

DR. JACK'S WIFE

By ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "Dr. Jack," "Captain Tom," "Miss Caprice," Etc., Etc.

(Continued.)

Little does Doctor Jack imagine what strange events lie before him as he stands for a minute upon the threshold of his adventure and gazes down the calle with its twinkling lights.

Around him arise the various sounds that may be heard in a Spanish town of a balmy evening—much laughter, loud talking, songs from jolly spirits passing, while from over the walls of a garden near by come the tinkling notes of a mandolin as one of Chili's dark-eyed daughters thrums a national air.

Doctor Jack hears, smiles, and turning his back on all this exhilaration of sounds plunges down the Calle los Angeles—advancing to meet the strange adventure that awaits him.

Now, keeping to the left, he reaches a tree upon which a board has been nailed, forming a rude cross—it is known as such to every dweller in Valparaiso, and has many a time served as a rendezvous for lovers and plotters.

At the Tree of the Cross he pauses and glances around him. A figure which the body of the tree has concealed suddenly bobs into view, and a voice in Spanish says:—

"Good evening, señor—I have been expecting you. You are prompt."

"Are you Jose?"

"Si, señor, that is my name," bowing, and Jack notices that he is attired as servants are in the families of rich Chileans.

"You are to lead me into the presence of one who signs the name of Don Rafael Ricardo."

"That is true, señor."

"Then lose no time—I am ready."

"Follow, señor."

Doctor Jack does so willingly; he is not in the habit of engaging in wild-goose chases, but on the present occasion the letter which has been handed to him, requesting an interview, contained so many points concerning his secret mission to Chili, which he believed were only known to himself, that, acting on the advice of his wife, it is only proper that he should take some risks in order to find out what this means.

Jose looks behind him several times, as if to see whether the American follows; but he need have no fear on this score, since Jack has entered the game determined to see it to the end.

"We arrive!" cries the man, suddenly, as he opens a heavy gate, above which hangs a red lantern.

It may be like the fly walking into the parlor of the cunning spider, but having made up his mind, the Yankee is bound to go forward, even though he may suspect all manner of evil hovers there in store for him.

So he passes the portals. Like many houses owned by the higher classes in Santiago and Valparaiso, this building is set in the midst of a garden, and surrounded by high walls to insure privacy—indeed, these same walls might not be amiss in conjunction with a penitentiary or lunatic asylum.

They pass along a walk bordered with flowers, the perfume of which at least makes itself manifest. Then comes the house—broad steps are ascended, a noble piazza crossed, and Jose throws open the door.

"Enter," he cries, and when Doctor Jack has done so he leads him to a room,

"Go West,"

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which though but dimly lighted, it was seen is elegantly furnished.

Here the American waits for an audience with the writer of the note, in the drawing-room where his deadly foe, Lord Rackett Plympton, is an honored guest—here he stands impatiently—then, desirous of seeing the paintings, turns on the gas, floods the room with light, and hearing what may be a sigh, turns to gaze upon a sight that would thrill most men!

CHAPTER III.

It is not into the frowning tubes of a revolver that Doctor Jack stares as he wheels in that Chilean parlor, but something just about as deadly to the peace of man—the fascinating eyes of a rarely beautiful woman.

She is of Spanish blood—her dusky orbs and olive complexion betray this fact. Jack has seen many lovely women in his time, but surely never one like the person who stands there and looks into his face—her gaze is peculiar, too, since it seems to fascinate, to a certain extent.

"Pardon, but I have come here to meet the writer of a note," he says.

She gives him a captivating smile.

"Yes, I know it, Señor Evans," she says, softly.

"I would see Don Rafael, if it please you, señorita."

"He is in Santiago."

"But—the letter—"

"I wrote myself, señor," again smiling.

Doctor Jack bows, accepting the situation.

"Then my interview must be with you."

"Are you sorry, Doctor Jack?"

This man is no fool—he detects the varied emotions of her voice, and knows she has entered upon the game she plays with a motive. As yet he cannot guess it—he is far from being conceited—ignores the fact of his fine physique and handsome face—cares only for the love and devotion of one woman in all this wide world, and that—his wife.

At the same time he is a gentleman, and able to meet a lady with compliments if need be.

"Certainly not, lady, but surprised," he replies.

"At what?"

"That so much of my secret business to this land, to Chili, should be known to one of your sex."

"Ah! perhaps I have an interest in you and your fortunes," with a bewitching look.

"That, too, would be singular, lady, for, outside of my dreams, I cannot remember ever having seen, pardon me, one so lovely."

She flushes and thrills, as though his empty compliment contains the elixir of life for her.

"Then you have seen me in your dreams—you believe in souls leaving their earthly tenement during sleep and holding intercourse with other congenial company, from whom in life they may ever be separated?"

"Ah! that is something I have never bothered my head about. I simply meant that in dreams we often see faces, and are startled at meeting their fac-similes later. But señorita, I have come here, braving what danger lies upon your streets after the recent disturbances"—with an involuntary glance at his hand and the bruised knuckle—"to hear what you have to say concerning my affairs. You will therefore pardon me if I ask you to proceed to business that I may return to the fonda."

At his words a change flashes over the lovely face of the Chilean beauty.

"You are anxious to return to your wife?" she cannot help saying.

"That is quite true, señorita," he replies, stoutly, and then adds: "You know there has been much lawlessness in Valparaiso since the Balmaceda party was defeated, and I am uneasy about leaving her unprotected in a common hotel."

That beautiful lip curls slightly.

"Ah! Doctor Jack, do not worry yourself about your wife—there is one in Valparaiso who means to protect her—whose forte in life is caring for the widows."

"Indeed—but Avis is no widow," with a laugh.

"He means she shall be before the steamer sails on which you expect to take passage for the grand country of California."

"The duse he does!" exclaims Doctor Jack, elevating his eyebrows; "and who may this party be who appears so solicitous about my welfare and that of my wife?"

"He is an Englishman."

"Perhaps I can guess now—I had a glimpse of his figure to-day, and it reminded me of a certain man, though I have not mentioned the fact to my wife. Is it Lord Rackett Plympton?"

"He is the man. Before you met your wife he adored her—he lost the maid, and now he swears to win Doctor Jack's widow."

"Bless me, that's cool. I'll have to keep an eye out for mildred. But it was not alone to tell me this you sent me that note?"

She shrugs her shoulders; rounded and perfection itself they are.

"Ah! señor, a variety of reasons caused me to seek an audience with you. I am not sorry, and I trust that you may not be. But what is the matter with your hand, señor—your handkerchief, carissima! it is spotted with blood."

(To be Continued.)

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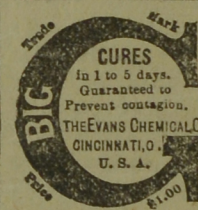
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