

THE RED TRAIL

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

The president looked round the assembly, rose in the midst of a profound silence, stretched out his arm toward the general, who stood cold and passionless before him, and, after darting at him a withering glance through the holes made in the crape that concealed his face, he said, in a grave, stern and impressive voice:

"Caballeros, remember the words you are about to hear. In the first place, in order to reassure you and restore your freedom of mind, learn that you have not fallen into the hands of Indians thirsting for your blood, or of pirates who intend to plunder you first and assassinate you afterward. When you have acted as impartial witnesses you will be at liberty to continue your journey, without the forfeiture of a single article. The men seated on my right and left, although masked, are brave and honest hunters. The day may perhaps arrive when you will know them; but reasons, whose importance you will speedily recognize, compel them to remain unknown for the present."

One of the travelers belonging to the second caravan stepped forward; he was a young man, with elegant and noble features, tall and well built.

"Caballero," he answered, in a distinct voice, "I thank you, in the name of my companions, for the reassuring words you have spoken. I know how implacable are the laws of the desert; but permit me to ask you one question."

"Speak, caballero."

"Is it an act of vengeance or justice you are about to carry out?"

"Neither, señor."

"Enough of this," the general said haughtily; "and if you are, as you assert, an honorable man, show me your face."

"No, Don Sebastian," said the president, "for in that case the game would not be even between us."

The general attempted to smile, but in spite of himself the smile died away on his lips. The president looked round with flashing eyes and began speaking again in a sharp, cutting voice.

"Now, listen, señores," he said, "and judge this man impartially; but do not judge him according to prairie law, but in your hearts. Gen. Don Sebastian Guerrero, who is standing so bold and upright before you at this moment, is one of the greatest noblemen of Mexico. His fortune is immense, almost incalculable. This man, by the mere strength of his will, and the implacable egotism that forms the basis of his character, has always succeeded in everything he has undertaken. Coldly ambitious, he has covered with corpses the bloody road he has followed to attain his proposed object, and he has done so without hesitation or remorse; he has looked on with a smiling face, when his dearest friends and nearest relations fell by his side; for him nothing which men respect exists. He had a daughter, who was the perfection of women, and he coldly lacerated her heart; he finally drove her to suicide, and the blood of the poor girl spouted on his forehead while he was triumphantly witnessing the legal murder of the man she loved, and whose death he resolved on because he refused to part with his honor. This human-faced tiger, this monster with the mocking skeptical face, you see, señores, has only one thought, one object, one desire—to attain the highest rank, even if, to effect it, he were compelled to clamber over the panting corpses of his nearest relations and friends; and if he cannot carve out an independent kingdom in this collapsing republic, which is called Mexico, he wishes to seize, at least, on the supreme magistracy, and be elected president. This man is Gen. Don Sebastian Guerrero, military governor of Sonora."

"Oh!" the audience said involuntarily, as they instinctively recoiled in horror.

"If this man is the ex-governor of Sonora," the hunter who had already spoken said, in disgust, "he is a wild beast, whom his ferocity has placed beyond the pale of society, and it is the duty of honest men to destroy him."

"He must die! he must die!" the newcomers exclaimed.

"Nonsense," said the general, shrugging his shoulders with a contemptuous smile. "I know now who you are; your hatred of me has unconsciously discovered you. Remove that veil which is no longer of any use. You are the French hunter whom I have constantly met in my path to impede my projects, or overthrow my plans."

"Add," the hunter interrupted, "and whom you will ever meet. Brothers," he added, turning to his assistants, "my mask alone must fall; retain yours, for it is important for my plans of vengeance that you should remain unknown."

The four men bowed their assent and the hunter threw away the crape that covered his features.

"Valentine Guillot!" the general exclaimed; "I was sure of it."

