

Hume Fergus

**The Harlequin Opal: A Romance.
Volume 2 of 3**



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PROEM

The stone had its birth in the nurturing earth.
Its home in the heart of the main,
From the coralline caves it was tossed by the waves
On the breast of an aureate plain;
And the spirits who dwell in the nethermost hell
Stored fire in its bosom of white;
The sylphs of the air made it gracious and fair
With the blue of the firmament's height.

The dull gnomes I ween, gave it glittering sheen.
Till yellow as gold it became:
The nymphs of the sea made the opal to be
A beacon of emerald flame.

The many tints glow, they come and they go
At bidding of spirits abhorr'd,
When one ray is bright, in the bosom of white,
Its hue tells the fate of its lord.
For yellow hints wealth, and blue meaneth health,
While green forbodes passing of gloom,
But beware of the red, 'tis an omen of dread,
Portending disaster and doom.

CHAPTER I

AWAY TO THE NORTH

Oh, leave the south, the languid south,
Its cloudless skies, its weary calms;
The land of heat, and glare, and drouth,
Where aloes bloom, and spring the palms.
There water is the best of alms,
To cool the ever-parched mouth;
Oh, with the breezes bearing balms,
Fly northward from the languid south.

Oh, seek the bitter northern skies,
Where falls the snow, and blows the sleet;
'Mid which the stormy sea-bird cries,
And circles on its pinions fleet.
On rocky shores the surges beat,
And icebergs crystalline arise,
Life thrills our veins with tropic heat,
Beneath the bitter northern skies.

Once more *The Bohemian* was breasting the warm waves of the Pacific, and seemed to rejoice in her freedom like a sentient thing, as she plunged north-ward to Acauhtzin. The smoke poured black from her wide-mouthed funnel, the blades of her propeller, lashing the waters to foam, left behind her a long trail of white, and her sharp nose dipped and fell in the salt brine with every pulsation of the pistons. Beneath the folds of the Union Jack, streaming in the wind, were gathered the Englishmen and the Cholocacans, all light-hearted and hopeful, despite the undoubted peril of their mission. It was no light task to beard Xuarez in his stronghold, to assert the authority of the Republic in the teeth of his army. The mission was a valiant one, but foolhardy, and Tim, if no one else, looked for anything but a peaceful termination to the voyage.

The distance to Acauhtzin was something over three hundred miles, and as *The Bohemian* was swirling along at the rate of seventeen knots an hour, it was hoped she would reach her destination in fifteen hours or thereabouts. Owing to one thing and another, the yacht had not left Tlatonac till close on four o'clock in the afternoon; so, making all allowance for possible accidents and stoppages, at the rate she was going, Philip calculated that he would fetch the northern capital about dawn. He did not wish to venture too near the port in the darkness, as the war-ships were protecting the town, and not seeing the English ensign, might open fire on his yacht, under the impression that she was an enemy. With this idea the engines were slowed down during the voyage, and *The Bohemian* was timed to enter the port some time before noon of the next day.

Owing to the number of people on board (twenty-six souls, in addition to the crew), it was somewhat difficult to provide all with accommodation. Fortunately, however, the nights were warm and rainless, so the soldiers made themselves comfortable on deck, and slept soundly enough, wrapped in their military cloaks. The sailing-master of *The Bohemian*, a tough old salt, by name Simon Benker, growled a good deal at the way in which his spotless decks were being spoiled, but Philip managed to smooth him down by representing the seriousness of the situation. Benker submitted with but ill grace. The yacht was the pride of his life, the darling of his heart, and he had no great love for the

inhabitants of Cholocaca. However, Sir Philip was master, and gave the soldiers permission to camp out on deck, so Benker was forced to acquiesce in the arrangement.

The ambassadors, in company with the three Englishmen, took up their quarters in the state-room and cabins. As there were not enough bunks, some of them had to sleep in the saloon, so the younger members of the party gave up the sleeping-berths to the elders, and did their best to make shift in a rough-and-ready fashion. As they sat up late, however, and got up early, this inconvenienced them but little, and the utmost good humour prevailed above and below during the voyage. The crew, with the exception of Benker, fraternised with the soldiers, and their masters entertained the Spanish hidalgos; so, despite all inconveniences, things went off capitally. Even Jack plucked up his spirits now that he was on his way to rescue Dolores, and Philip's excellent brand of champagne had a wonderful effect of keeping the temperament of all up to what Tim called, "concert pitch."

Don Alonzo Cebrian was a pompous old man, whose every second word was, "I, the Intendente." He was as proud as Lucifer, and never alluded to the rebels save by the opprobrious names of canalla, ladrons, demonios, all of which terms were echoed regularly by Captain Velez. This young gentleman, a good-looking spendthrift, with a rather scampish reputation, played the part of echo to please the Intendente, whose daughter he wished to marry for her dowry. The lady was plain, but her father was rich; so Captain Velez was quite willing to sacrifice his good looks and bachelor freedom on the altar of matrimony, provided he was well paid for doing so. Don Rafael was in the highest of spirits at the prospect of seeing Doña Carmencita, and kept things going by the liveliness of his sallies, while Colonel Garibay smoked endless cigarettes and spoke but little.

After an excellent dinner, which was done full justice to by the hungry Spaniards, they all went on deck, and sat down to smoke and talk. First and foremost, they all paid Sir Philip handsome compliments about the beauty and speed of *The Bohemian*, and then drifted gradually into the one subject of the hour – the war with X Suarez – the embassy to X Suarez – the certainty of punishing X Suarez.

"BEGAD! Philip," whispered Tim, who was smoking a villainous black clay pipe, "it's all X Suarez and nothing else. Is he the only man the Oposidores have?"

"So it appears," replied Philip, leaning back in his chair; "the whole row seems to hinge on X Suarez. Is that not your opinion, Don Rafael?"

"What is that, mi amigo? I do not understand English."

"That X Suarez is the only capable man on the side of the Oposidores?"

"Ladrons!" interrupted Don Alonzo, with stately spite. "I, the Intendente, think otherwise. X Suarez is clever; but, Señores, no one is so clever as Tejada! Canalla!"

"Canalla!" echoed Velez, removing his cigarette, "no one is so clever as Tejada!"

"Don José is being deceived by X Suarez," said Rafael, ruffled at this allusion to his proposed father-in-law; "he is a pompous old fool, and, if he is wise, will leave Acauhtzin with his family, and place himself under the protection of the Republic."

"He won't do that," replied Garibay, decisively; "he is of too much service to X Suarez. The Oposidores have but little wealth, and Tejada is a rich man."

"Well, no matter, Señores. I, the Intendente, will arrest them both, and carry them in chains to the Junta."

"I am afraid that will be more difficult than you imagine, Señor," said Rafael, dryly. "X Suarez is adored by the townspeople of Acauhtzin. He has a passably good army, the friendship of the Indians, who are being urged on to war by that prophetic opal, and a capital fleet. With all these at his command, he would be a fool to yield at the mere reading of a decree. No. This war will be a long one – a difficult one – and it is doubtful if, in the end, Don Hypolito will not conquer."

Garibay frowned, and looked sternly at the young man.

"Are your sympathies with the Oposidores, Señor?"

"By no means. I see in Xuarez a possible tyrant, an unscrupulous scoundrel; but I am not so blinded as to overlook his talents. Already he has scored heavily against us. The securing of the fleet, the gaining of Acauhtzin to his interest, and all without a blow. Believe me, Colonel, I speak truly when I say Xuarez is a foe to be dreaded."

"He will not dare to defy the decree of the Republic," said the Intendente, pompously. "When I read this," added Don Alonzo, tapping his breast pocket, where lay the official paper, "he will yield."

"Certainly!" echoed Velez, parrot-like, "he will yield. Carambo! He dare not defy Don Alonzo!"

"Do you think Xuarez is a second Montezuma, to yield in the presence of his army, Señores," cried Rafael, vehemently. "I tell you no! Were he alone, he would resist arrest. How much more so, then, when supported by the devotion of hundreds. I am a true subject of the Republic; I hate, dread, and scorn Don Hypolito. But I do not despise him. He will be the Napoleon of Cholacaca. Let the Republic beware!"

"Ah! bah!" said Colonel Garibay, while Don Alonzo snorted with indignation. "Xuarez may be a clever man; but he is no general. Why, he does not even make the first move!"

