



CHAPTER XII.

They had reached a dangerous point in their conversation, Carmen and Felix, and no one can tell what the influence of the moment might have had my comrades to say or do had they not been interrupted by her father's call. Her eloquent eyes and her musical voice, revealing in melodious Spanish her sentiment of interest in him, were perilously captivating to a young man whose years were not yet six and twenty. Nothing of charm was lost by the naive frankness of her reproof and warnings concerning Felix's conduct with Sangrado, which might have sounded startling to a person of the supercilious East. Her sentiments and her manner of expressing them were becoming and natural as well as thoroughly practical and wise in this girl of the Santa Cruz valley, reared among steel blades and firearms at her father's hacienda in this Indian-haunted, desperado-infested region of the Southwest. To make such words perfectly fitting and quite the best thing that could be said by a woman of her race under such circumstances, it needs only the condition that she came greatly for the man to whom she imparts her confidences.

Whether more intimate confidences might have been interchanged between the two had opportunity been given I leave to the inference of the reader. Beyond the fact that they had been together in stress of danger where Felix was her protector it may be taken as a principle that the average and properly-constituted man, not otherwise engrossed, when thrown into association with a beautiful Spanish girl willing to please him, will promptly fall in love with her. And this rule scarcely admits an exception among

the men of the romantic, adventurous, far Southwest.

One who knows that country and its people will fully understand why Felix and Carmen, with no preliminary languishments or conventional formulas of approach, with no introspections or analyses of motives, were in so brief an acquaintance, with so little said between them, undoubtedly and greatly taken up with each other. Already, if appearances were to be trusted, they were on the very verge of love-making and had perhaps passed the border. Why not? A handsome young fellow, brave and debonaire, knowing well the country and the *luzna Espanola*, their two days' acquaintance had more than once given him a chance to display before the eyes of Carmen his address in the time of danger.

In manifesting her interest in him so undisguisedly and in speaking her mind so promptly and frankly she was simply the spontaneous, impetuous Juliet that every one of her countrywomen is when by some chance the care of the *duenna* lapses even if *Romeo's* bright sword and silken doublet have been replaced by California jeans and revolver at cartridge belt. What most of all made me suspect that the flower of love was blossoming by the savage prairie trail was the vehemence of Carmen's expression of feeling against Gaspar Sangrado, whose desperate and assiduous pursuit of her may, before she met the handsome American, secretly have pleased even though it frightened her.

Love and hate alike begin and bloom and ripen all in a day in sunny, semi-tropical Arizona, like the riotous growth of verdure, flowers and poison vines that make the valleys of that region veins of emerald, decked with festal colour as they wind amid the ground-work of bare, beetling mountains and broad arid spaces. Whether love would have been in ardent words between the two had Don Ramon's nap lasted five minutes longer I will not venture to say. But in Carmen's face and manner and impression imparted by her pervading magnetism I read the unspoken thought of Lupita's taunt to Sangrado—that the senior's daughter looked kindly upon the young American caballero—and these words she knew Felix must have overheard. It was this thought, I was sure, which gave her the pleased, half-bashful look of self-consciousness she wore as she paused, with mantling cheek, after quoting so much as she did of the Mexican actress' words, and in that pause if ever eyes and smile carried unconsciously a message it was the message of hers to Felix that Lupita's words concerning him were true.

But we were on the trail, and now it was not sentiment, but "boots and saddles"—to mount and ride—that was the order of the day. We had far to go, and it was not the time and place for lingering. The mules were soon harnessed to the carriage, our horses were bridled and saddled as quickly and again we were off upon our journey. As we drew away from the spot the Missourian was bidding

up his team for a start, and we exchanged friendly words with the maestro, whose cavalcade came up at about the same time, having made a short nooning on the plain a mile or two behind us. Looking back after a time we could see that the Missourian's and the maestro's outfits were now travelling together.

