

BAUM LYMAN FRANK

THE FATE OF A CROWN

Лаймен Фрэнк Баум

The Fate of a Crown

«Public Domain»

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Schuyler Stanton

The Fate of a Crown

*See, my liege – see through plots and counterplots —
The gain and loss – through glory and disgrace —
* * * * * still the holy stream
Of human happiness glides on!*

– “Richelieu” – Bulwer-Lytton

CHAPTER I

THE BLUE ENVELOPE

Leaning back in my chair, I smoked my morning cigar and watched Uncle Nelson open his mail. He had an old-fashioned way of doing this: holding the envelope in his left hand, clipping its right edge with his desk shears, and then removing the inclosure and carefully reading it before he returned it to its original envelope. Across one end he would make a memorandum of the contents, after which the letters were placed in a neat pile.

As I watched him methodically working, Uncle Nelson raised a large blue envelope, clipped its end, and read the inclosure with an appearance of unusual interest. Then, instead of adding it to the letters before him, he laid it aside; and a few minutes later reverted to it again, giving the letter a second careful perusal. Deeply musing, for a time he sat motionless in his chair. Then, arousing himself from his deep abstraction, he cast a fleeting glance in my direction and composedly resumed his task.

I knew Uncle Nelson's habits so well that this affair of the blue envelope told me plainly the communication was of unusual importance. Yet the old gentleman calmly continued his work until every letter the mail contained was laid in a pile before him and fully docketed. With the last he suddenly swung around in his chair and faced me.

"Robert," said he, "how would you like to go to Brazil?"

Lacking a ready answer to this blunt question I simply stared at him.

"De Pintra has written me," he continued – "do you know of Dom Miguel de Pintra?" I shook my head. "He is one of the oldest customers of the house. His patronage assisted us in getting established. We are under deep obligations to de Pintra."

"I do not remember seeing his name upon the books," I said, thoughtfully.

"No; before you came into the firm he had retired from business – for he is a wealthy man. But I believe this retirement has been bad for him. His energetic nature would not allow him to remain idle, and he has of late substituted politics for business."

"That is not so bad," I remarked, lightly. "Some people make a business of politics, and often it proves a fairly successful one."

My uncle nodded.

"Here in New Orleans, yes," he acknowledged; "but things are vastly different in Brazil. I am sorry to say that Dom Miguel is a leader of the revolutionists."

"Ah," said I, impressed by his grave tone. And I added: "I have supposed that Dom Pedro is secure upon his throne, and personally beloved by his subjects."

"He is doubtless secure enough," returned Uncle Nelson, dryly, "but, although much respected by his people, there is, I believe, serious opposition to an imperial form of government. Rebellions have been numerous during his reign. Indeed, these people of Brazil seem rapidly becoming republicans in principle, and it is to establish a republican form of government that my friend de Pintra has placed himself at the head of a conspiracy."

"Good for de Pintra!" I cried, heartily.

"No, no; it is bad," he rejoined, with a frown. "There is always danger in opposing established monarchies, and in this case the Emperor of Brazil has the countenance of both Europe and America."

As I ventured no reply to this he paused, and again regarded me earnestly.

"I believe you are the very person, Robert, I should send de Pintra. He wishes me to secure for him a secretary whom he may trust implicitly. At present, he writes me, he is surrounded by the emperor's spies. Even the members of his own household may be induced to betray him. Indeed, I imagine my old friend in a very hot-bed of intrigue and danger. Yet he believes he could trust an

American who has no partiality for monarchies and no inducement to sympathize with any party but his own. Will you go, Robert?”

The question, abrupt though it was, did not startle me. Those accustomed to meet Nelson Harcliffe’s moods must think quickly. Still, I hesitated.

“Can you spare me, Uncle?”

“Not very well,” he admitted. “You have relieved me of many of the tedious details of business since you came home from college. But, for de Pintra’s sake, I am not only willing you should go, but I ask you, as a personal favor, to hasten to Rio and serve my friend faithfully, protecting him, so far as you may be able, from the dangers he is facing. You will find him a charming fellow – a noble man, indeed – and he needs just such a loyal assistant as I believe you will prove. Will you go, Robert?”

Uncle Nelson’s sudden proposal gave me a thrill of eager interest best explained by that fascinating word “danger.” Five minutes before I would have smiled at the suggestion that I visit a foreign country on so quixotic an errand; but the situation was, after all, as simple as it was sudden in development, and my uncle’s earnest voice and eyes emphasized his request in no uncertain manner. Would I go? Would I, a young man on the threshold of life, with pulses readily responding to the suggestion of excitement and adventure, leave my humdrum existence in a mercantile establishment to mingle in the intrigues of a nation striving to cast off the shackles of a monarchy and become free and independent? My answer was assured.

Nevertheless, we Harcliffes are chary of exhibiting emotion. Any eagerness on my part would, I felt, have seriously displeased my reserved and deliberate uncle. Therefore I occupied several minutes in staring thoughtfully through the open window before I finally swung around in my chair and answered:

“Yes, Uncle, I will go.”

“Thank you,” said he, a flush of pleasure spreading over his fine old face. Then he turned again to the letter in the blue envelope. “The Castina sails on Wednesday, I see, and Dom Miguel wishes his new secretary to go on her. Therefore you must interview Captain Lertine at once, and arrange for passage.”

“Very well, sir.”

I took my hat, returned my uncle’s grave bow, and left the office.

CHAPTER II

VALCOUR

The *Castina* was a Brazilian trading-ship frequently employed by the firm of Harcliffe Brothers to transport merchandise from New Orleans to Rio de Janeiro. I had formed a slight acquaintance with the master, Pedro Lertine, and was not surprised when he placed his own state-room at my disposal; for although the vessel usually carried passengers, the cabin accommodations were none of the best.

The Captain asked no questions concerning my voyage, contenting himself with the simple statement that he had often carried my father with him in the *Castina* in former years, and was now pleased to welcome the son aboard. He exhibited rare deference toward my uncle, Nelson Harcliffe, as the head of our firm, when the old gentleman came to the head of the levee to bid me good by; this Uncle Nelson did by means of a gentle pressure of my hand. I am told the Harcliffes are always remarkable for their reserve, and certainly the head of our house was an adept at repressing his emotions. Neither he nor my father, who had been his associate in founding the successful mercantile establishment, had ever cared to make any intimate friends; and for this reason the warmth of friendship evinced by Uncle Nelson in sending me on this peculiar mission to Dom Miguel de Pintra had caused me no little astonishment.

