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The Mesh

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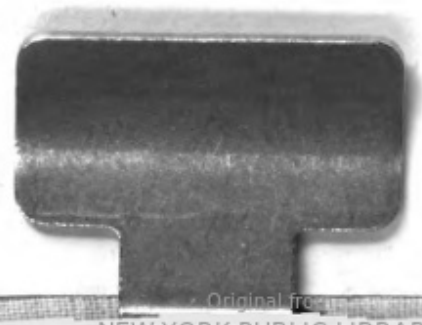

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BY

JOHN HASLETTE pseud.

AUTHOR OF "THE PASSION OF THE PRESIDENT"
"DESMOND ROURKE, IRISHMAN"
"THE CARVEN BALL"

"I have seen the wicked flourish like the green bay-tree"

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TO MY MOTHER

WITH RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

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THE MESH

CHAPTER I

UNPOETIC JUSTICE

His Excellency Don Luis Pescate—President of the Effulgent and Glorious Republic of Coquibe, as he loved to style himself in his *pronunciamientos*—lolled back in his chair, to survey with the eye of a connoisseur the charming face of a lady who sat *vis-à-vis* with him at the dinner-table. The service had been removed; only a few decanters and some thin-stemmed wineglasses remained to remind them of the Epicurean feast they had been discussing. Between them, many bunches of grapes flaunted their luscious purple in a massive silver epergne, standing up like a glistening oasis in a dazzling white linen desert.

His Excellency stretched out long thin fingers, loaded with rings, detached a grape from one cluster, and placed it delicately between his excellent teeth. He crushed it deliberately.

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The lady watched him, her air perceptibly sulky, her firm shoulders on the point of shrugging.

"My excellent Luis," she said, speaking in a sweet, hushed contralto which seemed strangely at variance with her piquante and coquettish face, "I must have more money, and I must have some Parisian frocks—positively must!"

"Heart of my life," replied his Excellency, in his gentle voice, "money is scarce; frocks are dear; the imperative mood does not suit your charming face, or your adorable voice. Frankly, my sweet, the Presidential coffers wink coldly with their last peso, and the Presidential credit—well, that is best left to the imagination, and the talk of fools."

The lady's mouth shaped a mutinous *moue*. "But, with it all, I must have money and frocks," she said, leaning towards him.

Don Luis smiled. He had heard this—all this, before. "My adored Carmencita, it will gratify me extremely if you can suggest to me a way to provide you with these necessities."

Her eyes glinted. "You are President, and you may do as you please," she hinted.

"Generally I do," he said, deliberately detaching another grape and subjecting it to the

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crushing process. "But it is the most difficult thing in the world—that."

The Doña Carmencita Pensol was gradually working herself into a delightful little feminine rage. "Ah-h! Me! I am in rags!" She tugged furiously at the priceless lace on her corsage. "Rags! Look at my hands! Not a ring—not a jewel. Are these the hands of a woman who should be permitted to go without rings?"

"*Corazon de mi vida*, they are not," replied Don Luis, reaching across the table, and patting them gently. "No doubt you have disposed of all the fine rings I gave you."

She shrugged. "Fine rings—the stones were mere sparks I assure you. You speak to me of them while that pestilent woman, the Doña Maria Luisa Carboles flaunts a tiara of the finest Brazilian stones, and also a necklet—*madre mia!* worth at least six thousand pesos."

Don Luis lighted a cigar, glanced at her amiably. "You surprise me. Is she not afraid to wear those gems in this town?"

"Perhaps," said the lady. "But on the days when she does not require them, they are placed in the safes of the English Bank."

"A thousand devils!" cried his Excellency. "The English Bank? I profess, as a patriotic

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statesman of our effulgent republic, *chiquita*, that I view with alarm and suspicion the appearance of these English in our commercial circles. Decidedly, they are serious competitors."

"Is it not a shame?" cried the Doña Carmencita, opening a little gold cigarette-case, which lay on the table beside her. "There is ever so much money—fabulous sums—while I, Carmencita Pensol, go in rags, and with my hands bare."

"The loveliest hands in the universe," said his Excellency, admiring them leisurely. "The most adorable since Cleopatra's. Well, we must see what can be done."

"But it is not well," she cried, her white shoulders moving irritably. "You talk and talk——"

"I shall also think," he said, rising from his chair, and coming to stand beside her. He put out a hand, and laid it tenderly on her arm, smiling down into the liquid eyes upturned to meet his.

She flashed white teeth at him, and laughed. "Then I shall have more money and more frocks?"

"Though the heavens fall," he said gently.

On the morning following, it was still early

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when Don Luis descended, and rang for his secretary. The latter appeared, rubbing his eyes sleepily. "Your Excellency?" he questioned.

The President stroked his chin complacently. "Soto, there are in the city some who are not well affected to our person."

"Many, Excellency," said the secretary.

"Then bring a few of them to me," said Don Luis amiably. "Those would be the leaders in any trouble. Conduct them through back streets to the private door of my study. I shall interview them immediately."

"But, your Excellency, they will not come," began Soto.

"You mistake, my good fellow, they will hasten with speed to assure me that nothing surpasses their attachment to my person and office. Away! You waste valuable time. *Vaya!* return quickly."

For some time after Soto had gone out, his Excellency continued to pace up and down the room, smoking an excellent cigar. He appeared thoughtful, pleasantly so. Then he descended to his study on the ground floor, and, sitting down in a comfortably cushioned chair, went carefully through some documents of State.

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Presently, there came a knock at the door, and Soto entered. He preceded into the room four hot, dusty, and alarmed individuals, who promptly began to explain to his Excellency the full intent and meaning of their devotion.

But Don Luis signed to his secretary to close and lock the door, giving on the street, and, with a disturbed air, rang a bell which stood on a bureau before him. At once, there was the tramp of feet from an outer passage, the second door of the room was flung open, and five *rurales* armed with Mauser carbines filed into the study.

"Seize these men and keep them under arrest!" cried Don Luis. "But first search them under my eyes."

Despite the oaths, protests, and appeals of the four men, they were seized and searched. On one was found a knife, on another a revolver. The President fronted them with lowering brows, one hand stretched out in a comminatory gesture.

"Ah! they seek my life. They intrude into my room with weapons in their hands, and in their hearts the foul purpose of assassination. Take them at once to the strong room in the basement, and secure them with cords. Meanwhile, no word of this to anyone. Go!"

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When the prisoners had been removed, Don Luis smiled, sighed, and, lighting a fresh cigar, glanced at Soto, who was regarding him with some mystification.

