THE FIREBRAND

A STORY OF THE EARLY CARLIST UPRISING.

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Ramon Garcia, known as El Sarria, having been induced to believe that his wife, Dolores, is unfaithful, stabs a village fop, Rafael Flores, whom he finds presumably kissing Dolores through the window. His estates are confiscated and he becomes a hunted man. At the same time a young Scotch adventurer, Rollo Blair, comes to Spain, and, during an inn quarrel, is aided by John Mortimer, an Englishman. The two start to visit Don Baltasar, abbot of the monastery of Montblanch. Blair and Mortimer are entertained lavishly by the abbot, and meet Etienne St. Pierre, a French gallant, who is studying for holy orders. These three, with El Sarria, who has found protection at the monastery, are commissioned by the abbot to capture the Queen Regent and her little daughter, in the interests of the church. En route for the camp of Cabrera, the Carlist General, they pass the home of El Sarria, who learns that Dolores was not false to him, and that his downfall was plotted by Luis Fernandez. Dolores is imprisoned in Luis' home, and the son to whom she had just given birth is about to be buried alive by Luis' brother, Tomas, when El Sarria falls upon him. El Sarria rescues his child and takes it to the Convent of the Holy Innocents, where Concha is immured. Then, aided by Rollo Blair, he circumvents Fernandez and finds Dolores.

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CHAPTER XVII.

With Rollo now for a time the tale runs more briskly. He set off for the Venta, where he found Etienne and John Mortimer sitting at meat.

"Good morning, friends of mine," he cried, "you are in excellent case, I see. John, I have made arrangements for you to go and visit some vineyards today. Old Gasper will guide you with his gun over his valiant shoulder. You can pick up points about wine buying without doubt. As to you, Etienne, mon vieux, I found your Concha and I am going to see her myself in half an hour. Shall I give her your love?"

"What!" cried Saint Pierre, "you jest—it cannot be my cruel, cruel little Conchita who fled from me and would not take the smallest notice of all my letters and messages. Where is she?"

"She is at the nunnery of the Sisters of Mercy outside the village. Poor Etienne, I am indeed sorry for you. With your religious views, it will be impossible for you to make love to a nun!"

"Would I not," cried Etienne eagerly, "mon Dieu, only procure me a chance and I will let you see! But a nunnery is a hard nut to crack. How do you propose to manage it?"

"I intend to make friends with the Lady Superior," said Rollo, confidently.

"You have a letter of introduction to her, doubtless?" said Etienne.

"I do not at present even know her name, but all in good time!" said the youth, cooly.

"For stark assurance commend me to a Scot," cried Etienne, with enthusiasm.

"Etienne," said Rollo, suddenly checking his glass in midair as an idea occurred to him, "lend me that ring of your sainted uncle's, the one with the picture of Don Carlos."

The young Frenchman indolently drew it from his finger, laid it on the polished marble top of the table, and with his forefinger flipped it across to Rollo.

"What shall I say to your Concha—that is if I chance to see her?" said Rollo, as he brushed his clothes and saw to the neatness of his neck ribbon.

Etienne held down his head.

"Indeed," he said a little reluctantly, "I am not so anxious that you should say anything at all about me. The little minx did not treat me so very well when I came this way on my last visit to my uncle. And to tell the truth, there is an exceedingly pretty girl living only three doors from the Venta. I have already spoken to her, and she has smiled at me thrice over the fence."

"That leaves me a freer hand with Concha, then," murmured Rollo to himself, as he stuck his hat on the back of his heat and strode out into the stable yard, smiling to himself.

He had his horse brought out and saddled. Then he mounted and rode down the village street toward the convent of the pious Sisters of Mercy. He smiled to himself as he rode, for he wondered how he would succeed with this good mother superior, and what manner of girl he would find that wicked, tricksome Concha to be, whose name was in all men's mouths with a certain approving flavor, as of pleasant naughtiness to be alternately scolded and cajoled. One thing this Master Rollo was as sure of as that he was a Scot. And that was—he never could, would or should fall in love with such a girl.

So Rollo rode up with a clatter of spurs and accoutrement to the gate of the convent. Dismounting he advanced briskly to the gate and knocked loudly upon it with his riding whip.

In a few moments a sour-faced portress opened the little square wicket and looked through at him.

"I must see the mother superior immediately on important business," quoth the brisk youth, slapping his waistcoat and settling the hilt of his sword in a business-like manner, as if he had all his life been in the habit of making early morning calls upon mother superiors.

The portress laughed.