After his simple handshake my uncle walked back to his office, and I immediately boarded the *Castina* to look after the placing of my trunks. Before I had fairly settled myself in my cozy state-room we were under way and steaming down the river toward the open sea.

On deck I met a young gentleman of rather prepossessing personality who seemed quite willing to enter into conversation. He was a dark-eyed, handsome Brazilian, well dressed and of pleasing manners. His card bore the inscription, *Manuel Cortes de Guarde*. He expressed great delight at finding me able to speak his native tongue, and rendered himself so agreeable that we had soon established very cordial relations. He loved to talk, and I love to listen, especially when I am able to gather information by so doing, and de Guarde seemed to know Brazil perfectly, and to delight in describing it. I noticed that he never touched on politics, but from his general conversation I gleaned considerable knowledge of the country I was about to visit.

During dinner he chattered away continually in his soft Portuguese patois, and the other passengers, less than a dozen in number, seemed content to allow him to monopolize the conversation. I noticed that Captain Lertine treated de Guarde with fully as much consideration as he did me, while the other passengers he seemed to regard with haughty indifference. However, I made the acquaintance of several of my fellow-voyagers and found them both agreeable and intelligent.

I had promised myself a pleasant, quiet voyage to the shores of Brazil, but presently events began to happen with a rapidity that startled me. Indeed, it was not long before I received a plain intimation that I had embarked upon an adventure that might prove dangerous.

We were two days out, and the night fell close and warm. Finding my berth insufferably oppressive I arose about midnight, partially dressed, and went on deck to get whatever breeze might be stirring. It was certainly cooler than below, and reclining in the shadow beside a poop I had nearly succeeded in falling asleep when aroused by the voices of two men who approached and paused to lean over the taffrail. They proved to be Captain Lertine and de Guarde, and I was about to announce my presence when the mention of my own name caused me to hesitate.

“I cannot understand why you should suspect young Harcliffe,” the Captain said.

“Because, of all your passengers, he would be most fitted to act as de Pintra’s secretary,” was the reply. “And, moreover, he is a Harcliffe.”

“That’s just it, senhor,” declared the other; “he is a Harcliffe, and since his father’s death, one of the great firm of Harcliffe Brothers. It is absurd to think one of his position would go to Brazil to serve Miguel de Pintra.”

“Perhaps the adventure entices him,” returned de Guarde’s soft voice, in reflective tones. “He is but lately from college, and his uncle may wish him to know something of Brazil, where the greater part of the Harcliffe fortune has been made.”

“*Deus Meo!*” exclaimed the Captain; “but you seem to know everything about everybody, my dear Valcour! However, this suspicion of young Harcliffe is nonsense, I assure you. You must look elsewhere for the new secretary – provided, of course, he is on my ship.”

“Oh, he is doubtless on board,” answered de Guarde, with a low, confident laugh. “De Pintra’s letters asked that a man be sent on the first ship bound for Rio, and Nelson Harcliffe is known to act promptly in all business matters. Moreover, I have studied carefully the personality of each of your passengers, and none of them seems fitted for the post so perfectly as young Harcliffe himself. I assure you, my dear Lertine, that I am right. He can be going out for no other purpose than to assist de Pintra.”

The Captain whistled softly.

“Therefore?” he murmured.

“Therefore,” continued de Guarde, gravely, “it is my duty to prevent his reaching his destination.”

“You will have him arrested when we reach Rio?”

“Arrested? No, indeed. Those Americans at Washington become peevish if we arrest one of their citizens, however criminal he may be. The situation demands delicate treatment, and my orders are positive. Our new secretary for the revolution must not reach Rio.”

Again the Captain whistled – a vague melody with many false and uncertain notes. And the other remained silent.

Naturally I found the conversation most interesting, and no feeling of delicacy prevented my straining my ears to catch more of it. It was the Captain who broke the long silence.

“Nevertheless, my dear Valcour – ”

“De Guarde, if you please.”

“Nevertheless, de Guarde, our Mr. Harcliffe may be innocent, and merely journeying to Brazil on business.”

“I propose to satisfy myself on that point. Great God, man! do you think I love this kind of work – even for the Emperor’s protection? But my master is just, though forced at times to act with seeming cruelty. I must be sure that Harcliffe is going to Brazil as secretary to the rebel leader, and you must aid me in determining the fact. When our man goes to breakfast in the morning I will examine his room for papers. The pass-key is on the bunch you gave me, I suppose?”

“Yes, it is there.”

“Very well. Join your passengers at breakfast, and should Mr. Harcliffe leave the table on any pretext, see that I am duly warned.”

“Certainly, senhor.”

“And now I am going to bed. Good night, Lertine.”

“Good night, de Guarde.”

They moved cautiously away, and a few minutes later I followed, regaining my state-room without encountering any one.

Once in my bunk I lay revolving the situation in my mind. Evidently it was far from safe to involve one’s self in Brazilian politics. My friend Valcour, as the Captain had called him, was a spy of the Emperor, masquerading under the title of Senhor Manuel Cortes de Guarde. A clever fellow, indeed, despite his soft, feminine ways and innocent chatter, and one who regarded even murder as

permissible in the execution of his duty to Dom Pedro. It was the first time in my life I had been, to my knowledge, in any personal danger, and the sensation was rather agreeable than otherwise.

It astonished me to discover that de Guarde knew so perfectly the contents of Dom Miguel's letter to my uncle. Doubtless the secret police had read and made a copy of it before the blue envelope had been permitted to leave Brazil. But in that case, I could not understand why they had allowed the missive to reach its destination.

In his cool analysis of the situation, my friend the spy had unerringly hit upon the right person as the prospective secretary of the revolutionary leader. Yet he had no positive proof, and it was pleasant to reflect that in my possession were no papers of any sort that might implicate me. Uncle Nelson had even omitted the customary letter of introduction.

"De Pintra knew your father, and your face will therefore vouch for your identity," the old gentleman had declared. Others have remarked upon the strong resemblance I bear my father, and I had no doubt de Pintra would recognize me. But, in addition, I had stored in my memory a secret word that would serve as talisman in case of need.

The chances of my puzzling Dom Pedro's detective were distinctly in my favor, and I was about to rest content in that knowledge, when an idea took possession of me that promised so much amusement that I could not resist undertaking it. It may be that I was influenced by a mild chagrin at the deception practised upon me by de Guarde, or the repulsion that a secret-service man always inspires in the breast of a civilian. Anyway, I resolved to pit my wits against those of Senhor Valcour, and having formulated my plan I fell asleep and rested comfortably until daybreak.

