

Select Tale.

THE WAY-SIDE INN.

Concluded.

"Caramba! only a half-duro; this little wretch is neither worth longing nor killing."

"Immediately after this, I heard them whispering with Martin Secco; and then they knocked at the door of old Pedro Barradas, who like a cautious man, had fastened it on the inside."

"Get up, said they, 'Senor Barradas—got up, you are wanted."

"But old Barradas either slept like a top or he was too wary to open; for he heeded them not."

"Then I heard Juan and Martin muttering curses, as they deliberately forced open the door; next there came a terrible cry of—

"Help! Pedrillo, help! Ayda por, amor de neustra, Senora Santisim!"

"This was followed by sounds like those made by a sheep when the knife of the carnero is in its throat; and, in the mean-time, Martin's two daughters were singing as they could, and dancing as bolero in the passage to conceal these terrible sounds which froze the blood within me.

Here Pedrillo paused.

"Go on, said Jack Hall, impatiently; and how did you escape?"

"If the noble senors would help me to refresh my memory—"

Ah, I comprehend, said I, tossing a peseta (a small coin) to him: now fire away, Pedrillo."

"You should not encourage the young picaro Senor Cabarello," said the Spaniard, whose face was now darkened by a terrible frown; for it is my belief that he was the mere decoy who led poor old Pedro Barradas to that villainous Posada."

Instead of being angry, Pedrillo only lifted up his hands, and prayed that Heaven and our Lady of the Seven Sorrows would forgive the speaker for his vile suspicions.

"I never closed my eyes that night. In the morning I was told by Inez Patrona, that old Barradas had departed across the hills of Antequera without me. Martin Secco asked me how I had slept. I said, like a dormouse; and as soon as I was free, I ran like a hare back to Malaga; and to make up for the loss of my last night's rest slept like a torpedo under the trees of the Alameda."

"You acquainted the magistrates—the alguzils, of course," said Hall knocking the ashes from his third cigar.

"I was only a poor, ragged picaro," replied Pedrillo in a whining voice; "and who would believe me? besides, old Barradas was a stranger from Cordova or Jean; and a man, more or less is nothing in Grenada; but since that time, Martin's two daughters have been sent to the galleys at Barcelona, by the Captain General of the Kingdom, for intriguing in many ways with the contrabandists of Juan. Now, it's time we were moving, if you wish to reach the Serra."

While we were placing fresh caps on our rifles and preparing to start, the Spaniard with the patch who had listened to Pedrillo's story with great impatience, now seized that young *gamin* by the arm and grasped it like a vice, gave him a savage scowl and said something in Spanish, but so rapidly, that I could only make out that he was reprehending him severely for telling us a "succession of falsehoods."

So I thought at the time; afterwards I was enabled to put a different construction upon his indignation, at which Pedrillo seemed to be constantly alarmed.

Bidding adieu to him and the contrabandists, we departed under Pedrillo's guidance, and (sans leave) shot all along the sides of the mountain range, on the slope of which stands the small but ancient city of Antequera, so noted for the revolt of the Moors in the sixteenth century, and had some narrow escapes from falling into those remarkable pits, where the water settles in the low places, and is formed into salt by the mere heat of the sun.

We did not see much game, but knocked over a few braces of birds, and with these, and two red foxes, our little guide Pedrillo was quite laden.—So he seemed to think; for taking advantage of the concealment afforded him by the olive groves, and the scattered remnants of an abandoned vineyard, among which we had become entangled, the young rogue slipped away with our game and made off, either towards Malaga or Antequera; at least we saw no more of him, or of his burden, at that time.

This was just about the close of the day, when Hall and I were surveying from the mountain slope the magnificent prospect of the verdant Vega spreading at our feet like a trightey tinted map having that warm and roscat glow which well might win it the name of *Tierra Caliente*, Malaga

the ancient bulwark of Spain against Africa, was shining in the distance, with its towers and gates flat-roofed houses, and vast cathedrals; its Moorish castles and Gothic spires, all bathed in a warm and sunny yellow; while beyond lay the broad blue Mediterranean, dotted by sails, and changing from gold to purple and to blue.