"A likely story," she said, "that I am to trail across the yard and leave my business here to fetch the lady superior from her devotions to see a young man at the gate."

"If you do not admit me," Rollo went on unabashed, "not only the lady superior will suffer, but the cause which all good Christians have at heart."

He suddenly thrust his bare hand close to the wicket and showed the ring which Etienne had given him.

"Do you know this?" he said.

At his first threatening motion the woman had mechanically withdrawn, but now curiosity brought her again closer to the grating, on perceiving that Rollo made no attempt to intrude his hand within.

"These are the royal arms of Spain, are they not?" she said, and dropped an involuntary courtesy.

Then Rollo played his trump card. The ring was made with a certain secret spring beneath the stone, which when touched sprang up like the lid of a box, and a beautiful little miniature was revealed, encircled with hair of a dark brown color.

"Do you know who this is?" he said.

"His absolute Majesty, Carlos Quinto!" said the portress with a deep reverence.

"Well, then," Rollo went on, "take this ring and with it the hair of the anointed and Christian king. It is a great trust, but I give it into your hands. Carry it reverently as a token to the Lady Superior that a messenger from the King waits to speak with her!"

The head of the portress disappeared from the young man's sight with the profundity and compass of the reverence with which she received the image of the sovereign of all Catholic hearts.

As the young man stood drumming his fingers upon the window sill, suddenly the most piquant face in the world appeared at the wicket.

"Better that you should look to your horse," a pair of red lips said, in the soft Southland speech of Andalusia. "The entero is chafing himself to pieces on a too tight curb!"

"Thank you, senorita!" said Rollo, his heart instantly disturbed within him, for he was a merciful man by nature and consistently merciful to his beast. Then he turned about, loosened the curb, and looking over his horse, noticed that the tail strap, also lathered the animal, whereupon he eased that. Then, with a smiling countenance, he turned for approval to the face at the wicket, but he was too late. His mentor had vanished.

The door of the porter's lodge was opened and he caught the heavy rustle of cloth clogging itself about unwontedly hasty ankles.

"The Mother Superior waits!" gasped the portress, opening the great door suddenly, and the young man found himself forthwith within the Convent of the Holy Innocents.

ROLLO LIFTED CONCHAS' HAND AND KISSED IT. "WITH MY LIFE AND MORE," HE SAID.

The Lady Superior proved to be a woman of about 55 or 60 years of age, in person stout and rubicund, a smile of good humor habitually repressed upon her lips, and a mouth slightly pulled down at the corners, contradicting the first impression of her jovial countenance.

"You are young, Colonel," she said frowning upon Rollo's good looks with a certain affectation of gloom quite foreign to her nature—"very young to be the messenger of a King!"

"I can, indeed, hardly claim that honor," said Rollo, smiling and bowing, "but I have the honor to belong to the army of Carlos Quinto, and to be entrusted with a most serious mission on his behalf by my good friend, Don Baltasar Varela, prior of the Abbey of Montblanch, a name probably known to you."

"How can I assist you?" she said. "Command me. There is nothing consistent with the order and discipline of this house that I will not grant to you." Rollo bowed grandly.

"I thank you in the name of my master," he said; "the King will not forget fitly to reward his faithful servants. I ask what is, indeed, somewhat irregular, but is, nevertheless, necessary. There is a man of this place who, for the King's cause, has become an outlaw—one Ramon Garcia——"

The prioress rose from her seat indignantly.

"He is a murderer—in intent, if not in act," she said. "He is no true man, but a villain——"

"Many men have been called so," said Rollo, sadly, "who for the King's sake have borne reproach gladly—of whom this Ramon, called El Sarria, is one. What he has done has been done by order of our Don Carlos—"

"Indeed, that is true, my lady," interjected a very pretty and unconventional young person, rising suddenly from behind certain frames of embroidery, where she had been at work unseen; "the gentleman refers to that same Ramon Garcia whose letters recommendatory I had the honor of submitting to you this morning. To kill in the King's name is surely no sin, else were soldiering a sin, and your reverend worthiness knows that, shriven or unshriven, the soldiers of Carlos Quinto go straight to heaven. And none can deny that, while on earth, a handsome uniform covers a multitude of sins."

"Hush, hush, hush!" cried the abbess, holding up her hands in horror; "your talk savors of the world, and, indeed, that reminds me—how in the world came you here?"

"I was seated at the embroidery," said the girl, demurely; "you set me the task yourself, to be ready for our Lady of the Pillar's festival on Tuesday next."

"Well, child, well, you can go now," said the abbess, with a nod of dismission. "I would speak with this young man alone."