"No; he bides his time. When he does move, Tlatonac will hear of it."

"You mean, he will bombard the city?"

"Yes, and no! I will explain. Excuse me one moment, Señores. I go for a map of the country."

Don Rafael ran down to the cabin; and during his absence the Intendente and Captain Velez scoffed at the idea that Xuarez would be a dangerous enemy. They had a duet in a braggadocio vein.

"He will yield, Señores, when I read this decree."

"The troops of Tlatonac alone can crush him," added Velez, confidently.

"We will swallow these rebels at a mouthful. I, the Intendente, say so."

"The war will be a mere military promenade!" said his echo.

"So said the French at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war," interjected Philip, grimly, "but they made a mistake. What is your opinion, Colonel?"

"I agree with Don Rafael," replied Garibay, slowly "I am by no means inclined to undervalue our opponent. Xuarez is as cunning as Satan, and as ambitious. His first moves in this war have resulted to his own advantage; therefore I am not so confident of a speedy termination to this campaign as are these gentlemen. Fire-crackers, such as reading a decree will not frighten a man like Xuarez!"

"Then you think this journey useless?" asked Jack, who was of much the same opinion himself.

"Absolutely, Señors. I believe we are on the eve of a terrible struggle, and to whom will result the advantage I know not."

"If all the Junta were as faint-hearted as yourself and Don Rafael, we would yield without a blow," said the Intendente, bitterly.

"Without a blow," from Velez, in the same tone! "Carambo!"

"You are wrong, Señor," cried the Colonel, with fiery earnestness, "I am not faint-hearted. I will fight against Xuarez to the last. But is it wise to scoff at this man as you are doing? I tell you he is a master-spirit, such as rises once in a century, and, as such, is all-powerful, even against the great power of the Republic. He is one of those men who change the destinies of nations. A Napoleon, a Garibaldi, a Washington. From my soul, Señores, I trust we shall win, and save the Republic; but it is as well to look on both sides of the question. Blind security is not wise. Por todos Santos, Señores," cried Garibay, rising to his feet in his excitement, "see how this man has already succeeded. Acauhtzin, the most important town next to the capital, is in his hands, our fleet has gone over entirely to his side; and have you forgotten the treachery of Marina and Pepe. A full plan of the fortifications of Tlatonac is before him. If he can do this much, he can do more. Till the end, I shall support the Republic, and resist a possible Dictator; but do not sneer at Xuarez! I tell you he is a great man!"

This was an unexampled outburst for the ordinarily calm Colonel, and he sank back in his chair with a look of agitation on his usually impassive face. The Intendente and Velez were for the moment

impressed; yet, soon recovering their obstinate belief in the invulnerability of the Republic, would have replied, but that at this moment Don Rafael made his appearance with a small map.

"Your pardon, Señores, that I have been so long!" apologised Rafael, sitting down promptly, and spreading out the map on his own and Philip's knees. "Look, now, mis amigos, and I will tell you how this campaign will be conducted!"

"How do you know, Señor? Are you in the confidence of Xuarez?"

"I am a gentleman, no traitor!" replied Rafael, haughtily, to the insulting question of the Intendente. "I know something of Don Hypolito's plans, because he spoke of them to Don José de Tejada. Before the revolt of the fleet, I was a visitor at the house of that gentleman, and so learned much. Had Don José known that I would remain true to the Republic, he would have been more cautious. As it was, he spoke sufficiently clearly to let me understand the broad outlines of the campaign as designed by Xuarez."

"Bueno!" said the Intendente, politely, "I ask your pardon, Don Rafael. And this plan."

"Behold!" said Rafael, tracing with his finger the various points; "here is Acauhtzin – there Tlatonac! – and at the extreme south you see Janjalla! This last town will be attacked first."

"And the reason?"

"Carrai! can you not see, Señor Garibay? Between Tlatonac and Acauhtzin are nothing but mountains – no roads, no open spaces. All giant hills, terrible precipices, a few paths made by Indians, and inhospitable deserts, where the land happens to be flat for a few miles. How then can Xuarez convey his army to the capital in that direction?"

"True, true! And most of his soldiers are dragoons."

"Certainly, he could attack Tlatonac with Indians who are used to their rugged country; but savages, as Xuarez well knows, can do little or nothing against trained troops. In conjunction with his own army, they can do something; but, alone, they are almost useless. Bueno! You see he, will not attack from the north."

"But why attack Janjalla instead of Tlatonac?" asked Tim, who was anxiously following this discussion, pencil and note-book in hand.

"Look to the south," replied Don Rafael, promptly. "No mountains between Janjalla and Tlatonac – nothing but rich plains – broad spaces on which armies can manoeuvre. Now, if Xuarez conveys his troops by the war-ships south to Janjalla, he can bombard and perhaps take that city."

"I, the Intendente, deny that!"

"Impossible to take Janjalla," echoed Velez, nodding his head wisely.

Rafael shrugged his shoulders. It was next to impossible to argue with these obstinate people who would only look at one side of the question.

"We will grant that Janjalla falls into the power of Xuarez," said Garibay, impatiently; "and afterwards?"

"Afterwards," resumed the young man, "Xuarez will garrison the town, and concentrate all his troops there."

"Thus leaving Acauhtzin open to attack," said Jack, satirically.

"By no means. The war-ships will prevent our troops getting to that town. We cannot get to it by land, and the sea will be blockaded by the rebel fleet."

"Unless the torpederas – "

"True! unless the torpederas arrive," replied Rafael significantly; "but it is doubtful as to whether the Junta or Xuarez will get them. However, I am only supposing all these things being in favour of the Opositores."

"Bueno! We will look at the matter from Don Hypolito's point of view," said Philip, quietly. "His troops are concentrated at Janjalla. Between that town and Tlatonac are open plains – and," added Philip, dryly, "the armies of the Republic!"

"Certainly. But let us presume, for the sake of argument, that Xuarez makes three simultaneous attacks. With his regular army on the plains, with the Indians from the north on Tlatonac – and from the sea by a bombardment from the war-ships."

"Dios!" muttered Garibay, biting his fingers; "that man is a general."

"The troops of the Republic will conquer everywhere," said Don Alonzo, gravely.

"Everywhere!" repeated his umbra.

"It is to be hoped so, Señores," said Tim, significantly, "the Republic will need all the help she can get to defend herself in three places at once."

"In my opinion," observed Rafael, calmly, "there is only one way to end the war."

"And that is?"

"By a naval victory. The Junta must secure the torpederas. We must have more war-ships, and cripple Don Hypolito's power on the sea. Then he will be unable to convey his troops to Janjalla – unable to bombard Tlatonac, and remain shut up in Acauhtzin, where we can crush him at our leisure."

Garibay disagreed with this view of the matter, and accused Rafael of looking solely at the matter from a naval point of view. A hot discussion ensued, in which every possible attack, repulse, strategy, and battle, was talked over far into the night. Philip and Jack grew weary of this incessant argument, and slipped down to the saloon, where they chatted about Dolores. Overhead they heard the hot-tempered Spaniards arguing fiercely, and several times thought they would come to blows so warm grew the discussion.

"Egad, Jack! I'm glad this voyage ends to-morrow," said Philip, as they turned in, "or they will certainly murder one another."

A grunt was Jack's unsatisfactory reply. He was, almost asleep, and already dreaming of rescuing Dolores from the clutches of Don Hypolito.

After a time, those on deck grew tired of such unprofitable talk, and one by one came down to snatch a few hours' sleep. In the space of fifteen minutes everyone was snoring, and the yacht flew northward with her cargo of sleeping men. Benker was in charge of the wheel, and as he had been in these waters years before, knew every inch of the coast. Keeping the boat about a mile from the shore, he headed her straight for Acauhtzin, which was many miles away, in the curve of the land where it stretched eastward into the Carribean Sea.

It was a perfectly calm night. Stars and moon, a placid sea, and the yacht swirling through the liquid plain with a slight roll. To the right, the infinite expanse of the waters heaving against the horizon; to the left, the long, low line of the coast, with its dim masses of foliage, and here and there a snow-clad mountain peak. Benker twirled the wheel, chewed his quid, and looked every now and then in disgust at the sleeping forms of the soldiers encumbering the white decks of the yacht. Moonlight and starlight, the throb of the screw, the singing of the wind through the rigging, and the hiss of the waves seething past; it was wonderfully beautiful. The boat sped onward like a shadow amid a world of shadows, and the most prosaic soul would have been touched by the profound beauty of this watery world. Not so Simon Benker. He was used to it all, and regarded nothing but his work and the soldiers.