This was all very fine; but our pleasure was lessened by the conviction that our little rascal Pedrillo was absconding with our game; and we knew it would never do to relate to the gun room mess how we had been out-witted, on returning to the Blond next day.

The foreground of this beautiful panorama was broken by innumerable small hillocks and clumps of wood of many kinds; but principally olive pine and cork trees, that grow on the slope of the great Sierra; and though the landscape darkened fast after sun set, we instituted a strict and angry search for Pedrillo, shouting and whistling as we stumbled on, we knew not very well whither, looking for our lost spoils—two foxes, with gallant brushes, and eight braces of birds.

No moon had risen, the wind began to whistle among the groves and hollows; the night was very dark.

"What if we should meet master Juan of Antequera?" said I.

"If we had our game, I should be very well pleased," replied Hall; "but I wish that Pedrillo had been with the old scratch when we hired him yesterday. If I had the little lubber on board the Blond, I would show him the main top."

"Spain is a land of mishaps and events," said I.

"Yesterday we were wishing for an adventure!"

"And to-night we have one with a vengeance," said I.

"Belay; I see some one moving in that hollow. Let us jump down—ahoy below there!"

"But we may lose the track," I urged.

"True: so do you remain where you are, while I go down into the hollow. Hallo, now and then, to let me know your whereabouts."

With his rifle in his hand, Hall, who was a fine active fellow, sprang down into a ravine that suddenly yawned before us, and I remained with my rifle cocked, and stooping low to watch what might follow. Hall disappeared in the obscurity below I hallooed; but the night-wind tossed back my own shout upon me. Then I thought I heard his voice, and sprang after him, but fell upon a point of rock and sank, completely stunned to the earth.

There I lay for nearly a quarter of an hour unable to move, or rally my senses. When I awoke, I found myself at the bottom of the hollow, and upon a narrow mule-track; the moon was rising brightly at the south end of the ravine, silencing the masses of rock, tufts of laurel trees, and wild vines that grew in the clefts of the basalt. I shouted, but received no reply; and after a long and fruitless search could discover no trace of Hall in any direction.

Considerably alarmed for his safety as well as my own—for to lie at night upon those hills of Antequera, with the devilish stories of Pedrillo and the contrabandists haunting one's memory, was anything but pleasant—I tried the charges of my rifle I looked again to the percussion caps, and set off in the direction where, by the rising of the moon, I knew that Malaga must lie, but frequently paused to hallo for Jack Hall, and received no reply save the echoes of the rocks.

The ravine descended and grew more open.—Again I saw the Vega sleeping at my feet in the haze; and, on turning an angle of the road, found myself close to an in or taberna, which I approach with joy, concluded that my friend Jack must have gone that way, and would probably be there.

Like all Spanish inns, it was a large and misshapen edifice, the lower story of which was nothing better than a great open shed, for mules and vehicles; and, ascending from thence by a stair, I reached the gallery at the door of which I was received by the host, who carried in his hand a stable lantern.

"Entrar," said he bowing profoundly; "entrar senor."

"I have been shooting on the mountains," said I, "and have lost my companion, a British naval officer. Has he passed this way?"

"No, senor," replied the host, (whose face I could not yet see,) as he led me up another stair.

"Then get supper prepared; for he must soon be here, as I have no doubt he knows pretty well the direction of Malaga. And now said I, drawing a long breath, as I seated myself, "what place is this?"

"La Posada del Cavallo" (A)

"Eh! ah—and you?" I asked, in a thick voice.

"Martin Secco, at your service, Senor Cabalero!"

Here was a *denouement*!

"Good Heavens!" thought I, mechanically re-

turning my rifle; "if the story of Pedrillo should be true."