"Soto, I have another errand for you. You know the prison. Go there; ask for the Governor; tell him to send me here those four criminals who were imprisoned on a charge of burglary last month. One, I believe, is a Swede. Tell the Governor that I also wish to see the tools found upon the men when they were arrested—wait! Ask him to accompany the men."

"I go, your Excellency," said Soto, and went.

The President took up a novel and became absorbed in its pages, until a sound warned him that the Governor, with the prisoners under guard, was at the outer door. In response to his polite invitation, first the Governor, then Soto, followed by four men with a small escort of *rurales*, entered. Don Luis bade the official be seated, dismissed Soto and the guard, and stared steadily at the four prisoners who had been submitted for his inspection.

"Your name is Forgas?" he asked the most burly of the men.

"It is, your Excellency."

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"*Bueno!* I have been inquiring into your case, and, to my mind, there has been a miscarriage of justice. Señor el Gubernador, I observe that one of your men has brought the tools found on these——"

"Yes, your Excellency."

Don Luis nodded. "Forgas," he said, "why was it that, at your trial, you did not state that you were a travelling locksmith?"

"I—I——" stammered the man, evidently surprised.

"That will do. You have been rightly served for the foolish impulse which led you to omit details which would have led to your acquittal—of your companions, two follow the same trade, the third is a clock-maker?"

The men, still perplexed, nodded vigorous assent. This was new to them.

Don Luis addressed the astonished Governor. "In this case I shall exercise my prerogative of mercy. These men are to be released; to be held, temporarily, at my disposal, rather. You, Governor, are a servant of the State, of which I have the honour to be head. Be honest! Govern wisely those committed to your care! Attend," he pointed a finger, "attend to the in-

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structions of those who direct the destinies of the republic—I commend your service. *Adios*."

"But——" began the Governor, glancing at his prisoners with an uneasy eye.

"Taking with you the guard," continued the President softly. "I salute you. *Adios*, señor."

The Governor, much perplexed, gave way. He saluted, opened the door, and retired. Then Don Luis rang the bell for his *rurales*, and gave an order.

"Lead these men below, but see that they do not get away. They should be given a full meal. And you, Intendente, return to me here."

The officer bowed, and the prisoners were withdrawn under guard. Then the Intendente came back. "Your Excellency?"

"Intendente, you have the uniforms of your corps. At dark this evening see that the four men are clothed in them. They will join with a half-section of your men. At twelve, midnight, remember, you will go to the English Bank, in the calle Suarez. I have received information," he smiled significantly, "which leads me to believe that an attack will be made on the bank by a number of disaffected persons. At the bank you will act under my instructions.

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Meanwhile, prepare the men you have bound below to leave this house to-night. They will also go to the English Bank, placed in the centre of your men."

"Very well, your Excellency."

It was very dark that night. The sky was bare of stars; the moon still lurked deep below the horizon. At eleven, the economical municipality extinguished the street lamps, and, thereafter, the streets were black as pitch. In Don Luis' mansion, all was bright and gay. The windows blazed with light, and envious loungers in the *plaza* could see servants passing across the squares illumined by the hanging electroliers within. In his room, Don Luis was dressing himself in the uniform of an officer of *rurales*. Near his feet lay a sack, containing certain tools. He smiled very cheerfully, and whistled a snatch from "Nozze di Figaro" with great accuracy and sweetness. In the room below the four released prisoners were assuming other uniforms, while the four citizens in mufti watched them with amazed alarm.

Every man of the force of *rurales* had been instructed to wear grass sandals; footwear which enabled them to pass almost noiselessly through the streets. They wore those normally on

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night duty, but never before had marched through the city in them, such a considerable force.

Presently, the lights in the mansion were extinguished, and the bold stucco façade, in the renaissance manner, faded out into the gloom which brooded all around. A side door opened, and a man wearing the uniform of an Intendente walked quietly out, followed by another officer with a small column of his force. In the midst of this latter were four men disaffected citizens of the republic, painfully left in doubt whether they were marching to glory or execution.

The little column passed on its way, moving softly, disturbing not even the lightest slumberer, and gradually drawing near the calle Suarez.

The residents of the English Bank House comprised the manager—a young man inclined to stoutness and pomposity—two servants, a man and a woman, and the bank messenger, a mestizo, who was intensely zealous and very stupid. The manager slept on the first floor; the servants in the basement; the messenger in a room near the main entrance.

Arriving opposite the bank premises, the Intendente told his men to form a cordon about

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the door, and himself ~~r~~rang the bell which communicated with the bank messenger. After a short space of time, the man opened the great door cautiously, and peered out. In his left hand he held a repeating shot-gun, in the right a lamp which he raised to throw light upon the face of the man who had rung. At sight of the *rurales*' uniform, he assumed a less tense pose, and asked what was required of him at that hour of night.

The Intendente, his sombrero pulled down over his brows, informed him that he must come a little distance from the door to speak upon an important matter; meanwhile the *rurales* would see that the place was guarded. This request had all the force of a command. The messenger left his shot-gun in the doorway, and followed the Intendente.

Still, all was silent in the bank. Another man, this time Don Luis in his new uniform, took command.

At a word from him, the four innocent locksmiths entered the bank, carrying the tools of their craft, and the four disaffected citizens followed perplexedly. Don Luis came after, and the silent force of armed men remained on guard outside.

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Don Luis seemed to know the bank intimately. He directed the locksmiths to the room where the safes were kept, and instructed them to set to work at once. He knew that they could not escape through the armed cordon. Then he passed upstairs, driving the citizens before him, and only paused on the landing outside the bedroom door of the bank manager.

This opened in a moment. The manager had heard the sound of feet, and appeared in his pyjamas, a heavy revolver in his hand.

"Stop, or I fire!"

Don Luis advanced. "It is I—the President," he announced quite shortly. "A force of armed *rurales* are guarding the door. This afternoon I received information that a number of men had secreted themselves in this house, with intent to commit a felony. For your bank's security, and for the credit of the republic, the house must be searched from top to bottom, and the criminals seized. Have you any unused top rooms? If so, señor, show them to us. With you and these four men, we shall search. They cannot escape us."

"In this house!" The perspiration began to trickle down the manager's face. Surely it was impossible that men had forced an entry with-

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out his knowledge. He thought of his responsibility, of the probable loss of his post if the bank should suffer from his negligence. "Good Heavens!" he cried, mopping his face, "you're not serious—you're joking! I can't believe it. Why, the messenger sleeps below and it is difficult to——"

"No doubt," said Don Luis, who was not disinclined to continue the conversation. "It is always difficult, *señor mio*, to believe that which is unpalatable. I assure you that this affair is equally disagreeable to me. In my republic, I would have every man honest, and every man's property safe and secure—but we waste time here. Let us search the upper floors."