It had been my habit to carry with me a pocket diary, inscribing therein any vivid impressions or important events that occurred to me. There were many blank pages, for my life had been rather barren of incident of late; but I had resolved to keep a record of this trip and for this purpose the little book was now lying upon the low shelf that served as table in my room.

Arising somewhat before my usual hour I made a hurried toilet and sat down to make entries in my diary. I stated that my sudden desire to visit Brazil was due to curiosity, and that my uncle had placed several minor business matters in my hands to attend to. My return to New Orleans would depend entirely upon how well I liked the country where our house had so successfully traded for a half-century. Arriving at this point, I added the following paragraphs:

"On the ship with me Uncle Nelson is sending a private secretary to Dom Miguel de Pintra, who, it seems, was an ancient customer of our house, but is now more interested in politics than in commerce. This secretary is a remarkable fellow, yet so placid and unassuming that no one is likely to suspect his mission. He seems to know everything, and has astonished me by his intimate knowledge of all that transpires upon the ship. For example, he tells me that my friend de Guarde, of whom I have already grown fond, is none other than a certain Valcour, well known in the secret service of his majesty the Emperor of Brazil. Valcour is on board because he knows the contents of a letter written by de Pintra to my uncle, asking for a shrewd American to become his private secretary; also Valcour is instructed to dispose of the rebel secretary before we land at Rio – meaning, of course, to murder him secretly. This seemingly horrible plot but amuses our secretary, for Valcour has only poor Captain Lertine to aid him, whereas the wonderful American has a following of desperate men trained to deeds of bloodshed who will obey his slightest nod. From what I learn I am confident the plan is to assassinate my friend Valcour in a secret manner, for here is a rare opportunity to rid themselves of a hated royalist spy. Poor de Guarde! I would like to warn him of his danger, but dare not. Even then, I doubt his ability to escape. The toils are closing about him, even while he innocently imagines that he, as the Emperor's agent, controls the situation. It would all be laughable, were it not so very terrible in its tragic aspect.

“But there! I must not mix with politics, but strive to hold aloof from either side. The secretary, though doubtless a marvel of diplomacy and duplicity, is too unscrupulous to suit me. He has actually corrupted the entire crew, from the engineers down, and at his word I am assured the fellows would mutiny and seize the ship. What chance has my poor friend de Guarde – or Valcour – to escape this demon? Yet, after all, it is not my affair, and I dare not speak.”

This entry I intended to puzzle Senhor Valcour, even if it failed to wholly deceive him. I wrote it with assumed carelessness, to render it uniform with the former paragraphs the book contained. These last were of a trivial nature, dating back for some months. They would interest no one but myself; yet I expected them to be read, for I left the diary lying upon my shelf, having first made a number of pin-marks in the paint, at the edges of the cover, so that I might assure myself, on my return to the room, whether or not the book had been disturbed.

This task completed, I locked the door behind me and cheerfully joined the breakfast party in the main cabin.

De Guarde was not present, but no one seemed to miss him, and we lingered long in light conversation over the meal, as it is the custom of passengers aboard a slow-going ship.

Afterward, when I went on deck, I discovered de Guarde leaning over the rail, evidently in deep thought. As I strolled past him, puffing my cigar, he turned around, and the sight of his face, white and stern, positively startled me. The soft dark eyes had lost their confident, merry look, and bore a trace of fear. No need to examine the pin-marks on my shelf. The Emperor’s spy had, without doubt, read the false entry in my diary, and it had impressed him beyond my expectation.

CHAPTER III

A GOOD REPUBLICAN

During the remainder of the voyage I had little intercourse with Senhor Manuel Cortes de Guarde. Indeed, I had turned the tables quite cleverly upon the spy, who doubtless imagined many dangers in addition to those indicated in my diary. For my part, I became a bit ashamed of the imposition I had practised, despite the fact that the handsome young Brazilian had exhibited a perfect willingness to assassinate me in the Emperor's interests. Attracted toward him in spite of my discoveries, I made several attempts to resume our former friendly intercourse; but he recoiled from my overtures and shunned my society. In order to impress upon de Guarde the truth of the assertions I had made in the diary I selected a young physician, a Dr. Neel, to impersonate the intriguing and bloodthirsty American secretary. He was a quiet, unobtrusive fellow, with an intelligent face, and a keen, inquiring look in his eyes. I took occasion to confide to Dr. Neel, in a mysterious manner that must have amused him, that I was afflicted with an incomprehensible disease. He promptly mistook me for a hypochondriac, and humored me in a good-natured fashion, so that we were frequently observed by de Guarde in earnest and confidential conversation. My ruse proved effective. Often I surprised a look of anxiety upon the Brazilian's face as he watched Dr. Neel from a distance; but de Guarde took pains not to mingle with any group that the physician made part of, and it was evident the detective had no longer any desire to precipitate a conflict during the voyage to Rio.

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I do not say that Valcour was cowardly. In his position I am positive I could not have escaped the doubts that so evidently oppressed him. He secluded himself in his state-room, under pretense of illness, as we drew nearer to Brazil, and I was considerably relieved to have him out of the way.

Captain Lertine, to whom Valcour had evidently confided his discovery of the diary, was also uneasy during those days, and took occasion to ask me many questions about Dr. Neel, which I parried in a way that tended to convince him that the physician was none other than the secret emissary sent by my uncle to Miguel de Pintra. The good Captain was nervous over the safety of the ship, telling me in a confidential way that nearly all his crew were new hands, and that he had no confidence in their loyalty to the Emperor.

His face bore an expression of great relief when we anchored in the bay of Rio de Janeiro on a clear June morning at daybreak, and no time was lost in transferring the passengers of the *Castina* to a small steam launch, which soon landed us and our effects upon the quay.

I had not seen Valcour since we anchored, but after bidding good by to Dr. Neel, who drove directly to his hotel, I caught a glimpse of the detective's eager face as he followed the doctor in a cab.

The whole affair struck me as being a huge joke, and the sensation of danger that I experienced on board the ship was dissolved by the bright sunshine and the sight of the great city calmly awakening and preparing for its usual daily round of business.

I dispatched my trunks to the Continental Railway station, and finding that I had ample time determined to follow them on foot, the long walk being decidedly grateful after the days on shipboard. Much as I longed to see the beauties of Brazil's famous capital, I dared not at this time delay to do so, as my uncle had impressed upon me the necessity of presenting myself to de Pintra as soon as possible after my arrival.

Another thing that influenced me was the deception that I had practised upon the detective. Valcour, with the Emperor at his back, was now a power to be reckoned with, and as soon as he discovered that I had misled him the police would doubtless be hot upon my trail. So my safest plan was to proceed at once to the province where my new chief had power to protect me.

