

ter!" And a tiger-cat up the cañon answers it, thinking it is the howl of his mate, cubbing in her cave.

The Tagal and the Chinaman, not daring to press Chaco's mercy farther, have disappeared. Maud's heart is beating as if it would force its way from her bosom. She stands shuddering but deathly calm—to be made a widow.

From out the gloom of the forest night comes faintly to her the hoarse-voiced Spanish command: "*Apunten!*"

"*Mörder!*" This is a German howl.

"*Fuego!*"

On the breeze floats the rattle of Mausers and an unearthly shriek!

The girl claps her hand to her heart, gives a kind of gasp: "Philip!"

Two minutes afterwards, Chaco standing before her, doffs his sombrero and says: "Dear lady, I have the honor to announce you divorced by court-martial! How long will you wear mourning?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"DEAR ONE, YOU LOOK NOT ON MY DYING FACE!"

BUT Maud answers this only by a plaintive cry and shudders: "Not now! Within this hour, I have had a lifetime's suffering. Take me in the house, but don't let them know that Ludenbaum is dead."

"But he is!" says Chaco grimly. "They are burying him beneath the big fig tree;" then suddenly pauses and mutters: "*Dios*, curious how so many women shrink at thought of blood." For the girl has reeled and fallen fainting.

In his arms, as he bears her to the house, her lips are at his mercy, but are sacred to him; for this man has the old-fashioned Don Quixote way of regarding the lady of his heart. Perchance as he looks upon the wondrous loveliness of the fair face and feels the glorious contours of the exquisite form he carries, the temptation would be too great, did not some words murmured hysterically reach his ears, that make him shiver and cry out: "*Car-*

amba! who is this Filipino Marston? *Diablo*, have I another man to kill?"

But having aroused the sleepy household, most of whom have been awake but have not dared to venture out with Spanish troops in sight, and have lain tremblingly in their hammocks, Chaco gives his orders very sharply as they come towards him: "Arouse the sister of this lady; also that German woman! Tell them to revive the mistress of this house, Doña Ludenbaum."

"Her husband, Herr Adolph?" questions the Teuton governess in sleepy voice, as she comes upon the veranda.

"Oh, the Dutchman went first to the cock-fight, I believe, and from there journeys to San Isidro; thence to Manila. He had a letter, this mercantile man, and for a time leaves his bride for care of commerce."

"But the awful noises that I heard?" asks Mazie, getting her sister in her arms. "Those cries, those shots! and Maud fainting?"

"Oh, *por Dios*, we rounded up a Tagal conspirator and a Chinese rebel. Did you hear the poor devils crying as I gave orders for the firing party? *Diablo*, your sister doesn't love blood as well as I do. She fainted when she saw me shoot the men. Take good care of Doña Maud, Señorita Mazie. Tell her, her most obedient servant Roberto Chaco will call to-morrow to ask her commands and wishes."

So with one longing look at his love, whose blue eyes have opened dreamily under her sister's caresses and attentions, Chaco mutters: "*Buenas noches*, Señoritas," and makes a stiff military bow. A moment later he cries to little Zima, who has crept out of some tamarind bushes from which she had viewed the doings of the night, "*Aquí*, Negra! Here's a *peso* for your swift feet. Come hither!"

And the girl going to him as he sits in his saddle he leans down and whispers: "No word of this to any one on earth. If you open your mouth Chaco cuts off your tongue!" and rides away, followed by his men, save some half-dozen that he leaves under Corporal Sanchez to keep order on the premises.

The next day Chaco is back again, and striding up to the bamboo balcony, finds the widow of his hands looking lovely, as all widows should—despite herself! For now

Maud, having used her beauty to gain her safety from one man, sees in it danger from another, and would wish to be as ugly in Chaco's eyes as the veriest hag. Unfortunately for her, nature and even herself rebel against this. Daintily robed in soft white tissues, with anxious half-appealing eyes, she looks lovely enough for any man to sacrifice upon love's altar.

Still her words are very grateful. She extends her white hand for him to place his lips upon. She murmurs: "I heard what you said last night to the servants. I have acted upon it. I am still considered the wife of Ludenbaum, not his widow. I have put that German woman in her place. She knows I am head of the household. I have told her my sister will study with her, but not the German language, for I hate its sound. Mazie must have something to do to keep her from going crazy. She loves an Englishman who has been cut off from her. Help me to make the child's life bearable in this lonely place."

