the distance around the world and put in your stables... your stables, Lucia. Do you hear me? Perhaps you love hawking. We have some falcons already. You shall have more! Do you love rich fittings in a house? You may plate your walls with solid gold if you choose! What more is there that a woman can wish? I have known of some bold hearts among your sex who loved the water. Lucia, there are many waterways where the sea is quiet between the islands and the coast. Aye, Lucia, and if you wish to be alone and reign like a queen and never feel any power, you shall have one of those islands... the largest... for your own. It shall be stocked with cattle and with servants. You shall build a house there according to your will. You shall build ships and trade with them on the seven seas, if you desire.

“You see, child, that when you speak of finding room on my estate, you may have as much as any prince... and more! And still, I shall never know what you have taken!”

To this lordly tale the girl listened with a faint smile.

“There is one rock on which all of those plans would split,” she said.

“And that?” asked Torreño.

“Don Carlos.”

“Ah? What of him?”

“Which of us would rule him?”

Torreño’s face grew dark with angry blood.

“He shall rule himself, señorita.”

She waved her hand. “That is folly, señor. I can twist him around my finger; and your very breath makes his whole strong body tremble like a dead leaf! Which would prove the stronger with him? Which of us would he dread the most? Which would he prefer... that I should laugh at him or that you should rage at him? I

cannot tell. But I feel, señor, that after a time I should be too strong for you. Therefore I advise you for your own sake. Break off this unhappy marriage.”

There was enough of the fox in Torreño to appreciate craft in others. He looked at Lucia with a glint of appreciation in his eyes.

“If I were twenty years younger... yes, or ten... there would be no question of Carlos. I myself should marry you, Lucia!”

“There would be no peace in your house.”

“For a year, for two years, no! But after that, I would give you commands by mere glances and liftings of the finger! So! Your voice would never be heard except in answer to my questions. Ah, yes. It would be that way!”

“But since you are too old for this battle, do you think that Carlos has strength for it?”

“I shall teach him,” said Torreño. “In the meantime, our grip is on you. You are in our cage. We have thrown the net over your head. Beat your wings, sing your song, but escape if you can, my dear! But you cannot. You belong to me; you belong to Carlos. There is the end! In a few months, a few years... what is a little time?... you will learn to curl up in your nest! All will be well!”

To this she made no answer, but she smiled at him in a way that made his heart fall.

“Tell me, Lucia,” he said, “what manner of man could make you love him?”

She answered instantly: “One who could fill me with fear.”

“And have you seen such a man in all the world?”

“One.”

“And what was he?”

She was silent again, and Torreño stared at her in real bewilderment. But here their interview ended. Filled with a whimsical impulse, he went to Carlos and told him everything, word for word.

“Would you have her under these conditions?”

“I love her,” said Carlos sadly. “And if love can breed love, she will come to care for me before the end!”

“Bah!” said the elder man. “The mailed fist is the thing for her!”

After that, the great Torreño gave little thought either to his son or to Lucia herself. He had before him what he felt to be more important matters, the details leading to the celebration of the marriage itself, which was to take place within three or four days after their arrival. And so, on the following day, they arrived at Casa Torreño itself.

It was like a child’s dream of a castle. Through a shallow little valley a stream ran and pooled its waters in a spacious lake. Beside the lake was a village of white adobe houses; above the village the road wound to the flat top of a great hill, and on the plateau stood the house itself, built of hewn stone. And at one side, a great square tower arose against the sky.

“Why will you have such a fortress and such a dungeon keep for a house?” asked Lucia.

“So that all the people in the plains may look up to this in clear weather and see the top of the tower... you see that it is painted white? And so they know that the eye of their master is on them while they work, while they sleep!”