I reached the railway station without difficulty and found I had a quarter of an hour to spare.

"Give me a ticket to Cuyaba," I said to the clerk at the window.

He stared at me as he handed the card through the grating.

"Matto Grosso train, senhor," he said. "It leaves at eight o'clock."

"Thank you," I returned, moving away.

A tall policeman in an odd uniform of black and gold barred my way.

"Your pardon, senhor Americano," said he, touching his visor in salute; "I beg you to follow me quietly."

He turned on his heel and marched away, and I, realizing that trouble had already overtaken me, followed him to the street.

A patrol was drawn up at the curb, a quaint-looking vehicle set low between four high wheels and covered with canvas. Startled at the sight I half turned, with a vague idea of escape, and confronted two stout policemen at my rear.

Resistance seemed useless. I entered the wagon, my captor seating himself upon the bench beside me. Instantly we whirled away at a rapid pace.

I now discerned two men, also in uniform, upon the front seat. One was driving the horses, and presently the other climbed over the seat and sat opposite my guard.

The tall policeman frowned.

"Why are you here, Marco?" he demanded, in a threatening voice.

"For this!" was the prompt answer; and with the words I caught a quick flash as the man called Marco buried a knife to the hilt in the other's breast.

My captor scarce uttered a sound as he pitched headforemost upon the floor of the now flying wagon. The driver had but given a glance over his shoulder and lashed his horses to their utmost speed.

Cold with horror at the revolting deed I gazed into the dark eyes of the murderer. He smiled as he answered my look and shrugged his shoulders as if excusing the crime.

"A blow for freedom, senhor!" he announced, in his soft, native patois. "Dom Miguel would be grieved were you captured by the police."

I started.

"Dom Miguel! You know him, then?"

"Assuredly, senhor. You are the new secretary. Otherwise you would not be so foolish as to demand a ticket to Cuyaba – the seat of the revolution."

"I begin to understand," I said, after a moment's thought. "You are of the police?"

"Sergeant Marco, senhor; at your service. And I have ventured to kill our dear lieutenant in order to insure your safety. I am sorry," he added, gently touching the motionless form that lay between us; "the lieutenant was a good comrade – but a persistent royalist."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked.

"To a suburban crossing, where you may catch the Matto Grosso train."

"And you?"

"I? I am in no danger, senhor. It is you who have done this cruel deed – and you will escape. The driver – a true patriot – will join me in accusing you."

I nodded, my horror of the tragedy growing each moment. Truly this revolutionary party must be formed of desperate and unscrupulous men, who hesitated at no crime to advance their interests. If the royalists were but half so cruel I had indeed ventured into a nest of adders. And it was the thought of Valcour's confessed purpose to murder me on shipboard that now sealed my lips from a protest against this deed that was to be laid upon my shoulders.

Presently the wagon slowed up, stopping with a jerk that nearly threw me from my seat. The sergeant alighted and assisted me to follow him.

We were at a deserted crossing, and the buildings of the city lay scattered a quarter of a mile away.

"Take this flag, senhor. The engineer will stop to let you aboard. Farewell, and kindly convey my dutiful respects to Dom Miguel."

As the wagon rolled away the train came gliding from the town, and I stepped between the tracks and waved the flag as directed. The engine slowed down, stopped a brief instant, and I scrambled aboard as the train recovered speed and moved swiftly away.

For the present, at least, I was safe.

Quite unobtrusively I seated myself in the rear end of the passenger coach and gazed from the window as we rushed along, vainly endeavoring to still the nervous beating of my heart and to collect and center my thoughts upon the trying situation in which I found myself. Until the last hour I had been charmed with my mission to Brazil, imagining much pleasure in acting as secretary to a great political leader engaged in a struggle for the freedom of his country. The suggestion of danger my post involved had not frightened me, nor did it even now; but I shrank from the knowledge that cold-blooded assassination was apparently of little moment to these conspirators. In less than two hours after landing at Rio I found myself fleeing from the police, with a foul and revolting murder fastened upon me in the name of the revolution! Where would it all end? Did Uncle Nelson thoroughly realize the terrible nature of the political plot into which he had so calmly thrust me? Probably not. But already I knew that Brazil was a dangerous country and sheltered a hot-headed and violent people.

It was a long and dreary ride as we mounted the grade leading to the tablelands of the interior. Yet the country was beautifully green and peaceful under the steady glare of the sun, and gradually my distress passed away and left me more composed.

Neither the passengers nor trainmen paid the slightest attention to me, and although at first I looked for arrest at every station where we halted, there was no indication that the police of Rio had discovered my escape and flight.

Night came at last, and I dozed fitfully during the long hours, although still too nervous for sound sleep. We breakfasted at a way-station, and a couple of hours later, as I was gazing thoughtfully out the window, the conductor aroused me by settling into the seat at my side. He was a short, pudgy individual, and wheezed asthmatically with every breath.

"I received a telegram at the last station," he confided to me, choking and coughing between the words. "It instructed me to arrest an American senhor traveling to Cuyaba. Have you seen him?"

I shivered, and stared back into his dull eyes.

"Ah! I thought not," he continued, with a short laugh. "It is not the first telegram they have sent this trip from Rio, you know; but I cannot find the fellow anywhere aboard. Do you wonder? How can I be expected to distinguish an American from a Brazilian? Bah! I am not of the police."

I began to breathe again. The conductor nudged my ribs with his elbow.

"These police will perhaps be at the station. Cuyaba is the next stop. But we will slow up, presently, at a curve near the edge of the forest. Were I the American, and aboard this train, I would get out there, and wait among the trees in the forest until Dom Miguel's red cart comes along. But, *ai de mim*, the American is not here! Eh? Thank God for it! But I must leave, senhor. Good day to you."

He bustled away, and at once I seized my traveling-bag and slipped out to the back platform. We slowed up at the curve a moment later, and I sprang to the ground and entered the shade of a group of trees that marked the edge of the little forest.

And there I sat upon a fallen tree-trunk for two weary hours, wondering what would happen next, and wishing with all my heart I had never ventured into this intrigue-ridden country. But at the end of that time I heard the rattle of a wagon and the regular beat of a horse's feet.

Peering from my refuge I discerned a red cart slowly approaching over the road that wound between the railway track and the forest. It was driven by a sleepy Brazilian boy in a loose white blouse and a wide straw hat.

As he arrived opposite me I stepped out and hailed him.

"Are you from Dom Miguel de Pintra?" I asked.

He nodded.

