

***MATURIN
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A vibrant street scene in Havana, Cuba, featuring a Cuban flag on the left and the Capitol building in the distance.

***THE HEART'S
SECRET; OR,
THE FORTUNES
OF A SOLDIER***

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The Heart's Secret; Or, the Fortunes of a Soldier

A Story of Love and the Low Latitudes

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PREFACE.

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THE locale of the following story is that gem of the American Archipelago; the Island of Cuba, whose lone star, now merged in the sea, is destined yet to sparkle in liberty's hemisphere, and radiate the light of republicanism. Poetry cannot outdo the fairy-like loveliness of this tropical clime, and only those who have partaken of the aromatic sweetness of its fields and shores can fully realize the delight that may be shared in these low latitudes. A brief residence upon the island afforded the author the subject-matter for the following pages, and he has been assiduous in his efforts to adhere strictly to geographical facts and the truthful belongings of the island. Trusting that this may prove equally popular with the author's other numerous tales and novelettes, he has the pleasure of signing himself,

Very cordially,

THE PUBLIC'S HUMBLE SERVANT.

DEDICATED TO THE READERS OF GLEASON'S PICTORIAL DRAWING-ROOM COMPANION, FOR WHICH JOURNAL THESE PAGES WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN, BY THEIR VERY HUMBLE SERVANT, LIEUTENANT MURRAY.



THE HEART'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER I.—THE ACCIDENT.

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THE soft twilight of the tropics, that loves to linger over the low latitudes, after the departure of the long summer's day, was breathing in zephyrs of aromatic sweetness over the shores and plains of the beautiful Queen of the Antilles. The noise and bustle of the day had given place to the quiet and gentle influences of the hour; the slave had laid by his implements of labor, and now stood at ease, while the sunburnt overseers had put off the air of vigilance that they had worn all day, and sat or lounged lazily with their cigars.

Here and there strolled a Montaro from the country, who, having disposed of his load of fruit, of produce and fowls, was now preparing to return once more inland, looking, with his long Toledo blade and heavy spurs, more like a bandit than an honest husbandman. The evening gun had long since boomed over the waters of the land-locked harbor from the grim, walls of Moro Castle, the guard had been relieved at the governor's palace and the city walls, and now the steady martial tread to the tap of the drum rang along the streets of Havana, as the guard once more sought their barracks in the Plaza des Armes.

The pretty señoritas sat at their grated windows, nearly on a level with the street, and chatted through the bars, not unlike prisoners, to those gallants who paused to address them. And now a steady line of pedestrians turned their way to the garden that fronts the governor's palace, where they might listen to the music of the band, nightly poured forth here to rich and poor.

At this peculiar hour there was a small party walking in the broad and very private walk that skirts the seaward side of the city, nearly opposite the Moro, and known as the Plato. It is the only hour in which a lady can appear outside the walls of her dwelling on foot in this queer and picturesque capital, and then only in the Plaza, opposite to the palace, or in some secluded and private walk like the Plato. Such is Creole and Spanish etiquette.

The party referred to consisted of a fine looking old Spanish don, a lady who seemed to be his daughter, a little boy of some twelve or thirteen years, who might perhaps be the lady's brother, and a couple of gentlemen in undress military attire, yet bearing sufficient tokens of rank to show them to be high in command. The party was a gay though small one, and the lady seemed to be as lively and talkative as the two gentlemen could desire, while they, on their part, appeared most devoted to every syllable and gesture.

There was a slight air of hauteur in the lady's bearing; she seemed to half disdain the homage that was so freely tendered to her, and though she laughed loud and clear, there was a careless, not to say heartless, accent in her tones, that betrayed her indifference to the devoted attentions of her companions. Apparently too much accustomed to this treatment to be disheartened by it, the two gentlemen bore themselves most courteously, and continued as devoted as ever to the fair creature by their side.

