

"one!" She shrugged lightly. "In the first place I care nothing for you. Is not that enough?"

"No, indeed. You'll get over that."

"Let us imagine, then, the contrary. You Americans are entirely different from our people. You are cold, deliberate, wicked—your social customs are not like ours. You do not at all understand us. How then could you be interested to meet a Spanish family?"

"Why, you're half American."

"Oh, yes, although it is to be regretted. Why, there is no other nice girl in all Panama who would have talked with you as I did in the forest that day."

"But what has all this to do with my coming to see you?"

"It is difficult to explain, since you will not understand. When a young man is accepted into a Spanish house, many things are taken for granted. Besides that, we do not know each other, you and I. Also, if you should come to see me it would cause gossip, misunderstanding among my friends."

"I'll declare myself in advance," he promised warmly.

"No, no, no! We Spanish-Americans do not care for strangers. We have our own people and we are satisfied. It is much better that old people who are of more experience should discuss these questions."

"But don't you want to have a voice in your own affairs?" he eagerly urged.

She answered frankly: "I do rebel sometimes. I protest, but it is only the American blood in me."

"If you'd learn to know me a little bit, maybe you'd enjoy having me around the house."

"But I cannot know you, any more than you can know me," she cried, with a little gesture of despair at his dullness. "Don't you see—before we could get acquainted nicely people would be talking."

"Let's try. You're living at the country place again, aren't you? Suppose I should get lost some day—tomorrow, for instance?"

"No, no! Listen. It is the warning bell, and we must return."

The crowd was filling into the theater now. They fell in behind Senor Garavel and Mrs. Cortlandt.

"I'm going hunting again tomorrow," prophesied Kirk, "and I'm almost certain to lose my way—about 3 o'clock. Suppose we have another stroll after the next act?"

"I shall be with my father. Never before have I enjoyed so much liberty." She sighed gratefully.

"Oh, I detest your blamed, strait-laced Spanish customs," he cried hotly. "What do they amount to, anyhow? I love you. I do, I do!"

She laughed and darted to her father's side.

"Don't you think Miss Garavel is a pretty girl?" Mrs. Cortlandt questioned, as they strolled toward their box.

"She's a dream," Anthony's tone left nothing unsaid.

"You got along together capitally. Most of the señoritas are impossible."

"By the way, what is her name?"

"Gertrudis. Rather pleasing, I think."

Kirk thought so too. When, after an age, the curtain fell for a second time he escaped from his companions, mumbling some excuse or other, and made haste to find her again. But as he approached he felt a sudden pang of jealous rage.

Ramon Alvarez was beside her, and the two were chatting with an appearance of intimacy that made him furious. Close at hand stood Garavel, deep in conversation with Colonel Jolson.

"Ah, Ramon, I wish you to meet Mr. Anthony," said Gertrudis. "So! You have met before?"

"In Colon," Kirk explained, while Alvarez scowled him with his eyes. "Mr. Alvarez was very hospitable to me."

"Yes," the Spaniard exclaimed. "It is my great regret that Senor Anthony did not remain for longer. Does Senor Anthony discover our climate to be still agreeable?"

"Very. It hasn't grown too warm for me yet."

"We are but approaching our 'ot season." The speaker's eyes snapped.

Heretofore Kirk had hated Ramon in a careless, indifferent sort of way, feeling that he owed him a good drubbing, which he would be pleased to administer if ever a fitting time arrived. But now, since he saw that the jackanapes had the audacity to love Gertrudis, his feeling became intense. The girl, of course, was fully alive to the situation and, although she evidently enjoyed it, she did her best to stand between the two men.

As for Alvarez, he was quick to feel the sudden fierce hostility he had aroused, and it seemed to make him nervous. Moreover, he conceived that he had scored heavily by his last retort, at which Kirk had only smiled. It therefore seemed best to him to withdraw from the conversation (anxiously conducted in English), and a few moments later he stalked majestically away. This was just what Kirk wanted, and he quickly suggested the balcony. But Gertrudis was obstinate.

"I must remain with my father," she said.

"May I sit beside you, then? Do you know, I'm going to nestle up to your father and make him like me."

"Again you are speaking of that subject. I have known you but an hour, and you talk of nothing but my father, of me, of coming to call. I have lost all modesty to speak of those things. You force me to embarrass myself."

"You once spoke of a chap your people had picked out. It isn't—Alvarez?"

She let her dark eyes rest upon his a moment, and his senses swam. Then she nodded slowly.

"You do not like him?"

"Just like a nose bleed. The day you and I are married I'm going to send him a wreath of poison ivy."

"It pleases you always to joke."

"No joke about that. You won't give in, will you?"

"There is no question of force nor of surrender, señor. I insist now that we shall speak of other things."

A few moments later he was constrained to rejoin his hostess' party.

"When are you going back to Las Savannas?" he asked as he reluctantly arose.

"Tomorrow."

"The hunting ought to be good"—

But she frowned at him in annoyance, and he left her after all without knowing whether he had gained or lost ground. She was not so warm and impulsive as he had supposed. Her girlishness, her simplicity, her little American ways, cloaked a deep reserve and a fine sense of the difference in their positions. The plague of it was that if anything he was more in love with the definite and dazzling Gertrudis Garavel than he had been with the mysteriously alluring Chiquita. And then, too, there was Alvarez!

CHAPTER XVI.  
An Awakening.

HE was in no more satisfactory frame of mind when, on the next afternoon, he shouldered his gun and set out for the country. He went directly to the fairy pool, and waited there in a very fever of anxiety. Despite the coolness and peace of the place, he felt his pulses throb and his face burn. If she came, it would mean everything to him. If she stayed away—why, then he would have to believe that after all the real Gertrudis Garavel had spoken last night at the opera. The sound of a voice shot through his troubled thoughts like a beam of sunlight through a dark room.

"Oh, Senor Antonio! How you startled me!"

Instantly his self possession came back. He felt relieved and gay.

"Good afternoon, queen!" He rose and bowed politely. "I thought I saw one underneath the waterfall just now."

"Who would have expected you to be here?" she cried, with an extreme and obviously counterfeit amazement that filled him with delight.

"I'm lost," he declared; then, after one look into her eyes, he added, "Ab-



"Oh, Senor Antonio! How you startled me."

solutely, utterly, irretrievably lost. Won't you sit down?"

"Since we have met quite by accident, perhaps it would not be so very improper." She laughed mischievously and settled uncertainly beside him like a butterfly just alighting, ready to take flight again on the instant.

"Perhaps I can help you to find your way, señor?" she said, with ingenuous politeness.

"You are the only one who can, Miss Garavel. I don't know that I ever told you, but I'm in love."

"Indeed?"

"I am the most miserably happy person in the world, for I have just this moment begun to believe that the young lady likes me a little bit."

"Oh! But I forgot—the real reason why I came. I have something I must tell you."

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