The girl cast a look at Rollo which remained with him long.

He held up his hand almost involuntarily.

"If this damosel is by any chance the Senorita Concha Cabezos, as I have some reason to suppose, though I have never before seen the young lady, it might be advantageous if she remained. She was formerly, as I am informed, in the family of Don Ramon Garcia, and can assist my mission very materially."

Then Rollo opened out his plans in so far as they concerned Dolores, showing the prioress how important it was for the success of the arduous mission on which they had been dispatched that El Sarria should leave no anxieties behind him, and beseeching her for the sake of the King's cause to receive Dolores within the convent as she had already received her child.

The prioress considered a while, and, after many dubious shakings of the head, finally agreed.

"It is indeed gravely irregular," she said, "but in these untoward times the King's service overrides all. I will receive Dolores tGarcia."

"And if it be your will I will arrange the details wih Senorita Concha," said Rollo, promptly. "I need not, in that case, further detain the noble and reverend prioress."

The lady superior bent a quick, sharp look upon the pair, but Rollo was grave and high of demeanor, as became the envoy of a King, while Concha sat at her embroidery as demure as a mouse.

"You will do your best, Concha," she said, gravely, admonishing that maiden with her forefinger, "to further he objects of this young man. And, above all, be sure to show him the deference due to his rank and mission!"

"Yes, my lady superior!" said little Concha Cabezos, "I will treat him as if he were the King's own high majesty in person."

"A very proper spirit!" said the prioress, nodding and going out. "Cultivate it, my young friend."

"I will," said litle Concha, and dropped a courtesy behind her back, which, alas, was not without a certain wicked suggestion of contempt for Kings and dignities and their emissaries.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"At your ambassadorial service!" said the Senorita Concha, bowing still lower and holding out her skirts at either side with a prettyish exaggeration of deference. "What commands has your Scottish excellency for poor little Concha?"

"Ahem!" said Rollo, more than a little puzzled, "they are not so much commands as—as—I thought you might be able to help me."

"Now we are getting at it!" said Concha Cabezos, nodding with a wise air.

"I must be on my guard with this girl!" thought Rollo. "I can almost bring myself to believe that—yet it sometimes seems impossible—that—the girl is chaffing me—me!"

"I wished to see you!" he went on.

The girl courtesied again, bringing her hands together in a little appeal almost childish. It looked natural, yet Rollo was not sure. But at any rate the sensation was a new one. He began to think of what he had heard in the Venta. But no—the girl looked so sweet and demure—such babyish smiles wickered and dimpled about the mouth—all scented of fresh youth like a June hay field. No, she—she must have been traduced. Not that it mattered in the least to him. He was cased in triple steel. His heart was adamant. Or at least as much of it as he had not left in the possession of Peggy Ramsay—and when he came to think of it—several others!

But the girl's expression altered so soon as she heard the service that was required of her, and she followed with rapt attention the tale of the garrisoning of the Mill House of Sarria, and the dire need of her former mistress and friend, Dolores Garcia.

Little Concha's coquetry, her experimenting upon all and sundry who came near her, her moods and whims, transient as the flaws that ruffle the ripple, breathe upon and again set sparkling the surface of a mountain tarn—all these dropped from the Andalusian maiden at the thought of another's need. A moment before, this young foreign soldier, with the handsome face and excellent opinion of himself, had been but fair game to Concha—a prey marked down, not from any fell intent, but for the due humbling of pride. For Concha was interested in bringing young men to a sense of their position, and mostly, if may be confessed, it did them a vast deal of good.

But in that moment she became, instead, the eager listener, the ready, self-sacrificing comrade, the friend as faithful and reliable as any brother.

"Let me see—let me see," she murmured thoughtfully. "Wait! I will come with you. (She took a glance at the young cavalier armed cap-a-pie, and thought doubtless of the horse chafing and shaking its accoutrements in the shade of the porter's lodge.) No, I will not come with you, I will follow immediately, and do you, sir, return as swiftly as possible to the Mill House of Sarria!"

And without the slightest attempt at coquetry, Concha showed Rollo to the door, and that arrogant youth, slightly bewildered and uncertain of the march of events, found himself presently riding away from the white gate of the monastery with Etienne's ring upon his finger and a belief crystallizing in his heart that of all the maligned and misrepresented beings on the earth, the most maligned and the most innocent was little Concha Cabezos.

The Mill House remained as he had left it when he rode away. The sunshine fell broad and strong on its whitewashed walls and green shutters, most of them closed hermetically along the front, as was the custom in Sarria, till the power of the sun was on the wane.