Temporel, the manager, was white, not from any lack of courage, but from a very definite realisation of what this meant to him.

"What shall we do?" he cried, trembling visibly with agitation. "Let us go downstairs first. They may have sacked the place already, eh?"

"No, no," said Don Luis, laying a reassuring hand on the shoulder of the young man. "The messenger sleeps below, as you have said, and he did not seem to have heard any suspicious sounds. In any case, a force of *rurales* is on

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guard. The men could not escape through the cordon. I saw to that at once. You will understand that my men have barred every outlet. With them on duty, we may proceed calmly to make a search."

"That seems true," said the unfortunate manager, steadying himself, his appealing eyes fixed on Don Luis' concerned face. "Well, let us go upstairs at once—you do not know what this means to me. I was only recently appointed, and I have a little girl——"

He broke off, and covered his face with his hands, the pistol falling to the floor. Then suddenly he stooped, picked up his weapon, and sprang towards the stairway. "Come on, your Excellency, we may get them yet."

"I trust we shall," said the President, smiling gently at his retreating back. He motioned the four waiting men to follow Temporel, and proceeded leisurely to follow in their wake.

Below, in the bank, the four expert workmen hurried on with their task. They had been supplied with an oxy-acetylene plant in addition to the tools found upon them when arrested. Soon one safe door was open, and they set to work upon the next. In the meanwhile, the Intendente had sent the bank messenger with a

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private message to General Mayoro, and returned to the bank with three men, carrying bags in which they bestowed the contents of the first safe. The cavalry barracks lay a mile and a half from the town, and the Intendente knew that the messenger could not deliver his message, and return, in much less than an hour—the General being a heavy sleeper, and not the sweetest tempered of men when incontinently aroused from his slumbers. The sacks, then, with their valuable contents, were carried out through the main entrance of the bank, unseen or unnoticed by the cordon of *rurales* stationed on the dark roadway.

The second safe soon yielded to its masters. It contained some unnegotiable scrip, a number of bank-notes, and, in a soiled leather jewel-case, the tiara and necklet of diamonds so unwisely flaunted by the Doña Maria Luisa Carboles. The Intendente returned, and emptied the second safe as he had done the first, replacing the scrip and the notes, which were of no immediate value to his employer, and might enable the bank authorities to set on foot certain dangerous inquiries.

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CHAPTER II

THE UNHAPPY DUPE

WHILE the men were working quietly below, Don Luis and his helpers had made an exhaustive search of the upper rooms. Sounding walls, tapping the flooring, looking under and behind piles of papers, rubbish, dismembered furniture. The time flew. Temporel was hopeful at first, then dejected. His impatience increased.

Surely it would be better to look into the office of the bank itself, to be certain that all was well? But the President held him—by argument, by ridicule, by appeals to his practical common sense. The *rurales* were waiting outside in the street; the concealed criminals, if such were there, could not break through the line. So he made time, and waited for a prearranged signal.

The Intendente, having secured the valuable contents of the safes, made his workmen pack up the plant, only directing them to leave the other

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tools scattered haphazard on the floor. Then he led them back to the street.

"Six of my men will escort you back to the President's palacio," he told them privately, as they passed through the hall. "The men think you are new recruits. Be silent—on your lives!"

Having dismissed the men, under guard, he returned to the bank, and ran upstairs, shouting as he went:

"Excellency! Your Excellency! The bank has been sacked. They have taken all. Come quickly!"

Temporel heard the shout, dropped his pistol, and staggered against the wall. "Oh, my Heavens!" he groaned, "this is the end. I'm done for."

"Come, señor," said Don Luis, in a kindly tone, "we must see what can be done——" As he spoke, the Intendente rushed in upon them, his eyes staring, his hands pantomiming horror. "Capos, calm yourself. What has happened?"

"The men must have forestalled us," cried the other. "They must have robbed the bank, while the messenger slept. Two safes have been opened."

"No more than two?" asked Temporel, in a

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broken, husky voice, dragging himself forward. "Come with me."

Suddenly, like a marionette of which the wire is violently agitated, he sprang forward. He descended the stairs three steps at a time, his face twitching, his jaw set in an unmeaning grimace. The President and his companions followed more leisurely.

The scene in the safe-room of the bank filled him with horror and dismay. Yes, the place had been sacked—that was the right word. Of the contents of the two safes, nothing remained but the scrip and the notes. This was an end to his dreams of marrying the little girl who waited for him in far-off England. They had had such high hopes, these two; they had counted on so much. Then Temporel had been promoted from cashier in a London branch to be manager of the South American branch in Santa Malua, and they had seen in this step the early fulfilment of all they had waited for so long.

Temporel was no longer pompous of manner. The events of the past hour had broken—and made him. The idle habit of mind engendered by years of regulations and of routine was shed from him in this hour of trial.

Furiously, they searched for traces of the

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criminals, but discovered none, except the tools which lay scattered on the floor. The President threw into his efforts such vigour and energy that Temporel was impressed. That the great man should so labour to retrieve the misfortune touched him to a sense of gratitude; deeply felt because he knew that from this time forward he would find few friends to help him. The establishment of a foreign bank in Santa Malua had stirred up local prejudices. The ignorant residents had seen in it some vague menace to their petty interests. From the bank directors at home he expected little. They were business men of a normal type; hard-headed men, good parents and husbands, but also servants of a company which had to show good dividends. The loss of so much money, and of jewels committed to their care by a new and wealthy customer, was not a light matter, nor would they regard it as such.

"Your Excellency," he said, at last, sitting down on a high stool, "it's no good. They must have got away before your men came up."

"Do not lose hope," said Don Luis, with an almost paternal air. He began to gather the tools from the floor, and to place them in a bag, which had lain disregarded under a chair.

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"These tools may help us to identify the criminals. I shall communicate with the Chief of Police, but, in the meantime, I must take charge of these. Ah! here comes the messenger."

José, hot, dusty, and frightened, flung into the room, and went straight to Temporel.

"Señor, is it true?"

"It is true," said Temporel sombrely. "José, I fear you will lose your place over this."

"*Ay de mi!* my place lost!" The man wrung his hands.

"But it will be easy for you to get another place," said the manager, looking at Don Luis, who was watching with an air of sympathetic goodwill. "With me it is different—it is different."

The President moved forward. "Señor el administrador, I must wish you good night. In the morning we will inquire further into this. *Vamos, hombres!*"

He drove the four men before him from the room. The messenger lingered for a few moments, looking blankly at his master, who stared into vacancy with a set and ghastly smile, then he retired to lock up the premises.

Temporel was alone. In the street outside the *rurales* moved off. There was the sound

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of soft, padding feet. Then stillness fell about the bank, the silence of quiet night. Behind Temporel, the safes in the little safe-room gaped reproachful and accusing.