"Apropos of love, dear lady," remarks Chaco, his eyes lighting up, "you answered not my question last evening. How long do you wear mourning?"

To this covert suggestion, Maud flutters bashfully: "At—at least three months. I should be criticised if I didn't mourn for him for three months *after* the world knows that he is dead; which must not be immediately."

"*Caramba*, why not?"

"Because neither you nor I dare let the news of this man's death get to Manila. Ludenbaum was all he declared himself to be, the friend of the Captain-General, the intimate of all the leading officials of the capital. The German Consul will send up a cry for warships if he knows this merchant's death came by your Spanish firing party. It was even as half German agent he imported the arms for which you shot him."

"*Madre de Dios*, how all nations want the last islands left poor Spain," says Chaco sadly; then adds: "No breath of this will get to the outside world. I love my country too well to bring more misery on her than she has with Cuba in rebellion and the accursed *Americanos* plotting to aid it." With this, he turns his eyes severely on a loveliness made piquant by bashfulness and remarks: "You in the court-room claimed to be a citizen of that infamous republic. Besides it was whispered about the

tribunal that you refused to acknowledge Ludenbaum as husband because you loved a—a Yankee sea-robber. Who is this Filipino Marston, whose name you muttered when half insensible last night?"

But here feminine artifice breaks in upon him quite haughtily, and astounds the Spanish soldier, who does not know woman as well as war. The accused mutters reproachfully: "You always seem to *desire* to think me unstable in my affections. In the court-room when you saw the forged certificate of marriage, without a question, you judged me to be a wife who refused to acknowledge her marriage vows. Now you accuse me of loving one of the Yankees that you hate."

"*Dios mio*, I wish only to think you, *mi querida*, a good Spaniard, so that I can wear upon my heart a true Spanish bride." His eyes are ardent as red-hot coals. The scowl of a jealous Fourteenth-century adoration is on his face.

Gazing on him, the girl realizes that though the German no longer stands between her and Phil Marston; already there is another in the Teuton's place. She knows she has received only respite, that she will have another battle to reach the arms she loves.

But Ludenbaum had been a satyr; Chaco is a knight bloodthirsty but chivalrous. He would butcher a rival in the lists of the duello with the delight of a bravo, but to his lady-love he will be as respectful as a Bayard; though his eyes, full of Spanish ardor, pay her the compliment of saying he wants her beauties and her graces with all the rapidity of a quick campaigner.

Therefore she goes to temporizing with Chaco, explaining that it will not be possible for her to wed him save in the usual course of things. In a little time Ludenbaum will be discovered dead. After a period of mourning—

"Then you will make me happy?" he cries.

"I suppose I'll—I'll have to," falters the girl.

"Oh, put it not in that way, lady of my heart. Say you will be joyous as Chaco when the wedding-bells sound, while you stand with me before the priest and give me the right to put the kisses on your lips that now I place upon your hand."

"Yes, but only place them upon my hand at present. Remember I am still the wife of an honored German merchant."

"*Diablo!* this is pleasantry and subterfuge! You and I know, dear one of my soul, where we have put the fellow, eh, sweetheart? Every day I shall say! 'Where is Herr Ludenbaum?' and you shall answer: 'Dearest Roberto, he is dead under the big fig tree, eh?'"

"Oh, don't remind me of that," gasps Maud. "Every moment that fig tree rises before me, until I could shriek and fly from this place."

"That's not the proper feeling for the affianced of a *Spanish soldier!*" remarks Chaco. "You should *love* to know your enemy is dead. 'Tis a fine feeling. But I respect the delicacy of your situation, a wife knowing that she is a widow, knowing that she loves another man with all her heart and soul, and anxious to break the bonds of social formula to throw herself into his arms, sighing each day, each hour: 'My Chaco, my Roberto, I am held from you by imperious fate, but when the time comes, for every moment I've kept you waiting my kisses shall be so much the more passionate, my love so much the grander!'"

To this fiery proposition Maud thinks it wise to offer no dissent. In fact she has little option. She makes her arrangements to live at the plantation, as the wife of Ludenbaum, writing a few letters even as her husband's amanuensis to his cashier and clerks in Manila. Yet all the time she is looking for a face she wants to see, but dreads to see, and shudders: "Chaco, when he and Phil meet!"

But thinking the matter over many a long night she sighs: "Of course, Phil will not come, he has read that accursed notice in the *Diario de Manila*. Why should he journey to a faithless girl, *to the wife of another man?*" And so pardoning her lover she grows savage with the affianced of her sister, muttering: "But that shouldn't keep the Englishman from coming. Pha, he dare not risk his life to find poor little Mazie, who is crying her eyes out and sighing her heart out for Señor Jack Curzon."

