

Ellis Edward Sylvester

**Up the Forked River: or,
Adventures in South America**



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Edward Sylvester Ellis

Up the Forked River; Or, Adventures in South America

CHAPTER I

Two friends were seated in the private office of Rowland & Starland, Montgomery Street, San Francisco, not long ago, discussing a subject in which both were much interested.

Each gentleman was past three-score, but they were well preserved, of rugged health, well to do and prosperous. They had got on for many years without so much as a shadow of difference between them. They had made the tour of Europe together, had engaged in many an outing and now as the evening of life was drawing on, they took matters with that complacency and comfort which was creditable to their good sense and which was warranted by their circumstances.

Mr. Thomas Starland, the junior partner, removed his cigar, leaned back in his chair, and, looking kindly into the face of his friend, said:

“Teddy, you came to California a number of years before I did.”

The other, who was in a reminiscent mood, smoked in silence for a minute or so, looking up to the ceiling, and, when he replied, it was as if communing with himself:

“Yes; it is close upon half a century. How times flies! I was a small boy, and I often wonder how it was Providence took such good care of me.”

“True, you were a young lad, but you had the best of companions.”

“That is hardly correct, so far at least as one was concerned. When I left home in the East to join my father, who had come to California ahead of me, my companion was an Irishman named Micky McGuigan, who was as green as I.”

“I have heard you speak of another comrade – a four-footed one.”

“Ah, yes, our dog Towser, one of the most faithful and intelligent brutes that ever lived. He died long ago of old age and I have showed my gratitude and love for his memory by placing a monument over his remains. Micky – peace to the memory of the good fellow – has also rested in the tomb for years, and it was not long after that my good father followed him, – so of all my companions on my first coming to the Pacific coast, not one remains.”

“You could hardly have passed safely through the many dangers without the help of others,” suggested Mr. Starland.

“I admit that. No braver man than Micky McGuigan ever lived. He had the traditional Irishman’s love of a fight and he got plenty of it. But, Tom, our perils began, as you know, before we touched foot in California. Off the southern coast our steamer, the *Western Star*, was sunk in a collision. Teddy and I were left on the uninhabited coast (so far as white people are concerned), without so much as even a gun or pistol. Finding ourselves marooned, we struck into the interior, stole a couple of guns and some ammunition (what’s the use of denying it at this late day?) from some Indians, and then went it blindly.”

“I recall something of a partnership you made with an experienced miner.”

“Yes; good fortune brought us together, and it was a lucky thing indeed for us that we were picked up by Jo Harman, who piloted us through no end of dangers. We spent weeks in hunting for gold in what was then one of the wildest regions in the world.”

“How did you make out?”

“We picked up a few particles, just enough to keep hope alive, but, in the end, had to give it up and take our chances in the diggings like the rest of the fortune hunters.”

“Well, Teddy, we have proved that there are other ways of getting treasure than by digging in the earth for it.”

“Yes, though it takes digging in any circumstances, and we had as hard times, at the beginning, as any of those who now dwell on Nob Hill.”

From the above brief conversation, you will recall the principal character whom you met in the story of “Teddy and Towser.” The lad who passed through more than one trying adventure had become a man well along in middle life. After settling in California, he made it his home. He married a lady of Spanish descent, to whom a single child was born, – Warrenia, now a miss almost out of her teens. Although Mr. Starland was younger than his partner and married later in life, his son Jack was several years the elder of the daughter of Mr. Rowland.

Since these two young people have much to do in the chapters that follow, the reader must be given a clear understanding of them and their peculiar relation to each other.

While the parents had been partners in prosperity, they were also united in affliction, for each had lost his wife by death, when the children were small. Neither married again, for they had loved their life companions too deeply and profoundly to think seriously of trying to replace them.

Another minor but curious coincidence must be noted. Years after the marriage of the partners, Mr. Starland employed a Spanish priest to trace the genealogy of his wife, who felt a strong curiosity in the matter. In doing so, he discovered that several generations earlier, during the time of the Spanish settlement of the Southwest, the ancestors of Mrs. Starland and Mrs. Rowland were related. This was surprising but peculiarly pleasing to both families. Because of this remote relationship, so trituated indeed that it had really vanished into nothingness, Jack Starland and Warrenia Rowland called themselves cousins.

It was just like the headstrong, impulsive, mischievous youth to go still further. He hinted that the priest had not told the whole truth, having been bribed to suppress it by the father of Warrenia, for mysterious reasons, which he dared not divulge. What did this young hopeful do but insist that he and Warrenia were brother and sister! The idea, grotesquely impossible on the face of it, caused no end of merriment and ridicule, but Jack stubbornly maintained his claim. He declared further that the real name of Warrenia was the same as his own, – that is Starland. He often addressed her as Miss Starland, and she, with her fun-loving disposition, pretended to agree with him. When together, they almost invariably spoke to or of each other as brother and sister, and there were not lacking those who believed they were actually thus related.

The odd whim gave the parents no little amusement and they too at times humored it. The very absurdity of the fancy gave it its comicality.

You can understand how deeply each parent loved his child. Nothing seemed more natural than that the son and daughter should become man and wife when they grew up, though neither father as yet had made any reference to such an event which would have been pleasing to both and eminently fit in every respect.

Jack and Warrenia grew to maturity as if they really were brother and sister. She was sent East to attend one of the most famous young ladies’ schools in the country. Jack was on the point of entering Harvard, when he received an appointment to West Point. There under the strict regulations he gained few opportunities of seeing his “sister.” When he did so, it was when she and some of her classmates, under proper chaperonage visited the model military institution on the banks of the Hudson.

Jack was graduated in time to take part in our war with Spain. He won a fine reputation at San Juan Hill, and would have received his well merited promotion, but when a Major by brevet, he resigned to become interested in his father’s business, which was growing to a degree that new blood and vigor were required for its full development.

CHAPTER II

Perhaps Jack Starland's most noticeable trait in boyhood was his fondness for the water. He was a magnificent swimmer and learned to handle a small boat with the skill of a veteran sailor. Some of his dare-devil exploits in cruising among the Farallones and down the coast caused his father great concern. He placed such severe restrictions upon the lad that he rebelled. One day he slipped out of the house, went down to the wharf and engaged to go as cabin boy on a South Sea whaler. At the critical moment, however, his conscience asserted itself and he drew back. His father never knew of this particular episode in the life of his son. Had it been carried out, it would have broken the parent's heart.

It was shortly after this that Jack received his appointment to the Military Academy. He had told his "sister" Warrenia of his narrow escape from playing the part of a fool and ingrate, and naturally she was horrified.

"There never would have been the slightest excuse for such folly and wickedness," said she, as the two sat in a palace car of the overland train, flying eastward; "you have the kindest of fathers and you can never do enough to repay your obligations to him."

"I admit all that," replied the young man smiling, "but what's the use of rubbing it in when I *didn't* run away?"

"But you started to do so," she persisted.

"And stopped in time: what was wrong in *that*?"