As Rollo went down the little slope past the corner of the garden, where Ramon had spoken first with La Giralda, it seemed to him that over the broiling roofs of the Mill House he caught the glimmer of something cool and white. He halted his horse and stood momentarily up in his stirrups, whereupon the glimmer upon the roof seemed to change suddenly to red and then as swiftly vanished.

Certainly there was something wrong. Rollo hurried on, giving the three knocks which had been agreed upon at the closed outer door of the house. It was opened by La Giralda.

"Who is signaling from the roof?" he asked hurriedly.

The old gypsy stared at him, and then glanced apprehensively at his face. It had grown white with sudden anxiety.

"A touch of sun—you are not accustomed—you are not of the country to ride about at this time of day. No one has been signaling. Don Ramon is with his wife, waiting for you; and, as I think, not finding the time long, I will bring you a drink of wine and water with a tisane in it, very judicious in cases of sun-touch!"

But Rollo was not to be appeased till he had summoned El Sarria and with him examined the strong room where the prisoners were kept as before. Don Luis sat listlessly by the table, his brow upon his hand. He did not look up or speak when they entered. But his brother moaned on about his wounded head and complained that La Tia had drunk all the water. This being replenished, Don Tomas wandered off into muttered confidences concerning his early travels, how he had made love to the Alcalde's daughter of Granada, how he had fought with a contrabandista at Ronda fair—with other things too intimate to be here set down, even returning, however, to his plea that the Tia Elvira had defrauded him of his fair share of the water jug.

"Nay, not so," said the Tia soothingly, "every drop of the water you have drunk, Don Tomas. But it is your head, your poor head. I turned the poultice and with the water he speaks of moistened the leaves afresh."

Had Rollo but followed the direction of her gaze he might have had his doubts of La Giralda's theory of sunstroke to explain the signaling from the roof. For there, clearly to be seen out of the half-open trap-door, was a little scarlet strip of cloth stirred by the wind and doubtless conspicuous from all the neighboring hills about the village of Sarria.

But Rollo, eager to get to his task of arranging transport for the evening, so that Dolores might be taken in safety and comfort to the Convent of the Holy Innocents, was already turning to be gone.

"Bring wine and water!" cried Rollo to La Giralda, "and Don Luis, in an hour I will trouble you to take a little tour of the premises with me, just to show that all is right."

So Rollo Blair and his companion withdrew into the cool saloon of the Mill House without having seen the little waving strip of red upon the roof. As soon as they were gone, however, Don Luis leaped up, and with a long fishing pole he flaunted a strip of white beside the red, waving it this way and that for a long time, till in the close atmosphere of the strong room the sweat rained from him in great drops.

Then he leaped down at last, muttering, "If the General is within 20 miles, as I think he is, that ought to bring him to Sarria. The angels grant that he is in time."—there he paused a moment, and then added with a bitter smile—"or the devils either. I am not particular, so be that he come!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A long strip of Moorish-looking wall and certain towers that glittered white in the sun, advertised to Rollo that he approached the Venta of Sarria. Without, that building might have passed for the palace of a grandee; within—but we know already what it was like within.

Rollo was impatient to find his companions. He had just discovered that he had most scurvily neglected them, and now he was all eagerness to make amends. But the house place of the Cafe de Madrid was tenanted only by the valiant and a clean, silently moving maid.

Rollo's questioning produced nothing but a sleepy grunt from Don Gasper Perico.

"My companions—where are they?" said Rollo hastily. He had much on his mind and wished to dispatch business.

"Your companions—nay, I know nothing of them," said the veteran. "True it is he of the stoutness desired to buy my wine, and when I gave him a sample, fine as iced Manzanilla and strong as the straw wine of Jerez, he spat it forth upon the ground and vowed that as to price he preferred the ordinary robbers of the highway!"

Rollo laughed a little at this description of John Mortimer's method of doing business, but he was eager to find his comrades, so he hastily excused himself.

But as he passed into the arcaded "patio" of the inn the silent maidservant passed him with a flash of white cotton gown. Her grass shoes made no noise on the pavement. She was beckoning him to follow her. There could be no doubt of that. She turned abruptly through a low doorway, upon the top of which Rollo nearly knocked out his brains.

The Scot followed down a flight of steps, beneath blossoming oleander bushes, and found himself presently upon a narrow terrace walk divided from a neighboring garden by a lattice of green-painted wood. The silent maidservant jerked her thumb a little contemptuously over her shoulder, elevated her chin, and turning on her heel disappeared again into her own domains.