"Listen then," the hunter coldly continued; "when my unhappy friend fell at Guaymas, in my paroxysm of grief I allow that I intended to kill you; but reflection soon came, and I saw that it would be better to let you live. Thanks to me, one week after the Mexican government, not satisfied with disavowing your conduct, deprived you of your command without inquiry and refused to explain to you the motives of their conduct."

"Ah, ah," the general said, "it was you, then, that I owe my recall?"

"Yes, general, to me alone."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"You remained, then, in Sonora, without power or influence, hated and despised by all, and marked on your forehead with that indelible brand which was imprinted on Cain, the first murderer; but Mexico is a blessed country, where ambitious men like yourself can easily fish in troubled waters, when, like yourself, they are not restrained by any of those bonds of honor. But you could not remain long bowed beneath the blow that had fallen on you and so you resolved to leave Sonora and proceed to Mexico, where, thanks to your colossal fortune and the influence it would necessarily give you, you could carry on your ambitious projects. Your preparations were soon made—listen attentively, general, for I assure you that I have reached the most interesting part of my narrative."

"As you fancied, for certain reasons which it is unnecessary to remind you of, that your enemies might try to lay some ambush for you, you thought it necessary to take the following precautions, the inutilty of some of which I presume that you have recognized. While, for the purpose of deceiving your enemies, you started in disguise, and only accompanied by a few men, for California, in order to return to Mexico across the Rocky mountains; while you gave questions the fullest details of the road you intended to follow, with your men—your real object was different. The man in whom you placed your confidence, Don Isidro Vargas, who had known you when a child, and whom you had converted into your tool, took the shortest, and, consequently, most direct route for the capital, having with him not only twelve mules loaded with gold and silver, the fruit of your plunder during the period of your command, but a more precious article still, the body of your unhappy daughter, which you had embalmed, and which the captain had orders to deliver with your ancestors at your Hacienda del Palmar. Your object in acting thus was not only to divert attention from your ill-gotten riches, but also to attract your enemies after yourself. Unfortunately, I am an old hunter so difficult to deceive that my comrades gave me long ago the glorious title of the Trail-hunter, and hence, I alone was not deceived."

"Still your presence here gives a striking denial to the assertion," the general interrupted.

"You think so, señor. That proves you are not thoroughly acquainted with me; but patience, I hope that you will, ere long, appreciate me better. Again, you have not reflected on the time that has elapsed since your departure from Hermosillo."

"What do you mean?" the general asked, with a sudden start of apprehension.

"I mean that before attacking you, I resolved to settle matters first with the captain."

"Ah!"

"Well, general, it is my painful duty to inform you that four days after he left Pitic, our brave friend Don Isidro fell into an ambushade resembling the one into which you fell to-day, with this exception—"

"What exception?" the general asked, with greater interest than he would have liked to display.

"My men were so imprudent," the hunter continued, "as to leave the captain the means of defending himself. The result was that he died, bravely fighting to save the gold you had entrusted to him, and the coffin containing your daughter's corpse."

"Well, and I presume you plundered the caravan, and carried off the gold and silver?" he asked, contemptuously.

"So, most probably, you would have acted under the circumstances, Don Sebastian," the hunter answered, "but I thought it my duty to act differently. What could you expect? I, a coarse, uneducated hunter, do not know how to plunder, for I did not learn it when I had the honor to serve my country. This is what I did; so soon as the captain and the peons he commanded were killed—for the poor devils, I must do them the justice to say, offered a desperate resistance—I myself, you understand, friend, I myself conveyed the money to your Hacienda del Palmar, where it now remains in safety."

The general breathed again, and smiled ironically. "Instead of blaming you, señor," he said, "I, on the contrary, owe you thanks for this chivalrous conduct."

"Do not be in such a hurry to thank me," the hunter answered; "I have not told you all. Captain Don Isidro Vargas not only escorted the money, but there was also a coffin. Well, general, why do you not ask me what has become of that coffin?"

An electric shock ran through the audience on hearing the ironical question so coldly asked by the hunter.