An hour after our start, with Stein's peak to the northward and Gablan peak to the southward, behind us, Don Ramon, sitting on the front seat of the carriage with his rifle between his knees, pointed to a buzzard sailing in great circles high in the air, two or three miles ahead of us. Soon it was joined by another and several others in the distance, growing larger as we looked, showed that others of the carrion birds were flying our way.

"It's a bad sign," said Don Ramon, gravely. "It means Apaches. The



Felix fell back a little behind the carriage.

buzzards follow them in their work, for they know they will find plenty of prey."

Soon came another sight which caused us all to rein up and pause for a time before going forward. We watched it with weapons held ready in hand as if to meet instant danger, although what we saw was far away. We had passed from the *Cienaga de San Simon* and now were in the high, broken country to the eastward. The mountains were about us, near at hand, although the trail for the most part still followed the open plain that lies between and about the ranges in this region. To the right and left many eminences were in view, sometimes rocky and jagged, mostly rounded hills or level-topped mesas dotted with *pinon* trees. Long reaches of plain, on which the mesquite and cactus grew, stretched to the southward, limitless seemingly, like the ocean, with solitary peaks rising like volcanic islands from the sea. All about the southern and eastern horizon the mirage played in similitude of a vast undulating water sheet, in which rocked and floated islands with strange trees and structures and monsters.

Far off, to the south, where the solid earth seemed first to lift into the mirage, looking as unsubstantial as shadows or as magic-lantern pictures thrown upon a screen, a herd of horses, mules and donkeys were galloping southward. Behind them rode mounted men, five or six in number, leading them along and darting to left or right as if to keep them to a course. To one trained in life upon the plains the difference between a white man and an Indian, even seen too far away to identify more than the outlines and motion of the body, is unmistakable, and the riders we saw were plainly Indians.

Whether the horsemen were far away or comparatively near could not be estimated with any certainty, nor was it necessary that it should be. They were widening the distance between us, and so far as we were concerned, there was no danger to be anticipated from them. But the sight of them, like that of the buzzards, was a bad omen of what might come, and a seriousness we had not felt before fell upon all our party. Don Ramon lifted the butt of his rifle from the bot-

tom of the carriage, and laid the weapon across his knees. Carmen, realizing the premonition of danger, rather from the feeling that pervaded our party than from anything she saw or understood, turned to Felix as if to gather from his expression what might be the matter, and if there were cause for alarm. Her bright face took on a questioning, anxious look at the shade of seriousness upon his brow, and she bent her gaze fixedly upon him as if to command an answer to the mute enquiry in her eyes. At once the signs of sombre thought left his face, and he smiled. Instantly the lock of anxiety vanished from her face, but her eyes still asked: "Is there anything wrong?" "I was afraid the rain was about to fall and give us a wetting," he said, as if she had spoken to him. He pointed to the mountains beyond Stein's peak, whose tops were dimmed slightly, as if with haze, and stood against the background of a darkened sky. Carmen sank back in her seat, reassured and satisfied.

Presently Felix fell back a little behind the carriage, signalling me to do likewise. We still could see the distant Indians as they receded, becoming more and more a part of the mirage beyond the plain.

"That's not all of them," he said. "It looks as if the general was right this morning in his idea of what the renegades would do—that they would break up into little bands and take the back track for Mexico. That

means that they are liable to be crossing the stage trail between here and Silver City anywhere and at any time, all heading for the Sierra Madre across the line. If we miss running into some of their parties we shall do well. Our salvation is in the fact that the scouts and soldiers are probably pressing them too closely to give them time to be round in wait for us."

"Well, whatever is to happen will happen. We can do no better than keep on and get out of the way of danger as fast as we can," I replied.

"Of course, and meantime we must keep in readiness against trouble if it rises. If that thunderstorm that seems to be gathering in the Peloncillo mountains doesn't break on us and flood the arroyos, we'd better make a night ride into Silver City. I think that will be Don Ramon's idea."

CHAPTER XIII.