I scrutinized my host and hostess.

Martin had a broad and open visage, with keen eyes, and a black beard as thick as a horse-brush; a wide mouth, that frequently expanded in grins; but in those grins no radiance ever lit up his glossy eyes. The mouth laughed, but they remained immoveable—invariably a bad sign. His forehead receded, and his ears were placed high upon his head. At the first glance, I concluded that my senor patron was an unmitigated brute. His figure was somewhat portly, and encased in a brown jacket, brown knee breeches, and black stockings; he wore his hair confined in a caul, and had a yellow sash round his waist.

His wife was, as Pedrillo had described Inez Secco, a Basque, for her Spanish was almost unintelligible; and her coarse black hair was plaited in one thick tail, which reached to her heels.

Her gown was of rough red cloth, with tight sleeves and a short skirt, displaying a pair of yellow worsted stockings and leather sandals, fastened by thongs above the ankle. Her face was coarse and bloated, but the expression of her eyes was terrible. It hovered between the bright ferocious glare of a snake, and the glazed orb of an arrant sot. She scanned me closely, and I thought the old devil (she was a Spanish woman, and past forty) was accurately appraising the value of all I had on.

"Well, senora patrona," said I, "what can I have for supper?"

"The senor has come at a bad time, for we have little or no provisions in our larder." (The larder of every Spanish inn has been in the same condition since the days of Cervantes and Gongora.)

For now this road between Malaga and Antequera is but little frequented after noon-day, owing to the terrible robberies and the four assassinations committed by Juan Roa, during the last Salame. Caramba! 'tis very hard that we should suffer for him."

"What can I have then?"

"A roasted galena, dressed with a few beans," said the patrona.

"And a glass of good aquadiente," added the host; "our Tiermo has soured in the wine-skins."

"'Tis poor fare, this, for hungry men. I have said that I expect my friend's arrival momentarily."

The host gave a cold smile, and said, "We have had nothing ourselves for a week past but Indian corn and boiled garbanzos (beans), but the best we have is at the disposal of the senor caballero."

The inn was old and crazy; the wind came in by one cranny, and whistled out at another. The roof, walls and floor of the large apartment where we three were seated, consisted of a multitude of beams and boards, placed horizontally and diagonally, without skill, and without regard to design or appearance; for in mechanics, the Spaniards are behind every nation in civilized Europe.—

There was but one candle in the house (as the host assured me, and that was rapidly guttering down in the current of air. The patrona transferred it from the lantern to an iron holder, and it was placed on the table to light the room and my supper.

An ostler, or nondescript servant, wearing fustian knee-buckles, without braces, with a muleteer's embroidered shirt, and having a yellow handkerchief tied round his head, spread a (not over clean) cloth on the table; knives, forks, and covers were laid for two, with a cold fowl, a loaf of white bread, a dish of beans, garlic, and a bottle of aquadiente.

I observed this wild-looking waiter looking frequently at my rifle, and the jewelled dirk that dangled at my waist-belt; I became suspicious of everything.

"You are well armed, senor," said he.

"That is natural, for arms are my profession," said I.

I looked at my watch, the hands indicated 11 o'clock! Two hours had elapsed since Hall and I had separated, still there was no appearance of him. Twenty times I opened the shutters of the unglazed windows and listened intently; but the night-wind that swept down the dark ravine in the Sierra, brought neither shout nor footstep; so I resolved to sup, go to bed, and trust to daylight for discovering Jack, if he did not arrive at the posada before morning.

I had just concluded supper, when the last remains of the last candle in this solitary inn, sank into its iron socket, and left us in darkness—at least with no other light than the red, wavering glow that came from the hearth, where a few roots of pine and cork-wood smouldered beside the brown punchero, in which the amiable patrona had boiled the beans for my repast.

"Here is a pretty piece of business!" said Martin Secco; "we have not another candle, were it

to light a blessed altar, and the senor caballero must go to bed in the dark."