A little to the right the path bent somewhat, and round the corner Rollo could hear a hum of voices. It was in this direction also that the silent handmaid of Gaspar Perico's kitchen had jerked her thumb.

Rollo moved slowly along the path, and presently he came in sight of a pretty damsel on the farther side of the trellis paling, deeply engaged in a most interesting conversation.

Her hand had been drawn through one of the diamond-shaped apertures of the green trellis-work, which proved how small a hand it was. And, so far as the young Scot could judge from various contributory movements on the lady's part, it was at that moment being passionately kissed by some person unseen.

"What fools!" he muttered, turning on his heel, adding as an afterthought, "and especially at this time of day."

He was walking off in high dudgeon, prepared to give the silent maid a piece of his mind, indeed a sample most unpleasing, when something in the tone of the lover's voice attracted him.

"Fairest Maria, never have I loved before," the voice was saying. "I have wandered the world heretofore, careless and heartfree, that I might have the more to offer to you, the pearl of girls, the all incomparable Maria of Sarria!"

The fair hand thrust through the lattices was violently agitated at this point. Its owner had caught sight of Rollo standing on the pathway, but the lover's grasp was too firm. As Rollo looked a head was thrust forward and downward—as it were into the picture. And there, kneeling on the path was Monsieur Etienne, lately Brother Hilario, of Montblanch, fervidly kissing the hand of reluctant beauty.

As Rollo, unwilling to intrude, but secretly resolving to give Master Lovelace no peace for some time, was turning away, a sharp exclamation from the girl caused the kneeling lover to look up. She snatched her hand through the interstices on the instant, fled upward through the roses and fuchsia bushes with a swift rustle of skirts, and disappeared into a neighboring house.

Etienne de Saint Pierre rose in a leisurely manner, dusted the knees of his riding breeches, twirled his mustache and looked at Rollo, who stood on the path regarding him.

"Well, what in the devil's name brings you here?" he demanded.

The mirthful mood in which he had watched his comrade kneel was already past with Rollo.

"Come outside and I will tell you," he said, and without making any further explanation or asking for any from Etienne, he strode back through the courtyard of the Venta, and out into the sunlit road.

Then, turning to his friend, who still continued to scowl, he said abruptly, "Where is Mortimer?"

"Nay, that I know not—looking for another meal, I suppose," answered the little Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, one higher than the other.

Rollo glanced at him from under his gloomy brows.

"Nay," he said, "this is serious. I need your help. Do not fail me tonight, and help me to find Mortimer. I had not the smallest intention of intruding upon you. It is not for myself," and forthwith, in a low voice, he told his tale, the Frenchman assenting with a nod of the head as each point was made clear to him.

Unconsciously they had strolled out of the village in the direction of the Convent of Holy Innocents, and they were almost under its walls when the little Frenchman, looking up suddenly, recognized with a start whither he was being led.

"Let us turn back," he said hastily. "I have forgotten an engagement."

They had not left the white walls of the convent behind before they were hailed in English by a stentorian voice.

"Here, you fellows!" it said. "Here's a whole storehouse of onions as big as a factory—strings and strings of 'em. I wanted to go inside to make an offer for them, and the old witch at the gate slammed it in my face."

Looking around they saw John Mortimer standing on one leg to eke out his stature and squinting through a hole in the white-washed wall.

"Just look there!" he cried eagerly. "Did you ever see the like of that—a hundred double strings hung from the ceiling to the floor right across. And the factory of onions there—a solid cargo, I tell you, and I want to trade. I believe that I could make my thousand pounds quicker that way, and onions are as good as wine any day! Look in—look in!"

To satisfy his friend, Rollo applied his eye to the aperture, and saw that one of the convent buildings was indeed filled with onions, as John Mortimer had said.

"A thousand pounds, Rollo," moaned John Mortimer, "and that old wretch at the wicket only laughed at me and snapped the catch in my face."

Rollo took his friend's arm and drew him away.

"This is not the time for it," he said soothingly. "Wait. We are going to the Convent tonight. The Mother Superior has permitted the lady on whose account we are here to be removed there after dark, and we want your help."

"Can I speak to the old woman about the onions, then?"

"Certainly, if there is an opportunity," said Rollo, smiling.

"Very well, then," said Mortimer, "I'm your man. I don't mind doing a little cloak-and-dagger for trimmings, but business is business."

The three friends proceeded Ventaward, and just as they passed the octroi gate, a muleteer went in before them. And as he entered he tossed his hand casually toward Gasper Perico, who sat in the retreat of custom calmly reading an old newspaper.