Then the east began to palpitate with the coming dawn. Lines of dim light low down on the horizon – yellow bands which melted to pale green, and flushed to delicate rose colours. Higher and higher the coming day dyed the sky in opaline hues, the stars fled westward, the wan moon paling before this fierce splendour, hid her face behind a bank of clouds. The dark world of waters became tinged with rainbow hues, then one thick yellow shaft of light smote the zenith with heavy brilliance. Ray after ray shot out like the spokes of a wheel, and suddenly the intolerable glory of the sun leaped from the nether world.

"Yonder," said Jack to Philip, who had come on deck to see the sunrise, "yonder, my boy, is the Harlequin Opal!"

"If it is as brilliant and as many-tinted as that," replied the baronet, staring at the gorgeous sky and sea, "it must, indeed, be a wonderful gem. Benker, how is she going?"

"You have no soul," said Duval, turning away. "I am going down to have a tub."

He thereupon vanished again, was shortly followed by Philip, after he had satisfied himself that *The Bohemian* had done good work during the hours of darkness. Afterwards they awoke their sleeping companions, and had breakfast, when the Spaniards were introduced to several English dishes, of which they approved greatly.

The heavens were now a pale turquoise blue, the sun mounting towards the zenith was already beginning to burn hotly, and all were assembled on deck impatiently waiting to catch sight of their destination. Here and there on the green shore, amid the forests they could see Indian settlements, and at times light canoes skimmed the surface of the waves. Towards eleven o'clock a white spot appeared on the land straight ahead. Don Rafael, who was standing by Philip, touched the young man's arm.

"Acauhtzin!" he said, cheerfully; "we will be there in the hour." Philip looked at his watch.

"We left Tlatonac at four yesterday. We will reach Acauhtzin at twelve to-day. Three hundred miles in twenty hours. That is not bad for slow steaming. Had I kept her at full speed, she would have done it in fifteen!"

Tim, who had his glass up, gave an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it, Tim?"

"Three war-ships are lying in the harbour."

"I thought as much," replied Philip, calmly; "we will have to run the blockade."

Tim pointed upward to the Union Jack.

"If they fire on that," he said slowly, "Xuarez is not the clever man I take him to be. What do you say, Jack?"

"Say!" repeated Jack, who was looking ahead with clenched fists, "that one of those three ships is *The Pizarro*, and that Dolores is on board."

CHAPTER II

ACAUHTZIN

Here, where mingle rocks and sands,
Phantom-like the city stands,
Looming vague and ghostly pale,
Through the dawning's misty veil.
Day and night, and night and day,
At the foot of ramparts grey;
Just a stone-throw up the shore
Ever-hungry surges roar,
As they would rejoice to tear
From her heights that city fair,
Where, engirt by forests green,
Proud she sits, a laurelled queen;
Dim the mighty fabric gleams,
As thought-built in magic dreams,
'Tis some palace city hoary,
Famed in song for golden glory,
Which, at dawn, will fade away,
In the traitor light of day.

The city of Acauhtzin was not unlike the capital in appearance, though it differed from Tlatonac in being built on a projecting point of land, instead of on a hill. On either side were mountains, partially enclosing a deep basin, wherein the war-ships were anchored, and on a tongue of rock jutting into the centre of this pool the city was built. The walls white and glistening, arose sheer from the rocky cliffs and above them only a few steeples and towers could be seen. The walls encompassing the tongue of rock formed a kind of citadel, and then ran along the inshore for some distance on each side, terminating in well-defended forts. At the back of the city arose a high mountain, clothed with green forests, from amidst which a mighty peak of snow shot up grandly into the blue sky.

Philip saw all this when the yacht was some distance away, and at once pronounced his opinion of the place.

"It is like Valetta," he said, handing the glass to Jack. "The city is built, on a tongue of land, the walls rise in the same precipitous fashion, and there are harbours on either side. Were it not for that mighty peak, and the mountains to right and left, it would be the Valetta of the old world."

On the flag-tower of the principal fort floated the banner of the insurgent leader, the same in all respects as that of the Republic, save that the colour was red instead of yellow. The Harlequin Opal was so interwoven with the history and superstitions of the Cholacacans that Xuarez could not afford to dispense with so powerful a symbol, and on the crimson ground of the flag gleamed the representation of the stone, shooting its myriad rays. At the entrance of the harbour were anchored two heavily armed war-ships, which Don Rafael recognised as *The Cortes* and *The Columbus*. His own vessel, *The Pizarro*, lay further in to the shore, almost across the gate which pierced the wall of the great fort, and gave admission to the city.

With the Union Jack flying at her masthead *The Bohemian* steamed boldly into the harbour between the threatening bulk of the two men-of-war. Through their glasses, those on board the yacht could see there was much excitement at her unexpected appearance both on the ships and on shore.

A crowd of people poured out of the gate like a swarm of bees, as *The Bohemian*, slowing down her engines, swung gracefully to anchor beside *The Pizarro*. Just as she cleared the war-ships at the entrance, a puff of smoke broke from the black sides of *The Cortes*, whereat Tim uttered an exclamation of rage.

"It's insulting the flag they are!"

"No. Blank cartridge," replied Philip, shrewdly; "they are saluting the Union Jack. Don Hypolito evidently wants to stand well with England. See, they are dipping their flags."

The three war-ships lowered their pennants for a moment, in salutation to the English flag, and then ran them up again to the masthead. Philip had by this time brought *The Bohemian* directly under the guns of the forts; so that, in any event, she would be safe. The forts could not depress their guns sufficiently to damage her, and the war-ships would not dare to fire lest they should injure the ramparts of the town.

Making everything safe by this artful manœuvre Philip, with the sanction of Don Alonzo, hauled down the Union Jack, to hoist the Republican banner. At first the forts thought the English ship was responding to their salute, and several guns thundered a welcome to the stranger, while the crowd on the shore cheered lustily. All these greetings, however, were changed to cries of anger when the yellow banner of Tlatonac flew up to the masthead of *The Bohemian*. Without doubt, had the yacht been outside, the war-ships would have opened fire on this audacious vessel, to make her pay for such insolence; but Philip, being safe under the walls of the fort, could fly the flag with impunity.

The crowd on the beach and wharf roared with rage, as they saw the hated ensign, and recognised the fact that by this audacious piece of strategy a band of their enemies had gained admission into the very heart of their harbour. Had those on shore been able to get on board *The Bohemian* it would have gone ill with Philip and his friends; but, fortunately, the yacht had cast anchor some distance away, by the side of *The Pizarro*. The crew of the war-ship lined the side of their vessel to look at the daring intruder, and seeing this, Don Rafael, suppressing all outward signs of rage, swore fluently to himself as he recognised the renegades.

In a remarkably short space of time, a boat with the rebel flag hanging over its stern pulled out from the shore, and in a few minutes came alongside *The Bohemian*. A ladder was thrown over at once, and there stepped on deck Don José de Tejada, accompanied by a few officers. He recognised Don Alonzo and his friends at once, for they had been intimates of his before the outbreak of this fratricidal war.

"Don Rafael! Don Alonzo," said Tejada, in astonishment. "What is the meaning of this, Señores? and how have you the hardihood to display the flag of Tlatonac under the guns of Acauhtzin?"

"I, the Intendente, with these gentlemen, have come hither on a mission to Don Hypolito Suarez from the Junta of Cholacaca."

"Oh, you would make peace. The Junta fears the result of an appeal to arms."

"Carajo, no!" cried Garibay, clapping his hand to his sword. "The Junta fears nothing; much less the rebel Suarez."

"Beware, Señor," said Tejada, as several of his officers muttered angrily; "I cannot protect you, if thus you speak of our honoured President."

"President!" cried Rafael, in a rage.

"Yes; the President of Cholacaca."

"Don Francisco Gomez is President?"

"By the will of the aristocrats," said Don José fiercely; "but Don Hypolito Suarez is President by the will of the people."

"Enough of this," exclaimed the Intendente, waving his hand; "we are here under a flag of truce. Even you, Señor, must respect that. We will deliver our message to Suarez, and depart unharmed."