The instant they were in view over the top of the hills, a bell in the great house began to ring, and its larger voice was taken up by the jangle of other bells in the hollow where the village lay. People appeared, streaming from the Casa Torreño, and out of the village a gay-colored procession started up the road. Torreño looked triumphantly toward the girl, but her face was a blank. The next instant he had broken into curses. For the most inopportune interruption came to break up the solemnity of this occasion. At the last rest house there had been added to his train some couple of fleet greyhounds, and they had been brought along on the leash all day without finding anything to their liking in the way of game. But just at this instant their sharp voices were raised; Hernandez Guadalmo was heard loudly ordering them to be slipped, and in another instant half a dozen of the lean-bodied hunting dogs were straining across the hills after a flying hare. Behind them rushed Guadalmo and a few others of his immediate train; the followers of Torreño had far too much wit to leave the ranks at such a moment as this.

The diversion took much from the grandeur of the moment, but Hernandez Guadalmo gave no heed to that. He was as greedy a hunter of wild game as he was of man. It mattered not the size of the quarry. The hunt itself was the thing for which he lived. He followed the greyhounds over the first hills and through the next valley. He leaped his horse recklessly across the brook and plunged up the slope beyond, many a length ahead of his closest followers, for nothing they bestrode was comparable with his fine barb. Uphill, however, the hounds gained fast upon him. And the hare fled like a thing possessed of the fiend. It darted up the hill, gaining ground on the dogs at every enormous bound. It reached the more even country beyond, and here the dogs gained at each stride as the hare had gained uphill. And, with each second, the gap between Guadalmo and his men grew greater. He was at the heels of the flying dogs when he saw something stir among the next grove of oaks. A deer, he thought at first. It burst into full view—a bay horse of matchless beauty with flying black mane and tail as it swept toward him, and on its back a tall, familiar figure—Richard Gidden come for the seventh time against him.

The seventh time! If there were any special fate in numbers, one of them must surely fall on this day! And the courage of Guadalmo wavered. There even came into his mind the thought that back yonder among his followers there would be safety—if he turned and fled to them!

But at the thought of flight—and flight before so many witnesses—his soul was steeled to face the ordeal. He caught out a horse pistol from its holster beside the saddle. He brought down the pace of his horse to a hard gallop and, taking careful aim, he fired at the advancing rider.

But still Gidden closed. There was no gun in the hand of his foe. Only the naked blade of a rapier gleamed in the hand of Gidden as he rushed in. Plainly he had determined that Guadalmo should die in the same fashion that Gidden's brother had received a death wound from the hand of the Spaniard. He drove straight on at Guadalmo. It seemed fate, not a mere mortal man, who bestrode that horse. Then Guadalmo threw the pistol away with an oath of fury and snatched out his own rapier. Holding it like a spear at arm's length before him, he spurred the barb at Gidden. They met in half a dozen lightning strides. There was a double flash of



light. Then, as Gidden hurtled past and swept off in a great arch away from the Spaniard, Guadalmo threw out his arm and the sword dropped from his hand.

Still he held the saddle for a moment with his head thrown back to the sky. He was like a man who sees an enraptured vision. Then he slumped sideways to the ground.

## **Chapter XIV**

### **A Rescuer.**

WITH song and with dance, with shouting and with music, they brought the cavalcade to the Casa Torreño. In all the great house there was only one sad heart, and that was the heart of Lucia d'Arquista. And she, sitting behind her window, looked down across the moonlit valley and saw the bright winding of the creek and the broad silver surface of the lake, darkened at the margin by the shadows of the trees. The air was crisp in these highlands, and a cool breeze blew to her, filled with strange, pungent odors unlike the meadow perfumes of old Spain. All was huge and strong and new in this country at the other end of the world. She was oppressed by its newness; she was oppressed by its size; and for one familiar glimpse of the old land she would have given ten years of life. Even the singing and the merriment in the house oppressed her more. And her last ally was stolen from her. Anna d'Arquista had been sympathetic enough until she saw the Casa Torreño itself. But after she had walked through it, hall after hall, garden after garden; after she had seen the artificial pools, the statues brought at fearful cost, the stables large and costly as a palace in themselves, her mind was changed.