That there was a prospect of heavy rains to come upon us that day would be more evident to one who knew the country well than to a tenderfoot. Off to the south the mirage phantoms danced and floated as lightly as they had done at any time before during the day, and from the clear sky the sun shone in the south-west as brightly as he had beamed throughout the morning. It was in the north and north-west that the thickening sky boded rainclouds, which might linger in the mountains to discharge their contents among the peaks or might drive forth above the plain to fall in heavy showers of rain, characteristic of this region. At this time of the year, after weeks of clear weather, the rainy season might be supposed to have ended, but it often happens in New Mexico and Arizona that such days of brightness prove only the prelude to a terrific rainstorm which gives the grand finale to the rainy season in true melodramatic fashion, with accompaniments of wind, hail, lightning, crashing thunder, and inundation.

The rainstorms of this arid region come from the mountains, as in the coast regions they come from off the sea. So the increasing haziness about the Peloncillos and the Burro range, though far away, indicated possible trouble later for us upon the plain. The pleasant southern breeze that had blown throughout the morning had fallen, and there was a boding stillness and mysterious electrical quality in the half sultry air that oppressed the spirits and filled the minds of all our party with vague uneasiness. So we travelled silently forward over the trail, and when one of our number spoke, what he had to say was said briefly and in monosyllables. Without the appearance of great watchfulness, our eyes closely scanned the country far and near, from the distant mountains from which Apache smoke spirals rose fitfully here and there to the rocks and eminences, and hollows, the yuccas, cactuses, and mesquite clumps closer at hand. Whenever our party drew near a point where the trail descended an arroyo, as the dry water courses of the country are called, or turned the base of a foothill, Felix or I rode forward in advance of the carriage to explore the ground ahead and see that it sheltered no Indian ambuscade. Not less we watched well to the rear lest Apaches, lying unseen as we passed, should dash upon us from behind, their chosen method of attacking a travelling outfit.

One thing which surprised us was that we had seen nothing of the two prospectors. They had started from the station much earlier than we, and we knew how astonishingly far the long, swinging pace of men like these, accustomed to cover long distances on foot, will carry them in the day's round. Still it seemed that we ought by this time to have sighted them somewhere in the distance before us. That they were yet ahead of us we could tell by their tracks and the hoof prints of their horses upon the trail. The buzzards that we had seen gathering in the air were now circling above a point we were approaching near at hand. It was evident that they were only waiting for someone to go away and leave them a clear field before settling down upon a prey that they had discovered.

Ah, here were signs that might account for the presence of the buzzards. The tracks of the prospectors and their horses were lost in a confusion of hoof prints of horses and mules which recently had crossed the trail. A little farther along a lead burro, which we recognized as one of those driven by the prospectors, lay dead, shot with a bullet, beside the trail. Cautiously we went on, scrutinizing every object to left and right that might conceal an enemy. A quarter of a mile farther along, against a rocky slope grown up with scrub oak, our mules suddenly shied away to the right, swerving so much that it was with difficulty that Manuel held them to the road.

(To be Continued.)

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" Hunter River	8.28 "
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" Emerald	8.58 "
" Freetown	9.08 "
" Kensington	9.22 "
" Summerside	9.45 "
" Misconche	9.50 "
" Wellington	10.00 "
" Port Hill	10.25 "
" O'Leary	10.55 "
" Bloomfield	11.10 "
" Alberton	11.30 "
" Tignish	6.00 "

Fares.

Charlottetown to Milton, inclusive	\$1.25
Colville to Fredericton,	1.15
Elliot's to Bluesbank,	.95
Kensington to Misconche,	.85
St. Nicholas to Northam,	.75
Port Hill to Portage,	.60
West Devon to O'Leary,	.45

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Parties east of Charlottetown wishing to connect with Special Train can do so by taking train the day previous, to Charlottetown, at a single first class fare, to Charlottetown with the special Excursion Ticket therefrom.

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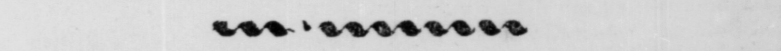
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