The boy of whom we have spoken was a noble child, frank and manly in his bearing, and evidently deeply interested in the maritime scene before him. Now he paused

to watch the throng of craft of every nation that lay at anchor in the harbor, or which were moored; after the fashion here, with their stems to the quay, and now his fine blue eye wandered off over the swift running waters of the Gulf Stream, watching for a moment the long, heavy swoop of some distant seafowl, or the white sail of some clipper craft bound up the Gulf to New Orleans, or down the narrow channel through the Caribbean Sea to some South American port. The old don seemed in the meantime to regard the boy with an earnest pride, and scarcely heeded at all the bright sallies of wit that his daughter was so freely and merrily bestowing upon her two assiduous admirers.

"Yonder brigantine must be a slaver," said the boy, pointing to a rakish craft that seemed to be struggling against the current to the southward.

"Most like, most like; but what does she on this side? the southern shore is her ground, and the Isle of Pines is a hundred leagues from here," said the old don.

"She has lost her reckoning, probably," said the boy, "and made the first land to the north. Lucky she didn't fall in with those Florida wreckers, for though the Americans don't carry on the African trade nowadays, they know what to do with a cargo if it gets once hard and fast on the reefs."

"What know you of these matters?" asked the old don, turning a curious eye on the boy.

"O, I hear them talk of these things, and you know I saw a cargo 'run' on the south side only last month," continued the boy. "There were three hundred or more filed off from that felucca, two by two, to the shore."

"It is a slaver," said one of the officers, "a little out of her latitude, that's all."

"A beautiful craft," said the lady, earnestly; "can it be a slaver, and so beautiful."

"They are clipper-built, all of them," said the old don. "Launched in Baltimore, United States."

Senorita Gonzales was the daughter of the proud old don of the same name, who was of the party on the *Plato* at the time we describe. The father was one of the richest as well as noblest in rank of all the residents of the island, being of the old Castilian stock, who had come from Spain many years before, and after holding high office, both civil and military, under the crown, had at last retired with a princely fortune, and devoted himself to the education of his daughter and son, both of whom we have already introduced to the reader.

The daughter, beautiful, intelligent, and witty to a most extraordinary degree, had absolutely broken the hearts of half the men of rank on the island; for though yet scarcely twenty years of age, Senorita Isabella was a confirmed coquette. It was her passion to command and enjoy a devotion, but as to ever having in the least degree cherished or known what it was to love, the lady was entirely void of the charge; she had never known the tenderness of reciprocal affection, nor did it seem to those who knew her best, that the man was born who could win her confidence.

Men's hearts had been Isabella Gonzales's toys and playthings ever since the hour that she first had realized her power over them. And yet she was far from being heartless

in reality. She was most sensitive, and at times thoughtful and serious; but this was in her closet, and when alone. Those who thought that the sunshine of that face was never clouded, were mistaken. She hardly received the respect that was due to her better understanding and naturally strong points of character, because she hid them mainly behind an exterior of captivating mirthfulness and never ceasing smiles.

The cool refreshing sea breeze that swept in from the water was most delicious, after the scorching heat of a summer's day in the West Indies, and the party paused as they breathed in of its freshness, leaning upon the parapet of the walk, over which they looked down upon the glancing waves of the bay far beneath them. The moon was stealing slowly but steadily up from behind the lofty tower of Moro Castle, casting a dash of silvery light athwart its dark batteries and grim walls, and silvering a long wake across the now silent harbor, making its rippling waters of golden and silver hues, and casting, where the Moro tower was between it and the water, a long, deep shadow to seaward.

Even the gay and apparently thoughtless Senorita Isabella was struck with delight at the view now presented to her gaze, and for a moment she paused in silence to drink in of the spirit-stirring beauty of the scene.

"How beautiful it is," whispered the boy, who was close by her side.

"Beautiful, very beautiful," echoed Isabella, again becoming silent.

No one who has not breathed the soft air of the south at an hour such as we have described, can well realize the

tender influence that it exercises upon a susceptible disposition. The whole party gazed for some minutes in silence, apparently charmed by the scene. There was a hallowing and chastening influence in the very air, and the gay coquette was softened into the tender woman. A tear even glistened in Ruez's, her brother's eyes; but he was a thoughtful and delicate-souled child, and would be affected thus much more quickly than his sister.