"Now, that's curious," said John Mortimer; "that fellow had a red and white cloth in his hand. And all the time when I was skirmishing about after those onions in the nuns' warehouse, they were waving red and white flags up on the hills over there—wigwag, like that!"

And with his hand he illustrated the irregular and arbitrary behavior of the flags upon the hills which overlooked the village of Sarria to the south.

At the sound of his words Rollo started, and his countenance changed. It was then no mere delusion of the eye and brain that he had seen when he entered the precincts of the Mill House of Sarria, as La Giralda would fain have persuaded him. The thought started a doubt in his mind.

Who was that old woman? And what cause had el Sarria for trusting her? None at all, as far as Rollo knew, save that she hated the Tia Elvira. Then that flicker of red and white on the hillside to the south among the scattered boulders and juniper bushes, and the favor of the same color in the muleteers' hand as he went through the gate!

Verily Rollo had some matter for reflection as, with his comrades on either hand of him, he strolled slowly back to the Venta.

And outside, though they knew it not, the red and white pennon was still flying from the roof of the Mill House of Sarria, and on the hills to the south, through the white sun glare, flickered at intervals an answering signal.

Meanwhile, in a hushed chamber, the outlaw sat with his wife's hand in his, and thought on nothing, save that for him the new day had come.

CHAPTER XX.

Upon the village of Sarria and upon its circling mountains night descended with Oriental swiftness. The white houses grew blurred and indistinct. Red roofs, green shutters, dark window squares took on the same shade of indistinguishable purple.

In the Mill House of Sarria they were not idle. Ramon Garcia and Rollo had constructed a carrying couch for Dolores, where, on a light and pliant framework of the great bulrush canes that grew along the canal edges, her mattress might be laid.

Very gently, and, as it were, in one piece, like a swaddled infant, Dolores was lifted up upon the hastily arranged ambulance. The four bearers fell in. La Giralda locked the doors of the Mill House, and by a circuitous route, which avoided the village and its barking curs, they proceeded in the direction of the convent buildings.

As often as the foot of any of the bearers slipped upon a stone, Ramon grew sick with apprehension, and in a whisper over his shoulder, he would inquire of Dolores if all was well.

"All is well, beloved," the voice, weak and feeble, would reply. "You are here—you are not angry with me. Yes, all is well."

They moved slowly through the darkness, La Giralda with many crooning encouragements waiting upon Dolores, now lifting up the corner of a coverlid and now anxiously adjusting a pillow.

They were soon passing under the eastern side of the convent.

"Ah, I can smell them," murmured John Mortimer; "a hundred tons if not more. I wonder if I could not tackle the old lady tonight about them?"

At last they were at the little white cowl of the porter's lodge, out of which the black bars of the wicket grinned with a semblance of ghastly mirth.

Rollo knocked gently. The panel slid back noiselessly and there was the face of Concha Cabezos dimly revealed. No longer mischievous or even piquant, but drawn and pale with anxiety.

"There are bad people here," she whispered, "who have persuaded the Lady Superior that you are imposters. She will not receive or keep Dolores Garcia unless she is satisfied—"

"What?" came from the rear in a thunderous growl.

"Hush, I bid you!" commanded Rollo sternly. "Remember, you have put this in my hands." And the outlaw fell back silenced for the moment, his heart, however, revolving death and burnings.

"Trust me with your papers—your credentials," said Concha quickly. "These will convince her. I will bring them to you at the Mill House tomorrow morning!"

Rollo ran his knife round the stitching of his coat where he carried these sacredest possessions.

"There," he said. "Remember—do not let them out of your sight a moment. I am putting far more than my own life into your hands."

"I will cherish them as the most precious thing in the world. And now I will go and show them to the Lady Superior."

"Not ... you have taken in my Dolores as you promised," came the voice of el Sarria; "or by heaven I will burn your convent to the ground. She shall not be left here in the damp dews of the night."

"No, no," whispered Concha, "she shall be! aid in the lodge of the portress, and La Giralda shall watch her till her own chamber is prepared, and I have eased the mind of the Lady Superior.

The great bars were drawn. The bolts gave back with many creakings, and through the great black gap of the main gate they carried Dolores into the warm, flower-scented darkness of the portress' lodge.

She was laid on a bed, and the moment after Concha turned earnestly upon the four men.

"Now go," she said, "this instant! I also have risked more than you know! Go back!"

"Can I not stay with her tonight?" pleaded el Sarria, keeping the limp hand, wet with chill perspiration, close in his.