"That is as Don Hypolito wills it."

"Your pardon, Señor," interposed Philip, taking off his yachting cap; "this is an English vessel, and as such you dare not seize her."

"I recognise no vessel as English under those colours," said Tejada, fiercely, pointing to the opal banner.

"Bueno! I will endeavour to remove your prejudice."

In another moment Philip had given orders to Benker, and the Union Jack was flying at the other masthead.

"You must respect our neutrality now, Señor."

Don José bit his lip, and turning to one of his officers, gave an order. The soldier bowed, dropped over the side of the yacht, and went ashore in the boat.

"I have sent to tell Don Hypolito that an embassy has come from Tlatonac," said Tejada, addressing the Intendente with marked coldness; "in ten or fifteen minutes you shall know his decision."

"He must receive us, Señor."

"No doubt; but the question is, will he let you depart?"

"By the law of nations, which recognises the white flag, he must let us go as we came, unharmed."

"Had you not sailed under the English ensign, you would not have got into the harbour so easily. This boat would be now sunk by the guns of *The Cortes*."

"I thought as much," said Philip, easily; "therefore I flew a flag which even you had to respect."

"And may I ask, Señores," sneered Don José, with elaborate politeness, "under which flag you sail? the English, the Opal, or the White?"

"Under the white," replied Garibay, promptly.

"Good! Then lower those two banners, and run up the white flag."

"I'll see you hanged first!" retorted Philip, bluntly. "This is an English vessel, and I defy you to touch it or the flag."

Tejada blushed red with rage, for he knew that Xuarez, anxious to stand well in his quarrel with the great nations of Europe, would not dare to insult the Union Jack. In fact, seeing that the deputation had arrived in an English vessel, Tejada was well assured in his own mind that it would be received and sent away with the utmost courtesy, let their message from the Junta be galling as it might be. Xuarez was no barbarian, and in any case would have treated a flag of truce with honour, but the presence of these English gentlemen, of this English ship, put the matter beyond all doubt.

Under these circumstances, Tejada was unable to reply to Sir Philip; but suppressing his wrath with a great effort, bowed politely and turned away. As he did so, Don Rafael sprang forward, as also did Jack, both eager to learn if Dolores was in the town.

"I will speak, amigo," said Rafael, hurriedly to Jack. "I know Don José, as my private friend, though public enemy; he will answer me."

"Your servant, Señor!" remarked Tejada, stiffly, finding himself face to face with Don Rafael.

"Señor," said the young man, taking off his sombrero with ceremonious politeness, "we are enemies because we follow different leaders; but I implore you, by the friendship which once existed between us, to answer a question I would ask."

"Surely, Señor! You were ever welcome at my table, in time of peace. As you say, we are now enemies; but God forbid that this unhappy war should banish all courtesies between gentlemen. What question do you wish to put, Señor? It shall be answered."

"Is my cousin – is Doña Dolores at Acauhtzin?"

Tejada started, and seemed much surprised.

"No, Señor Maraquando, she is not here. Why ask me such a strange question?"

"Not here!" cried Jack, who also knew Tejada well; "but she must be here, Señor Tejada; she has been carried off from Tlatonac, taken on board yonder vessel," – pointing to *The Pizarro*– "and is now in Acauhtzin with Don Hypolito."

"I swear to you, Señor Duval, that you wrong us. You wrong Don Hypolito," replied Don José, earnestly. "I am aware that our leader loves Doña Dolores, and desires to marry her, but he would not carry her off so basely. No, Señor," continued Tejada, proudly; "we are men of honour, we do not make war on women. When Don Hypolito conquers, he will ask for the honour of Doña Dolores' hand in due form. She is not here, I swear."

"Great Heavens!" cried Jack, in despair. "Can this be true?"

"Don José," said Rafael, eagerly, "I know you to be a man of honour. I do not doubt your word; but I feel sure that my cousin is here."

"Señor!"

"I do not say that you know, or are deceiving me," went on Rafael, rapidly. "But look you, Don José. There is a zambo called Pepe, who acted as a spy for your party at Tlatonac. The other night he decoyed my cousin from the cathedral on board *The Pizarro*. A fisherman saw Pepe rowing to the war-ship, with a female in his boat."

"Bueno! That is so," interrupted Tejada, bluntly; "but the woman was a poblana – one Marina."

"Marina!" cried Duval, savagely. "Then I have been tricked. We have all been wrong! Doña Dolores must be with the Indians."

"I trust, Señor, your fears are groundless; but if Doña Dolores is with the Indians, she will be quite safe. They reverence her as the guardian of the Chalchuih Tlatonac."

"Does Don Hypolito know anything about the Indians?" asked Rafael, hurriedly.

"That question, Señor, I am not at liberty to answer."

Rafael cast one swift and penetrating glance at the impassive face of the old man, and turned away with a suppressed oath.

"Carrai!" he muttered, fiercely, to Philip, who stood by, a silent spectator. "I believe Xuarez is in league with the Indians, and has made them carry her off. If she is not here, she is at that hidden temple; but, in either case, Don Hypolito is mixed up with the case."

"In my humble opinion, she is at Acauhtzin," said Philip, quietly. "Don José does not know all the black dealings of Xuarez's heart. Cheer up, my dear Jack, we will soon see Don Hypolito, and wring the truth from him."

Jack muttered something indistinctly, and turned away, whereon Philip, taking him kindly by the arm, led him down to the saloon, with the intention of giving him such consolation as he was able.

"If she is here, Xuarez must know," said Philip, earnestly; "and if he knows, he will not be able to deceive me. I can read most faces, and it will be strange indeed if Don Hypolito's is the first to baffle me."

"Don José denies everything."

"Yes; because Don José knows nothing. That old man is a pompous old ass, like the Intendente. Many things could take place under his nose without his being any the wiser. Drink this glass of wine, my dear lad, and keep up your spirits. We will find Dolores yet."

Duval was so overcome by the loss of Dolores that he submitted to Philip's orders like a child, and obediently drank the wine poured out for him. In most emergencies, Jack would have been ready to act at once with a cool head, and iron nerve; but Dolores was very dear to him, and her loss had rendered him useless for the moment – in other words, the shock had paralysed his will.

After Philip had succeeded in putting some heart into the poor fellow, he insisted on his coming on deck, and they ascended thereto just in time to see the return of the officer sent by Tejada to Don Hypolito. The messenger walked straight up to Don José, and gave the reply of Xuarez, on hearing which, Tejada turned towards the waiting Intendente.

"His Excellency Don Hypolito Xuarez will see you at his palace."

Don Alonzo almost choked with rage at hearing these terms applied to a rebel like Xuarez, but managed to bow with tolerably good grace. He moved towards the side of the yacht, and scrambled down into the boat in a somewhat ungraceful fashion for an ambassador. Colonel Garibay, Don Rafael, and the Englishmen followed, together with Tejada and his staff.

Tim, who had been fraternising with the rebels, showed his note-book to Jack, filled with shorthand notes.

"I've got no end of information," he said gleefully; "and when I get back to Tlatonac, it goes to the *Morning Planet* straight."

"That is if we ever do get back," said Jack, gloomily.

"Of course we will, you pessimist; and, what's more, we'll take back Doña Dolores with us."

"Do you think she is here, then, after all?" asked Duval, with reviving hope.

Tim winked in a vulgar fashion.

"A word in your ear, Jack," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the pompous Tejada. "That old man's a liar. The pretty colleen is here, and Don José knows it? but she's not with Don Hypolito."

"Then where do you think she is?"

"With Rafael's sweetheart, no less; the old man's daughter."

"Doña Carmencita?"

"You've hit it."

Jack would have questioned Tim further, so as to learn his grounds for such a belief, but just then the boat touched the stone steps of the wharf. The embassy stepped ashore, and waited till the soldiers of Tlatonac arrived. Don Alonzo, with a due regard for the dignity of the Republic, refused to move until his bodyguard came on shore. In a few minutes, the soldiers landed, under the command of Captain Velez, and thus escorted, the ambassador of the Republic moved slowly forward, beneath the mighty arch which led into the heart of the rebel capital.

"We've got in, Señor," whispered Rafael to Philip with sudden doubt; "but I hope we shall be able to get out."

Philip pointed back to the Union Jack, which could be seen in the distance at the yacht's masthead.