"Heed not that, senor patron," said I; "for I am a soldier as you may see, and am used to discomfort."

"'Tis well, for I am sure the senor has experienced nothing but discomfort in our poor posada.—When I am rich enough, senor, I hope to have an hotel in the Alameda; and then should the caballero ever come to Malaga again, he will remember Martin Secco."

At this remark, I heard the patrona utter a low, chuckling laugh; but whether at the prospect of the fine hotel, or the doubtful chances of my ever again visiting Malaga, I could not say.

"Now, senor, patron," said I, rising, and taking up my rifle, "I should like to reach the town to-morrow; so show me my chamber, and should my friend arrive, fail not to call me."

"Will you not leave your gun here?" suggested the host.

"Thank you—no," said I, while my undefined suspicions grew stronger within me. "Do you lead the way, senor, I shall follow. Good night, senora patrona."

"Buena noche, senor," said she, stirring up the embers, and we separated.

To follow Martin was, perhaps, the most unpleasant part I had yet acted; for I had to grope my way after him along a dark passage, about forty feet long, at the end of which he ushered me into a room, where there was no other light than that given by the moon, which shone through a small window glazed with little panes of coarse glass.—Here he bade me "*Buena noche*" (good night,) and after many apologies for my miserable accommodation, left me."

The apartment was small. In one corner stood a French bed, having light-colored curtains; this, with a basin-stand, two chairs, and a mirror, made up the furniture. Like a true soldier I turned to secure the door.

Destitute of lock or bolt: it had only a small thumb-latch.

Dismounting the ewer and basin, I placed the stand endwise between the bed and the door, firmly fixing it, and thus forming a barricade, which none could move without waking me. To make all sure I again dropped the ramrod into each barrel of my rifle, passed a finger over the caps, unbuckled the belt at which my dirk dangled; and without undressing, for every moment I expected to hear Jack Hall hallooing outside the house—in short to be prepared for anything—I threw myself down on the coverlet, and weary and worn by a long day's ramble among the mountains, prepared to sleep.

For a long time, a species of painful wakefulness possessed me; the moans of the passing wind, the flapping of a loose board in the external gallery, the wavering shadows thrown by the moonlight on the damp and discolored walls—even the ticking of my watch disturbed me, and kept me constantly thinking of poor Hall's unaccountable absence, with many fears that he might have fallen into the hands of Juan of Antequera, and not a few reproaches for my having, perhaps, too easily relinquished my search for him.

These thoughts completely obliterated my sense of my own immediate danger; and I was about to drop to sleep, when something moist, that oozed about my neck and face, aroused me. I started—fully awake in a moment; and, passing a hand across my cheek, looked at it in the moon light.

"Blood!" said I, springing off the bed, while a thrill ran through me. I had not been wounded or cut by my fall, then from whence came this terrible moisture? I examined the pillow, and found the lower part of it quite wet. I turned it, and lo! it was saturated with blood!

This was the reason that Martin Secco had declined to give me a candle. My heart beat thick and fast; apprehension of something horrible came over me, and I remembered the stories of Pedrillo. I also recollected that I had some excellent Spanish cigar fuses, and, tearing three or four blank leaves from my note-book I twisted them together, lit them and surveyed the dingy chamber. The boards in front of the bed were marked by recent spots of blood: I raised the little fringe or curtain, and, guided by some terrible instinct, looked below, and saw—what?

Poor Jack Hall, lying there in his naval uniform with his epaulette torn off, and his throat literally cut from ear to ear!

He had found his way here before me, and had been assassinated.

Almost paralysed, I continued for half a minute to gaze at this terrible spectacle, till the paper buried down to my fingers, and expired. I heard my heart beating; and my head spun round as I tightened my belt and grasped my loaded rifle.—Before I could adopt any plan of operations, I heard a rustling and whispering in the passage near my door; and, looking through a crack in the

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