Presently, he laid his flushed face on his hands, and his shoulders shook. The blood, flowing in a quickened stream from his heart, seemed to gather like a flood, to submerge his brain, to beat like the loosened waters of a dam against the back of his eyes. It was like the shouting of waters, exultant and past restraint.

He continued to sit there, hunched up, immobile. He was thinking of the things that had been, that might not be again.

On the following morning, the semi-official *Mundo* devoted half a column leader to a panegyric upon the President, first giving details of the bank robbery, and winding up with:

"It is known to all men that his valiant and immensely respected Excellency, our President, Don Luis Pescate, has for many years led this Glorious and Effulgent Republic in the van of civilisation. But he has wider claims to our respect. His paternal solicitude for the welfare of his people extends to cover with a golden

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mantle of protection even the strangers and sojourners within our gates.

"He was the first on the scene of the dastardly outrage above referred to, leading our brave *rurales* at the risk of his life; abandoning sleep, forgetting his own high person, working nobly to project and preserve the property of the English bankers.

"Long live his Excellency, a landmark to other national directors, a father to his devoted and loving people!

"*Viva la Libertad!*"

This leader had been carefully written by his Excellency, and forwarded to the offices of *El Mundo* by the hand of his secretary. The paper was in receipt of a small subsidy from the Government, and was the medium through which it delivered its *pronunciamientos*.

The President's morning was spent in receiving callers—generals, colonels, the commander of the cruiser *Don Luis*, lying in the blue bay beyond the mole, and sundry military small fry, with most of the notables of Santa Malua. They poured through the doors of the palacio in a congratulatory stream; commenting volubly upon his Excellency's goodness, graciousness,

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piety, valour; upon the largeness of his heart, the catholicity of his sympathies.

With Temporel it was, as he had said, different. He sat in his private office at the bank, out of earshot of the talkative clerks in the office, endeavouring to frame a cable message for his directors. With aching head, and eyes red from lack of sleep, he worked on—writing, correcting, and destroying successive messages. At length he had finished. The substance of the cable was in these words:

"Regret bank burgled, cash lost, £10,000, also jewels value £1800 property customer deposited; no arrests yet, inquiries being made."

He rang the bell, and a Spanish clerk, a thin yellow-faced man, with a sparse chin tuft, entered.

"Marino," said the manager, "send off this cable immediately, will you?"

"*Si*, señor," said the man, surveying him curiously for a moment. He took the slip the other handed him, bowed, and withdrew. Coming through the general office, he approached the desk of the cashier. "The señor el administrador will not be allowed to remain here, I am sure, Mistaire Peters," he said softly.

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Peters, the cashier, looked up, and a light came into his eyes. "So, ho!" he thought, "the managership may fall vacant soon." He liked to think that Temporel had in some vague way taken from him the coveted post at Santa Malua. Of course, Temporel would be held responsible now. Might it not be a good thing to write to the directors proffering his own services. But no—he must go slow, and wait for news. Perhaps, indeed, those beasts of directors had some protégé of their own waiting to go out!

These thoughts flashed through his mind as he looked at the cable message handed to him by Marino. "All right," he said aloud, "I'll just count the words—poor devil! this affair will muddle him up a bit with the chiefs at home."

That morning the bank premises were invaded by a small army of *rurales*, policemen, and Presidential emissaries. They interviewed Temporel at length; were shown over the building from top to bottom; took solemn measurements; made small notes in large notebooks; and generally comported themselves as inefficient detectives confronted with a mystery which they clearly realised was beyond their power to solve.

Nothing of a hopeful nature came of their investigations. Don Luis sent his secretary

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with a message to say that he had had the burglars' tools examined by an expert, who had given it as his opinion that they bore no mark which would help to identify the owners. This was comfortless and unsatisfactory. Temporel began to see that he need expect no useful help from the local authorities. It only remained for him to await the cable from his directors, the purport of which he was able to guess.

When the last caller had gone, he again retired to his private room, passing through the general office, his head up, his shoulders squared.

"Bad business, sir," said Peters, as he went by.

The manager nodded, but did not reply. He was conscious of a certain new familiarity in his subordinate's tone, and did not relish it. Intuitively, he guessed at the man's thoughts. But, once behind the private door, he rang the bell for José, the messenger, who came to him promptly.

"You require me, señor?"

"Look here, José," began Temporel, sitting back in his chair, and fidgeting with some papers, "this is a very bad business. You understand that you are practically acting as

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watchman here. Last night, as you know, the bank was burgled. To enter, the men must have passed your door; did you hear any suspicious sounds?"

José's olive face went a dirty white. "No, señor, I swear it."

"Strange—very strange," said the manager in an absent voice. "Come, tell me what occurred when the *rurales* arrived last night. You did not enter with the President?"

José explained what had taken place, and added: "Señor, the Intendente sent me to the cavalry barracks with a message for General Mayoro. I returned as soon as possible."

"Ah! did the message request the General to come back with you?"

"Señor, I cannot tell. It was a written message, and was handed to me in an envelope. The General said to me, 'Tell his Excellency I will send ten troopers.'"

"That was all?"

"Yes, señor." The man hesitated, then went on timidly: "Does the señor believe that I shall lose my place here because the ladrones broke in while I slept?"

Temporel shook his head regretfully, feeling that he was in like case, though he did not care

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to say so. "I cannot tell you. I believe that it is very possible. I trust that the matter may not go further, but, at present, it is impossible to forecast anything. You may go now, José. I will do what I can for you."

When José had gone, Temporel turned wearily to the arranging of some papers on his desk. He felt sick at heart. At this moment they might be flashing from ocean to ocean his directors' fateful cable. For a time he tried to delude himself into the belief that all would come right, that the money would be recovered, and the matter cleared up. But not for long. He knew that much might be forgiven him, but never the loss of the bank's money.

On the following morning the cablegram arrived. He scanned the flimsy slip, flung it from him, and grew gradually paler. He stood stock-still for a minute, staring into space; silent, enraged, despairing. The cable, in the insane words of an insane code, informed him that the directors asked him to hand in his resignation. He had a twelve months' agreement with them, and was to retain his post until the arrival of his successor. His salary for the forthcoming year must serve in lieu of notice. The word "resignation" was a mere mockery.

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"Curse them!" cried Temporel, smarting under the blow, "and those ruffians who have ruined me——" He stopped; bit his lips; saw in a sudden and complete vision the girl who waited for him in England. The oaths died upon his lips. There was surely something better than futile and idle swearing, some more manly way of meeting the crisis. But he stood still, his eyes under tight lids, his mouth half-open, as if he had received a terrible and unexpected blow in the face.