"While that flag is there I have no fear, Don Rafael."

CHAPTER III

DON HYPOLITO XUAREZ

A visionary? Wherefore not? All men
Who change the world are dreamers in their youth.
Thought comes before fulfilment! – in the earth,
The hidden seedling hints the future flower!
So is it with this man! For years his brain
Hath dallied with a thousand fantasies,
Which had no being save within himself.
But now his dreams take shape! – with purpose firm,
He aids their due fulfilment, till therefrom
New heavens and earth are formed, and ancient things
Crashing to ruin, as foundations serve
Whereon to build earth's future destinies.

There was no doubt that Don Hypolito laid due stress on ceremonial observances as necessary to consolidate his pretensions. On the ground that Gomez had broken the constitutional rules by which he held his position, Xuarez proclaimed himself saviour and President of the Cholacacan Republic. Not being in possession of Tlatonac, he constituted Acauhtzin his capital for the time being, and there assumed all the airs of a ruler. He called himself by the title of President, his personal staff and intimate friends constituted a kind of revolutionary Junta, and the building in which this illegal assemblage met for conference was dignified with the name of the Palacio Nacional. In all respects the machinery of the lawful Government was copied at Acauhtzin, and that town was regarded by the Opposidores as the true capital of the country until such time as Xuarez should enforce his pretensions by marching in triumph into the head city of the Republic. As in the Middle Ages two Popes ruled – the one at Rome, the other at Avignon – so the allegiance of Cholacaca was claimed by two Presidents: Gomez at Tlatonac, Xuarez at Acauhtzin.

The extraordinary man who avowed himself the saviour of type country possessed in a marked degree that power of dominating all with whom he came in contact by the personal charm of his manner. This dæmonic influence is a peculiar characteristic of all great men, without which they could not hope to accomplish their missions. Napoleon changed the map of Europe, Mahomet created a religion, Cæsar consolidated the Roman Empire, Luther tore half the civilised world from the grip of ecclesiastical Rome. These great events sprang in the first instance from the strong personality of the men who accomplished them, hence the performance of what appear to be miracles. Don Hypolito Xuarez, son of a Spanish adventurer and an Indian woman, possessed this dæmonic influence, and gifted with such power, arose from obscurity to the full glory of supreme power. Nowhere was his authority more noticeable than in Acauhtzin. Years before a political adventurer, he had been accepted by the people of that town as their deputy to the Junta. Acauhtzin, always jealous of the superiority of Tlatonac, was desirous that the seat of Government should be transferred thither from the city of the opal. This ambition was fostered by the crafty Xuarez, who saw therein a safe way of gaining the love of the northern capital. After he had accused Gomez in the Junta of breaking the rules of the constitution, he came northward to claim the protection of his constituents, a protection which was freely accorded to one who had their interests so much at heart.

Cunning Don Hypolito saw his position and how he could better it. Casting all his fortunes on one bold stroke, he assembled the townspeople in the great plaza, and harangued them with all

his marvellous powers of oratory. Gomez had tampered with the sacred constitution of Cholacaca. Gomez was therefore unworthy to occupy the Presidential chair. One man alone could save the country, that man was himself. Let them throw in their fortunes with his, and resort to arms to enforce his elevation to the supreme power. Then he would transfer the seat of Government from Tlatonac to Acauhtzin, and the northern port would become the greatest city in Central America. Dazzled by this vision, the townspeople elected Don Hypolito President with enthusiasm, and vowed to stand by him to the end. That end they never for a moment doubted would be victory over the established Government, and the transference of the seat of power from Tlatonac to Acauhtzin. They firmly believed in Don Hypolito as the man of the future, and when, by a skilful stroke of diplomacy, he secured the support of the Regimiento de Huitzilopochtli and of the fleet, his triumph was complete. He who could do so much could do more! The admiring townsfolk swore by the brilliant adventurer, and when the message carried by Don Alonzo arrived at the northern capital, the crafty Mestizo was the idol of the populace. The ironical part of the whole affair was that he had no intention of fulfilling any promises made to his trusting constituents.

Jack, owing to his long residence in Tlatonac, was already acquainted with Xuarez, but both Tim and Philip were exceedingly curious to behold this man, of whom they had heard so much, and who seemed to hold the destinies of the Republic in the hollow of his hand. In the Great hall of the Palacio Nacional (so called) they beheld him for the first time, waiting to receive the emissaries of the Government. Surrounded by a brilliant throng of officers, he alone was plainly dressed, no uniform, no gaudy tints, no decorations, yet his personality raised him high above those by whom he was encircled. The supporters of Xuarez were mediocrites; Xuarez himself was a great man.

The revolutionary leader was small of stature, ungraceful in appearance; his legs were short, his body was long, so that he rather waddled than walked. At first sight this ungainly figure, this ungraceful gait, was apt to bring a smile to the lips of the onlooker, but that smile faded before the grand countenance surmounting the misshapen frame. It was as though the head of a Greek statue had been, by mistake, joined on to the body of a Polynesian idol; the first was so noble, the latter so grotesque. A Roman head, such as tradition ascribes to the Cæsars, a Napoleonic face, calm, powerful, terrible as the impassive countenance of the Sphinx. Broad forehead, prominent nose, large eyes, full of fire and determination; no beard or moustache to hide the contour of the cheeks, the strong curve of the mouth, a skin of marble whiteness, and the whole surmounted by masses of waving hair, dark as the eyes beneath. Such faces are seen on the coins of the Cæsars, on the painted walls of Egyptian tombs, on the carven walls of Assyrian palaces. They belong alone to kings, to heroes, to conquerors. Nature marks her great men thus. When such faces of terrible calm appear at intervals of centuries, mankind trembles, they recognise the scourges of God, destined to whelm the world in waves of blood. Philip came to see Xuarez – he looked, and lo! Napoleon.

"The struggle is unequal," he whispered to Jack, as Don Alonzo unrolled his papers.

"Yes," replied Duval, in the same tone. "His force is too weak to stand against the power of the Junta."

Philip smiled scornfully.

"What can the Junta do against that face?" he said, contemptuously. "There stands the greatest man in Cholacaca."

"D – n him," muttered the engineer, fiercely, "he has carried off Dolores."

"Silence, boys," growled Tim, in a voice of subdued thunder, "the Don's speaking."

The Intendente was not a particularly brave man, and hardly liked the position in which he now found himself. His mission had appeared to be great and grand and glorious at Tlatonac! but now it assumed quite a different complexion. To utter threats against the rebel Xuarez, when in the society of friends, was one thing; to order the followers of the revolutionary President to give him up to punishment, in the middle of his army, was another. Don Alonzo Cebrian hummed and hawed, and cleared his throat, to get down a nasty lump which impeded his speech. Don Hypolito saw his

confusion, but said nothing, he did not even smile, but sat serenely in his chair, impenetrable as the Sphinx. At last the Intendente screwed up his courage and delivered the decree of the Junta – sufficiently badly, it is true – still, he delivered it.

"As the legally qualified representative of the Junta of Cholocaca, in congress assembled, I hereby order those in arms against the Republic to surrender to the Government, and to deliver up for punishment the body of the rebel, Hypolito Suarez, for – "

He did not finish his sentence. A low murmur of rage arose from the supporters of the rebel leader, and, half-drawing their swords, they looked towards Suarez for authority to cut down the daring man who had thus insulted him in the midst of his army. Don Alonzo turned pale at the sight of the half-bared weapons, and shrank back among his friends; but Suarez, leaning his chin on his hand, stared steadily before him and waited. Seeing this impassive demeanour, which he was not clever enough to know was more dangerous than an outburst of rage, Don Alonzo regained his spirits. A more unfitted diplomatist than Cebrian could scarcely have been chosen.

"I need not speak at any great length," he said, rapidly. "The orders of his Excellency Francisco Gomez are that the town of Acauhtzin surrender to the Government, deliver up the rebel Suarez for punishment, and submit to the clemency of the Junta. If this is done at once, the Junta will be lenient; if not, the opal standard will be unfurled, and all the inhabitants of Acauhtzin will be treated as rebels. This is the decree of Don Francisco Gomez on the part of the Junta of Cholocaca, delivered by myself the Intendente of Xicotencatl."