"It was wrong that you should have had a minute when you seriously intended to commit the crime."

"Commit the crime!" he repeated, with a reproving look; "perhaps it would have been a crime, but I'm not so sure about that."

"I am; Jack I'm ashamed of you."

"So am I; but don't forget that I was younger then than now."

"Yes; two or three months; persons sometimes grow a good deal in that period."

"They may not grow so much in stature, but they do in sense."

"I have heard of such instances, but I do not remember to have met any."

"Come now, sister," laughed the youth who admired his friend's brilliancy, "I beg you to let up; I confess all you have charged; I am a base villain, for whom hanging would be too good; you will be filled with remorse when I become General of the army and you recall all the harsh words you have said of me."

"*When* you become General I will mourn my cruelty in sackcloth and ashes. But I am willing to change the subject. Let us drop the past and talk of the future. Your term at West Point I believe is four years."

"Provided I'm not 'found' as the expression goes. But I'm not really admitted as yet, though I passed the preliminary examination before leaving home and won my appointment in a competitive contest. The decisive examination will take place at the Point when I get there; I understand it is severe, but I am quite confident."

"You always were, no matter what issue was involved."

Since we have already learned that all went well with the young man, it is not necessary to repeat the speculation of the couple as they steamed eastward. Jack did enter the Military Academy, and, as I have said, made a creditable record for himself. Warrenia Rowland at the same time became a student in the famous young ladies' seminary, to which further reference will be made later, and the two were graduated within a few weeks of each other.

It would be supposed that the military career upon which Major Jack Starland entered would have extinguished his love of boating and the water, but it did not. Could he have chosen his profession

it would have been that of the navy, and he would have entered the Academy at Annapolis, but that could not be arranged and he threw his whole energies into the military work.

Now it chanced that Jack's room mate and intimate friend was the son of a prominent ship builder in the East. This youth was as fond of the sea as the young Californian. In one respect he was more fortunate, for his father had presented him with a superb yacht, with which he had cruised up and down the Atlantic coast and made a trip or two to the West Indies. I may as well add that this same yacht was placed at the disposal of our government at the opening of the war with Spain and did good service in scouting in Cuban waters.

The cadets at West Point have only one vacation during their four years' course; that comes at the end of two years and lasts for a couple of months. Jack Starland made a flying visit home and then accepted the invitation of his room mate to go on a cruise with him in his yacht. It being in the summer time, the craft headed northward and visited Newport, Bar Harbor and several other noted resorts on the Atlantic seaboard.

The excursion was a continual delight to both young men, who, as you are aware, must have been fine specimens of physical vigor, or they would not have been in the Military Academy. Jack wrote such a glowing account of his holiday that his father's heart was touched. He read the letter to his partner who remarked:

"A good sailor was spoiled when Jack became a soldier."

"I never knew a lad with a stronger liking for a nautical life. Nothing would have delighted him more than to become a sailor. What makes me respect Jack, is that with all this overwhelming fondness for a sailor's life, he has had too much good sense to yield to it. He has never asked me to allow him to go to sea, but has always placed my wishes first. Do you know, Teddy, that even when a headlong, impetuous youngster, he must have withstood temptation with Roman firmness. Of course for the last year or two no thought of going contrary to my desires has ever entered his mind."

(Ah, fond parent, you are but a single example of multitudes of fathers, who have kept their eyes closed to what was going on within touch of their hands.)

"A father is a poorer judge of his children than others. My love for Jack is hardly second to yours, but I am not blind to his faults. I am glad to say that he hasn't any more of them than he is entitled to have. No father ever had a more obedient son; judging the boy therefore, in cold blood, I must say I agree fully with you. If anybody had suggested to Jack when a boy that he should go contrary to your wishes or run away, he would have made it a *casus belli*."

(From which remark, it would appear that the father of a boy is not always the only one who makes an error concerning the youth.)

"What I'm getting at, Teddy, is this: the reading of that letter from Jack has caused me to decide upon a piece of extravagance. I'm going to present him with a handsome yacht."

"It will cost you a tidy sum, Tom."

"I know that, but it will be a good investment. He may not have many opportunities for enjoying it while he is an officer of the army, but unless we have war very soon, Jack will follow the example of many others who have been educated at West Point and resign, holding himself at the disposal of the government whenever needed. Of course his ultimate destination is here, in our business, in this office, and the yacht will come in handy during his vacation times."

"And probably add to the number of his vacations."

"Which will be well; for it can be said of few of our business men that they have more vacations than are necessary or good for them."

"May I give you a suggestion, Tom?"

"I am always glad to receive anything of the kind from you."

"We can make as good yachts on this side of the continent as in the shipyards of the East. Nevertheless, purchase Jack's yacht in the East."

"Why?"

“To bring it through the Golden Gate, he will have to come around Cape Horn.”

“A pretty risky voyage, – one that tests the staunchness of a boat and the seamanship of the captain.”

“True, and make it a condition that Jack himself shall bring the yacht to California.”

“It shall be done, – nothing will delight the young rascal more.”

CHAPTER III

The reputation of the Misses Credell's Young Ladies' Seminary was international and the halo of its history was sanctified by time. It was founded by the grandmother of the estimable sisters, one of the foremost educators of her day, and one who took up the profession of teaching through love for it, since her wealth made her independent for life.

At the period when the institution rises before us, its students represented the four quarters of the globe. There were young women fitting for the missionary field in India and China; the daughters of eminent financiers in England, Germany, France and Spain, those whose parents' influence was felt in distant climes, including several from the revolution-pestered republics of South America.

Manuela Estacardo was the only child of the deceased sister of President Pedro Yozarro, Dictator of Atlamalco. She was a brilliant daughter of the tropics, gifted in mind and person, with the midnight eyes and hair, the dark complexion, classical features, small white teeth and faultless form rarely seen except in the fervid sunlight of the low latitudes. Positive and negative electricity draw together, which perhaps explains why the two most devoted intimates at the seminary were Señorita Estacardo and Warrenia Rowland. The latter was a true product of the North, with blue eyes, pink skin, hair like the floss of the ripening corn, and a figure as perfect as her sister's of the South, while the mental gifts in one were equalled in the other.

The friendship of these two began with their first meeting, and continued unrippled to the sad day of gladness when they were graduated. Manuela spent most of her vacations in the home of Warrenia in California, and the promise had been solemnly given by the latter that she would visit her friend after her return to her distant home under the equator. The story of this sweet comradeship cannot be told in a fractional part of its fulness. To prevent any misunderstanding, however, on the part of the reader, let it be known that though Major Jack Starland and the Señorita were often together, and they became the warmest of friends, there never was and there never could be any tenderer feeling between them. And this was true for the best of reasons: the dark-eyed Señorita had pledged her heart to a certain young officer of her own country. Both were as loyal in their affections as is the magnet to the pole and there was no possible room for complications.