How was he going to tell her? But was there any need for that yet? He had two months before his successor would arrive. He would be in possession of a year's salary. It was necessary that he should discover the bank robbers. If the local authorities did not succeed, he must. In the end he would achieve his purpose, set himself right with his directors, and ask to be reinstated. With this thought in his mind, he sat down to write a letter, acknowledging receipt of the cable, and enclosing a report, with details regarding the inquiries which had been set on foot.

Then he took a sheet of private writing-paper, and began a letter to his fiancée, Miss Carvel. He wrote in a cheerful strain, quite at variance

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with the gloomy mood which was on him, and passed over the bank robbery as "a little case of theft at the office," and expressed a hope that he might soon be able to send for her.

The last paragraph gave him most pain to write. "My dearest girl," he said, "do not build too much on our early marriage. You see, business has not come in rapidly yet—local prejudices are a factor—and I shall not get the necessary rise until the branch is fully established."

He closed with contradictory hopes, endearing words, with those tender banalities which will endure when the most daring and forceful phrases shall have lost their meaning. Then he sealed and stamped the envelope and went out to post it.

Don Luis, in his palacio, was also busy. Before the darkness had given place to day, on the morning of the raid, ten troopers rode into the patio. They found, in the pleasant court, four men, gagged, bound, and strapped to the saddles of their horses. Don Luis' secretary was there to give instructions. These four men, daring and dangerous criminals, were, he said, to be conveyed to the fort at Puerto Pelos, and there kept in solitary confinement at the Presi-

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dent's pleasure; the troopers took their orders obediently. After all, it was no affair of theirs.

At the same hour, a letter was sent to the Governor of the jail in Santa Malua, and ran as follows:—

"My Very Excellent Friend,—I have subjected the four criminals to a searching and thorough examination, and regret that I made, in the first instance, a rash and hasty judgment which may have seemed to reflect on your discrimination.

"Contrary to my expressed belief, they have failed to prove their innocence; and, in these circumstances, I consider them deserving of the severest punishment. I have consigned them, under escort, to the fortress at Puerto Pelos. The tools found upon them at the time of their arrest, I return to you for inclusion in the Criminal Museum.

"Accept, my excellent friend, the assurance of my most distinguished regards,

"Don Luis Parajal Pescate,

"President of the Republic of Coquibe."

These matters arranged, Don Luis settled himself again to enjoy life. At the hour when Temporel was writing to his distant Cynthia,

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the President was standing beside the Doña Carmencita Pensol in the *salon* of his residence, and listening gravely to the explanations of his private jeweller.

"This tiara, your Excellency, can be readily managed," the man was saying. "I shall have the stones taken out, and mounted again after the design of which your Excellency has done me the honour to approve—the necklet also."

"*Bueno!*" said Don Luis, pinching the ear of his inamorata and smiling down into her face, "go then and see that the work is done well and speedily."

When the jeweller had gone, Carmencita went off into a delicious gurgle of laughter.

"Luis, you are the most adorable man in the world."

"*Sin duda*," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder, "without doubt, heart of my life, I shall remain so until you have spent the money, and tired of the jewels—after——"

"And, well?" said she.

"Well," he said, smiling cynically, "who knows but some day even I—such things have happened, *querida*."

She stood up, and putting an arm about his

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neck, kissed him on the lips. "With some women, yes. With me, no," she said.

He still smiled. "You misunderstand me, sweet of my life. I was going to add that, some day, I might even tire—of you!"

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CHAPTER III

PREGNANT SILENCE

Two days later, Temporel met the President.

In rather a gloomy humour, he had left the bank to take a *paseo* on the Alameda, and, as he turned from the avenue into the *plaza*, Don Luis' carriage whirled round the corner. The President saw him, cried out to his coachman, and the big landau drew up. Temporel saw a beckoning hand, and, raising his hat, advanced to greet his Excellency.

"Señor Temporel," said the latter, smiling sympathetically, "I am sorry that the inquiry has not been much advanced. They do not seem to have solved that mysterious affair at the bank. We were just too late in arriving. Accept my regrets, and, if you please, communicate them to the señores, your directors."

"Thank you," said Temporel. "Your Excellency is very kind. I have already communi-

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cated to my directors the fact that you took a personal interest in that unfortunate affair."

Don Luis bit his lip. The peculiar turn of the phrase seemed momentarily disquieting. Without purpose, the manager had struck the mark. "Well, well," he said, recovering his composure, "we must not yet abandon hope. Some other time we shall talk of it. At the moment, I have other business with you. Will you dine with me some night this week, say Friday?"

"I shall be delighted," said Temporel gratefully. "Delighted and honoured."

"I shall expect you then at eight o'clock. Now, *adios*. I have an appointment with the Minister of Commerce."

The carriage drove on. Temporel felt a new lightness of heart. He had some friends still. "What a good sort he is," he was saying to himself as he looked after the fast-disappearing carriage. "By Jove! now I come to think of it, he might get me a place here, when I have to leave the bank; I must sound him on that point."

While he stood there, absorbed in the possibilities of this new idea, a slight, bearded man had approached, and was surveying him from the distance of a few paces. When the Presi-

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dential carriage had rolled out of sight, he came closer, and touched Temporel on the sleeve. The latter started, and turned.

"What can I do for you, señor?" he asked, raising his hat politely.

The slight man stared hard at him, nodded furiously, and pointed in the direction taken by the carriage. His face worked a little, like that of a man eagerly striving to express some idea, but at a loss for a word. Temporel looked at him perplexedly.

"Señor, it is evident that you do not speak English. That does not matter. I understand Spanish."

The man nodded, but continued to gesticulate.

"Spanish—speak Spanish!" Temporel said impatiently. "I can understand that."

But the man did not speak. He pulled a handful of coins from his pocket with his right hand, snatched them with the left, and placing them in the left-hand pocket, pointed excitedly up the Alameda. The other shook his head.

"No, I have no money to spare," he said.

The fellow flushed; making it clear that he was not a beggar. He repeated the pantomime without conveying any lucid idea of his meaning to the mystified Englishman. He was con-

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scious of that, perhaps, for he spun once more upon his heels, and shook his head sorrowfully, as if at a loss to proceed.

Temporel thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets, and stared at him. "My dear fellow, I can't understand what you mean. If you have anything to say, please say it. I am not a quick hand at picking up sign language."

The other pointed first to himself, then Temporel, and managed by an expressive look to indicate that he wished the Englishman to accompany him. The latter was in two minds. Perhaps the fellow had something to say—he seemed intensely anxious. Possibly he understood neither English nor Spanish. On the other hand, it was possible that he was endeavouring to decoy Temporel into some criminal haunt, with evil intention. But curiosity prevailed over prudence in the Englishman's mind. He looked up and down the street, and nodded.