Then, Cebrian, having delivered his message sufficiently badly, rolled up his papers with the air of a man who has done his duty, and waited the reply of the rebel leader. All those on the side of Suarez frowned heavily, but made no demonstration of wrath at the insolence of the message. They waited to hear Don Hypolito speak. The Mestizo arose to his feet, and addressed himself, not to the emissaries of the Republic, but to his own supporters.

"Señores," he said, in a singularly mellow and powerful voice, "you hear the decree of the so-called Junta of Cholocaca. Lest you should mistake the purport of the message delivered by Don Alonzo Cebrian, I will repeat it shortly. You are to lay down your arms, surrender my body to the Junta, and trust to the tender mercies of your rivals of Tlatonac for judgment. These are the conditions, which, if not accepted, will bring on us the thunderbolts of war from a Government who have not a navy, and scarce an army. Your answer?"

Hitherto he had spoken in a low tone, clear and distinct, but distinguished by no oratorical fire. At the last words, however, his voice rang through the hall like thunder, and he repeated them with emphasis.

"Your answer, Señores?"

"No! no! no! Viva Suarez! Viva el gefe! Abaja, Gomez!"

Don Hypolito listened to those fierce responses with a smile of pleasure on his usually immobile face, and when the clamour died away, arose slowly to his feet. Facing the messengers of the Republic, he addressed them sharply, laconically.

"You hear, Señores. Go!"

"You refuse!" said Don Alonzo, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"I refuse to surrender myself to your tyrants. The people of Acauhtzin refuse to lay down their arms. Between myself and the illegal Junta now sitting at Tlatonac, there is no friendship, no trust, no faith. They proclaim me a rebel! I, Hypolito Suarez, proclaim war!"

He flung up his hand with a fiery gesture, and as he did so a hundred swords flashed from their scabbards.

"War!" cried those in the hall. "War! Viva Suarez!"

Don Alonzo tore the message of the Republic in twain, and cast the pieces at the foot of the dais whereon Suarez was seated.

"So be it!" he cried, turning his back, "War!"

"Hold!" said Xuarez, in a voice of thunder. "You came, Señores, under the protection of the English flag. You go with the opal banner flying at your masthead. Such a precaution was useless. I am not a barbarian to fire on a flag of truce; but you – you, Señores, are cowards to thus distrust an honourable foe."

Before the Intendente could speak, Philip sprang forward, and faced the speaker.

"The fault, Señor, if fault it be, is mine. The vessel in which we came is English, and, therefore, flies the English flag. In the port, I hoisted the opal banner, to show that these gentlemen were on board, and had come on a mission from the Junta."

"An excellent explanation!" sneered Hypolito, frowning; "but untrue!"

"Señor!"

"Untrue, I say! You thought I would fire on your ship! You looked on me as a barbaric foe! You mistrusted me!"

"And who would not?" said Jack's deep voice savagely, "who would not mistrust one who makes war on women?"

"Be quiet, Jack."

"I do not understand you, Señor Duval," said Xuarez, who knew the young engineer quite well. "Explain!"

"Doña Dolores, the niece of Don Miguel Maraquando, has been kidnapped from Tlatonac! I accuse you of carrying her off."

"I deny it, Señor! It is false," cried the rebel leader, a flush reddening the marble whiteness of his face. "Doña Dolores is not in Acauhtzin."

"She may not be here, Señor, but you know where she is!"

"I do not, Señor! You have no proof of what you say."

"Pepe, the zambo, a spy in your pay, carried off a woman from Tlatonac," cried Rafael, stepping forward. "That woman was my cousin, Dolores."

Xuarez started, and spoke rapidly to one of his officers, who thereupon left the room.

"Ah! you know much, Señor," he resumed, scornfully; "but you are wrong; the zambo was my spy –"

"Carambo!"

"I repeat he was my spy in Tlatonac," said Xuarez, coolly; "and he left the city with a plan of your fortifications."

"Por todos Santos," roared Garibay, fiercely, clapping his hand on his sword.

"Call on whom you like, Señor Commandante! I have no reason to hide this from you or from the Junta, else would I have kept silent. I know when to hold my tongue, Señores; I know when to speak! I speak now! Go back and tell your President that I have a full plan of Tlatonac in my possession, and that I will use it to take your city, and level its walls to the ground."

"If you can do so!" said Garibay, tauntingly.

"If I can do so. As you say," replied Xuarez, suddenly recognising that this controversy was unworthy of his rank; "we need say no more on that subject. Ha!" he added, as the officers, with a man and a woman, entered the hall, "here is Pepe! and here, Señores, is the woman he carried off."

The woman threw back her rebozo.

"Marina!" cried Jack, in despair.

"You see, Señores," said Don Hypolito, serenely, "I am not the base one you think me to be."

"I'm not so sure of that," muttered Tim, under his breath.

"But this, Señores, is outside the question. You came to me with a message from the Junta. I have answered that message. Go! Go, and carry back to Tlatonac my defiance and that of Acauhtzin. Sail away under your opal flag, caballeros, and I promise you my guns will respect your vessel. Adios. Go!"

He pointed imperiously down the hall to where the great doors stood wide open, and, headed by Don Alonzo, the deputation retired. Rafael was biting his lips with rage, and Garibay was swearing under his breath. The exit was scarcely dignified or worthy of the greatness of the Republic.

"I never felt so mean in my life," whispered Philip to Tim. "What a beast the man is!"

"And you said he was a great man!"

"So he is. But even great men are human. Xuarez is not perfect; but I believe he is honourable as regards rules of warfare. We can leave the harbour in safety."

"I doubt that, my boy," said Tim, significantly; "the man's a liar!"

"What!" said Jack, overhearing this; "do you think that Dolores – ?"

"I think that he knows where she is."

"Then I'll stay here till he gives her up."

"You'll stay here a long time, then. She is not in Acauhtzin."

"Then where is she?"

"It's more nor I know."

They were marching down the street on their way to the sea-gate, surrounded by their own soldiers and a troop of the Regimiento de Huitzilopochtli. Around this living barrier raged the populace, who had heard of the message sent by the Republic, demanding the surrender of Xuarez, and were mad with anger. To give up the idol of their hearts – the man on whom the glorious future of Acauhtzin depended! It was an insult! If they could have got at the emissaries, they would have torn them to pieces; but, fortunately, the line of soldiers prevented this. Don Alonzo was pale with terror, but Rafael and Garibay swore loudly at the rebel crowd. The three Englishmen smiled scornfully and marched serenely along, not heeding the savage howling of the mob, which recognised them as foreigners.

"Abajo los Americanos! Mueran los Yankies!"

"We would have rather a hard time out there," said Philip, as Tim, his huge frame shaking with anger, ranged alongside of him. "Keep together boys. Where's Jack?"

"Behind, with Don Rafael. Don't trouble, Philip; Jack Duval has his six-shooter on him."

"Good! I hope I am not a coward," said the baronet, serenely, as a clod of earth hit him on the shoulder; "but I will be glad when we are safe on board *The Bohemian*."

"So will I. This is like Donnybrook Fair. But we're nearly outside the town. Glory be to the saints!"

As they approached the gate, the fury of the mob increased, and it took all the strength of the soldiers, tramping shoulder to shoulder, to prevent them breaking through and falling on the emissaries of the Junta. At the gate, however, a soldier stumbled and fell, whereon, through the gap thus formed, a torrent of men rushed, shouting wildly. The escort fought bravely, and the rebel soldiers did their best to save the ambassadors. It would be a disgrace to Acauhtzin to let the mob have their will.

Inch by inch they fought their way down to the sea-shore, surrounded by the howling multitude. Philip knocked down a man who tried to snatch his watch-chain, and Tim, head and shoulders above the torrent of humanity, whacked every head he saw heartily with his heavy stick. "When you see a head, hit it." That was Tim's rule of warfare. He picked it up at Donnybrook Fair, and applied it practically in his present predicament.

At the water's edge they were hurried into several boats, and amid a shower of stones and mud, managed to get on board the yacht. As soon as all were on deck, Benker, without waiting for instructions, started the boat. Philip stood at the side of the ship and shook his fist at the shore.

"You scoundrels!" he raged, fiercely. "You dishonourable wretches."

"And Xuarez is a great man," scoffed Tim, wiping the blood from his face.

"Well," retorted Philip, viciously, "he's not responsible for this mob."

"When we return," swore Rafael, who stood near him, "we will level those walls with the sand."