"I am the American he is expecting," I continued, and climbed to the seat beside him. He showed no surprise at my action, nor, indeed, any great interest in the meeting; but as soon as I was seated he whipped up the horse, which developed unexpected speed, and we were soon rolling swiftly over the country road.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHIEFTAIN

The province of Matto Grosso is very beautiful, the residences reminding one greatly of English country estates, except that their architecture is on the stiff Portuguese order. At least a half-mile separated the scattered mansions from one another, and the grounds were artistically planned and seemingly well cared for. At this season the rich, luxuriant foliage of Brazil was at its best, and above all brooded a charming air of peace that was extremely comforting after my late exciting experiences. We met few people on the way, and these were peasants, who touched their hats respectfully as we passed.

We had driven some five miles when we came to an estate rather more extensive than its neighbors, for the hedge of blooming cactus that divided the grounds from the roadway ran in an unbroken line as far as the eye could reach.

However, we came to a gateway at last and turned into the grounds, where magnificent trees shaded a winding drive ascending to the fine old mansion of de Pintra.

A man stood upon the porch shading his eyes with his hand and gazing at us as we approached. When I alighted from the cart he came down the steps to meet me, bowing very courteously, and giving my hand a friendly pressure. No other person was in sight, and the red cart had disappeared around the corner of the house.

“You are welcome, sir,” he said, in a quiet but most agreeable voice. “You come from my friend Nelson Harcliffe? That was my thought.” He paused to give me a keen look, and then smiled – a sweet, winning smile such as I have seldom seen. “Ah! may you not be a Harcliffe yourself? Your features seem quite familiar. But, pardon me, sir; I have not introduced myself. I am Miguel de Pintra.”

I fear I stared at him with somewhat rude intentness, for Dom Miguel was a man to arouse interest in any beholder. Tall, spare, but not ungraceful, his snow-white hair and beard made strong contrast with his bronzed features. His eyes, soft and gentle in expression, were black. His smile, which was not frequent, disclosed a line of even, white teeth. His dress was a suit of plain, well-fitting black, supplemented by irreproachable linen. Taken altogether, Dom Miguel appeared a model of the old school of gentility, which may be as quickly recognized in Brazil as in England, France or America. Indeed, it seemed an absurdity to connect this eminently respectable personage with revolutions, murders, and intrigue, and my spirits rose the moment I set eyes upon his pleasant face.

“I am Robert Harcliffe,” said I, answering the question his politeness would not permit him to ask; “the son of Marshall Harcliffe.”

A flash of surprise and delight swept over his dark face. He seized both my hands in his own.

“What!” he cried, “Nelson Harcliffe has sent me his own nephew, the son of my dear old friend? This is, indeed, a rare expression of loyalty!”

“I thought you knew,” I rejoined, rather embarrassed, for the fathomless eyes were reading me with singular eagerness.

“I only knew that Nelson Harcliffe would respond promptly to my requests. I knew that the Castina would bring my secretary to Brazil. But whom he might be I could not even guess.” He paused a moment, to continue in a graver tone: “I am greatly pleased. I need a friend – a faithful assistant.”

“I hope I may prove to be both, sir,” I returned, earnestly. “But you seem not to lack loyal friends. On my way hither from Rio de Janeiro I have been protected more than once, doubtless by your orders.”

“Yes; the cause has many true adherents, and I notified our people to expect an American gentleman on the Castina and to forward him to me in safety. They know, therefore, that you came to

assist the Revolution, and it would have been strange, indeed, had the royalists been able to interfere with you.”

“Your party is more powerful than I had suspected,” I remarked, thinking of my several narrow escapes from arrest.

“We are only powerful because the enemy is weak,” answered Dom Miguel, with a sigh. “Neither side is ready for combat, or even an open rupture. It is now the time of intrigue, of plot and counterplot, of petty conspiracies and deceptions. These would discourage any honest heart were not the great Cause behind it all – were not the struggle for freedom and our native land! But come; you are weary. Let me show you to your room, Robert Harcliffe.”

He dwelt upon the name with seeming tenderness, and I began to understand why my father and my stern Uncle Nelson had both learned to love this kindly natured gentleman of Brazil.

He led me through cool and spacious passages to a cozy room on the ground floor, which, he told me, connected by a door with his study or work-room.

“I fear my trunks have been seized by the government,” said I, and then related to him the details of my arrest and the assassination of the police lieutenant.

He listened to the story calmly and without interruption; but when it was finished he said:

“All will be reported to me this evening, and then we will see whether your baggage cannot be saved. There were no papers that might incriminate you?”

“None whatever.”

Then I gave him the story of Valcour, or de Guarde, and he smiled when I related the manner in which the fellow had been deceived.

“I knew that Valcour had been dispatched to intercept my secretary,” said he, “and you must know that this personage is not an ordinary spy, but attached to the Emperor himself as a special detective. Hereafter,” he continued, reflectively, “the man will be your bitter enemy; and although you have outwitted him once he is a foe not to be despised. Indeed, Harcliffe, your post is not one of much security. If, when I have taken you fully into our confidence, you decide to link your fortunes to those of the Revolution, it will be with the full knowledge that your life may be the forfeit. But there – we will speak no more of business until after dinner.”

He left me, then, with many cordial expressions of friendship.

A servant brought my luncheon on a tray, and after eating it I started for a stroll through the grounds, enjoying the fragrance and brilliance of the flowers, the beauties of the shrubbery, and the stately rows of ancient trees. The quiet of the place suggested nothing of wars and revolutions, and it was with real astonishment that I reflected that this establishment was the central point of that conspiracy whose far-reaching power had been so vividly impressed upon me.

Engaged in this thought I turned the corner of a hedge and came face to face with a young girl, who recoiled in surprise and met my gaze with a sweet embarrassment that caused me to drop my own eyes in confusion.

“Your pardon, senhorita!” I exclaimed, and stood aside for her to pass.

She nodded, still searching my face with her clear eyes, but making no movement to proceed. I noted the waves of color sweeping over her fair face and the nervous tension of the little hands that pressed a mass of flowers to her bosom. Evidently she was struggling for courage to address me; so I smiled at her, reassuringly, and again bowed in my best manner, for I was not ill pleased at the encounter.

I have always had a profound reverence for woman – especially those favored ones to whom Nature has vouchsafed beauty in addition to the charm of womanhood. And here before me stood the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, a type of loveliness more sweet and delightful than any I had even dreamed could exist.

It was my fate to recognize this in the moments that I stood watching her lips tremble in the endeavor to form her first words to me.

“You are the American?” she asked, finally.

“Assuredly, donzella. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Robert Harcliffe.”

“My uncle expected you,” she said, shyly.

“Your uncle?”