"All right. Go on, and I will follow you."

A look of intense satisfaction flitted across the man's mobile face. He did not attempt to conceal his feelings, but smiled openly, and approvingly upon Temporel, who stared back inquiringly Leaving the corner of the Alameda, and

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skirting the palm-fringed enclosure in the centre of the Gran' Plaza, they walked quickly to the spot where the calle Destina debouches into the square. The President's residence stood at this corner; the main façade fronting the *plaza*, the side running on the street.

The man stopped there, and looked upwards, tapping Temporel on the shoulder.

"Well, what is it now?"

The other again drew money from his pocket, but this time varied the pantomime by feigning to place it upon one of the sills of a window near them. That done, he stared expectantly, anxiously at his companion, his face a study in half-sick hope. Temporel shook his head. He could not understand. He believed, indeed, that the man must be insane. Observing the look of doubt and amazement the other redoubled his exertions. He almost danced before Temporel, flinging out his arms, grimacing, endeavouring to express by signs something inexplicable and vague. That, at least, was how it seemed to Temporel. Without wishing to appear impolite, he was anxious to leave the man. He was now well aware that he would never understand what his companion tried so eagerly, but so silently to express.

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"I am sorry," he said, at length, "but I am in a hurry, and you must excuse me."

His companion looked at him mournfully, and with a sudden swift access of excitement, pulled at his sleeve. Temporel followed him. They passed down the calle Destina, cut across a side street, and entered the calle Suarez. Here they stopped near the bank; the man pointed at the building, and began vigorously to gesticulate. But the Englishman's patience had come to an end. He moved off a few paces, and raising his hat prepared to resume his walk. Whether the man in normal circumstances would have endeavoured to detain him is uncertain; for, at that moment, a mounted *rurale* came trotting down the street.

He was still some fifty paces distant when the man caught sight of him, and stood suddenly still, fixed, as it were, in making an excited gesture. His face became suddenly despondent. Then his arms fell to his sides; he left Temporel, and hurried quickly up the street. He went without ceremony, without a word, as if the appearance of that solitary *rurale* was the signal which set him in motion. Before the *rurale* had come level with Temporel, he had

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turned into the calle Santander, and disappeared.

The manager looked after him wonderingly. What the deuce did the fellow mean by his posturing and gesticulating? Why didn't he speak? Apparently he did not wish to be seen by the *rurale*, who was busying himself with the rolling of a cigarette, the reins lying loose on his horse's neck. Of course, it was possible that he was known to the police; a fact which would account for his sudden departure. If this were true, it was as well that Temporel had not followed him farther.

Temporel, however, soon forgot the incident. The sight of the bank building reminded him sharply of the robbery which had dealt a death-blow to his hopes. He wondered anew how the criminals had contrived to insinuate themselves into the building without being observed. He judged that it was impossible that they could have entered during the hours of daylight. At five o'clock, the doors were closed and bolted for the night. He now approached the main entrance, and, for the twentieth time, closely scrutinised the massive iron door. There was not a scratch, not a mark to show how the entry had been made. The deftest burglar must leave

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some traces of his handiwork, but there was nothing to be seen.

It was strange. There remained only the supposition, difficult of belief, that the thieves had stolen into the premises by day, and had secreted themselves somewhere until nightfall. Temporel turned away disappointed. He looked up and down the street. Not a soul was in sight. Lighting a cigar, he debated whether he would resume his interrupted *paseo*, or return to the rooms in the bank to ponder on new lines of inquiry. But Fate decided for him. As he stood there, thinking absently, the sound of running feet startled him, and made him turn.

From the entrance to the calle Santander, a man came running. His face was flushed, and dripping with perspiration. He went like a man pursued, and Temporel now heard the distant clatter of hoofs.

The man ran straight towards him. He was the very fellow who had mystified and intrigued Temporel by his silent but persistent panto-miming.

"What is it?" said the latter irritably, as the panting man came up to him. Then something told him. He read it in the man's eyes, in

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his despairing face, in the quick, hard breathing that told of close pursuit. Even while he put the question, he was fumbling for his latchkey, found it, and turned it in the lock.

"Inside, quick!" he said violently, as the door yielded to his hand.

The man gave him a glance of thanks, sprang to the opening, and disappeared. Temporel shut the door, moved off a pace, and stood opposite the main entrance of the bank.

He was standing there, watchful and expectant, when a mounted *rurale* came galloping from the calle Santander. Another appeared from the cross street. One wheeled to the right, and joined the other, and they came hastily up the street to the bank.

"Señor, you have seen a man running?" asked the first.

"No," said Temporel bluntly. He had yielded to the promptings of a primal instinct—the instinct which bids us shelter the hunted—but he was asking himself if he had made a mistake. Had he been wise to shelter the flying man?

"But he came this way, señor," protested the second *rurale*.

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"Possibly, but I am not looking for running men. What was he like this fellow?"

"A slight man, and bearded, señor. We have orders to apprehend him on a charge of having broken into your honour's bank."

Temporel started. For a moment he was tempted to say that the man they sought was at that instant behind his private door. Then came a doubting question: why should a bank robber fly for protection to the bank itself. It was absurd.

"I will let you know if I see such a man," he said indifferently. "The scoundrel must be taken, of course. If he returns this way I shall detain him."

"Thank you, señor; we shall be glad of any information," said the *rurale* who had first spoken; then to his comrade, "Pardo, I shall ride towards the Plaza Magellan; you must search the calle Juan Esposito, and the alleys near-by —*adios*, señor."

They spurred on, with a jingle of silver-mounted headstalls, their carbines pounding lightly in the leather buckets. Temporel watched them for a moment; then entered his private doorway, and opened the door. He proceeded cautiously up the stairs,

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He found the hunted man on the landing, crouching behind a curtain. He could also see the dull steel of a knife blade half withdrawn from his belt. But at sight of his protector, the man pushed back the weapon and advanced with outstretched hands. The Englishman surveyed him dubiously, almost harshly.

"Well, the *rurales* have passed. I told them a lie; I said that I had not seen you."

The man seized his hand, and pressed it to his lips. His eager eyes shone with friendliness and gratitude. Still he did not speak.

"Are you dumb?" cried Temporel angrily. He felt that he had been a fool. Even the man's exuberant gratitude could not drive away that idea. If this fellow had not been concerned in the bank robbery what did he mean by that pantomime with the money he took from his pockets? Temporel flushed up.