"What!" Don Sebastian exclaimed.

"The assassin can have no claim to the body of his victim, and you are morally your daughter's murderer, I have robbed you of this body, which must rest by the side of him for whom she died."

There was a moment's silence. The general's face, hitherto pale, assumed a greenish hue. At length he yelled in a hoarse and hissing voice:

"It is not true; you have not done this. You cannot have dared to rob a father of his child's body."

"I have done it, I tell you," the hunter

said coldly. "I have taken possession of the body of your victim, and now you understand me; never shall you know where this poor body rests. But this is only the beginning of my vengeance. What I wish to kill in you is the soul and not the body; and now begone, and remember that you will find me in your path everywhere and ever."

"One last word," the general exclaimed, affected by the deepest despair, "restore me my daughter's body; she was the only human creature I ever loved."

The hunter regarded him for a moment with an undefinable expression, and then in a harsh and coldly mocking voice, "Never!"

Then, turning away, he re-entered the grotto, followed by his assistants.

Don Sebastian, who was the more overwhelmed by the last blow because it was unexpected, stood for a moment like a man struck by lightning. At last a heart-rending sob burst from his bosom, two burning tears sprang from his eyes and he rolled like a corpse on the ground.

In the meanwhile the Jester had ordered the peons to saddle the horses and load the mules. The general was placed by two servants on a horse, without appearing to notice what was done to him, and a few moments later the caravan left the fort of the Chichimeques.

When the Mexicans had disappeared in the windings of the road Valentine emerged from the grotto, and walked courteously up to the hunters.

"Forgive me," he said, "not the delay, but the involuntary alarm I caused you; but I was compelled to act as I did. You are going to Mexico, where I shall soon be myself, and it is possible that I may require your testimony some day."

"A testimony which will not be refused," the first hunter gracefully answered.

"What!" the hunter exclaimed in amazement, "are you French?"

"Yes, and all my companions. We have come from San Francisco, where, thanks to Providence, we amassed a fortune, which we hope to double in the Mexican capital. My name is Antoine Rallier, and these are my brothers, Edward and Augustus; the two ladies who accompany us are my mother and sister."

The hunter pressed the hand his countryman offered him.

"Then," he said, "I will not let you go alone! These mountains are infested by dangerous bandits, but with my protection you can pass anywhere."

"I heartily accept the offer; but why do you not come with us to Mexico?"

"That is impossible for the present."

Two hours later the Fort of the Chichimeques had returned to its usual solitude; white men and Indians had abandoned it forever.

CHAPTER IX.

We will now leap over about two months, and invite the reader to accompany us to the heart of Mexico, to the capital. Half-past nine was striking by the cathedral clock at the moment when a dull sound resembling the rustling of reeds shaken by the wind was audible on the gigantic highway joining the city to mainland. This sound soon became more distinct, and changed into the trampling of horses, which was denuded by the damp air and the ground, softened by a lengthened rain. A black mass emerged from the fog, and two horsemen wrapped in thick cloaks stood out distinctly in the moonlight.

These horsemen seemed to have made a long journey. They at last reached a low roofed house through whose dirty panes a doubtful light issued, which showed that the inhabitants were still awake.

The horsemen stopped before this house, which was an inn, and without dismounting one of them gave the door two or three kicks and called the host in a loud, sharp voice. The latter was in no hurry to answer, and would have probably left the strangers for some time in the cold if the man who had kicked, probably tired of waiting, had not thought of an expeditious means of obtaining an answer.

"Ah!" he shouted, as he drew a pistol from his holster and cocked it, "since this dog is resolved not to open, I will send a bullet through his window."

This menace had scarce been uttered ere the door opened as if by enchantment and the landlord appeared on the threshold.

"Believe me, señor, that if I had known what a distinguished caballero did me the honor of stopping before my humble dwelling, I should have hastened to open," he said.