“Dom Miguel is not really my uncle,” answered the girl; “but he permits me to call him so, since he is my guardian. Yet it was not from him I learned of your arrival, but from Francisco, who traveled from Rio on the same train.”

My face doubtless showed that I was puzzled, for she added, quickly:

“Francisco is my brother, senhor. We are both devoted heart and soul to the Cause. That is why I felt that I must speak with you, why I must welcome you to our fellowship, why I must implore you to be strong and steadfast in our behalf!”

I smiled at the vehemence that had vanquished her former hesitation, and to my delight her exquisite face lighted with an answering smile.

“Ah, you may laugh at me with impunity, senhor Americano, for I have intuitions, and they tell me you will be faithful to the cause of freedom. Nay, do not protest. It is enough that I have read your face.”

With this she made a pretty courtesy and vanished around the hedge before I could summon a word to detain her.

It is astonishing to what an extent this encounter aroused my enthusiasm for “the Cause.” Heretofore I had regarded it rather impersonally, as an affair in which I had engaged at the request of my good uncle. But now that I had met this fellow-conspirator and gazed into the enchanting depths of her eyes, I was tremendously eager to prove my devotion to the cause of freedom.

True, I had seen the girl but a few moments. Even her name was unknown to me. But she was a rebel; Francisco, her brother, was a rebel; and Dom Miguel permitted her to call him “uncle.” Very good; very good, indeed!

When I returned to my room I was surprised to find my trunks there, they having arrived in some mysterious way during my brief absence.

I dressed for dinner and found my way to the drawing-room, where my host – or my employer, rather – was conversing with a lady and a gentleman.

There was no reason my heart should give that bound to warn me; no one could fail to recognize that slender, graceful figure, although it was now enveloped in dainty folds of soft white mulle. But she had no intention of allowing her chance meeting to stand for a formal introduction, and as Dom Miguel presented me she shot a demure yet merry glance at me from beneath her long lashes that might readily have effected my conquest had I not already surrendered without discretion.

“The Senhorita Lesba Paola,” announced de Pintra, speaking the name with evident tenderness. Then he turned to the man. “Senhor Francisco Paola,” said he.

Francisco Paola puzzled me at that first meeting nearly as much as he did later. His thin form was dressed in a dandified manner that was almost ludicrous, and the fellow’s affectation was something amazing. Somewhat older than his bewitching sister, his features were not without a sort of effeminate beauty, of which he seemed fully aware. At once I conceived him to be a mere popinjay, and had no doubt he would prove brainless and well-nigh insufferable. But Dom Miguel introduced Paola with grave courtesy and showed him so much deference that I could not well be ungracious to the young dandy. Moreover, he had a stronger claim to my toleration: he was Lesba’s brother.

Scarcely were these introductions complete when another lady entered the room. She gave a slight start at sight of me, and then advanced gracefully to Dom Miguel’s side.

“My daughter, Mr. Harcliffe; Senhora Izabel de Mar,” said he, and gave me a curious glance that I could not understand.

I looked at Madam Izabel and lowered my eyes before the cold and penetrating stare I encountered. She was handsome enough, this woman; but her features, however regular, were

repellant because of their absolute lack of expression – a lack caused by repression more than a want of mobility. Her face seemed carved of old ivory. Even the great eyes were impenetrable, reflecting nothing of the emotions that might dwell within. I found myself shivering, and although I sincerely tried to be agreeable to Dom Miguel's daughter, the result was little more than farcical.

My sudden appearance in the household had evidently caused Madam Izabel surprise; perhaps it annoyed her, as well. But she drew me to a seat beside her and plied me with questions which I was at a loss how to answer, in view of the supposedly private nature of my mission to Brazil. Inwardly I blamed Dom Miguel for not telling me how far his daughter and his guests were in his confidence; but before I blundered more than a few aimless sentences a light voice interrupted us and Francisco Paola leaned over Madam Izabel's chair with a vapid compliment on the lady's charms and personal appearance that was fairly impertinent in its flippancy.

The look she gave him would have silenced an ordinary man; but Senhor Francisco smiled at her frown, took the fan from her hand, and wielded it in a mincing manner, pouring into her unwilling ears a flood of nonsense that effectually cut me out of the conversation.

Dom Miguel came to my relief by requesting me to take the younger lady in to dinner, and to my surprise Madam Izabel took Paola's arm without apparent reluctance and followed us to the dining-room.

The repast would have been, I fear, rather stupid, but for Senhor Francisco's ceaseless chatter. To my great disappointment the donzella Lesba Paola appeared exceedingly shy, and I could scarce recognize in her my eager questioner of the afternoon. De Pintra, indeed, courteously endeavored to draw the ladies into a general conversation; but his daughter was cold and unresponsive, and the host himself appeared to be in a thoughtful mood. For my part, I was glad to have the fop monopolize the conversation, while I devoted my attention to the silent girl beside me; but it was evident that a general feeling of relief prevailed when the ladies returned to the drawing-room and left us to our cigars and wine.

When the servants had been dismissed and we three men were alone, Dom Miguel addressed me with unrestrained frankness.

"I suppose you know little of our revolutionary movement, Mr. Harcliffe," he began.

"Very little, indeed," I responded, briefly.

"It dates back for several years, but has only recently attained to real importance. Gradually our people, of all degrees, have awakened to the knowledge that they must resist the tyranny of the imperial government, with its horde of selfish and unscrupulous retainers. The Emperor is honest enough, but weak, and his advisors leave him no exercise of his own royal will. Spurred by the nation's distress, the Revolution has at last taken definite form, and at present centers in me. But as our strength grows our danger increases. The existing government, knowing itself threatened, has become keen to ferret out our secrets and to discover the leaders of the Cause, that they may crush all with one blow." He paused, and flicked the ash from his cigar with a thoughtful gesture. "For this, and many another reason, I need the assistance of a secretary whom I may trust implicitly – who will, if need be, die rather than betray my confidence."

I glanced hesitatingly at the man opposite me. It seemed strange that Dom Miguel should speak of these personal matters before a third party.

Paola was trying to balance a spoon upon the edge of his glass. He met my gaze with the usual vacant smile upon his face, yet in the instant I caught a gleam in his eye so shrewd and comprehensive that it positively startled me. Instantly his face was shrouded in a cloud of smoke from his cigar, and when it cleared away the idiotic leer that appeared upon his countenance indicated anything rather than intelligence.

Dom Miguel looked from one to the other of us and smiled.

“Perhaps I should tell you,” said he, earnestly, “that no man is higher in our counsels or more thoroughly esteemed by all classes of patriots than Francisco Paola. You may speak in his presence with entire freedom.”

