

THE UNION JACK

THE "UNION JACK"
CONTAINS
A LONG, COMPLETE NOVEL
EVERY FRIDAY.

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THE TRACK OF A TRAITOR



In the heat of the chase many of the Mexican horsemen rode boldly into the sea. One of them, swept from his saddle, scrambled into the fugitives' boat. In an instant a knife flashed into Silvio Castillo's hand; and the intruder paid for his rashness with his life.

No. 389

THE TRACK OF A TRAITOR.

A Splendid Complete Story of Adventure
Afloat and Ashore.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

The "Gadfly's" Mysterious Passengers
& Mexican Mixer and His Money—
Two Peril to Come

"This is pretty rough night for sending a
boat away, isn't it? What do you say, Talbot?"
"Probably a very bad one, sir."

"I wish I had never agreed to do it. But
we have to have an out partner, as how could I
allow?" asked Captain Raleigh, shaking his
head anxiously. "Anyhow, we're in for it
now. These people are waiting for us at
White Flat, and we must send for them."

Charles Talbot, the mate of the brig "Gad-
fly," looked dubiously at his captain.

That morning the "Gadfly" had sailed
from the Mexican port of Acapulco, and
headed northward. Talbot had seen that the
skipper was worried and uneasy, continually
casting nervous, anxious glances landward,
where the peaks of the Mexican sierras
loomed against the blue sky. And as even-
ing drew on Captain Raleigh suddenly an-
nounced that he intended to send a boat
aboard at Palma Flat—a tract of desert border-
ing the sea north-west of Acapulco—to fetch
some passengers aboard.

Talbot scented a mystery. He could not
understand why the passengers had not come
onboard at Acapulco. But he said no-
thing of his suspicions to the skipper. It was
Captain Raleigh's business to give orders, and
he obeyed. But the young man could not
help feeling a certain surprise and disquietude.

"We must send for them, Talbot," repeated
Captain Raleigh. "And I shall ask you to
take the boat. I must be here to look after
the 'Gadfly' with all my eyes, as this con-
founded wind will drive her on the rocks, as
sure as thunder."

"I'm perfectly ready to go, captain," said
Talbot quietly.

He didn't like the task; but he was a
British sailor, and never shrunk from danger.

Under close-reefed topsails, the English brig
was standing off and on, opposite a dreary-
looking stretch of rocky coast.

The wind, already strong, showed every sign of increasing
to a gale; and when that happened the "Gadfly" would be
upon a lee-shore of the most dangerous description.

It was Captain Raleigh's aim to get the business over before
the blow came on, and he had eagerly waited for the hour of
ten, which was the time appointed.

The surf broke upon the shore with a thunderous noise, and
cast up spray in clouds; except at one spot, where a black
gap showed in the line of snowy foam.

That was the landing-place—the only possible landing-place
for miles.

"You will find your passengers there, Talbot," continued
Captain Raleigh. "There are three of them, and one is a
lady."

"A lady, sir? On such a night as this, in an open boat!"
exclaimed Talbot, aghast. "Why, the fright will be enough
to kill her."

Captain Raleigh shrugged his shoulders.

"That's her father's look-out, Talbot. If Senor Olivarez
chooses to let her run the risk, I cannot prevent him."

"Olivarez? Not Pablo Olivarez, the Mexican financier?"

"The same."

"And the third party—who is he?"

"Oh, a friend of Olivarez, I believe, or more likely a lover



Castillo gave a growl like an enraged wild beast,
and sprang at Talbot. In the starlight was seen the
glimmer of bare steel. Dolores shrieked, and reeled
against the rock; but Talbot was quite prepared for the attack.
Straight from the shoulder his clenched fist shot, and ere he could
stab, Don Silvio measured his length upon the ground.

of his daughter. Anyhow, he has elected to accompany the
old banker in his flight, and I am to place a cabin at his dis-
posal. His name is Silvio Castillo."

There was no time for further explanation, for the boat was
ready, and waiting for Talbot.

As he took his place, the young mate was by no means easy
in his mind. Captain Raleigh's words seemed to imply that
Olivarez, the Mexican banker, was fleeing—but from what?
Doubtless from the law; bankruptcy, or perhaps fraud, the
cause.