"Why don't you speak? They tell me you are suspected of breaking into this bank. Well, if that is true, you have ruined me—do you hear? —ruined me. If I thought you had, my Heavens! I'd smash you where you stand. I'd smash you!"

He surprised himself by this mood of gusty anger which seemed to have sprung out of noth-

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ing. Something hot filled him like embers kindled suddenly by the breath of a strong wind. The memory of what had destroyed at a blow his career and his best hopes spurred him to an outburst of almost uncontrollable anger.

"Eh, did you?" he cried. "Won't you speak? I'll force it out of you! You followed me this evening with your infernal foolery, but that don't matter—this does. It means everything to me." He grew incoherent; the words ran off his tongue, jostled, clipped of their terminations, in a mad race to surge upon this silent man. "Were you one of them? If I thought it—even thought it. It was all one to you. You wanted money, and you took it. I was in charge, but you never thought what it would mean to me. You didn't care, blast you all!"

The man looked disconcerted and dismayed. He put out his hands again, and shook his head vigorously.

Temporel suddenly gripped him by the shoulders. "You've got to tell me!" If this were indeed one of the robbers, he might be able to recover some of the stolen money; only a few days had passed. He shook the man violently.

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"Yes, you've got to. See? I'll have it out of you, if I have to—won't you speak?"

The man had not attempted to struggle. He remained quiet, silent, protesting only with one expressive hand.

The meaning of it all came suddenly to Temporel. That hot something seemed to chill suddenly within him, to die, as a spark dies suddenly in a close place. He felt hopeless, listless: the reaction after these moments of intense nervous strain. The man was armed, but had not attempted to use his weapon. He could not be the criminal—the idea was absurd. Temporel gaped at him, and repeated his former question, but now with a new significance.

"Are you dumb?"

The man nodded affirmatively, his teeth showing in an apologetic and explanatory smile. He put up a hand to his lips, tapped them, nodded once more.

"I'm awfully sorry——" Temporel stammered in English, seeing now the brutality of which he had been capable. His disappointment was like a blow. If this had been the man, he would have glutted his rage upon him. His hand had itched for a strangle grip; to force the robber down, to kneel upon him, to crash his fist down

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upon the face of the man who had ruined him. As it was, he had only treated roughly a man who did not speak because he was dumb. He stared him now, laughing discordantly. "Sorry —I thought you would not speak—see? But how am I to get at what you want? Can you write?"

The head was shaken mournfully.

"Read, perhaps?"

Again the mournful negation. It was likely enough. Those in Coquibe who suffered from physical disabilities were left to bear their burdens alone. The people would have struck at a law which might seem to favour the weak at the expense of the strong.

"At least, you can hear," said Temporel slowly. "Well then, the *rurales* are after you, Heaven knows why—shall I conceal you here for a few days, or do you think you can slip out safely? Nod once for the first question, twice to the second."

The man shook his head to the first question, nodded twice to the second. It was evident that he preferred to go.

"Very well," said Temporel. He was relieved at the answer. He remembered that in common fairness to his directors, it would not

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be right to shelter even a suspect. It would be difficult, too, to conceal the fact of the man's presence from the servants. "Will you wait a little, or go at once? I will give you a glass of brandy."

He led the way to the sitting-room, found a decanter half-full of brandy, and poured out a glass of the liquor. The man gulped it. They descended the stairs, and coming to the outer door, Temporel opened it, and glanced out. The dark had fallen suddenly. The street, from the absence of noise, seemed almost deserted.

"Ready?" he asked.

The man pressed his hand, and slipped past him. Temporel stood close in the doorway, looking in the direction taken by the fugitive. As he looked, the stone paving emitted a shower of sparks; a horse's hoofs clattered furiously; and mingled with that sound the rush of a man's running feet. Then the darkness opened to a fine, wedge-like spurt of flame, and the report of a pistol woke the slumbering echoes.

Temporel went hastily indoors, locked the door behind him, and ascended to his sitting-room facing the street. He looked out through the slats of the jalousies but could see nothing.

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All was dark. The street lamps had not yet been lighted. Had they laid a trap for the dumb man, hoping to catch him in the darkness? It seemed so.

To-morrow he might hear what had happened.

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CHAPTER IV

A DANGEROUS CRIMINAL

PUNCTUALLY at the hour of eight on Friday evening, Temporel reached the President's palacio. He wore a well-cut evening-suit, carried a crush hat, and seemed in some measure to have recovered his former good spirits. He had heard nothing of the dumb man since, nor of any arrest having been made. To tell the truth, he was hoping for a great deal from this interview with his Excellency. He knew there were many Government posts in Coquibe which carried a good salary, and would be suitable for a man familiar with finance. The President had been kind; his manner suggested that he was prepared to show his goodwill by another friendly act.

A *mozo* took his cane and hat, another preceded him up a broad, soft-carpeted stairway to the room where they were to dine. It was one

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of the smaller rooms, normally sacred, though Temporel did not know it, to those light hours when Carmencita Pensol dined or supped with his Excellency. Now, covers were laid for two, a fact which seemed to hint at a certain intimacy between him and the great man.

The President appeared. He spoke English easily and well. Extending his hand, he greeted Temporel with quiet amiability.

"Ah! how do you do? I am delighted that you are able to come. I wish to talk over some matters with you. In part they relate to that unfortunate affair at the bank, in part to yourself—be seated. I will ring."

Soup was served, an excellent clear soup, such as Temporel had never before tasted in Santa Malua. The gentle warmth acted like a stimulant, and he glanced at the President gratefully.

"Now, señor," said the latter, bending a little forward, "there is something I wish to say, but find difficult. One does not like to intrude oneself upon the private affairs of another, but I wish to help you, and I cannot do so till I know how you stand."

Temporel flushed. He knew what this meant. It was unpalatable to have to reply. But what a good sort the President was! Such delicacy,

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such tact. Personally, he had not expected this."

"Well, your Excellency, it is not pleasant to talk about one's failures, but you are right, and you are very kind. That loss has damaged me. My directors cannot afford to lose so much without visiting it on someone."

The President tilted his plate forward. "Much? But it was only a small sum, they told me. Ten or twelve thousand pounds——"

"That seems to me considerable."

"Ah! to a bank with perhaps millions? But you English are a commercial nation. What then?"

"They have asked me to hand in my resignation," said Temporel ruefully. "My successor is already on his way here."

"Scandalous!" cried Don Luis, with some warmth. "To dismiss an honourable and efficient gentleman because some ladrones stole a few pounds—*madre santisima!*"

Temporel saw that it was unjust. He thought of it while the servant took his soup plate, and the fish course—a delicate kind of mullet, served with a piquant sauce—was brought to table. The President was right. It was a shame—an infernal shame! They had treated him very

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badly. After all the years he had served them, too. He had been in no other bank. They had had the best of him—years out of his life—and now they threw him out because something had happened to their confounded cash. He set his teeth hard.