At this the popinjay twisted the end of his moustache and bowed with mock dignity. I stared at him with an astonishment tinged with disgust. His eyes were now glassy and his gaze vacuous. The eternal smile expressed merely stupidity and conceit.

I turned to Dom Miguel, who gravely awaited my reply.

“Sir,” said I, “you are my father’s old friend. My uncle, who was my father’s partner and is now my own associate in business, sent me to you with the injunction to serve you to the best of my ability. This, by way of gratitude for many favors shown our house by you in the days when a friend counted largely for success. Being an American, I love freedom. Your cause shall be my cause while I remain with you. Of my power to serve you there may be question; but my loyalty you need never doubt.”

Dom Miguel reached across the table and grasped my hand warmly. Paola poured himself a glass of wine and drank to me with a nod of his head.

“When first I saw you,” said de Pintra, with emotion, “I knew we had gained a strong ally, and God knows we need trustworthy friends at this juncture. The great Revolution, which is destined some day to sweep Brazil from Para to Rio Grande do Sul, is now in my keeping. In my possession are papers wherein are inscribed the names of the patriots who have joined our Cause; to me has been intrusted the treasure accumulated for years to enable us to carry out our plans. Even those plans – carefully formulated and known to but a few of my associates, the trusted leaders – are confided to my care. I cannot risk a betrayal that would imperil the Revolution itself and destroy all those concerned in it, by employing for secretary a Brazilian, who might become a spy of Dom Pedro, or be frightened by threats and imprisonment.”

Leaning forward, he regarded me earnestly. His eyes, so gentle in repose, now searched my own with fierce intensity.

“I cannot even trust my own household,” he whispered; “my own flesh and blood has been suspected of treason to the Cause. There are spies everywhere, of both sexes, among the lowly and the gentle. So I accept your services, Robert Harcliffe, and thank you in the name of the Revolution.”

It was all rather theatric, but I could not question the sincerity of his speech, and it succeeding in impressing me with the gravity of my new position.

“Come,” said Paola, breaking the tense pause, “let us rejoin the ladies.”

Five minutes later he was at the piano, carolling a comic ditty, and I again wondered what element this seemingly brazen and hollow vessel might contain that could win the respect of a man like Miguel de Pintra. Evidently I must, to some extent, glean a definite knowledge of the Revolution and its advocates through a process of absorption. This would require time, as well as personal contact with Dom Miguel and his confrères, and my only hope of mastering the situation lay in a careful study of each personage I met and a cautious resistance of any temptation to judge them hastily. Nevertheless, this mocking, irrepressible Francisco Paola had from the first moment of his acquaintance become an astounding puzzle to me, and so far I could see no indication of any depths to his character that could explain the esteem in which he was held by the chief.

But now his sister’s sweet, upturned face drew me to her side, and I straightway forgot to dwell upon the problem.

CHAPTER V

MADAM IZABEL

I slept well in my pleasant room, but wakened early, the bright sunshine pouring in at my open window and the songs of many birds sounding a lively chorus.

After a simple toilet I sprang through a low window to the ground and wandered away among the flowers and shrubbery. It was in my thoughts to revisit the scene of my first meeting with Lesba, but I had no hope of finding her abroad at that hour until I caught a glimpse of her white gown through a small arbor. The vision enchanted me, and after pausing a moment to feast my eyes upon her loveliness, I hastily approached to find her cutting roses for the breakfast-table. She greeted me in her shy manner, but in a way that made me feel I was not intruding. After a few conventional remarks she asked, abruptly:

“How do you like Dom Miguel?”

“Very much,” said I, smiling at her eagerness. “He seems eminently worthy of the confidence reposed in him by his compatriots.”

“He is a born leader of men,” she rejoined, brightly, “and not a rebel of us all would hesitate to die for him. How do you like my brother?”

I was sorry she asked the question, for its abruptness nearly took my breath away, and I did not wish to grieve her. To gain time I laughed, and was answered with a frown that served to warn me.

“Really, donzella,” I made haste to say, “if I must be quite frank, your brother puzzles me. But I think I shall like him when I understand him better.”

She shook her head as if disappointed.

“No one ever understands Francisco but me,” she returned, regretfully.

“Does he understand himself?” I foolishly asked.

The girl looked at me with a gleam of contempt.

“Sir, my brother’s services are recognized throughout all Brazil. Even Fonseca respects his talents, and the suspicious Piexoto trusts him implicitly. Francisco’s intimate friends positively adore him! Ah, senhor, it is not necessary for his sister to sing his praises.”

I bowed gravely.

“Let me hope, donzella, that your brother will soon count me among his intimates.” It was the least I could say in answer to the pleading look in her eyes, and to my surprise it seemed to satisfy her, for she blushed with pleasure.

“I am sure he likes you already,” she announced; “for he told me so as he bade me good by this morning.”

“Your brother has gone away?”

“He started upon his return to court an hour ago.”

“To court!” I exclaimed, amazed at his audacity.

She seemed amused.

“Did you not know, senhor? Francisco Paola is Dom Pedro’s Minister of Police.”

I acknowledged that the news surprised me. That the Emperor’s Minister of Police should be a trusted leader of the Revolutionary party seemed incomprehensible; but I had already begun to realize that extraordinary conditions prevailed in Brazil. Perhaps the thing that caused me most astonishment was that this apparently conceited and empty-headed fellow had ever been selected for a post so important as Minister of Police. Yet the fact explained clearly how I had received secret protection from the moment of my landing at Rio until I had joined Dom Miguel.

The girl was laughing at me now, and her loveliness made me resolve not to waste more of these precious moments in political discussion. She was nothing loath to drop the subject, and soon

we were chattering merrily of the flowers and birds, the dewdrops and the sunshine, and all those inconsequent things that are wont to occupy youthful lips while hearts beat fast and glances shyly mingle. When, at length, we sauntered up the path to breakfast I had forgotten the great conspiracy altogether, and congratulated myself cordially upon the fact that Lesba and I were well on the way to becoming good friends.

Madam Izabel did not appear at the morning meal, and immediately it was over Dom Miguel carried me to his study, where he began to acquaint me thoroughly with the standing and progress of the proposed revolution, informing me, meantime, of my duties as secretary.

While we were thus occupied the door softly opened and Izabel de Mar entered.

She cast an odd glance in my direction, bowed coldly to her father, and then seated herself at a small table littered with papers.

A cloud appeared upon Dom Miguel's brow. He hesitated an instant, and then addressed her in a formal tone.

"I shall not need you to-day, Izabel."