When Mr. Starland presented the handsome yacht to his son Jack, neither he nor his partner Mr. Rowland dreamed of the strange consequences that were to follow. Jack resigned his commission in the army, his yacht, which he had named the Warrenia, in honor of his "sister," was returned to him with the thanks of the United States government, and he was then ready to carry out the stipulation of his father, that he should bring the craft around Cape Horn to San Francisco. Her usefulness when in the naval service, required her presence in the Atlantic, but she was now free to go whither her owner willed. Thus the perilous voyage had been postponed for a few years.

Manuela Estacardo had returned to her home in tropical America, and she and her dearest friend, Warrenia Rowland, were never laggard in their correspondence. The South American insisted that Warrenia should make her long-promised visit, and the daughter of the North was eager to do so. The journey, however, was so long and difficult that no practicable way presented itself until in a twinkling, as may be said, the path was cleared by the decision of Major Starland to double Cape Horn with his yacht.

What was to prevent his taking Warrenia as a passenger, ascend the Amazon to the home of Manuela and pay that cherished visit? The plan was so simple that every one to whom it was mentioned wondered why it was not thought of before. Aunt Cynthia would accompany her niece as chaperon, and the pause would cause little delay in the voyage. What matter if it did, for time was of no special consequence, and a few weeks, one way or the other, were not worth taking into account.

When Mr. Rowland proposed to his partner that a condition of the gift of the yacht to his son ought to be the severe test of a voyage under the latter's direction around Cape Horn, he never

imagined that his daughter was to share the danger. But he could not ask that the young man of whom he was so fond should be compelled to face a peril of that nature in which he would refuse his daughter a share. It cost him a pang to yield, but he did so without murmur, and fondly kissed her good bye, with never a thought of the remarkable experience she would be called upon to pass through.

As for good Aunt Cynthia, she was wholly ignorant of what in the most favorable circumstances was inevitable. The smothering temperature, the plague of insect life and the actual dangers from the character of the natives themselves, were wholly unknown and unsuspected by her. Had she understood one-half the truth, not even her love for her niece would have impelled her to leave her comfortable home, nor would she ever have given her consent that Warrenia should engage in any such wild, foolhardy undertaking. But Aunt Cynthia's education had been of the early fashionable kind, which furnished only the smallest modicum of knowledge. You may be sure that the younger ones, who knew a good deal more about the country and the people, took care not to enlighten her when they answered her numerous inquiries.

However, all was satisfactorily arranged and Señorita Estacardo was thrown into transports of delight by the receipt of a letter saying that by the time it reached the young woman, a Miss Rowland would be out on the ocean in the charge of their old friend, Major Jack Starland, and well on their way to the home of the Señorita, where they intended to make a good long visit, before resuming their long voyage around the southern point of the continent and then up the western coast to San Francisco.

Ascending the mighty Amazon to the mouth of the Rio Rubio, known also as the Forked River, the yacht reached the home of Señorita Estacardo, who, it need not be said, gave the most joyous welcome to the girl whom she loved more than any one else in the wide world.

Before reaching its present destination, the *Warrenia* came to the little republic of Zalapata, where a pause was made for two or three days, during which the Major and the young ladies called upon General Bambos, the President and Dictator, who treated them with the utmost consideration. Later, he became the guest of Major Starland on the yacht, upon which he spent most of his time while the Americans lay off that quaint town. The susceptible heart of the bulky South American crackled into flame on the first sight of the northern beauty, though he smothered the secret so well that none except the young woman herself suspected it and with her it was scarcely more than a suspicion.

From Zalapata the yacht steamed to Atlamalco, the home of Manuela Estacardo. There the party was received by the other impressionable type of the tropics, General Pedro Yozarro, who left nothing undone to make their visit pleasant in the highest degree. The novelty of her experience was its chief enjoyment to Miss Rowland, who found a thrill in the life, with its conditions the opposite of those to which she had always been accustomed. She and her aunt were received into the household of General Yozarro, who immediately became their humble slave. Since the death of his wife and sister, the latter taking place shortly after the return of his niece, Manuela, the latter had been the head of the household and its retinue of servants.

The Señorita had been told the agreement between Major Starland and Miss Rowland, which was that during their visit to this part of the world, they were to be known as brother and sister. She was to be addressed as Miss Warrenia Starland. Her hostess faithfully carried out the wishes of her friend.

"It was Jack's proposition," explained Warrenia; "he seems never able to get over that absurd fancy of his boyhood that we are really brother and sister, when in fact we do not bear the slightest relation to each other. I wanted him to use my name, but he is so stubborn he wouldn't agree to it. You know there is some similarity in our names, but he said it would be much more convenient for me to take his."

"There are several good reasons why you should do so," said the Señorita with a meaning smile; "one of which is that you will grow accustomed to it."

"But what advantage is there in that?"

"It will come easier when you *do* make the change."

“I can’t pretend to misunderstand you, but I am sure that will never take place; neither Jack nor I has such a thought.”

“How do you know what his thoughts are?”

“Would he not have told me long ago?”

“Hasn’t he done so?”

“Not so much as by a hint. It has really been as brother and sister between us. He has always accepted that relation and so have I.”

“You give no reason why it should not soon assume a tenderer and closer nature; I believe it will; I shall be delighted.”

“Ah, my dear Manuela, I know your heart, but we of the North do not make love as you of the tropics. One of these days, Jack will meet the right woman.”

“I believe he met her years ago.”

“Meaning me, but you are mistaken.”

“How is it with *you*?”

“I am still heart free. I won’t deny that I have met one or two with whom I was pleased, but it was nothing more.”

“Because your love has gone elsewhere; it went long ago; you may think I am mistaken, my darling Warrenia, but you will soon find I am not.”

Then both laughed, kissed and talked of other things.

CHAPTER IV

General Fernando De Bambos, President and Dictator of Zalapata, had summoned one of the most momentous councils of war in the history of the Republic. Those present were our old friend, Major Jack Starland, who was a guest of the General, and Captain Alfredo Guzman, Chief of Staff. The other leaders sulked because they were not invited to the conference, but General Bambos dared not trust them with the important matters that were oppressing his ponderous brain and had troubled him for weeks.

The meeting was held in the upper room of the east wing of the palace, safely removed from eavesdroppers, two armed guards on the outside of the door adding to the isolation of the council. General Bambos, though short of stature, weighed an eighth of a ton. His uniform gleamed with blue, scarlet and gold, and the crimson sash around his waist, with its gilt tassels almost touching the floor, was six inches nearer his head in front than at the rear. His crimson countenance was set off by a prodigious mustache, the waxed ends of which, when he grinned, tickled his temples. He was short-breathed, asthmatic and possessed a tempestuous temper. The big curved sword at his side flipped the ground when he strode to and fro, as was his custom while agitated, though during his calmer moods, the formidable weapon swung fairly clear of the floor.

Captain Guzman, Aide and Chief of Staff, was swarthy, deliberate and cool, and of moderate stature. He had proved himself a good soldier in more than one fight with their neighbors in that breeding-nest of revolutions.