"There are marriages for love," she had told her niece. "There are also marriages of state. The sons and the daughters of kings submit to them happily enough. Why cannot you, Lucia?"

And the girl made no answer; it was a thing not worth argument, she felt. And the willful blind cannot be made to see.

Torreño himself was quick to see the change in the girl's chaperone. He was at this minute closeted with her. Perhaps he was suggesting certain methods by which she could change the mind of Lucia. As for that, the girl cared nothing. Steel cannot be changed to lead even by magic.

Here the wind increased suddenly almost to a gale—then fell away to its former strength. It was as though a door had been opened and shut behind her. So she turned her head, carelessly. She saw nothing, at first, but just as she was moving back again the tail of her eye caught on a tall black figure against the wall, half obscured by the curtain. She whipped around upon him. But even before she saw his face, she had no doubt.

"Señor Gidden!" she breathed.

"It is I," said the Black Rider.

"You escaped from Guadalmo's men. I knew that you would! But how by magic did you ever reach this room? They have guards everywhere."

"The same means by which I shall leave it. The hill is tunneled through from top to bottom and steps cut. It was done before the house was built... so long ago that even Torreño has forgotten them, I suppose. They brought me up to the cellar level. After that, I have been feeling my way until I reached you."

She was trembling with fear and with delight.

"Where shall I hide you? Where shall I put you, Richard Gidden, madman! They spy on me every step I make. They have listeners at every door!"

"They know that the bird will be out of the cage if they are not wary. But they are cautious too late. She is already gone!"

"Señor!" breathed the girl.

"What would you give, señorita, to be free from this house, and away on the sea?"

She paused.

"I am paying for every second of this talk," said Gidden a little sternly. "Speak to me as if I were your inner mind. Let there be nothing between us but honesty."

"I would give all my life!" said the girl suddenly. "You knew that or you would never have come. But I am lost. Not even a miracle could save me."

"Yankee hands and Yankee wits will accomplish that miracle," he said. "If you will trust yourself to me. Come to the window!"

He led her to the casement.

"Do you see the trees under that hill above the river? I have two horses there... my own and a strong black mare which Señor Torreño will miss out of his stable in the morning. They are saddled and bridled. In a few short hours they will take us to the sea. And in the port there is a Yankee ship loaded and waiting for a fair wind and a word from me. The wind has come. Do you feel it? There is only one thing that keeps the anchor of that skipper down and that is tidings from Richard Gidden. Will you come with me... down those same steps that I climbed to get to you?"

"If we are caught, you are a dead man, señor. I shall not go!"

"As well die now as later. They have marked me down. They are ten thousand to one. Sooner or later they are sure to take me if I stay in this land. Guadalmo's men have sworn to take me!"

"Then flee, Richard Gidden! Ride for the shore and the ship of your friend."

"And leave you here? I cannot! If they were an army, I should stay near you in the hope of seeing you once in a year... a single glimpse."

"Do you care so much, Richard?"

"I love you, Lucia."

"And I you, Richard, even when your skin was red and you stood so tall and proud and disdainful before Torreño. I was afraid of you, afraid for you, and I knew that I could love you."

Like two shadows that the wind moved, they swayed together, whispering.

"But I never dreamed that such a wild joy could come to me."

"Now I fear nothing, Lucia. Nothing! I used to think when I sailed for this country that I had only one great purpose in my life, and that was to revenge the death of my poor brother. I was shipwrecked and lived among Indians. I felt that God kept me for that end alone. I was hunted for my life. And still I felt something predestined that would bring me on. But it was not to meet Guadalmo. It was to

find you, my dear, and save you from the calf, Don Carlos, and the bull, his father. Save you and keep you and love you forever.”

“Richard, if...”

A footfall in the hall; she started back from him.

“It is my aunt!”

“It cannot be!”

The footfall approached, paused at the door, and then went on.