"Go! Go, I say!" said Concha. "Go, or it may be too late. See yonder!"

And on a hill away to the west a red light burned for a long moment and then vanished.

The three young men went out, but el Sarria lingered, kneeling by his wife's bedside. Rollo went back and touched him on his shoulder.

"You must come with us—for her sake!" he said. And he pointed with his finger. And obediently at his word the giant arose and went out. Rollo followed quickly, but as he went a little palm fell on his arm and a low voice whispered in his ear:

"You trust me, do you not?"

Rollo lifted Concha's hand from his sleeve and kissed it.

"With my life—and more!" he said.

"What more?" queried Concha.

"With my friends lives," he answered.

And as he went out with no other word Concha breathed a sigh softly and turned toward Dolores. She felt somehow as if the tables were being turned upon her.

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Outside there was a kind of waiting hush in the air—an electric tension of expectation, or so, at least, it seemed to Rollo.

As they marched along the road toward the Mill House, they saw a ruddy glow toward the south.

"Something is on fire there," said John Mortimer.

"They are more like campfires behind the hills," commented Etienne, from his larger experience. "I think we had better clear out tonight."

"That," said Rollo firmly, "is impossible so far as I am concerned. I must wait at the Mill House for the papers. But do you three go on, and I will rejain you tomorrow."

"I will stay," said el Sarria, as soon as Rollo's words had been interpreted to him.

"And I," cried Etitnne, "shall it be said that a Saint Pierre ever forsook a friend?"

"And I," said John Mortimer, "to look after the onions."

The Mill House was silent and dark as they had left it.

"Let us go and see that all is right," said Rollo, and led the way into the large room where they had found Luis Fernandez. He walked up to the window, a dim oblong of blackness, only less Egyptian than the chamber itself. He stopped to strike his flint and steel together into his tinder box, and even as the small, glittering point winked Rollo felt his throat grasped back and front by different pairs of hands, while others clung to his knees and brought him to the ground.

"Treachery! Out with you, lads—into the open!" he cried to his companions, as well as he could for the throttling fingers.

But behind him there arose the sound of a mighty combat. Furniture was overset or broken with a sharp, crashing noise, as it was trampled underfoot.

"Show a light there," cried a quick voice, in a tone of command.

A lantern was brought from an inner room, and there on the floor, in the grasp of their captors, were Ramon Garcia, still heaving with his mighty exertions, and Rollo the Scot, who lay very quiet so soon as he had assured himself that present resistance would do no good.

"Bring in the others," commanded the voice again, "and let us see what the dogs look like."

Mortimer and Etienne, having been captured in the hall, while trying to unlock the outer door, were roughly hauled into the room. Rllo was permitted to rise, but the giant was kept on his back while they fastened him up securely with ropes.

Then Luis Fernandez came in, an evil smile on his dark, handsome face, and behind him a little, thick-set, active man in some military dress of light material. The uniform was unfamiliar to Rollo, who, for a moment, was in doubt whether he was in the hands of the Cristinos or in those of the partisans of Don Carlos.

But a glance about the chamber eased his mind. The white bolnas of the Basque provinces mingled with the red of Navarre told him that he had been captured by the Carlists.

"Well," said the little dark man with the curly hair, black and kinked like a negro's, "give an account of yourselves and of your proceedings in this village."

"We are soldiers in the service of his Excellency, Don Carlos," said Rollo, fearlessly. We are on our way to the camp of General Gabrera on a mission of importance."

Luis Fernandez looked across at his companion, who had seated himself carelessly in a large chair by the window.

"Did I not tell you he would say that?" he said. The other nodded. "On a mission to General Cabrera," repeated the chief of Rollo's captors. "Well, then, doubtless you can prove your statement by papers and documents. Let me see your credentials."

"I must know first to whom I have the honor of speaking," said Rollo, firmly.

"You shall," said the man in the chair. "I am General Cabrera, in the service of his Absolute Majesty Carlos V of Spain. I shall be glad to receive your credentials, sir."

Then it flashed upon Rollo that all his papers were in the hands of Concha Cabezos.

"I can indeed give you a message, and that instantly," said Rollo, "but I am unfortunately prevented from showing you my credentials till the morning. They are at present at the ——, in the hands of a friend—"

Here Rollo stammered and came to a full stop. Luis Fernandez laughed scornfully.

"Of course," he said. "What did I tell you, General? He has no credentials."

Cabrera struck his clenched fist on the table.