At the present time, the *Warrenia* was absent for a few days at San Luis, down the river, while Jack Starland was the honored guest of General Bambos, who was eager to secure his valuable military ability for the republic. He really knew nothing of the young American's experience in military matters, but he was not ignorant of the bravery of his people, and had learned how completely they crushed Spain in the late war. When he heard the youth addressed as "Major" he was immediately fired with the ambition to gain him as an ally, in the new revolution that was impending.

"Comrades," said the General, as he heaved ponderously to his feet, addressing the two who sat at the table, listening expectantly to him, "you will agree with me that golden opportunities come to nations as well as to men. Such an opportunity has opened to the Republic of Zalapata."

As he spoke, he leaned forward with his hands resting on the table, and the chubby fingers doubled in upon the palms. His huge mustache twitched, and his little black eyes shone upon the placid countenance of Captain Guzman, lolling in his chair at the farther end and languidly smoking a cigarette. The Captain calmly met the flickering glare and the General shifted it to Major Starland on his right, who was looking through the open window on the other side of the apartment, as if the blue sky, with its fleecy clouds, framed by the opening, was all that interested him. None the less, he was thinking hard and not a word escaped him.

"I repeat that such an opportunity has now opened to the Republic of Zalapata."

The thin husky voice climbed several notes of the register, and the right hand of the speaker thumped so hard on the table that it shook. The noise would have been considerable, had not the impact been dulled by the fleshy cushion that smothered the knuckles of the orator.

Without stirring a muscle, Major Starland glanced sideways at the face of the General, who swung his head around like a turtle peeping from his shell and stared again at Captain Guzman. The latter snatched his cigarette from his lips and nodded quickly several times.

General Bambos swung back to the upright poise, or rather went a little beyond it since his bulky protuberance in front gave him the appearance of leaning backward. The deepening crimson of his countenance showed the profundity of his anger.

"How much longer shall we submit to the insults of that infamous tyrant, President Yozarro of the Republic of Atlamalco. Actuated by my fervent love of peace, my affection for my people,

and my ardent desire for their happiness, I have acquiesced in wrong, vainly hoping that a sense of justice would restrain the oppressor from going too far. But he mistakes our calmness for fear, until every man of intelligence clearly perceives that unless resistance is made, – not simple resistance alone, but aggressive protest, the grand, glorious Republic of Zalapata will become a mere appanage of Atlamalco. I have remonstrated with General Yozarro, and in return he treats me with contumely and insult. My nature revolts, my blood is stirred – ”

To make more emphatic the ebullition of his circulation, General Bambos abruptly stopped speaking and snatched out his perfumed silk handkerchief from beneath the partly unbuttoned breast of his coat, and mopped his lumpy forehead. He had carefully conned his oration, but his surging emotion would not give him pause. The climax leaped from him. At the highest reach of his vibrant, staccato voice, he shouted:

“The time has come to draw the sword!”

Grasping the top of his scabbard with his left hand, and the handle of his sword with his right, he made a curving swing upward, while drawing the blade from its nestling place. There was always difficulty in doing this, since when the arm was extended to its limit, two or three inches of the point of the weapon remained in the sheath. The only way to overcome the hitch was to push downward and backward with the hand which inclosed the upper part of the scabbard. In his excitement, the General forgot this necessity, and, with the right arm extended to the highest elevation, the weapon was not free from the incumbrance at the other end. He tugged, swore under his breath and grew purple of countenance.

Major Starland, without the shadow of a smile, looked at the lower hand of the General and nodded meaningly. The other recovered his wits at the same moment, liberated the blade by the method indicated, and flourished it so far aloft that the keen point nipped the ceiling.

“The time has come to draw the sword! Liberty, justice, equality and right is the war cry of the patriots of Zalapata!”

Carefully adjusting his weapon so that it would not interfere, the General sagged down in his chair, and puffing from his exertion and excitement, looked into the faces of his friends to signify that he was now ready to listen to their sentiments. A brief silence followed, and then Major Starland said in an even voice:

“I have learned of some of the insults received from General Yozarro, Dictator of the Republic to the west, but I am not clear as to the last outrage: may I be enlightened?”

He looked invitingly at Captain Guzman, who silently puffed for a minute or so before speaking:

“A month ago, the single boat which constitutes the navy of President Yozarro was engaged in target practice; one of the shots passed over the boundary and struck the dwelling of a citizen of Zalapata, smashing in a side-wall and scaring the family to that extent that they are still a-tremble. Complaint was made to President Yozarro, who treated the complainant with contempt. Then appeal was had to President Bambos, who despatched a messenger to Yozarro, demanding damages and an apology, and the salutation of our flag. What answer did the tyrant send? He kicked the messenger down the steps of his palace, bidding him to tell our revered President that if he or anyone else came to him on a similar errand, he would ram him down the throat of one of his cannon and fire at the palace of General Bambos.”

“But that threat is idle,” gravely remarked Major Starland.

“Why?” demanded President Bambos.

“Neither he nor you have any ordnance big enough to allow a man to serve as a charge for it.”

“A quibble!” commented the Captain; “it does not lessen the deadly nature of the insult.”

“What is the amount of the claim?”

General Bambos nodded to the Captain to answer.

“Forty-two *pesos*.”

“Ah-um!” mused the American, who picked up a pencil from the table and made a few figures on a blotting pad; “the present value of a *peso* is twenty-eight cents. That would make the total damage eleven dollars and seventy-six cents in the currency of my country. Does President Yozarro refuse to pay this claim?”

“He not only refuses to pay the just demand,” thundered the President, “but accompanies his refusal with an unpardonable insult.”

“No one can deny that you have cause for indignation, but knowing how deeply you have the good of your people and country at heart, General, I would ask whether there is not some way of settling the dispute without going to war.”

“Explain yourself,” said the President severely, for, having set his heart on having war, he did not mean to be bluffed out of it.

“Why not refer the dispute to The Hague Tribunal of Arbitration?”

“What good could come from that?”

“Suppose it decided in your favor and ordered General Yozarro to pay the claim?”

“That wouldn’t wipe out the insult.”

“But, if he was ordered to apologize?”

“He wouldn’t do it.”

“How do you know he wouldn’t?”

“Don’t I know the man better than The Hague Tribunal or anyone else knows him?”

“If you have so clear a case against President Yozarro, the decision is sure to be in your favor.”

“You forget, Sir, that The Hague has insulted the Republic of Zalapata through its President.”

“I was not aware of that.”

“When the members assembled a short time ago, I sent a representative with a request that he be permitted to act as one of them. Do you know what reply was made? They said they had never heard of the Republic of Zalapata.”

“In other words, they told you to make a reputation first. Quite natural, under the circumstances. Nevertheless, I would beg to insist that the proper course is to refer this quarrel to The Hague Tribunal, unless the President of the United States can be induced to act as arbitrator. More than likely he will settle the wrangle by paying the claim out of his own pocket.”

“You mistake your man!” roared General Bambos; “you fail to see that that would relieve General Yozarro from punishment for his insults and outrages against Zalapata. It would encourage him to continue his infamous course, since our powerful neighbor on the north would relieve him from all penalty. Moreover, it would display a fatal timidity on the part of the United States regarding their pet idol, – the Monroe Doctrine. Such a subterfuge cannot be permitted.”