Still this inaction drives Señorita Maud nigh unto madness.

She has made up her mind to tell Chaco she must go to Manila, giving some reason of business for the journey, when one day late in the third week of May, Providence begins to shine once more upon this young lady it has

been persecuting; not with the light rays of genial sun, but rather like strokes of forked lightning, each one of which makes her reel and quiver, yet places her nearer to the man she loves.

It is on the afternoon of this May day that Chaco rides wildly up to the house followed by Sergeant Lopez, who is swearing each time he drives his spurs into his pony's sides. The captain astonishes his lady-love by omitting to doff his *sombrero* in old time *caballero* fashion. His eyes are staring and bloodshot. He half reels as he springs off his pony, but still flies up to the bamboo balcony, and bowing before her, mutters in broken voice: "Your pardon, Belita, I must take you to Manila!"

"To Manila?" This is a cry of joy. Then the girl suddenly whispers: "*Santos*, what's happened?" For the face of the Spanish warrior is pale under its bronze. "Has Captain-General Augustin discovered that there is—?" she pauses falteringly.

"A dead man under the big fig tree up there, and wishes us to answer for our court-martial?" he breaks out jeeringly; then suddenly moans, grinding his teeth and striding about like a crazy man: "*Diablo*, no! Would that it were. *O Dios de mi alma*, the cursed *Americanos!*"

"The cursed *Americanos!* What have they done?"

"*Santa Maria!* the news has just come by courier from Isidro, their fleet is in Manila Bay. They have destroyed the Spanish squadron under Montojo. They have not landed yet, but these barbarians hold Manila at the mercy of their murderous cannon."

"Thank God!"

"*Diablo*, what did you say, girl?" snarls Chaco in awful voice.

"I—I said thank God they have not captured Manila yet," mutters Maud, who dare not tell this man of frightful mien that she is grateful to Heaven with all her heart and soul. Then she falters: "Were many killed?"

"On our fleet? Yes, hundreds of gallant fellows who fought as they sank beneath the waves."

"Were many killed—upon—the—Yankee—fleet?" The girl's voice is slow and harsh in its intensity.

"*Caramba*, millions!"

"Oh, dear God!"

"The bay about Cavité was red with the scoundrels'

blood. But still I can't understand it. Somehow their vessels float and ours have sunk."

"They did it by firing bombs that were filled with liquid fire, think of that, noble lady!" cries Sergeant Lopez. "The demons, the fiends, the barbarians! But still we'll brush them off the face of the earth."

"What—what vessels did the work?" The girl is speaking very slowly. Her eyes have a far-away look in them.

"I don't know their names. Here is *El Comercio*. Read how our gallant sailors were murdered by improved arms and great guns that *hit* when they were fired," replies Chaco and passes to her the journal.

Looking over it she sees the names of the *Olympia*, *Raleigh*—*Petrel*!

"*Dios*, you're fainting," cries the captain, "at the awful blow to Spain. Brave heart, noble lady; but fear not, I, Chaco, will protect you."

"Protect me from what?"

"Have you not read further, that these Yankee *ladrones* have captured Cavité and have armed Aguinaldo whom they brought from Hong Kong. The rebels are rising again to strike Spain in her extremity. Our garrisons are all being called into the capital. I have my orders. I depart with my men to-night. Lady of my heart, I dare not leave you here to the mercy of brutes who burn priests."

"Yes, take me to Manila," begs the girl. "Dear Captain Chaco, take me to Manila!"

But she is really crying: "Take me to the *Petrel*! Take me to Phil Marston, who must have stood upon her deck when she destroyed the Spanish squadron!"

"Will not I? Your sister too, and also, I suppose, this German woman, who is always asking about Herr Ludenbaum."

"Herr Ludenbaum!" shudders Maud. "What shall we say of him to his friends and the German Consul when we reach Manila?"

"Say of him?" laughs Chaco, who is more used to murderous secrets than the fair girl who is trembling as he whispers: "Pha, that's an easy lie now! Say that your husband has been lost as he struggled through the jungle and the rice swamps escaping from the Rebels. If any, in the famine of a blockaded town care to ask of

Señor Ludenbaum, we will whisper: 'An insurgent bullet!' Thousands will die in bush fights on their bloody road to the capital. We'll tell that story of your departed spouse. You shall enter Manila as a widow—if we ever get to the Spanish lines."