"I must not discuss my directors, however," he said.

"True," said the President, with an approving look. "I admire loyalty to those who have treated you so ill. But now a question."

"I will answer if I can."

"Well, how do you stand? When your successor arrives, will you take some other post, or return to England?"

To England? To see Cynthia, to confess what had happened, to receive the patronising commiseration of her relatives, to be forgiven, perhaps, for a happening with which he had nothing to do. That was unthinkable. He bit his lip.

"Your Excellency, I shall stay here. I must find the men who robbed the bank. I shall never rest until they are found. I owe that to myself—I shall take any post that offers."

"Bravo!" cried Don Luis. "That is the

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spirit in which every man should meet undeserved misfortune. You will go far—now, as to the robbers. The police confess themselves baffled; the *rurales* have scoured the country for the criminals—in vain. Were I absolutely master, they should never rest till the men were found. But that is impossible. You know these ignorant prejudices. The deputies would say in Congress that I was spending the money of the republic on behalf of a foreign company which had come to Santa Malua to compete with native Coquibians—you see? Sadly as I regret it, the official inquiry into the affair must come to an end this week."

"But I say!—I mean, it is a very serious affair for us. Surely, your Excellency, the inquiry will not be totally abandoned?"

"It is ridiculous, indeed, almost culpable, Mr Temporel; but what would you do? Ah! if you knew of my difficulties with these half-bred people, so small of mind, so narrow, so prejudiced! They will never understand. I would continue until success had been attained, but my ministers think otherwise."

"I am sure your Excellency would pursue it at any cost," said poor Temporel earnestly. "But if the officials refuse to go on, I must,

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I'll spend my last farthing, but I shall see the criminals in jail."

"Again, bravo," said Don Luis, clapping his hands gently. "Could I assist you with funds —privately, of course?"

Temporel sat up, flushing a little. "Many thanks, but I could not accept money from your Excellency. I have some money in hand, and shall use that."

Don Luis bent over his plate to hide a smile of gratified amusement. He had counted on this answer. "At least, you will let me help you in some way," he said. "You will need a post. In a month or two there will be a vacant one in the office of the Minister of Commerce."

"Oh! your Excellency——" Temporel began.

Don Luis held up an arresting hand. "Not a word, I beg you. But trust me; I shall see to it. Now, again to the inquiry. You will be wise to engage some native expert in tracing men—I know of such a man, and will gladly give you his name He was an Intendente in the *rurales* here, dismissed for some slight fault, years ago. He will not rejoin the force."

"That is very good of you. I shall be prepared to pay him one hundred pesos a month,

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but he must be absolutely at my disposal, night or day."

"*Bueno*. He will be delighted. His name is Pedro Barriga; his address, Calle Santander, No. 9. I shall now give you some valuable information which came into my hands only yesterday. There is a man who lives, or used to live in the town—a slight man with a beard." He looked hard at Temporel. "He is dumb. If you can secure him you will have in your hands the head of the gang. He is a dangerous criminal. Well, after dinner, I will write a note to Barriga, which you may take to him. I wish you good luck in your quest."

Temporel thanked him warmly. Was it really true that he had had the man in his hands and had allowed him to slip through them? It was evident that the man had not been shot that night. But what audacity! To shelter from the police in the very bank which he had robbed! Temporel felt hot all over at the thought of it.

Dinner over, Don Luis begged to be allowed to write. He sat down at a little bureau in a corner, took up a pen and wrote:—

"BARRIGA,—You will place yourself at the disposal of the señor Temporel, the English-

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man. Do what he commands. You will receive a salary of one hundred pesos a month. Seventy-five pesos must be rendered to me here each month.

"DON LUIS PARAJAL PESCATE."

The President did not disdain small gains. He sealed up the envelope in which he had placed the letter, addressed it, and handed it to Temporel.

"I am greatly obliged to your Excellency."

The President smiled. "*No es nada.* It is nothing. I wish you success. But, in all you do, remember the dumb man. You will know him. Slight, bearded, dumb."

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CHAPTER V

THE SPY

If the *teniente*, now retired, recommended to Temporel by his Excellency, and the Intendente who commanded the *rurales* on the night of the bank robbery, were not one and the same person, it is certain that they were marvellously alike. The resemblance was sufficiently striking to have impressed those who had seen the Intendente. Temporel, even, had some distant recollection of having seen the man before, but not with sufficient definiteness to carry conviction. However, he visited the house in the calle Santander, and engaged the former officer of *rurales* at the figure he had named to Don Luis.

Barriga seemed well pleased with the commission. He looked keen, alert, intelligent; and indeed he enjoyed those excellent qualities in conjunction with a very pretty taste in knavery

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and the friendship of his Excellency, the President.

"You think we shall be able to lay our hands on those men?" Temporel asked rather anxiously, when they had talked the matter over.

Barriga tugged at his fine moustache. "But yes, I believe so. The police here are foolish fellows. They know nothing of the art of detection. If you show them a criminal, they can apprehend him—beyond that, nothing."

"What about the slight man who is dumb? Do you agree with his Excellency?"

Barriga knew his cues. "Absolutely, señor. He is well known as a desperate man."

Temporel reflected. He had not told the President how he had sheltered the dumb man from the pursuing *rurales*. Would it not be advisable to mention the fact now? After all, Barriga was his paid assistant. So he explained how the man had come to him once at the bank, omitting the details with regard to his own part in the matter. Barriga's eyes lighted up at this intelligence.

"Ah, what a lost chance! If you had only seized him, we should have no more trouble. But the superb audacity of the fellow! it makes one smile to think of it. Señor, I have a plan.

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He may think that you do not know him in his real person. You were kind to him. He assisted to rob your bank once, he may again. He will, perhaps, come to you, ask for shelter—and then——"

"Let him!" cried Temporel, with sparkling eyes. "I hope he will come. See, I am on the telephone. If the dumb man comes to my house I shall detain him on some pretext, and communicate with you."

"My house is not connected with the telephone, but you could ring up the Chief of Police. He would send men instantly. Of course, he may not come again to you, señor, but I shall look for him very thoroughly. Between us—ah!"

"We shall do the trick," said Temporel, shaking his hand. "Good! get to work to-morrow, and let me have a short report every evening. If you want a small amount in advance for expenses, I shall be glad to let you have it."

Barriga seemed to ponder. "Twenty pesos will be enough for the present," he said slowly. "I do not wish to waste money. Well, *adios*, señor. I shall report to-morrow."

Temporel bade him good-bye and returned

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