“Now,” he said, “that is a warning. Are you ready?”

“One instant. My jewels, Richard...”

“Let them be! Let them be! I am robbing Torreño of you. Let him keep the jewels. They will be a part repayment. I want you as you are, dear. Without a thing, without a penny. To be all mine!”

“If they see us as we go... if you are lost, Richard... I want to carry some weapon. They shall not have me back!”

“Hush, my dear. That is a sin. No harm shall come. Are you quite ready?”

“Yes.”

“Is there one regret?”

“None in all the world!”

## Chapter XV

### Escape.

THEY slipped into the outer corridor. A door opened; a shaft—a soft yellow lamplight slipped down the wall. But the footsteps which sounded immediately went before them, almost as though leading the way. And the lovers looked at one another with suffused faces, with glistening eyes, thinking the same thought.

Now down the hall to the rear of the house. They reached a stairway at the back, narrow, swiftly turning, and down this Richard Gidden descended first, with the girl behind him, and as he climbed down he could feel the tremor of her breath behind him and sometimes catch a whispered word, so he knew that she was praying for their safety. But he needed no prayers to help him; he felt the strength of a lion in him.

They turned a sharp corner of the stairs—a servant, scampering up, crashed against Gidden and recoiled, staggering.

“In the name of heaven,” he gasped out.

“Dog!” said Gidden sternly. “Are you a blind bat?”

The magnificence of his manner struck the other full of awe. He cowered against the wall.

“Alas, señor, on these steps... the servants only... I did not know...”

Gidden brushed past him with the girl on his arm.

“He has stopped and is staring after us. He begins to suspect something,” said Gidden. “The devil fly away with him. I should have stabbed him to the heart and gone on without a word!”

"No, no, Richard, only when your own life is in danger... swear that you will not harm a single human soul! If there is blood on this first day..."

"The devil is loose!" murmured Gidden. "He has given an alarm. Did you have the hood over your face?"

There was a loud babbling of voices from the rear of the great house.

"I had the hood over it. He could not have guessed."

"He has guessed, nevertheless, Lucia. We can never reach the bottom of the hill by the hidden stairs before the whole household will be swarming like hornets."

"We are lost, then, Richard? Shall I turn back? Shall I hide you?"

"You could not hide me here if I were no larger than a grain of sand. Old Torreño would smell me out. Keep heart, Lucia. We walk straight forward and trust to blind chance!"

They entered the great hall. Yonder sat Don Carlos himself at a small table with a book in his hand, but with idle, sad eyes fixed straight before him.

"We are lost!" whispered the girl.

"Not yet. He knows my red face, not my white one. And you are hooded. He will think it strange but he is in a dream. Perhaps he will not even see. We must walk straight toward the big door, yonder. If I have to delay, run straight forward, dear. There are horses in the courtyard tethered at the rack. Take one and ride with all speed down the hill. I shall be after you in a trice... or else I shall be a dead man. Do you hear?"

"Yes!"

"And are you afraid?"

"No!"

"Then..."

"Señor, señor!" broke in the voice of Don Carlos from the side.

"Señor Torreño!" said Gidden in his perfect Spanish and with a courteous intonation. To the girl: "Faster, my dear!"

"One moment!"

"On, on!" whispered Gidden. "I must stop here for an instant. Show no haste. Be slow and at ease. Sing a song softly. It will be better than a mask!"

He turned to Carlos.

"I have not your face in my mind, señor. Are you one of poor Don Hernandez's men?"

"I am, señor," said Gidden.

"Your name, then?"

"Christobal Paraña."

"Paraña? I have heard all the names of his men. I do not recall that one. Yet there is something familiar about your face. It is connected with some sinister recollection in my mind, sir."

"I shall explain to you whatever you wish when I return. The girl..."

He gestured.

"Señor!" said Carlos sternly. "Stand where you are. I have the strangest thought in the world. You are Gidden!"