She turned upon him with a fierce gesture.

"The letters to Piexoto are not finished, sir," she exclaimed.

"I know, Izabel; I know. But Mr. Harcliffe will act as my secretary, hereafter; therefore he will attend to these details."

She rose to her feet, her eyes flashing, but her face as immobile as ever.

"I am discharged?" she demanded.

"Not that, Izabel," he hastened to reply. "Your services have been of inestimable value to the Cause. But they are wearing out your strength, and some of our friends thought you were too closely confined and needed rest. Moreover, a man, they considered –"

"Enough!" said she, proudly. "To me it is a pleasure to toil in the cause of freedom. But my services, it seems, are not agreeable to your leaders – rather, let us say, to that sly and treacherous spy, Francisco Paola!"

His face grew red, and I imagined he was about to reply angrily; but the woman silenced him with a wave of her hand.

"O, I know your confidence in the Emperor's Minister, my father; a confidence that will lead you all to the hangman, unless you beware! But why should I speak? I am not trusted, it seems; I, the daughter of de Pintra, who is chief of the Revolution. This foreigner, whose heart is cold in our Cause, is to take my place. Very well. I will return to the court – to my husband."

"Izabel!"

"Do not fear. I will not betray you. If betrayal comes, look to your buffoon, the Minister of Police; look to your cold American!"

She pointed at me with so scornful a gesture that involuntarily I recoiled, for the attack was unexpected. Then my lady stalked from the room like a veritable queen of tragedy.

Dom Miguel drew a sigh of relief as the door closed, and rubbed his forehead vigorously with his handkerchief.

"That ordeal is at last over," he muttered; "and I have dreaded it like a coward. Listen, senhor! My daughter, whose patriotism is not well understood, has been suspected by some of my associates. She has a history, has Izabel – a sad history, my friend." For a moment Dom Miguel bowed his face in his hands, and when he raised his head again the look of pained emotion upon his features lent his swarthy skin a grayish tinge.

"Years ago she loved a handsome young fellow, one Leon de Mar – of French descent, who is even now a favorite with the Emperor," he resumed. "Against my wishes she married him, and her life at the court proved a most unhappy one. De Mar is a profligate, a rake, a gamester, and a scoundrel. He made my daughter suffer all the agonies of hell. But she uttered no complaint and I knew nothing of her sorrow. At last, unable to bear longer the scorn and abuse of her husband, Izabel

came to me and confessed the truth, asking me to give her the shelter of a home. That was years ago, senhor. I made her my secretary, and found her eager to engage in our patriotic conspiracy. It is my belief that she has neither seen nor heard from de Mar since; but others have suspected her. It is hard indeed, Robert, not to be suspicious in this whirlpool of intrigue wherein we are engulfed. A few weeks ago Paola swore that he found Izabel in our garden at midnight engaged in secret conversation with that very husband from whom she had fled. I have no doubt he was deceived; but he reported it to the Secret Council, which instructed me to confide no further secrets to my daughter, and to secure a new secretary as soon as possible. Hence my application to your uncle, and your timely arrival to assist me.”

He paused, while I sat thoughtfully considering his words.

“I beg that you will not wrong my daughter with hasty suspicions,” he continued, pleadingly. “I do not wish you to confide our secrets to her, since I have myself refrained from doing so, out of respect for the wishes of my associates. But do not misjudge Izabel, my friend. When the time comes for action she will be found a true and valuable adherent to the Cause. And now, let us to work!”

I found it by no means difficult to become interested in the details of the plot to overthrow the Emperor Dom Pedro and establish a Brazilian Republic. It was amazing how many great names were enrolled in the Cause and how thoroughly the spirit of freedom had corrupted the royal army, the court, and even the Emperor’s trusted police. And I learned, with all this, to develop both admiration and respect for the man whose calm judgment had so far directed the mighty movement and systematized every branch of the gigantic conspiracy. Truly, as my fair Lesba had said, Dom Miguel de Pintra was “a born leader of men.”

Night after night there assembled at his house groups of conspirators who arrived secretly and departed without even the servants having knowledge of their visit. During the counsels every approach to the house was thoroughly guarded to ward against surprise.

Strong men were these republican leaders; alert, bold, vigilant in serving the Cause wherein they risked their lives and fortunes. One by one I came to know and admire them, and they spoke freely in my presence and trusted me. Through my intercourse with these champions of liberty, my horizon began to broaden, thus better fitting me for my duties.

Francisco Paola, the Emperor’s Minister, came frequently to the conferences of the Secret Council. Always he seemed as simpering, frivolous, and absurd as on the day I first met him. To his silly jokes and inconsequent chatter none paid the slightest attention; but when a real problem arose and they turned questioning to Paola, he would answer in a few lightly spoken words that proved at once shrewd and convincing. The others were wont to accept his decisions with gravity and act upon them.

I have said that Paola impressed me as being conceited. This might well be true in regard to his personal appearance, his social accomplishments – playing the piano and guitar, singing, riding, and the like – but I never heard him speak lightly of the Cause or boast of his connection with it. Indeed, he exhibited a queer mingling of folly and astuteness. His friends appeared to consider his flippancy and self-adulation as a mask that effectually concealed his real talents. Doubtless the Emperor had the same idea when he made the fellow his Minister of Police. But I, studying the man with fervid interest, found it difficult to decide whether the folly was a mask, or whether Paola had two natures – the second a sub-conscious intelligence upon which he was able to draw in a crisis.

He certainly took no pains to impress any one favorably, and his closest friends were, I discovered, frequently disgusted by his actions.

From the first my judgment of the man had been influenced by his sister’s enthusiastic championship. Lesba seemed fully in her brother’s confidence, and although she was not a recognized member of the conspiracy, I found that she was thoroughly conversant with every detail of our progress. This information must certainly have come from Francisco, and as I relied absolutely upon

Lesba's truth and loyalty, her belief in her brother impressed me to the extent of discrediting Madam Izabel's charge that he was a traitor.

Nevertheless, Paola had acted villainously in thrusting this same charge upon a woman. What object, I wondered, could he have in accusing Izabel to her own father, in falsely swearing that he had seen her in conversation with Leon de Mar – the man from whose ill treatment she had fled?

Madam Izabel had not returned to the court, as she had threatened in her indignant anger. Perhaps she realized what it would mean to place herself again within the power of the husband she had learned to hate and despise. She still remained an inmate of her father's mansion, cold and impassive as ever. Dom Miguel treated her with rare consideration on every occasion of their meeting, seeking to reassure her as to his perfect faith in her loyalty and his sorrow that his associates had cast a slur upon her character.

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