

ROMANTIC RUNAWAY

KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

CHAPTER XXVI

ed in some sound bonds, gave prodigally to the orphanages of Cuba and made a little.

Across the hard-beaten road where each day plodded oxen with cane-laden carts, stood a suburban grocery store and in the apartment which was above Lottie, Pablito and Beau lived. The road was their front yard, the roof their garden. Beau who could lean over the rail of the open, twisting, rear stair to call "Cinco botellas de lager!" was satisfied since five bottles of lager were among the few things necessary for his peace. Lottie didn't care where they lived. Lottie murmured a good deal about dwelling in "a swell house" at La Playa de Marianno, the fashionable bathing beach where the Havana Yacht club is located. "You can always see something goin' on there," she pointed out but she never persuaded the others to move.

Pablito read avidly between work-outs in the gymnasium, cross-country runs and rub-downs. Books gave him the peace and forgetfulness he could find nowhere else. The truly happy, he realized, did not need an anodyne for life nor to turn sharply from the sweetness of the past because of its contrast with the present. He wondered often about Estelle Field—what she was doing, and where she might be and whether or not she was happy. He preferred not to think of her because thinking of her was painful. Nevertheless, when his anodyne was dull or when the old hunger was too strong to be quieted he found himself thinking of her. He hoped—with an ache—that she was happy.

Pablito had sent more than one messenger to Key West to search for Noyes but not one of them had found any trace of him. A lame old woman lived in the shack on the island, he learned. She had broken her hip a few years before, she told the inquirers, and it left her so that she could move only a few steps. She lived alone. Her old neighbors, she said, helped her. No, she had never seen a thin-faced, stoop-shouldered man who wore eyeglasses with heavy lenses. Never! God could witness that as truth. Never had she seen such a man!

In the grip of a mood which was a mixture of dull hopelessness and sharp disgust, Pablito turned toward Havana one raw, February morning. The warmth of the previous day had been wiped from the air by a north wind and the sky was low.

The apartment had been creeping cold and during breakfast Lottie had been bitter and sharp of tongue, making Pablito, as she often did, a target for her anger. Her back hurt "like hell," she said. Then she tossed her head, sniffed and glowered at Pablito.

"It was liftin' you while you had that fever that done it," she went on. "I had to do everything for you. You just laid there like a log—"

Pablito had heard this before. He could silence her and turn her mood with a casual kiss, he knew, but this morning he could not bring himself to offer such an olive branch. He said instead glumly that she should have let him die.

"Hell, this is a merry party!" Beau put in, looking at Lottie slyly. She was a pretty smart kid, he felt, yet she always stumbled in her too apparent and over-eager approach of Pablito. Or else she made a scene and Pablito hated them even more than Beau did.

Pablito rose from his chair. He was going to Havana, he announced. He didn't care what happened to the old idiot who came to slap each other in the gymnasium and to fall into a trance after two minutes of sparring. He was fed up with the whole business and sick of it! Just as soon as he could he was going to get out of it! Then, shamed by this outbreak which surprised him even more than it surprised Lottie and Beau, he left them, speechless and gazing after him.

(To Be Continued)

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