“I had thought of offering to pay the bill myself.”

With fine sarcasm, General Bambos said: “I am glad you are provided with a surfeit of funds. Perhaps you will be willing to float our last loan?”

“That depends upon its size; if it isn’t more than a few hundred dollars I am quite ready to give you a lift.”

“I must decline to permit any more quibbling.”

“Will you consent that I shall close the incident by paying this claim against President Yozarro of the Republic of Atlamalco?”

“I do if you will agree to enforce the other conditions.”

“What are they?”

“That he shall apologize, salute our flag and pledge himself never again to turn his gun in the direction of our boundary line.”

“You have added impossible terms, General, for you would bind him to make no resistance in the event of your going to war with him.”

“And don’t you perceive on your part that there is nothing to arbitrate? This talk of arbitration is very fine for the one who is in the wrong. Suppose a set of employees refuse to work any longer unless their wages are doubled. The employer, knowing it means his ruin, refuses, and the strikers demand that the dispute shall be referred to arbitration. Is that just? – is it common sense?”

“Not on the part of the employees. But your supposition is hardly supposable; the employers would incur no risk in agreeing to arbitration, since no committee on earth would fail to decide in their favor, after the whole truth was made clear to them. I have noticed that it is generally the one who is in the wrong who refuses to arbitrate. At the same time, I concede that there can be no such thing as forced arbitration. Every employer or capitalist has the right to run his own business to suit himself, just as any man, or set of men, have the right to quit work and to try to persuade their friends to quit with them; but, your pardon, General; we are wandering from the question.”

“A suggestion I was about to make. When you reflect that a respectful demand has been made upon President Yozarro for the payment of a just claim, and that he brutally refuses, what would you advise, most wise and honored Sir?”

“I have offered to pay the claim myself.”

“Your offer is declined, since you cannot enforce all the conditions.”

“I have named arbitration.”

“And I have pointed out the impossible folly of such a thing.”

“Admitting that President Yozarro refuses to comply with the decision of The Hague Tribunal, you will not only be free to carry out your original intention, but you will be justified before the world.”

“No more than I shall be justified now, for many of the Atlamalcans themselves condemn the course of their President.”

“Why not make one more appeal to him?”

“How shall I shape my message? Whom shall I send to bear it to him?”

“I will be the messenger.”

“And be returned to me from the throat of a cannon?”

“I will take my chances on that; if they have a gun capacious enough to expedite matters in that fashion, the journey certainly will not be a monotonous one. You forget one thing, General.”

“What is that?”

“My sister is the guest of President Yozarro; I am anxious to see her; this gives me the opportunity.”

CHAPTER V

Major Jack Starland decided to make his ambassadorial trip to the Atlamalcan Republic by water instead of land, and to take as his companion, Captain Guzman, though there would have seemed to be slight choice between the two routes.

The Rio Rubio, flowing from the foot of the Andes, eastward to the Atlantic, forks a few miles to the westward of Atlamalco, the two branches reuniting twenty leagues to the eastward. The island thus formed is twenty miles across the widest part, and tapers to the east and west. As if nature aimed to provide for two distinct communities, a precipitous mountain spur, which sprawls several hundred miles north and south, ribs the territory almost mathematically in the centre, and tumbles onward, broken and disjointed, to the shores of the Caribbean Sea. The rumors that gold and diamonds are awaiting garnering in the wild solitudes have roused the earth hunger of more than one powerful nation, but the grim dragon that crouches in the pulsing jungles, on whose forehead flames the legend, "MONROE DOCTRINE," sends them scudding back across the seas.

The western half of the island forms the Republic of Atlamalco, whose President and Dictator is General Pedro Yozarro; the eastern half constitutes Zalapata, with General Fernando de Bambos at its head. The name "republic," as applied to the peppery provinces has as much appropriateness as if given to Russia or China. The respective population of the two republics is about the same, and but for the whimsical, intense jealousy that is the most marked peculiarity of South American countries, the two might grow rich, prosperous and of considerable strength, for no region on the globe is more favored in the way of climatic and natural resources.

Major Starland understood the delicate tensivity of the relations between Zalapata and Atlamalco. They had been at war before, with the advantage at times on one side and then on the other, the final result being no decisive change in their mutual strength or in their combative propensities. The addition of a "gunboat" to the power of Atlamalco naturally made her more aggressive and demonstrative. President Bambos dreamed of acquiring two similar engines of war, when he would proceed to wipe his hated rival off the earth; but the loan which he tried to float remained inert and the northern barbarians, whose shipyards send forth most of the navies of the world, insisted upon cash or security as preliminary to laying the keels of the Zalapatian fleet. The project therefore hung fire. Though the craft that roamed up and down the bifurcated river was referred to as a gunboat, it was simply an American tug, some seventy-five feet in length, of the same tonnage and with a single six-pounder mounted fore and another aft. From New York it had sneaked southward, so far as possible, through the inland passage to the Gulf of Mexico and then puffed across the Caribbean and so on to the Rio Rubio and thence to its destination.

As intimated, Major Starland had the choice of two routes to the western Republic: one by mule path or trail through the Rubio Mountains, and the other by boat, fifty miles up the Rio Rubio: he chose the latter.

On the morning following the council of war, he and his swarthy friend, Captain Guzman, hoisted sail on their little catboat, at the wharf of the capital, and catching the favoring breeze, curved out into the stream, which was half a mile wide, and began their voyage against a moderate current. Old campaigners like them needed little luggage. The native officer took none at all, while the Major's was in a small hand bag, which he had brought from his yacht, twenty miles away at San Luis.

The American seated himself at the stern, where he controlled the tiller, while the native lounged on the front seat smoking his eternal cigarette. Behind them the pretty little capital, with its five thousand inhabitants, distributed mostly in adobe huts, shabby and of small dimensions, gradually sank out of sight, and finally vanished behind a bend in the river. To the right, stretched the immense undulating plain of exuberant forest, with its tropical luxuriance, its smothering climate and its overwhelming animal life. The banks on either hand were flat, and so low that a continuous east

wind often brought an overflow of the shores for leagues inland. Here and there the bamboo or adobe hut of a native peeped from the rank foliage, and the naked or half-dressed occupants stared stupidly at the craft as it skimmed past. The head of the family lolled on the bank, or in the shade beside his home and smoked; the stolid wife slouched hither and thither like an automaton, plodding at her work or perhaps scratching the ground, that it might laugh a harvest, though oftener her work lay in fighting off the prodigious growth which threatened to strangle everybody and everything. She took her turn at smoking, while the youngsters, most of them without a thread of clothing, frolicked and tumbled in the simple delight of existence. But all these were such common sights to the voyageurs that they gave them no more than passing attention.