The eldest of the two gentlemen who were in attendance upon Don Gonzales and his family, was Count Anguera, lieutenant-governor of the island; and his companion, a fine military figure, apparently some years the count's junior, was General Harero of the royal infantry, quartered at the governor's palace. Such was the party that promenaded on the parapet of the Plato.

As we have intimated, the two gentlemen were evidently striving to please Isabella, and to win from her some encouraging smile or other token that might indicate a preference for their attentions. Admiration even from the high source that now tendered it was no new thing to her, and with just sufficient archness to puzzle them, she waived and replied to their conversation with most provoking indifference, lavishing a vast deal more kindness and attention upon a noble wolf-hound that crouched close to her feet, his big clear eye bent ever upon his mistress's face with a degree of intelligence that would have formed a theme for a painter. It was a noble creature, and no wonder the lady evinced so much regard for the hound, who ever and anon walked close to her.

"You love the hound?" suggested General Harero, stooping to smooth its glossy coat.

"Yes."

"He is to be envied, then, upon my soul, lady. How could he, with no powers of utterance, have done that for himself, which we poor gallants so fail in doing?"

"And what may that be?" asked Isabella, archly tossing her head.

"Win thy love," half whispered the officer, drawing closer to her side.

The answer was lost, if indeed Isabella intended one, by the father's calling the attention of the party to some object on the Regla shore, opposite the city, looming up in the dim light.

Ruez had mounted the parapet, and with his feet carelessly dangling on the other side, sat gazing off upon the sea, now straining his eye to make out the rig of some dark hull in the distance, and now following back the moon's glittering wake until it met the shore. At this moment the hound, leaving his mistress's side, put his fore paws upon the top of the parapet and his nose into one of the boy's hands, causing him to turn round suddenly to see what it was that touched him; in doing which he lost his balance, and with a faint cry fell from the parapet far down to the water below. Each of the gentlemen at once sprang upon the stone work and looked over where the boy had fallen, but it would have been madness for any one, however good a swimmer; and as they realized this and their helpless situation, they stood for a moment dumb with consternation.

At that moment a plunge was heard in the water from the edge of the quay far below the parapet, and a dark form was traced making its way through the water with that strong bold stroke that shows the effort of a confident and powerful swimmer.

"Thank God some one has seen his fall from below, and they will rescue him," said Don Gonzales, springing swiftly down the Plato steps, followed by Isabella and the officers, and seeking the street that led to the quay below.

"O hasten, father, hasten!" exclaimed Isabella, impatiently.

"Nay, Isabella, my old limbs totter with fear for dear Ruez," was the hasty reply of the old don, as he hurried forward with his daughter.

"Dear, dear Ruez," exclaimed Isabella, hysterically.

Dashing by the guard stationed on the quay, who presented arms as his superiors passed, they reached its end in time to see, through the now dim twilight, the efforts of some one in the water supporting the half insensible boy with one arm, while with the other he was struggling with almost superhuman effort against the steady set of the tide to seaward. Already were a couple of seamen lowering a quarter-boat from an American barque, near by, but the rope had fouled in the blocks, and they could not loose it. A couple of infantry soldiers had also come up to the spot, and having secured a rope were about to attempt some assistance to the swimmer.

"Heave the line," shouted one of the seamen. "Give me the bight of it, and I'll swim out to him."

"Stand by for it," said the soldier, coiling it in his hand and then throwing it towards the barque. But the coil fell short of the mark, and another minute's delay occurred.

In the meantime he who held the boy, though evidently a man of cool judgment, powerful frame, and steady purpose, yet now breathed so heavily in his earnest struggle with the swift tide, that his panting might be distinctly heard on the quay. He was evidently conscious of the efforts now making for his succor and that of the boy, but he uttered no words, still bending every nerve and faculty towards the stemming of the current tint sets into the harbor from the Gulf Stream.