"You fear?"

"Chaco fears for nothing but your safety. He only dreads sorrow in your face, *niña de mis ojos*." He kisses her hand gallantly. "But, lady, it will be a desperate journey."

"Why so?"

"Because the nearer garrisons have all been drawn in. When we arrive at San Isidro it will be deserted by our troops and perhaps occupied by the rebels. Then we fight our way to Bulacan! That may be evacuated also! But never had *caballero* fairer lady to protect than I, Roberto Dominic Chaco. Whatever befalls him, you, *mi querida, mi alma, mi paloma*, for whom I fight with bright sword, shall, while Chaco lives, be safe!"

And right gallantly the Spanish captain keeps his word. That night, mounted on ponies, Maud and her sister and the German woman, escorted by Chaco and his hundred men, ride through the steep mountain gorge to the great plains and from there descend to the banks of the Baliuag.

Here they are delayed collecting boats, but the *comandante*, by indefatigable exertions and shooting one or two lying natives, at last obtains sufficient crafts.

Embarked on boats and canoes, they drift down the river to where the deserted railway running to Dagupan crosses it.

At this point they are joined by some Spanish stragglers. A few words of converse with them and Don Roberto coming to his lady-love, whispers: "These men say San Isidro is lost to us, but also report what is good news for us. El Corregidor, the friend of Ludenbaum, he who gave false witness as to your marriage—"

"What of him?" asks Maud sharply.

"The rebels finished him three days ago, with some other better men."

"*Santos*, that helps our story as to my—my husband's death," falters the girl, "if—if we ever reach Manila."

For now a problem is before them. Shall they take

the deserted, destroyed and unused railway track, and by it make their way towards the capital, or, journeying down the Pampanga in their boats, attempt to cross the Bay of Manila to the blockaded city?

Ah! how Maud tries to persuade the *comandante* to take the chances of Yankee gunboats and steam launches, pleading the journey by water will be so much easier for her and Mazie.

But the Spanish captain mutters: "No, I feel not at home upon the waves. I nearly tossed up my soul once on a voyage to Mindanao. Besides, it is impossible. Their boats, I have news, patrol each night the bay. *Dios mio*, do you want us to be captured by these American barbarians?"

So with his men traveling on foot and the ladies upon ponies, for Chaco has contrived for their use to bring down three of these wiry beasts in a flat-boat, they make their way over the long hot miles of the deserted railway track, fording streams, the bridges over which have been burnt. Then they are compelled to deviate from it, for it begins to be occupied by rebels in overpowering numbers. They plunge into the jungles and the rice fields. Here the poor German governess, driven one night half crazy by mosquitoes, wanders away and is found early the next morning in a swamp so eaten up by leeches, that they are compelled to leave her behind in the care of a group of wandering Tinguianes.

This seems to take a weight off Maud's mind, for the German language shrieked out by this woman in her nightly fights with insects has reminded the widow of the dead man under the big fig tree, and she hates its guttural sound.

After two or three awful days in the heat of the paddy swamps, once or twice repulsing small attacks of rebels, they finally make their way into Bulacan, to find it evacuated by its Spanish garrison.

Here a fourth of Chaco's *voluntarios* desert him, Aguinaldo's proclamation being in full display in this part of the country. Desperately he turns towards Malabon, journeying by a sneaking night march, for Aguinaldo's soldiers grow more numerous as they near Manila, which is now entirely surrounded.

So at daybreak one morning, Maud from the back of her pony, which is cautiously led by her cavalier, gives

a low cry of joy; in the dull gray of early morning light she can just discern the waters of the Bay.

Barring their path to safety and the Spanish flag, stands only one thin line of rebel soldiers, unsuspecting danger in the rear, for Chaco has led his men cautious as snakes through the undergrowth.

Immediately in front of these men the *comandante*, using his field-glass, sees a breast-work. Above this is the Insurgent flag.

But three hundred yards beyond it is a somewhat similar skirmish line, just at the foot of a little hummock, upon whose summit stands a blockhouse protecting the first railway station outside of Manila. Above it flies Spain's yellow banner.

"Now first to make you safe," Chaco whispers, "dear lady of my heart," and leads Maud and Mazie on their ponies to the protection of some great trees in a little ravine, ordering a detail of men to guard them as they love their lives, for awful stories have been whispered of insurgent barbarities upon women.