By this time the yacht had passed out of the harbour, and was steaming between the two warships. Don Alonzo began to recover his courage.

"Thanks to the Holy Virgin, we are all safe, Señores," he said, in a trembling voice. "The Junta will bitterly resent this insult shown to the Intendente of Xicotencatl."

Philip looked around with an alarmed expression of countenance.

"Where's Jack?"

"Jack!" cried Tim, in a stentorian voice.

There was no answer.

"Señor Juan was with me," said Rafael, quickly, "but I lost him from my side outside the gate."

"He must be down below," said Philip, greatly disturbed, and went off to the cabin. In a few moments he reappeared.

"He is not there. My God! Can he be lost?"

The yacht was searched thoroughly, but no trace of Jack Duval could be found. Philip wanted to put back and rescue his friend, who had been evidently left ashore.

"Impossible, Señor!" cried Don Alonzo, in alarm; "it is dangerous."

"I do not care. Do you think I am going to leave my dear friend to be torn to pieces by these savages?" raged Philip, stamping his foot.

"The soldiers will protect him," said Garibay, who was terribly upset at the discovery of their loss. He was very fond of Jack.

"Did they protect us?" said Tim, who was quite beside himself with grief and rage. "Turn her head back, Philip."

Don Rafael, Tim, and the baronet were all in favour of doing this, but Don Alonzo and Garibay said it would be madness. By this time they were beyond the range of the fort guns, and in safety; but notwithstanding the remonstrances of the terrified Intendente, Philip altered the course of the boat, and started back to the harbour.

"I will save Jack, if I die for it," he said, fiercely.

Just as *The Bohemian* approached the warships, a puff of smoke burst from the sides of both, and two balls ricocheted across the waves.

"Not blank cartridge this time," muttered Tim, grimly, "The dirty cowards, to fire on an unarmed boat. And the forts!"

One! two! three! four! A perfect cannonade thundered from the forts, and one of the spars of the boat was carried away. The warships repeated their fire, and, against his will, Philip was forced to stop the engines. It was no use running into a hornet's nest. Another quarter of a mile, nay less, and *The Bohemian* would be smashed to pieces. The engines were reversed, and Philip shook his fist wildly at the town.

"First Dolores! then Jack! Oh, cursed, cursed town!"

CHAPTER IV

RIVALS

I this side! You that side! – a woman between us,
You love her! – I love her! – each fain would caress her.
By Paul, I will never surrender this Venus,
For I in my arms would for ever possess her.

You say that she loves you! A lie! – for she told me
Her heart had no caring for love or for lover.
Let her but a moment behold you! behold me!
And he whom she chooses we'll quickly discover.

Well, say! – we'll suppose it! – to you she is tender!
And goes with you thither; while I remain lonely,
Think you that this woman I thus would surrender?
Nay! she shall remain with me! mine to be only.

Why, you are my captive! but though I can slay you!
Give over this folly – you'll find me a true man!
Nay more, you are free, honoured, wealthy – what say you?
What madman refuse you! – then lose life and woman.

Jack recovered his senses in complete darkness. He put his hand to his head and heard the clank of a fetter, felt the cold iron clasp his wrist. He moved his legs, more chains, and the unexpected discovery that he was lying on straw. Not a ray of light anywhere to be seen. On all sides darkness, the darkness of Egypt. Rolling heavily to one side with a groan of pain forced from him by his aching head, he felt the cold chill of a stone floor. Straw, chains, stones, darkness! What did it all mean? He tried to think, but his head was confused, stunned as with a blow. It was a blow! For at the back of his cranium he felt a wound, his fingers were moist with his own blood.

Slowly, slowly, his scattered senses came back to him, and he strove to recall all that had taken place since he had left the Palacio Nacional. Yes! he had gone down the street with the rest of his friends. Rafael had walked by his side, Philip and Tim had marched on in front. Then the howling mob on all sides dashing itself against the lines of soldiers. A dragoon had fallen by the sea-gate just as they were on the verge of safety – the mob rushed in through the gap – then he remembered fighting desperately – a blow on the head – a cowardly blow delivered from behind, and he remembered no more. Remembrance ceased with that blow, it revived again here in darkness, with him lying on a straw bed chained like a prisoner. A prisoner! Jack saw his position in a moment – he was in prison, at the mercy of his rival, of the lover of Dolores, of Don Hypolito Xuarez, rebel and traitor.

"Great Heaven," moaned Jack, as the horrors of his situation slowly dawned on his confused brain, "this must all have been designed by that scoundrel, Xuarez. His promises that we should go unscathed were all lies. Philip! Tim! poor Rafael! Where are they now? Perhaps in this accursed prison."

It was so dark that he was afraid to move lest he should fall into danger. At length he put out his hand cautiously, and, kneeling forward, felt all round his bed. The straw was simply thrown on the floor in a heap, and on three sides he found nothing but the pavement, on the fourth the massive

stones of the wall. Unexpectedly his hand touched a crock of water, and drawing this towards him, he found it full, much to his delight, as, owing to his wound, he was consumed with a burning thirst. After taking a good draught, he sat back on his straw to think of what he should do next.

Jack was always cool in time of danger. The obstacles which would have appalled other men only sharpened his wits, and as his brain was now clearer, he set himself to work to think over the situation. Before doing this, however, he soaked his handkerchief in the little water remaining at the bottom of the crock, and bound it round his head. The cool cloth somewhat assuaged the throbbing of his wound and thus quieted his heated brain.

On leaving Tlatonac, Jack and his friends had doffed their fine uniforms as likely to compromise them in the eyes of Xuarez, and reassumed their European garb. He was, therefore, dressed in a Norfolk jacket, with trousers of rough blue serge, these latter being tucked into high riding-boots of untanned leather. The pith helmet he had worn had evidently been knocked off in the struggle at the sea-gate, as his head was bare; but, on feeling his pockets, he found everything else was safe. Money, knife, keys, they were all there; but his revolver was gone, a loss which he much regretted.

The first thing he did was to remove his fetters, which he managed with some difficulty and the assistance of his knife. Luckily they were only of light steel, and had evidently been put on more through the malignity of Xuarez than because they prevented his escape. Indeed, it was a useless precaution, for, even now that they were removed, he knew not where he was, and in which direction to turn for egress. With his knife he managed to bend back the links of one chain so that it parted, leaving the steel ring still on the wrist; but, with considerable pain to his hand, he managed to slip it through the other. As regards the rings round his ankles, Jack was unusually powerful, and, in spite of his wound, with the strength of despair, managed to wrench the locks of the chains asunder. The steel chains were old and badly made, else he would not have freed himself so easily; but as it was, after half-an-hour's hard work, he managed to get rid of the chains, and stood up with no manacles on him, save the steel ring on his left wrist, with a few links dangling therefrom.

Free so far, he next placed his head against the rough damp stones of the wall, and cautiously moved round his cell. A few steps from his bed brought him against another wall, at right angles to the former. Following this, he soon arrived at the other side of the prison, and felt his way along the opposite wall. Towards the end of this, he stumbled over a flight of squat, stone steps, projecting into the prison, and by careful touching, managed to ascertain that those led up to a low door of wood, clasped with iron. Beyond, a short space, and another wall, at right angles, and so back to his straw bed, on which he resumed his seat.

"Fifteen by twenty," muttered Jack, taking another drink of water, "and steps leading down from the door. Damp walls too. I guess this cage is in the basement of one of the forts, or below the Palacio Nacional. That cursed Xuarez! One of his men stunned me in that fight with a foul blow, and they then clapped me in here. I wonder what he intends to do with me. He knows I love Dolores, and am his rival; so I expect he'll make things pretty hot for me, if he can. Well, at all events, my life is safe, for what with Philip and Tim to stand by me, he dare not kill me."

Then a sudden dread entered his mind regarding Philip and the war correspondent.

"If they should be killed in that row, or clapped in prison also! No, I don't believe that. Putting Philip out of the question, Xuarez is too cunning to hurt a war correspondent of a great English paper. He wants to stand well with the world in this struggle, and would not dare to risk the outcry of anything happening to Tim. I expect they all got back safely to the yacht. Xuarez could afford to let them go with his defiance to Tlatonac. He only wanted me because I am his rival in the affections of Dolores. The question is, has he got her in his power also? He says 'no,' but the man's a liar, whom it is impossible to believe. Hang this wound."

