

MY FAIR ROAD COMPANION.

To all in any degree familiar with the history of Mexico, it is well known that a regular system of highway robbery exists in every section of that miserably governed country...

Why such systematic boldness of robbery is allowed—if not with the connivance, at least with very rarely any interference of the government or State authorities—is one of those mystical matters...

The first of the series occurred on the route between Vera Cruz and the city of Mexico. In the regular diligencia, running between the places mentioned, I had taken passage...

At Perote, where we halted for a relay and refreshments, all my fellow passengers took leave of me...

At Perote, I repeat, all who had been my companions from Vera Cruz, took leave of me, this being the end of their journey in that direction...

"I have two pistols," said I, "if you will have one it is at your service."

"You are very kind, senor; but can I use it?"

"With ease, senorita," and producing one of my revolvers, I explained to her the manner in which it was to be used.

"And this, you say, will shoot half a dozen times?"

"I think it safe to calculate that five charges out of the six will explode."

"What a beautiful invention!" she observed, reaching over and taking it from my hand.

"The words were scarcely uttered, when her finger pressed the trigger, and one of the barrels exploded with a sharp report."

"Yield you prisoners, or die!" "Quick, senorita!" said I, extending my hand, "quick! in heaven's name! give me one of those weapons, for now is our time for decisive action."

"Nay," she replied, putting the weapons behind her. "You will be too heavy, let them suppose you yield."

"Oh, not it will be too late!" "As I spoke, the door was suddenly thrown open, and three or four swarthy, heavily bearded men presented themselves."

"Quick, senorita, for the love of God!" I cried, grasping her arm.

"We were not, senor, but the two foreigners subsequently paid dearly for their resistance, for in journeying back and forth, both were killed separately and at different times, near the same spot."

"I have observed them frequently, but here they seem to be much more numerous," I said, looking from the vehicle.

"Each stand on the spot where some one has met a violent death," she rejoined. "and as we go along I will call your attention to those which mark the places where the foreigners met theirs."

"Do you know," said I, "that I am resolved to emulate their example, let the consequences be what they may?"

"Holy saints defend us!" she exclaimed, "you are not in earnest?"

"Seriously, I assure you. You would only bring certain death upon us both."

"Say, rather, I should lighten the expenses of the journey—for your knights of the road understand retreat as well as advance—and you yourself have acknowledged that firm resistance put them to flight for once."

"But there were numbers opposed to them, and you are only one."

"Ah, Santa Maria! You will think better of this, senor—the very idea of resistance terrifies me!"

"Because I have never met with violence."

We continued to converse in a similar strain for some time longer—my fair companion graciously changing the subject, and seeming much interested in myself.

I learned that her family name was Valerde, that she was unmarried, that her father and brother were officers in the army, and so on; and in return I gave her my own name, stated something of my history, business and prospects, and altogether became more communicative than I would advise any friend to be with any stranger of either sex in a strange country.

As we continued our journey, the conversation gradually changing from one thing to another, Senorita Paula suddenly brought it back to where it first opened.

"We are coming to a dangerous part of the road," she said; "are you still resolved to defend yourself if assailed?"

"I do not think it advisable," she replied; "but still, if such is your intention, I think it no more than right to take part in my defense, since my risk of danger will be as great as yours."

"And have you really the nerve to defend yourself?" I inquired.

"I have two pistols," said I, "if you will have one it is at your service."

"You are very kind, senor; but can I use it?"

"I acknowledge myself conquered by being outwitted," said I bowing to the senorita.

Then turning to the robbers, who had now collected in a body in front of the door of the diligencia, I continued: "Gentlemen, will you permit me to alight and make you some valuable presents? In the language of your country, 'all I have is yours.'"

The leader of the party bowed politely in return, and said with a smile: "Senor, we shall be happy to receive anything which so distinguished a traveler may have to bestow."

"With this," I quietly stepped from the vehicle; and one glance put me in possession of the whole state of affairs.

The diligencia had been stopped in a wild gloomy place, and the driver was sitting carelessly on his box, taking everything as a matter of course.

"I might also be an accomplice of the robbers, or he might not; but, in either case, there was little hope of assistance from him—for any attempt of the kind would certainly bring upon him a severe punishment sooner or later."

I glanced up and down the road, where it wound between dark, overshadowing trees, but discovered nothing to give me any hope.

"Will you accept this purse?" said I, producing one that held several gold coins, and handing it to the chief.

"This diamond ring, I trust, you will retain as a keepsake," I continued, drawing the jewel from my finger and presenting it to a third.

"I beg your pardon, Senores!" I pursued, glancing at the Senorita Paula, who, with my pistols still in her possession, was quietly standing within the diligencia, regarding the whole proceedings with one of her coolest smiles.

"I lifted the box carefully; but, as I was about to open it, I gave a start, and, as the Senorita started back, I, with the quickness of lightning, seized both weapons, wrenching them from her."

To wheel and commence firing upon the party, was now only the work of a moment. The first shot, fortunately, stretched out the chief; the second took effect on the one nearest to him; and by the time the third had been sent on its mission, there arose one simultaneous yell of dismay, and the astounded robbers began to scatter in every direction.

I had no disposition to follow them, however, another minute they might rally and turn upon me; and spring forward, I grasped the reins of a freed mustang and rushed into the safety of the diligencia.

One glance around me showed the Senorita Paula upon the body of the chief, her laughter turned to grief, and some of the scattered robbers bringing their weapons to bear upon me.

"Adios, senorita and senores!" said I, bitterly; "he laughs best who laughs last."

The next moment I was dashing away down the road, the half rallied robbers pouring after me a volley, but not touching their mark. They doubtless would have followed me, but for the wholesome dread they had of my still undisclosed weapon.

As it was, I escaped, and entered the town of Perote in triumph; where, it is almost needless to add, a narration of my exploit made me a hero and a lion for the time.

Here I sold my captured mustang and trappings for enough to indemnify me for what I had disposed of in the way of presents; and the next day saw me an inside passenger of the same diligencia, en route for Mexico, where I arrived in safety, without any further event worthy of note.

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