Captain Guzman was not a talkative man. He preferred to lounge, to smoke, to fight, or to think. Major Starland had plenty of thinking to do and little work. Having guided the craft out into the middle of the stream, he rested the tiller between his elbow and side and held the boat to its course, while he also lazily puffed at his cigar. He glanced from side to side, like one who was familiar with the scenery and he figured out that if the breeze held, they would reach Atlamalco early on the morrow, for he did not mean to continue the voyage after darkness had set in.

No one, however, can sail for a mile over the tropical waters of South America without a striking experience with its myriad animal life. The swarms of fish often clog the progress of vessels. Numerous tiny thumps against the prow of the boat told of the miniature collisions, and, looking over the side, the American saw more fish than water. They varied in length from a few inches to a couple of feet or more. Recognizing one vicious species, he caught up a pole and thrust an end into the current. Instantly fierce snaps followed, and when he drew out the dripping stick, its extremity was gouged as if with dagger stabs.

“What little demons those caribs are!” he said, holding up the pole for the Captain to see. The native nodded his head and silently smoked on. Had either of them trailed his hand in the current alongside the boat, a finger would have been nipped off in a flash by those concentrated sharks.

There was a rush like that of the Atlamalcan tugboat and an immense alligator surged up from the muddy depths, and kept pace with the craft, as though tied to it. His piggish eyes surveyed the two men as if meditating the crushing of the boat and its occupants in one terrific crunch, like the hippopotamus of the Nile. He partly opened and smacked his jaws, in anticipation, and slightly increasing his speed, passed forward to the prow.

Finally Captain Guzman showed an interest in matters. Sitting up, he drew his revolver from the belt around his waist, aimed quickly and fired. The bullet darted into the nearer eye and ripped through what little brain the saurian possessed. With a snort, it whirled, darted several rods out into the stream, and then spun round and round, as if caught in the vortex of a whirlpool. Slight in one sense as was the wound, it was mortal and quickly drew the attention of other alligators, who seemed to be projected upward from the ooze of the river, and assailed their unfortunate comrade with remorseless ferocity. In a twinkling he was torn piecemeal by the cannibals, whose taste of blood set aflame their rapacity. Had they known enough they might have smashed the boat with their tails or rolled it over with their snouts; but, unaware of their own strength, they kept up their wild darting to and fro and were soon left behind.

CHAPTER VI

The Captain resumed his lolling posture, placed another cartridge in his revolver and lit a fresh cigarette. By and by his eyes closed and Major Starland saw that he slept. The American arose to his feet, yawned and stretched his arms over his head, holding the tiller in place between his knees.

“Unless I am alert I shall fall asleep too, and then the mischief will be to pay. It isn’t prudent to disturb these creatures, but to hold a position of armed neutrality. If the fools don’t know their power, it isn’t wise to set them investigating.”

To the right on the mainland, the low flat plain extended to the limit of vision. The tall, reedy grass came down to the edge of the water, and the nodding plumes showed for some distance out in the stream. Several miles in advance, on the same shore, the dark green mass of a forest buffeted against the soft sky, the species of trees being innumerable and so closely wedged in many places, that not even the attenuated Captain Guzman could have forced his way through except by scrambling from limb to limb.

The southern bank was similar, but far to the westward, the rugged outline of the Rubio Mountains rose in the sky and wore the soft blue tint of the sea of clear atmosphere. Beyond the mountains, snuggled the Republic of Atlamalco which was the destination of the American.

On the northern bank, two-score wild cattle that had been browsing on the succulent grass, loafed down to the river and waded out till the current bathed their sides. They sought the water for its coolness at this oppressive period of the day and to escape the billions of insect pests that at times make life a torment. Their tails, whose bushy tips flirted the water in showers over their heads and backs, were never idle. Some of them kept edging outward until no more than their spines, horns, ears, and the upper part of their heads remained in sight.

The leader of the herd was a magnificent black bull, who stood on the bank and bellowed at the boat sailing past, as if challenging it to a fight to the finish. He was afraid of nothing on earth and revelled in a battle which would allow him to display his tremendous prowess, power and wrath.

Seeing that the boat paid no heed to his thunderous challenge, the bull galloped sideways and backward to shore, and trotted along its bank, looking at the craft, thrusting out his snout and calling for it to come ashore and have it out with him. Major Starland picked up his Krag-Jorgensen from where it leaned beside his feet and sighted at the bull, into whose bellowing there seemed to intrude a regretful note over the ignoring of his challenge.

“It’s a pretty good distance, but I can drop you so quickly you would never know what did it, and, being that you wouldn’t know, where’s the satisfaction to either of us? I’ll be hanged if I uncrown such a noble monarch in that pot fashion!”

The weapon was laid down and the Major resumed his seat and care of the tiller. At this time the bull was standing on a slight rise of ground, just clear of the water with Major Starland contemplating the superb fellow. Something dark and sinuous suddenly darted out like a black streak of lightning from the mud just in front of the animal and the cry of the bull changed to one of frenzy. He was scared at last.

Still bellowing, he planted his four hoofs rigidly in the mud, and leaned so far backward that his legs were inclined at a sharp angle. His feet sank slowly and he yielded a short, reluctant step. Then he paused and putting forth his great strength gradually moved the hoofs, one after the other, backward. He strove mightily to continue his retreat, but the uplifted fore foot was instantly jammed down again, and the utmost he could do was to hold his own.

The black thing which had flashed out from the mud a few paces away was the head of a gigantic anaconda that had hidden itself in the slime and was waiting for cow or bull to come within reach. The instant the king of the herd did so, the head shot from its concealment and the teeth were

snapped together in the cartilage of the animal's nose. Then the serpent began drawing its victim forward with terrific power. The bull knew his peril and resisted to the last ounce of his strength.

But the reptile was a fool. Had it voluntarily freed itself, or allowed the bull to get clear of the enveloping mushy earth, it could have whirled its entire length around the quadruped and mashed it to pulp. But the Atlamalcan tugboat, if tied by a hawser to the reptile could not have drawn it forth, for it will allow itself to be pulled asunder before yielding. Nor can any conceivable power induce the serpent to let go, its unshakable resolve being to draw its prey within its folds, instead of meeting its victim.

It was a veritable tug of war, and the sympathies of Major Starland were wholly on the side of the bull. Slipping a bit of rope over the tiller to hold it in place, he knelt on one knee and sighted with the utmost care. The six or eight feet of the reptile which was clear of the mud had been stretched to nearly double its natural length by the furious pulling of the bull, and was as tense as a violin string and so attenuated as to be hardly one-half its ordinary diameter. The American aimed at a point just back of the head and the bullet sped true. Perhaps, as is sometimes the case, the serpent's body would have yielded in the end, but the missile expedited matters. It snapped apart, the bull with another bellow whirled about and galloped up the bank and away, with the appendage dangling and flapping from his nose, there to hang until it sloughed off.

The report of the rifle awakened Captain Guzman, who sat up, but did not understand all that had taken place until it was explained to him. Then the two partook of the lunch they had brought with them. When the brief twilight closed over forest and stream, they had passed three-fourths of the distance between the respective capitals of the republics. Night had fully come, however, before the boat was sheered toward the mainland, and drawing it up the bank beyond the reach of the current, the two stepped out and walked a short way to a hut that had caught their notice some time before.