"A truce to such impertinent remarks, and open the door."

A glance was sufficient for the travelers to understand the place to which accident had led them, still they did not display any of the disgust with which the sight of this cut-throat den inspired them. They seated themselves as comfortably as they could at a table, and the one who had hitherto addressed mine host went on:

"Look here, we are dying of hunger, patron; could you not serve us up a morsel of food?"

"Hum!" said the host, with an embarrassed air, "it is very late, caballero, and I don't believe I have even a maize tortilla left in the whole house."

"Nonsense," the traveler replied, "I know all about it, so let us deal frankly with each other; give me some supper, for I am hungry, and we will not squabble about the price."

"Even if you paid me a piastre for every tortilla, excellency, I really could not supply you with two," the landlord replied, with increased constraint.

(To be continued.)

What the Stork Learned.

The Owl—Twins, eh? Ain't you afraid they'll displease your patrons?

The Stork—Certainly not. Cupid says he often hears 'em telling each other that two can live as cheaply as one.—Puck.



Pineapple Preserve.

No pineapple preserve is so delicious as the old-fashioned grated sort, rich and flavorful. The fruit is pared, grated and measured, and a pound of sugar allowed to each pint of pulp. Add the sugar to the fruit in a porcelain kettle and put it on the range, grading the heat so that it is moderate for the first twenty minutes. After that time the kettle may be drawn to a hotter part of the range, where it should still cook gently for about three-quarters of an hour. It should be clear and transparent when done, and about the consistency of marmalade. If a specially juicy variety of the pineapple is used the pulp may be drained in a sieve before it is cooked, the finished preserve being the richer for it. The juice thus taken out is useful to flavor sauces, or with particularly agreeable results an apple compote.

Beef Tea.

Take a pound of good round steak, remove all the fat, wipe the meat with a damp cloth, and cut it into pieces about 1 inch square. Put this in a glass fruit jar, pour over it two cups of cold water, and salt, and let it stand for half an hour. Into a deep saucepan put several thicknesses of newspaper and set the jar on this. Pour water into the saucepan so that it will rise to the same height as the liquid inside the jar. Let the water reach the simmering point, and let it stand for two hours, then increase the heat a very little, and cook a little longer. Pour off the liquid, strain, add more salt, if necessary, and serve very hot.

Mushrooms and Cream.

Get very large mushrooms and remove the stems; peel them and put each one on a round of toast in a baking dish, first covering the toast with thick cream and seasoning with salt and paprika. Turn the cupside of the mushroom up, and fill this with more thick cream, paprika and salt; cover tightly and bake in a hot oven forty minutes; remove, but let the dish stand covered four minutes that the mushrooms may absorb the steam; serve in the same dish without the cover; the mushrooms may also be put in individual dishes.

Molasses Waters.

Cream well together one cupful of butter and one cupful of sugar, add one pint of molasses and one pint of flour. This will make a thin batter. Have flat pans well buttered. Drop a few spoonfuls on each pan and place in a moderately hot oven. The butter will run together. Bake until the mixture begins to stiffen around the edges, then take from the oven, cut quickly into squares and roll at once on the stick.

Prune Pudding.

Mix three and a half cups of flour, one teaspoonful of salt, half a teaspoonful each of cinnamon and nutmeg mixed and rub into one cup of sweet chopped fine, one cup of prunes stoned and cut small; add one cup of sweet milk, then one cup of molasses, with one teaspoonful of soda. Turn it into a buttered mold and steam three hours. Serve with snowy sauce.

Fried Tomatoes.

Slice the tomatoes into thick pieces and fry in butter until done. Transfer to a hot platter, sprinkle with salt and pepper and keep hot while you add to the butter in which they were fried a tablespoonful of flour and a pint of milk, cook, stirring, to a smooth white sauce and pour over the tomatoes.

Apple Taffy.