Here taking Maud's hand, he whispers: "When I have dispersed that thin line of insurgents, be ready on the instant to come with me. I'll be back to you in five minutes, or be in another world. Keep mounted to move the instant they are brushed aside; speed is our only hope. If we wait five minutes these murdering Filipinos will return reinforced and we are destroyed. Now, *adios*, lady of my love."

Waving gallant hand to her he strides off before his sixty veterans, twenty of his men having fallen on the road from Bulacan, the few Spanish stragglers he has picked up have scarce added to his numbers.

Five minutes after, Maud hears shots and shouts of combat, then prolonged volley firing.

A moment after she gives a cry of joy, for Chaco is in front of her with fifty of his men, saying: "Quick! These devils are brushed aside. Besides our brothers from the blockhouse are sallying out to meet us. *Presto!* Come!" A drop of blood flows from his mouth at every word.

"*Santos*, you're wounded!" moans the girl who has grown almost to love this rough and ready soldier, who has watched over her with the tenderness of nurse, who has treated her with the respect of elder brother, who has

fought for her with the chivalry of medieval knight—his only crime being that he loves her.

"Yes, slightly. I—could you walk, dear lady, for the sake of one who can walk no more."

"Oh, Heavens, they'll butcher you with their bolas!" cries Maud. "Quick, put him in my saddle!" I'll lead your pony, Chaco. Hold him up, men! Now come!" and for a moment the maid is leader of the party. Guided by old Sergeant Lopez they run the rebel lines from which Aguinaldo's men have been brushed aside by this unexpected attack—but only for a moment.

Two companies of Catalan infantry sally forth from the blockhouse to assist them, and in five minutes they are all inside the intrenchments of Manila. The wounded Spanish warrior looks upon the banner floating over him, and whispers: "Dear one, you're safe under the flag of Spain, the flag of civilization and advancement, the flag of our Church, the only flag fit to—die under!" He reels in his saddle and they lift him from the pony to the ground.

Half drowning his whispers is the rattle of more rifles and heavy volley firing at the front, and his men, called by the Spanish officers, run off to repel the charge of the insurgents.

So in the beautiful tropic foliage that here fringes the white sand of the beach, Maud kneeling down cries: "*Ay de mi!* God help us, Mazie, we must staunch the blood in some way," and takes her wounded soldier's head upon her lap.

"Water!" he gasps, "and—and a priest!" and Mazie flies away to seek them both.

Even as she holds Chaco's fainting body, before Maud are the rippling waves of the Bay of Manila bright in the sun that is rising over the Cordilleras. Upon it, some mile away, is a little gunboat, its foremast square rigged, its main and mizzen carrying fore and aft canvas. A flag of stars and stripes is floating from her peak. Photographs of his vessel sent her by her sweetheart flit through the girl's mind. She gasps: "*The Petrel!*" and her eyes devour it as if she would draw it to her arms.

The dying man whose head is in her lap gazes up at her and murmurs, a strange pathos in his voice: "Dear one, you look not at my face,"

"Yes—," she says abstractedly—her eyes caressing the distant vessel.

"You look not at me. You listen not to my lips when they speak their last words to you."

"Oh, not your *last* words, dear Chaco!" screams the girl.

"My very last—upon this earth. Dear love, you must protect yourself from the death of that villain. Here is a statement on my breast written and sworn to by me, subscribed to by the corporal and the sergeant, stating how I executed Herr Adolph-Ludenbaum after honorable drumhead had made quick sentence upon him, together with the documentary evidence that caused the doom of a scoundrel who called you wife—a dear title—I—I shall never give you—my beauty, my bird of Paradise! This document will protect you from Spanish law. It is the best that I, a dying man, can do for you. Dear—you look not on my face—your eyes are upon the vessel of my enemies. You think not of what I say."

"I do! Chaco, I do! I know you have been true to me as ever knight was to lady of his love," sobs Maud.

"Then place the Cross of Christ upon my lips and now your own. Kiss me as—as I die."

And the girl bending down to him thinks: "The man upon that deck would forgive me kissing this dying man who saved me, that I may come to him the same Maud Gordon who left his arms."

With the thought, she places her lips upon the cold ones of the dying Spaniard, who shivers a little and mutters: "Your eyes are not on me. They are on that accursed Yankee ship. *Santa Maria!* Is he there? the man whose name you uttered on that night I killed the German who would have dishonored you—the man, O *Dios,—THAT YOU LOVE?*" and sighing dies within her arms.