The hound had been running back and forth on the top of the parapet, half preparing every moment for a spring, and then deterred by the immense distance which presented itself between the animal and the water, it would run back and forth again with a most piteous howling cry; but at this moment it came bounding down the street to the quay, as though it at last realized the proper spot from which to make the attempt, and with a leap that seemed to carry it nearly a rod into the waters, it swam easily to the boy's side.

An exclamation of joy escaped from both Don Gonzales and Isabella, for they knew the hound to have saved a life before, and now prized his sagacity highly.

As the hound swung round easily beside the struggling forms, the swimmer placed the boy's arm about the animal's neck, while the noble creature, with almost human reason, instead of struggling fiercely at being thus entirely buried in the water, save the mere point of his nose, worked as steadily and as calmly as though he was merely following

his young master on shore. The momentary relief was of the utmost importance to the swimmer, who being thus partially relieved of Ruez's weight, once more struck out boldly for the quay. But the boy had now lost all consciousness, and his arm slipped away from the hound's neck, and he rolled heavily over, carrying down the swimmer and himself for a moment, below the surface of the water.

"Holy mother! they are both drowned!" almost screamed Isabella.

"Lost! lost!" groaned Don Gonzales, with uplifted hands and tottering form.

"No! no!" exclaimed General Harero, "not yet, not yet." He had jumped on board the barque, and had cut the davit ropes with his sword, and thus succeeded in launching the boat with himself and the two seamen in it.

At this moment the swimmer rose once more slowly with his burthen to the surface; but his efforts were so faintly made now, that he barely floated, and yet with a nervous vigor he kept the boy still far above himself. And now it was that the noble instinct of the hound stood his young master in such importance, and led him to seize with his teeth the boy's clothes, while the swimmer once more fairly gained his self-possession, and the boat with General Harero and the seamen came alongside. In a moment more the boy with his preserver and the dog were safe in the boat, which was rowed at once to the quay.

A shout of satisfaction rang out from twenty voices that had witnessed the scene.

Isabella, the moment they were safely in the boat, fainted, while Count Anguera ran for a volante for

conveyance home. The swimmer soon regained his strength, and when the boat reached the quay, he lifted the boy from it himself. It was a most striking picture that presented itself to the eye at that moment on the quay, in the dim twilight that was so struggling with the moon's brighter rays.

The father, embracing the reviving boy, looked the gratitude he could not find words to express, while a calm, satisfied smile ornamented the handsome features of the soldier who had saved Ruez's life at such imminent risk. The coat which he had hastily thrown upon the quay when he leaped into the water, showed him to bear the rank of lieutenant of infantry, and by the number, he belonged to General Harero's own division.

The child was placed with his sister and father in a volante, and borne away from the spot with all speed, that the necessary care and attention might be afforded to him which they could only expect in their own home.

In the meantime a peculiar satisfaction mantled the brow and features of the young officer who had thus signally served Don Gonzales and his child. His fine military figure stood erect and commanding in style while he gazed after the volante that contained the party named, nor did he move for some moments, seeming to be exercised by some peculiar spell; still gazing in the direction in which the volante had disappeared, until General Harero, his superior, having at length arranged his own attire, after the hasty efforts which he had made, came by, and touching him lightly on the arm, said:

"Lieutenant, you seem to be dreaming; has the bath affected your brain?"

"Not at all, general," replied the young officer, hastening to put on his coat once more; "I have indeed forgotten myself for a single moment."

"Know you the family whom you have thus served?" asked the general.

"I do; that is, I know their name, general, but nothing further."

"He's a clever man, and will remember your services," said the general, carelessly, as he walked up the quay and received the salute of the sentinel on duty.

Some strange feeling appeared to be working in the breast of the young officer who had just performed the gallant deed we have recorded, for he seemed even now to be quite lost to all outward realization, and was evidently engaged in most agreeable communion with himself mentally. He too now walked up the quay, also, receiving the salute of the sentinel, and not forgetting either, as did the superior officer, to touch his cap in acknowledgement, a sign that an observant man would have marked in the character of both; and one, too, which was not lost on the humble private, whose duty it was to stand at his post until the middle watch of the night. A long and weary duty is that of a sentinel on the quay at night.