Here, strange to say, the native man and wife had only two children, both boys, six or eight years of age, naked and not ashamed. Captain Guzman, who spoke Spanish as well as the American, explained that they desired food and lodging for the night. The husband told them they were welcome, while the slatternly helpmate said nothing, but did her part with commendable diligence. No fire was burning, nor was one started, though the cinders on the outside showed that food was sometimes cooked after the manner of civilized peoples. No table, chairs or furniture were seen, while the floor was of smooth, hard earth. A large, earthen bowl was nearly filled with a mixture of tomatoes, onions, olives and several kinds of fruit chopped together. This was set outside on the ground, between the two guests, who ate and were filled.

CHAPTER VII

Through the hot pulsing of the tropical midnight, with its myriad throbbings of animal life, came the sound of husky coughing, steadily growing more distinct, until the two men seated on the outside of the native hut, on a fallen tree, smoking and listening, identified it as the voice of the Atlamalcan tugboat, named for its owner, *General Yozarro*. In the vivid moonlight, a dim mass assumed form up the river, the sparks tumbling from its small smokestack helping to locate the craft, which constituted the navy of the little Tabascan republic. The puffing grew louder, the throbbing of the screw, and the rush of the foamy water from the bow struck the ear more clearly, and the outlines of the craft were marked as it rushed past, near the middle of the river, with the starred, triangular flag of Atlamalco wiggling from the staff which upreared itself like a needle from the stern.

In the flood of illumination every part of the vessel was plainly seen: the wheelhouse and even the outlines of the captain at the wheel, the upper deck, the gleam of the one cannon at the front near the pile of wood, and the other at the rear, as well as the forms of several men in sombreros lounging here and there, as if playing the part of sentinels, though there was no earthly call for any service of that nature.

So distinct was everything, that Major Starland saw the Captain reach upward, grasp a cord and pull down. The hoarse throb of the steam whistle awoke the echoes along shore and as it rolled through the forests and jungles caused hundreds of denizens of the solitude to wonder what sort of new beast was coming among them.

Gradually the boat grew hazy and indistinct, but the throbbing of the engine and the soft wash of the current lingered long after the craft itself had faded from view.

"It may be that President Yozarro is afraid President Bambos will forget he has a navy," suggested the American.

"He does not mean to attack him, I am sure."

"He has no cause for doing so, which is generally the reason why these wasps sting their neighbors. If they waited for a just cause there would be eternal peace. Ah, my yacht is not due for several days! I would it were here."

"What would you do, Major?"

"Declare on the side of General Bambos; I shouldn't ask better sport than to blow that crab out of the water."

"Is General Bambos a better friend of yours, Major, than General Yozarro?"

"I count neither as a friend, but Yozarro has my sister as his guest, though she has overstayed her time. I may be wrong, but I am not convinced that she is a willing visitor."

"He holds also the gunboat that we saw pass but a short time ago."

"And I have a yacht with a single gun; with that my crew would make as short work of the *General Yozarro* as we did with the Spanish fleets at Manila and Santiago."

Captain Guzman shrugged his shoulders and smoked in silence.

"My boat will be here in two or three days. Then I shall ask no help from Bambos or any one else in this part of the world."

"Why not wait, Major? Who knows that if your sister is restored to you through the help of General Bambos, you may not have to ask General Yozarro to help you make *him* give her up?"

It was a contingency of which Major Starland had not thought. Prudence told him to be patient till the coming of the *Warrenia*, with her crew of a dozen men, beside the captain. Three of the crew had fought against Spain and would welcome a scrap with the Atlamalcan navy.

But the American was restless. He carried a pretext for calling upon General Yozarro, and his anxiety would not allow him to remain quiescent. That night as he slept in the hammock which he had brought from his boat and swung in front of the native hut, he heard as in a dream, the puffing

of the tug on its return to Atlamalco. He did not rouse himself to look at her, as she glided past in the moonlight, but it was a great relief to know that she had gone back. President Yozarro was so proud of his navy that most of the voyages up and down the Rio Rubio were taken for his personal pleasure. He would be at home, therefore, on the morrow when his American visitor presented himself.

And such was the case. The forenoon was no more than half gone, when the small sailing craft rounded to at the wharf in front of the native town, and Major Starland leaped ashore. It was agreed that Captain Guzman should await his return to the pier. The alert American noted everything. The tug seemed to be crouching beside the wharf, a hundred feet distant, like a bull dog waiting for some one to venture nigh enough for him to leap forward and bury his fangs in his throat. But no steam was up, and the war craft, like everything else, was adrowse and sleeping.

The city of Atlamalco sprawled over half a square mile, the most ancient dwellings being made of adobe, squat of form and with only a single story. The more pretentious were of a species of bamboo, of large proportions, and, although divided into a number of apartments, they too consisted of but a single story, like most houses in an earthquake country. They were of flimsy make, for the climate was generally oppressive, and the narrow streets were fitted only for the passage of footmen and animals with their burdens. The swarthy, untidy inhabitants are among the laziest on earth, for, where nature is so lavish, the necessity for laborious toil is wanting. The avenues leading to the wharf slope gently upward, winding in and out, and mingling in seemingly inextricable confusion.

Pen cannot describe the vegetable exuberance of this portion of South America. Sugar, coffee, cocoa, rice, tobacco, maize, wheat, ginger, mandioc, yams, sarsaparilla, and tropical fruits beyond enumeration smother one another in the fierce fight for life. The chief dependence of the people is upon mandioc, manioc, or cassava, which the natives accept as a direct gift from the prophet Sunè. This, however, is not the place to dwell upon the endless variety of trees and the fauna and flora of that extraordinary country.

Major Starland left his rifle in charge of Captain Guzman, and, with his revolver at command, strolled up the main street. The hottest part of the day being near, few of the people were astir or visible. Most of them were asleep within doors, their siesta beginning before the mid-day meal and lasting long afterward.

A single pony came stumbling forward at the first turn of the street, so heaped over with bundles that little more than his head, ears and front legs below the knees were in sight. His driver, swarthy, long-haired, and in sombrero, slouched at the side of the animal, whacking his haunches now and then, swearing at him in mongrel Spanish, to both of which the brute paid no more heed than to the tiny flies that nipped in vain at his armor-like hide.

CHAPTER VIII

A few paces after the second turn brought the American to the palace of President Yozarro, – a long, low, bamboo structure, standing on slightly rising ground, where it could catch what little air sometimes caressed the town at this time of day. The largest apartment at the rear was the cabinet or council room of the Dictator and President, since the open windows on that side were sure to receive the cool breath of the mountains when it stole through the open windows.

The American officer was fortunate in the time of his call. In the long hall he met two men in uniform, well advanced in years and stooping in an unmilitary way, whom he recognized as the leading officers and counsellors of President Yozarro. It was manifest that they had been holding a conference. The Major saluted them as he passed down the hall to where a guard stood outside the door, musket in hand.