"Sir," he said, "you are a strange messenger. You pretend a mission to me, and when asked for your credentials, you tell us that they are in the hands of a friend. Tell us your friend's name, and how you came to permit documents of value to me, and to the cause for which you say that you are fighting, to fall into any hands but your own."

Rollo saw that to refer to the Convent of the Holy Innocents or to mention Concha's name, would infallibly betray the hiding place of Dolores to her enemies, so he could only reiterate his former answer.

"I am unfortunately prevented by my honor from revealing the name of my friend, or why the documents were so entrusted. But if your excellency will wait till the morning, I promise that you shall be abundantly satisfied."

"I am not accustomed to wait for the morning," said Cabrera. "There is no slackening of rein on the King's service. But I have certain information os to who you are, which may prove more pertinent to the occasion and perhaps may prevent any delay whatsoever."

Cabrera leisurely rolled and lighted a cigarette, giving great attention to the closing of the paper in which it was enwrapped.

"Search them!" commanded Cabrera suddenly, in a sharp tone of anger, in which the latent cruelty of his nature came out.

Their captors, with no great delicacy of handling, began to overhaul the contents of the pockets of the four. They examined their boots, the lining of their coats and ripped up the seams of their waistcoats.

Upon Ramon nothing at all was found except the fragment of a handbill issued by the Nationalist General offering a reward for his capture.

But in the outer pocket of Rollo Blair was found a far more compromising document. When the searcher drew it forth from his coat, the eyes of Luis Fernandez gleamed with triumph.

Cabrera took the paper and glanced it over carelessly, but as soon as his eye fell upon the signature the fashion of his countenance changed. He leaped to his feet.

"Nogueras!" he cried. "You are in correspondence with Nogueras, the villain who, in cold blood, shot my poor old mother for no crime but that of having borne me! Have the fellow out instantly and shoot him!"

Rollo stood a moment dumbfounded, then he recovered himself and spoke.

"General Cabrera," he said, "this is a trick. I have had no correspondence with Nogueras. I had not even heard his name. This has been dropped in my pocket by some traitor. I hold a commission in the service of Don Carlos, and I have had no communication with his enemies."

Cabrera took up the letter again and read aloud:

"To the young Englishman of the Foreign Legation, Pretending Service With Don Carlos: You are ordered to obtain any information as to the movements of the brigand Cabrera and his men, by penetrating into their district, and if possible joining their organization. You will report the same to me, and this pass will hold you safe with all servants and well-wishers of the Government of the Queen Regent. NOGUERAS."

The Carlist commander, whose voice had been rising as he read, shouted rather than uttered the name of the murderer of his mother.

More than one Carlist soldier glanced at his neighbor with a look which said, plain as printed proclamation, "It is all over with the foreigners!"

At last Cabrera stopped his promenade. He folded his arms and stood looking up at Rollo.

"'The morning'—I think you said—well, I will give your friend till the morning to be ready with proofs of your innocence. But if not, so soon as the sun rises over the hills out there, you four shall be shot for spies and traitors. Take them away!"

(To be continued.)

WASN'T HUNTING ALLIGATORS

Thus Abijah Informed the Smart City Clerk.

"City folks think they're so smart!" said Abijah Potts with fine scorn. "They cal-late all they need to do is just to give one look at a man, and then tell where he was born and where he's going; but they miss the mark sometimes."

"I bet they missed it on you, pa," said the youthful counterpart of Mr. Potts, who was testing the powers of a three-blade knife, a souvenir of his parent's recent trip to Boston.

"They did," said Mr. Potts, triumphantly; "that's just what they did. First thing I set out to get me was a new valise. My old bag has busted beyond repairs after all these years.

"Well, sir, I stepped into a leather store along with Cy that very morning, and the clerk come forward polite enough, though he cast a look at my linen duster that I didn't exactly like.

"'I want to look at traveling bags—valises,' I said.

"'Step this way, sir,' he spoke up, glib as a monkey. 'I can give you just what you want—an excellent alligator bag for $8.'

"My dander rose, but I kept a grip on my feelings and looked at him calm as a clock.

"'Young feller,' said I, 'just because I've got on a linen duster and a cool spell's come on, you needn't decide that I'm going to Floridy. It just happens,' said I, and I guess by the color he took on that my tone was pretty sarcastic—'it just happens,' said I, 'that I'm not a-goin' to Floridy, but to the fair in Buffalo, New York State,' said I.

"Then, long as I didn't want to be too severe with him," said Mr. Potts leniently, "I let him show me some good ribbed leather bags, and bought that one I fetched home with me."—Youth's Companion.