CHAPTER II.—THE BELLE AND THE SOLDIER.

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WHOEVER has been in Havana, that strange and peculiar city, whose every association and belonging seem to bring to mind the period of centuries gone by, whose time-worn and moss-covered cathedrals appear to stand as grim records of the past, whose noble palaces and residences of the rich give token of the fact of its great wealth and extraordinary resources—whoever, we say, has been in this capital of Cuba, has of course visited its well-known and far-famed Tacon Paseo. It is here, just outside the city walls, in a beautiful tract of land, laid out in tempting walks, ornamented with the fragrant flowers of the tropics, and with statues and fountains innumerable, that the beauty and fashion of the town resort each afternoon to drive in their volantes, and to meet and greet each other.

It was on the afternoon subsequent to that of the accident recorded in the preceding chapter, that a young officer, off duty, might be seen partially reclining upon one of the broad seats that here and there line the foot-path of the circular drive in the Paseo. He possessed a fine manly figure, and was perhaps of twenty-four or five years of age, and clothed in the plain undress uniform of the Spanish army. His features were of that national and handsome cast that is peculiar to the full-blooded Castilian, and the pure olive of his complexion contrasted finely with a moustache and imperial as black as the dark flowing hair that fell from beneath his foraging cap. At the moment when we introduce

him he was playing with a small, light walking-stick, with which he thrashed his boots most immoderately; but his thoughts were busy enough in another quarter, as any one might conjecture even at a single glance.

Suddenly his whole manner changed; he rose quickly to his feet, and lifting his cap gracefully, he saluted and acknowledged the particular notice of a lady who bent partially forward from a richly mounted volante drawn by as richly caparisoned horse, and driven by as richly dressed a calesaro. The manner of the young officer from that moment was the very antipodes of what it had been a few moments before. A change seemed to have come over the spirit of his dream. His fine military figure became erect and dignified, and a slight indication of satisfied pride was just visible in the fine lines of his expressive lips. As he passed on his way, after a momentary pause, he met General Harero, who stiffly acknowledged his military salute, with anything but kindness expressed in the stern lines of his forbidding countenance. He even took some pains to scowl upon the young soldier as they passed each other.

But what cared Lieutenant Bezan for his frowns? Had not the belle of the city, the beautiful, the peerless, the famed Senorita Isabella Gonzales just publicly saluted him?-that glorious being whose transcendent beauty had been the theme of every tongue, and whose loveliness had enslaved him from the first moment he had looked upon her-just two years previous, when he first came from Spain. Had not this high-born and proud lady publicly saluted him? Him, a poor lieutenant of infantry, who had never dared to lift his eyes to meet her own before, however deep and ardently he might

have worshipped her in secret. What cared the young officer that his commander had seen fit thus to frown upon him? True, he realized the power of military discipline, and particularly of the Spanish army; but he forgot all else now, in the fact that Isabella Gonzales had publicly saluted him in the paths of the Paseo.

Possessed of a highly chivalrous disposition, Lieutenant Bezan had few confidants among his regiment, who, notwithstanding this, loved him as well as brothers might love. He seemed decidedly to prefer solitude and his books to the social gatherings, or the clubs formed by his brother officers, or indeed to join them in any of their ordinary sports or pastimes.

Of a very good family at home, he had the misfortune to have been born a younger brother, and after being thoroughly educated at the best schools of Madrid, he was frankly told by his father that he must seek his fortune, and for the future rely solely upon himself. There was but one field open to him, at least so it seemed to him, and that was the army. Two years before the opening of our story he had enlisted as a third lieutenant of infantry, and had been at once ordered to the West Indies with his entire regiment. Here promotion for more than one gallant act closely followed him, until at the time we introduce him to the reader as first lieutenant. Being of a naturally cheerful and exceedingly happy disposition, he took life like a philosopher, and knew little of care or sorrow until the time when he first saw Senorita Isabella Gonzales-an occasion that planted a hopeless passion in his breast.