Wipe small apples carefully and run a thin skewer through each. Make a sirup of a pound of sugar and a small tea-cupful of water, and when a little hardens when dropped into iced water, add a tablespoonful of lemon juice and dip the apples into the sirup. Lay on waxed paper to dry.

Rhubarb Fool.

Two bundles of rhubarb, half a pound of sugar, half a pint of water, quarter of a pint of cream, a little lemon rind. Cut the rhubarb into small pieces and stew gently with the water, lemon rind and sugar for about one hour; then rub it through a fine sieve and when quite cool add the cream.

Mint Sauce.

For roast meat. Use the tips and tender leaves. Wash dry on a cloth, and chop very fine. To three tablespoonfuls of chopped mint add two tablespoonfuls of granulated sugar. Mix, and cover with six tablespoonfuls of vinegar. Leave an hour, squeeze and strain.

Cottage Cake.

One and one-half cupfuls of sugar, one-half cupful of butter, one-half teaspoon of soda, one teaspoonful of cream tartar, two cups of flour, two-thirds cup of milk; flavor to suit taste.

A Hair Dressing

Nearly every one likes a fine hair dressing. Something to make the hair more manageable; to keep it from being too rough, or from splitting at the ends. Something, too, that will feed the hair at the same time, a regular hair-food. Well-fed hair will be strong, and will remain where it belongs—on the head, not on the comb!

The best kind of a testimonial—
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SARSAPARILLA,
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Sagacity of Ravens.

A case of remarkable sagacity in a pair of ravens is related in the Field. Two collie dogs were hunting rabbits and the ravens were soaring overhead. As the dogs drove the rabbit out into the open near the top of a hill it ran straight into a trap and was caught. As the dogs came near the ravens came down and by loud croaking managed to drive away both. They then started to devour the rabbit, which they quickly dispatched.

"Bumper."

The word "bumper," meaning a drinking vessel, derived its origin from the Roman Catholic religion.

It was the custom in England in ancient times to drink the health of the Pope after dinner in a full glass of wine. This was called "au bon pere," from which we have the contraction "bumper."

Mothers will find Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup the best remedy to use for their children during the teething period.

Wily Woman.

"Women are such convenient liars," declared Mr. Jefferson Judd. "When the Wigginses were here to dinner you kept saying Mrs. Wiggins didn't eat enough to keep a bird alive. You know that wasn't so."

"Well," retorted Mrs. Judd. "There's different kinds of birds. You may have had a canary in your mind while I was referring to an ostrich."—Kansas City Times.

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His Easy Job.

"Isn't this a wearisome sort of occupation?" asked the customer. "You have to remember so much, and answer so many questions."

"Not at all, madam," answered the book store salesman. "All I have to remember is the titles, names of authors, and prices."

"You sell a great many of the popular novels, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, but I don't have to read them."

No Right to Complain.

"See here!" cried the irate man. "I purpose to sue you. Look at my head! You professed to cure—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted the maker of Fakeley's Balsam; "we advertise merely that we cure partial baldness and not—"

"Well, I was only partially bald when I started using your stuff; now I haven't a hair!"

"Well, then you're cured of your partial baldness, aren't you?"

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Allen's Foot-Powder. A powder. It makes tight or new shoes feel easy. It is a certain cure for sweating, callous and hot, tired, itching feet. Sold by all Druggists. Price 25c. Trial package mailed FREE. Address Allen S. Olmsted, LeRoy, New York.

Candor.

Borem—Hello, old man! What's the matter? You look disgusted.

Cutting—Yes, I feel that way.

Borem—Why, what have you run up against now?

Cutting—You. I didn't see you soon enough to escape.—Philadelphia Press.

Don't Push

The horse can draw the load without help, if you reduce friction to almost nothing by applying

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to the wheels. No other lubricant ever made wears so long and saves so much horse power. Next time try MICA AXLE GREASE. Standard Oil Co. Incorporated

