

A CAST FOR FORTUNE.

Don Maurizio. And, by the bye, we have forgotten about the target-practice. Shall we not try it? Yonder is a water-fowl on the beach. Let me see you knock it over.

CHAPTER XII.

"I am sorry," said Don Maurizio, coming out the next morning to find the usual group gathered under the arcade around the great doorway,—to wit, Dona Zarifa, Derwent, the horses, and the mozos,—

"I am sure that he is, if I may be allowed to interpret his sentiments by my own," said Derwent. "And you are going to the hospital, senorita? I can say nothing against such a charitable intention, but before you spoke—so quick is thought—I was about to propose a visit to the Canada. Ever since you said that you would like a picture of it, I have been anxious to try what my efforts can accomplish in the way of a sketch."

"I shall be delighted," she said. "I hope that you will try. And surely my absence cannot matter. You do not need assistance in your drawing?"

"Oh, yes," said Derwent, though he had the grace to blush, "I need your assistance to determine the best point of view,—that is, the one you would prefer. But I will take my materials and follow my own judgement. Then, when you have finished your charitable ministrations, you will perhaps come and tell me if you like my choice."

"Yes, I will come," she said, smiling. And then without waiting to change her dress, she walked away toward the village on the other side of the gardens.

Derwent stood and watched her as long as she was in sight. The close-fitting habit showed every line of her statuesque figure and the perfect grace with which she moved, as she passed down one of the shady avenues, her favorite companion, a beautiful greyhound, walking beside her, and looking as thorough-bred as herself. All around stretched the grounds, dappled with sunshine and shadow, while the long vista of the tree-arched avenue held only the one moving figure, as a perfect picture, in the heart of the green loveliness.

Senor Derwent, know pretty accurately, I think, what you can do.

"I wish I did," said Derwent, devoutly. "But I am like other men: misled by vanity, I sometimes essay tasks beyond my strength and fail. I shall probably fail in making this sketch; but I mean to try. Fortunately, I have sketching materials with me; for I thought I would do something of the kind in Mexico. This will be my first attempt."

A few minutes later, with a portfolio under his arm and accompanied by the padre, he was on his way to the ravine, where he had spent many delightful hours since the day when he was first introduced to it. They tried various points of view, and it was finally decided that the sketch should be made from the pavilion. So Derwent settled himself, with the more satisfaction because he had a support on the railing for his book, and a roof overhead to keep away the intrusive rays of the sun.

Padre Francisco lingered talking pleasantly, until he was finally at work; and then, saying that his own work awaited him, he took his departure, with many wishes for the success of the picture.

As his slender, casked figure went down the glen, Derwent watched it with a smile, saying to himself that if his picture was a success that figure should enter into it. "Dona Zarifa will like that," he thought, for he knew how dear the gentle priest was to every one at Miraflores. He had heard from Don Maurizio that he belonged to one of the proscribed religious orders, which, robbed, exiled, and defrauded by the government, are yet quietly doing the work of God in poverty and obscurity all over Mexico.

The young man was thinking of that figure, and of all the long line of such figures which had Christianized and civilized a savage people, as he worked with a facility that surprised himself. Perhaps the stimulus was the desire to gratify Dona Zarifa,—for love can do wonderful things and develop powers almost undreamed of,—or perhaps he possessed more talent than he had hitherto imagined. At all events, his sketch was growing in the most satisfactory manner, and he was so absorbed in its progress that he had almost forgotten to wonder if Dona Zarifa would appear according to her promise, when suddenly in such quick succession as to be almost simultaneous, two shots rang sharply on the air, the last—a rifle-ball—just grazing his ear, and then flattening itself on the stone column beside which he sat.

The book dropped from his hand, and the sheet of paper on which he was sketching was borne by a current of air over the railing and fluttered unheeded into the current below, as with a violent start he looked up, to see Dona Zarifa standing on the path below, with a still smoking pistol in her uplifted hand.

In an instant he was by her side, for instinct told him that the shot had not been fired idly. "For God's sake, what is it?" he cried, gazing with astonishment at the pale, set face, the shining eyes, and the uplifted hand pointing so steadily without a tremor in the direction of the pavilion.

"There is a man, an assassin, behind yonder rock," she answered. In a clear, vibrant tone, pointing to a low, long boulder, that crowned the hill which rose immediately in the rear of the pavilion. "I saw him about to shoot you, and I fired just as he had his finger on the trigger. His aim swerved, and he fell. I think I killed him."

"I will see," said Derwent, turning quickly; but she stopped him by a motion, and extended the pistol. "He may be merely wounded," she said. "Be cautious."

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