“Will you say to his Excellency that Major Starland desires to speak with him?” asked our friend in excellent Spanish. The Major did not send in his card, for, truth to tell, he had none printed in the language of the country, and he knew the other possessed no knowledge of English.

The guard tapped on the door and disappeared for a minute. When he came back, he held the door open and nodded to the visitor. Major Starland, hat in hand, passed within with brisk, military step, saluted and awaited the pleasure of the President of the Atlamalcan Republic.

The latter was seated behind a large desk at the farther side of the room, smoking a cigarette and facing the visitor. He was of short stature and lacked the protuberant rotundity of President Bambos. Like him his mustache was of glossy blackness and was waxed to needle-like points, but the hair of General Yozarro was cropped and there was a white sprinkling about the temples and behind the ears. This, with the crows’ feet and wrinkles, showed that he was fully ten years the senior of his brother President. He was in European dress, his coat, waistcoat and trousers being of spotless white duck, his linen irreproachable, his feet inclosed in patent leathers, and a diamond of eight or ten carats scintillated in his snowy shirt front. He had been heard to boast that this remarkable gem had been taken from the mountains of his own province.

The moment his glittering black eyes rested upon the trim figure of the American he rose and gracefully waved him to a seat on his right. Thanking him for his courtesy, Major Starland walked briskly thither, sat down, crossed his legs, cleared his throat and expressed his pleasure at seeing his distinguished friend looking so well. President Yozarro returned the compliment in the flowery language of his country, and asked the caller to do him the great honor of telling him in what way he could serve him. He assured him that it would be the joy of his heart, if his humble aid would be accepted by one whom he held in such warm friendship and lofty esteem.

While thus overwhelming his caller, President Yozarro snatched up his cigarette box from his desk and held it out to the American, who accepted the courtesy with thanks, lighted the wisp of fragrant tobacco to which, as we know, he was unaccustomed, and sat back at ease.

“Your Excellency, I come from President Bambos.”

“I am delighted to welcome you, and how is my esteemed brother?”

“Never better; when he told me of a slight misunderstanding, I volunteered to lay the matter before you, knowing how willing you would be to listen patiently, and aware too of your deep sense of justice.”

“You do me honor, my good friend,” replied President Yozarro, bowing and smiling so broadly that his white teeth gleamed through his mustache. “I am eager as always to right any wrong and to correct any misunderstanding.”

“Three days ago when your excellent gunboat was at target practice, on the Rio Rubio, one of the shots injured the dwelling of a citizen of Zalapata.”

“It grieves me to learn that,” replied the President, as if the episode was wholly new to him; “I am impatient to do what I can to repair the carelessness of my gunner: will it please you to have him shot, as a warning to others to be more careful?”

“By no means; the payment of the slight sum – only forty-two *pesos*– with an expression of regret, will more than satisfy President Bambos.”

“I shall hasten to comply with so moderate and just a demand: will you be good enough to convey this statement to my esteemed brother?”

Considering the moderate sum involved, it would seem that President Yozarro might well have closed the incident by passing over the amount to the ambassador, but, since he made no offer to do so, the ambassador could not in common courtesy remind him of it. The Atlamalcan Republic had its own methods and red tape ruled there as elsewhere.

“I am sure that President Bambos could ask nothing more, and I shall take pleasure in repeating your gracious words to him.”

President Yozarro bowed, smiled, muttered “*Gracias*,” and lit another cigarette.

“I beg your Excellency that I may have the privilege of a few words with my sister, Miss Starland, who came ashore from my yacht last week to visit her friend Señorita Estacardo, and whom it has not been my pleasure to see since then.”

“My good friend makes another request which it shall be my delight to grant,” replied President Yozarro, with his bland smile, as he crossed his shapely legs, leaned back and blew the puffs of his cigarette toward the ceiling.

Major Starland felt that he was getting on swimmingly. He had already decided to hand over to President Bambos the amount of the damages for the injury to the property of one of his citizens, quite content to place it to his personal account of profit and loss. Uneasy over the prolonged absence of Miss Starland, he would quickly arrange matters with her during the impending interview.

“I have a pleasant surprise for you,” said the President, after his caller had expressed his acknowledgments; “the Señorita made known so warm a wish to see her brother that I hastened to take her, as she and I supposed, to him.”

“I do not understand your Excellency.”

“She is now at Zalapata, whither she went in our gunboat.”

“When?”

“Last night; we must have met on the way, for you could scarcely have made the voyage between the capitals since sunrise.”

This remark explained that night trip of the *General Yozarro*, whose going the Major had seen and whose returning he had heard.

“Yes,” added his host; “she had but to make known her wish, when she and her friend Señorita Manuela, my niece, became my guests on my gunboat, and were landed at Zalapata last evening, where she will be disappointed to find you absent, though your meeting will be deferred but a short time.”

With many acknowledgments, Major Starland bade President Yozarro good bye, passed out into the hall and hurried down the street to the wharf, where Captain Guzman was placidly awaiting him. The same drowsiness that he had noted on his arrival, brooded over everything, and no time was lost in casting off and heading down the river.

But during the absence of the American, the Captain had had a visitor, who did not step ashore, but helped in getting the boat under way, and showed by his action, that he meant to remain with them, if they did not object thereto.

“Who is he?” asked Starland, at the first opportunity to speak privately to his friend.

“Martella, a deserter from President Yozarro.”

“That won’t do, Captain; I cannot permit him to go with us.”

“Not so, Major; he is more valuable than you think; he will tell you something you ought to know.”

CHAPTER IX

The little craft was fairly under way, and with favoring wind and current, ought to reach Zalapata in the course of ten or twelve hours. Martella, the new recruit, so to speak, seeing there was nothing just then for him to do, sat down at the bow of the boat and smoked his cigarette, while Captain Guzman kept company with Major Starland at the stern.

“Two years ago, when there was war between Atlamalco and Zalapata,” explained the native officer, “we captured a party of raiders in the mountains and shot them all excepting one. He was Martella, who, being wounded, was saved at my prayer. Since then we have been friends.”

“He ought to be your life friend if there is any such thing as gratitude in his nature.”

“I have been to see him and he comes to see me. Martella is one who speaks the truth.”

“I was not aware that – barring yourself – there was any man in this part of the world who had that virtue.”

“What did President Yozarro tell you?” asked the Captain so bluntly that the American resented it.

“You have no warrant for asking that question.”

“Pardon me, Major; I do not ask to know what he said about the claim of President Bambos, for I already know that.”

“You do! Well, what was it?”

“He said he would pay the amount of the claim and asked you to tell President Bambos he is very sorry.”

“You are right; that is what he said.”

“But he did not pay you the money; and, begging pardon again, Major, you intended to pay it yourself to President Bambos, as if it came from General Yozarro.”

“You would be called a mind reader, Captain, in my country, for you are right in everything you say. It will spoil his game, however, if General Bambos is as keen as you.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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