He was drawing his pistol as he spoke. Half of its silver-chased length was in view when Gidden caught his wrist with fingers of hot steel that crushed the flesh against the bone and made him drop the weapon. He himself tore the pistol out

and with the heavy barrel of it struck poor Don Carlos to the floor and that in the view of half a dozen *mozos*. The servants raised a shout. Someone fired a gun. But Gidden was already out of the hall and down the white stone steps into the courtyard. There he saw Lucia mounted on a tall gelding, with the reins of another in her hand. Before her stood a cavalier of Guadalmo's troop, half frowning, half smiling. No doubt it was his very horse, by unlucky chance, that she had mounted.

He saw before him greater obstacles. There were a dozen armed men in that court. Two watched the gate steadfastly. Others were scattered here and there. It was plain that Torreño considered his house a garrisoned fort until that marriage was consummated.

"Don Carlos!" shouted Gidden as he raced out. "They are murdering Don Carlos! Help!"

That startling word brought a rush from the nearest men to the door, and there they crushed against the outcoming tide of those in pursuit of Gidden. Only one man had stayed by his place, and that was he who argued with Lucia. Gidden bounded on him like a tiger and struck him to the ground, then leaped into the saddle of the horse which Lucia held. He had one glimpse of her pale, set face, then they whirled and raced for the gateway.

Through that gateway they pressed at full speed and, out of the babble swelling confusedly behind them, they heard one great single voice—the voice of Don Carlos: "It is Gidden and the Señorita Lucia! Kill the man."

A gun exploded; but it must have been fired wildly, for not even the sound of the bullet came to them. Then they were rushing down the looping road which led to the base of the hill. Halfway down they looked back to Casa Torreño's stone face, pale in the moonlight, and a dark tangle of horsemen who spurred out from the gate. Then face forward, they goaded their horses and galloped for the stream. The stone bridge rang beneath the heavy hoofs. They tore up the valley toward that shadow of trees beneath the hills where the picked horses of Gidden waited for them.

Twenty riders stormed behind them, and the leaders were gaining when Gidden and the girl reached the covert. It seemed the ropes which tied the horses were strands of iron, refusing to be loosed. And the horses themselves were possessed of devils, dancing wildly, unwilling to be mounted. By sheer might of hand he raised the girl and put her into the saddle. Then into the saddle on the back of the bay. The brush was already crashing with the charge of Torreño's men as they started away on their fresh mounts.

They issued on the farther side. Through the trees, shadows among shadows, the horsemen of Torreño cursed and spurred and shouted. Don Carlos, pressing toward the front, was offering thousands and fresh thousands for the capture.

But the fugitives had beneath them, now, speed like the gallop of the wind. A long level lay before them, twisting around the shoulders of hills which stepped down into the valley, and over it they raced, with the clamor growing fainter behind them.

It was a black sea under the cold light of dawn that they saw at last. But rocking on the waters of the little harbor they saw the long body of a ship. To them it was like a promised land. On the hilltop above the beach they loosed the two

horses. The black mare raced off with high head and flaring tail, but the bay horse followed his master curiously and watched as the pair with numbed, weary hands, gathered driftwood and kindled two fires.

“If they come... if Torreño comes before the boat?” she breathed, as they stood shivering beside the growing fires.

“Fate,” said Gidden, “is against them. Look!”

From the side of the ship a boat had put off and was heading to the shore, swinging on with the rhythmic stroke of half a dozen men. It came closer. In the sheets stood a tall man, waving his hat, calling. And they hurried down to the edge of the water, where the wet sands yielded beneath their feet.

The bow cut the sand. The sailors leaped out, regardless of the icy water; but Gidden was already waist deep beside the gunwale, bearing the girl in his arms. And as she was lowered gently to a place, she heard a man in the bow saying in the unfamiliar English tongue: “Dick Gidden, we have cheated the devil and got you safe! But here are two birds instead of one!”

“It is the spring of the year,” said Gidden.

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