It was burning with heat, and taking off the bandage, he dipped it into the dregs of water remaining. Then he bound it over the wound again, and took out his watch, which luckily had not been stolen, as it was safely stowed inside his Norfolk jacket. With his fingers, he delicately felt the hands.

"Six o'clock!" he said, somewhat startled; "and we left the palace at three. I've been three hours in this cursed hole. It must be still light, or, rather, twilight; so, as it is here as dark as pitch, this cell must be built far down. Hang them! do they intend to starve me?"

He felt vainly for the traditional loaf of bread, which always accompanies the pitcher of water in prisons, but, to his dismay, could find none. This pointed to one of two things. Either Xuarez intended to starve him to death, or would visit him shortly with a meal. He would not dare to do the former, as Jack, feeling sure his friends had escaped, knew the outcry of these against the rebel leader would be great, did he carry his hatred so far; and as to the latter, the young man hopefully waited, in the hope that his gaoler would soon arrive.

"He won't come himself, I suppose," said Jack, throwing himself down on his straw; "some soldiers will come and escort me to the upper world. Hang it! if the man isn't a thorough blackguard, he'll let me have a meal and a doctor. My head is aching like, to split. Even a candle would be acceptable in this infernal gloom."

Clearly there was nothing for it but to wait till some one entered the cell. Jack was too wise to waste his time in kicking at the door, or exhaust his strength in shouting for help. He was in the power of Xuarez, and it depended on future events as to how matters would turn out. Of one thing Jack felt confident, and that was that even if Philip and the others reached the yacht in safety they could do nothing.

"I guess Xuarez brought the guns to bear on *The Bohemian*, and ordered Philip to clear out. He could do nothing against that order, so I expect the boat is by this time on her way back to Tlatonac with the news of my capture or death. I'll have to wait here until the Junta captures the town, and Lord only knows when that will be. I wouldn't mind so much if I only knew of the whereabouts of Dolores."

Thus talking to himself, in order to keep up his spirits, this unfortunate young man sat for some considerable time, waiting with philosophic resignation the turn of events. By means of his watch, he calculated that it was close on eight o'clock before he was disturbed. Then he heard the sound of a bolt slipping out of its socket, the door of his cell opened, and a man appeared. A man draped in a long black cloak, flung Spanish fashion over his left shoulder, and wearing a broad-leaved sombrero which effectually concealed his features. He carried a lantern which illuminated the cell with a sufficiently feeble light, but it was comforting to Jack, after the intense darkness of the previous hours, and enabled him to see whom was his visitor.

The stranger closed the door of the cell, descended the steps, and advanced towards Jack, swinging the lantern to and fro so as to flash the light into every corner of the small room. That squat figure, that ungraceful walk; Jack recognised him at once. Notwithstanding the sombrero, the long cloak, the silence observed by the man, his prisoner at once saluted him by name.

"So this is how you keep your prisoners, Don Hypolito Xuarez?"

Xuarez started at being thus recognised so speedily, but restraining his speech, flashed the lantern up and down Jack's tall figure as he leaned against the wall, and started again.

"Carambo! You are free! The chains – "

"Are there, Señor!"

The rebel leader looked first at the broken chains afterwards at Jack, and seemed to regard his prisoner as a kind of Samson. He had a profound respect for physical strength, for physical beauty; and the splendid frame of the young Englishman, in conjunction with this evidence of his muscles, inspired Don Hypolito with great admiration.

"Bueno, Señor Duval!" he said, in the frank tone of a man who cherishes no animosity, "you are a difficult person to deal with. You have broken your chains! Had I not arrived thus opportunely, you might by this time have broken out of prison."

"It's not impossible, Señor," replied Jack, coolly. "You may be certain I would not have sat down much longer doing nothing. But now – "

"You are thinking of making use of my presence here to facilitate your escape. Is it not so, mi amigo? If you are wise, do not try. You may knock me down – I am but a dwarf beside you! You may steal these keys, this lantern; but you know not the palace, you know not the guards, and, above all, even if you did get free, you could not escape from Acauhtzin. No, mi amigo! Here you are! here you stay, unless you agree to my conditions."

"Conditions!" echoed Jack, scornfully. "I think I can guess what those conditions are, Señor Xuarez."

"Bueno! Then I can save my breath," replied Don Hypolito, setting down the lantern. "If you know the conditions of your release, you also know whether to accept them or not! Speak plainly, mi amigo!"

"Don Hypolito," observed Jack, not answering this question directly, "I do not know whether to regard you as a knave or a fool. You must be the former, else you had not betrayed me and my friends. You are the latter, or you would not ask me to agree to certain conditions which you know are quite impossible – with me?"

"You have the great merit, Señor Duval, of candour. I admire it as a virtue, but it can be carried too far. I do not like being called knave or fool, as I deserve neither name."

"Is that so? Good! I say you are both! However, I am open to argument; so let me hear your side of the question."

Don Hypolito laughed quietly, and eyed his rival with increased respect.

"I wish you were on my side, Don Juan. A man such as you would be invaluable to me."

"I thank you for your good opinion, Señor; but I am not on your side, neither am I likely to be. I support the established Government of Cholacaca."

"You are a – but no," said Xuarez, checking himself with a sardonic smile; "we have no time to discuss politics. All are against me now, but when I am seated in the presidential chair, the world will be in my favour. To-day, Señor, I am an adventurer. To-morrow I will be a conqueror. Success is everything in the eyes of the world. However, we need not talk of these things which do not interest you. I notice you have not yet asked after your friends."

"Why should I, Don Hypolito?" replied Jack, determined to show no signs of anxiety in the presence of this man. "I know that my friends are safe, and are at present on their way to Tlatonac."

"It is true, but how did you guess this much, Don Juan?"

"From what I know of your character."

"Pardon me, Señor, no one knows my character," said Xuarez, quietly.

"Not your real character, perhaps, but the character by which you choose to be known to the world."

The nonchalance of the young Englishman somewhat puzzled Xuarez. Here was a man talking quietly with one whom he had every reason to hate and dread. Wounded as he was, incarcerated in a gloomy cell; in doubt as to the safety of his friends, the whereabouts of his sweetheart – Jack had yet sufficient pluck to conceal his real feelings, and play a part which entirely deceived even so acute an observer of human nature as Don Hypolito. He saw that Jack was purposely holding himself back instead of giving way to his righteous indignation, but while admiring the self-restraint of the young man, he was doubtful as to the meaning of such diplomatic conduct.

Experience had taught Don Hypolito that the only way to fathom the feelings of others was to make them talk freely, listen attentively, and draw conclusions from chance observations. This method he now applied to Jack, and asked him to proceed in a grave tone of voice, all the time keeping his ears open to find out the underlying meaning of this impassive demeanour. He discovered nothing, because there was nothing to discover. Jack spoke truthfully and bluntly, giving voice to his real feelings, and Xuarez, accustomed to double dealing, to double meaning, was for once in his life utterly at fault.

"You have started this war, Señor," said Jack with painful candour, "entirely for your own ends. The excuse you make is that Gomez has broken the constitution of Cholocaca. This is false, as you know well. However, it is a good excuse upon which to work out your aims. In this war you wish the civilised world to be on your side – to look upon you as a great man, fitted to be the saviour of Cholocaca from a tyrannical Government. To this end you dare not act violently towards any representative nation of the civilised world. England is a representative nation, and you to-day saluted her flag. You respected the ambassadors from the Junta because they were accompanied by Englishmen, because they came here on an English ship. One of those men whom you thus respected is the war correspondent of a London paper, and you wished him to write home to his journal narrating the courtesy of Don Hypolito Xuarez, and thus interesting our nation's feelings in your favour. The attack made by the mob was, I firmly believe, made without your sanction. You wished the embassy to depart in safety, and they so departed. One man, however, you desired to detain, because he was your rival in the affections of a woman. That man is myself! So you made use of the riot to have me knocked down in the fight, and taken here to prison. Now that you think I am worn out with wounds, thirst, and imprisonment, you come to offer me my liberty on two conditions. First, that I surrender all right to the hand of Doña Dolores. Second, that I leave Cholocaca for ever. These, Señor Xuarez, are your motives in acting as you have done, dictated, as I said before, not, perhaps, by your real character, but by the noble character in which you wish to appear to the world."

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