To aid in a criminal's escape was not exactly the sort of
enterprise that a frank and honourable sailor cared about.
But Talbot reflected that, after all, he was under Captain
Raleigh's orders. The responsibility and the blame—if there
was any blame—must rest upon the skipper.

With some difficulty the boat shoved off from the side of
the brig, and the oarsmen pulled rapidly shoreward.

Black sky, black sea, black shore—everywhere a blackness,
only relieved by the white line of the roaring surf. Now up
on a wave-crest, now down into an abyss that seemed bottom-
less, with the heaving waters towering around, threatening to
overwhelm the cockleshell that braved their fury. Grim were
the faces of the boat's crew. Death was around and beneath
them, and over them the shadow of death.

"KING OF THE SCOUTS"—COMPLETE. NEXT FRIDAY.

Talbot himself steered. In spite of wind and wave, he kept the boat headed direct for the opening in the surf-line that marked the position of the landing-place.

Slowly onward they won their way—worn, weary, drenched, but indomitable; and at length with a rush the boat passed the gap, and glided into smooth water.

The bigger rocks here kept off the force of the sea. Here were safety and shelter.

Standing up, and yielding the tiller to a seaman, Charlie Talbot swept the shore with his eyes. A single point of light showed against the wall of blackness. It was a lantern, burned by the three who waited on the shore, to guide the boat. Talbot at once headed for its light, and the boat ran safe and sound upon the soft sand of the shore.

"Ahoy!" called Talbot, with his hands to his mouth.

"Hola, señor!" came back from the blackness.

"A young man's voice—Don Silvio Castillo, I suppose," thought the mate. "Are you ready, señores?" he cried aloud.

"You are from the 'Gadfly'!" called the same voice, in good English.

"We are. I am Charles Talbot—mate. Captain Raleigh has sent me for Señor Olivarez and his daughter, and Señor Castillo."

The light came nearer, and by Talbot's order a sailor started a couple of lanterns; and now a circle of dim light, in the midst of the gloom, showed the actors in this strange scene to one another.

Talbot sprang ashore, and stood before the trio, examining them critically. An old man, with a dark Mexican-Spanish face—so lined and wrinkled as to appear a mere mass of furrows—leaned upon the arm of a young girl. Under his bushy brows the jet-black eyes gleamed keenly and cunningly. His whole expression was furtive and fox-like.

The girl was vastly different. Slender and graceful and willowy, she moved with the ease and vivacity of a fawn. Her complexion was so much fairer than her father's as to show that Anglo-Saxon blood flowed in her veins. She was pale, and trembled slightly, and more than once the mate of the "Gadfly" saw her glance uneasily into the blackness behind.

Silvio Castillo, the third of the group, did not favourably impress our hero. He was young, and passably handsome; but there was in his dusky face something of the foxy expression which marred that of Olivarez.

"Assist my father, Mr. Talbot," said the girl, in the purest English. "And may I beg of you to hasten?"

"Yes, yes," said the old man, in hasty, nervous tones. "There is no telling who may be lurking in yonder shadows."

A scornful smile crossed Castillo's face.

"There is no danger, I tell you, Olivarez," he said roughly.

"So you say, so you say. But how can I tell? What if—"

He ceased. His eyes rolled, his face became transfixed with the wildest terror. He raised a shaking hand.

"Did you hear it?" he breathed, only half-articulate, so deep and intense was the fear that lay upon him.

"I heard nothing," said Castillo sharply.

"But I did," said Charles Talbot. "Most certainly there are horsemen coming at a gallop from the hills yonder!"

"Oh, take my father aboard quickly, señor! I entreat you to hasten!" cried the girl; and she clasped Talbot's arm in her agitation.

With her starry eyes fixed upon his, an odd thrill passed through Talbot's veins.

How lovely was her olive face—so sweet and tender in its anxiety for her father's safety!

"At once, Miss Olivarez. You have enemies yonder?"

"Oh, yes, yes—bitter enemies, señor!" she faltered.

The old man was now trembling so violently that he would have fallen but for the support of his brave daughter's arm. Her terror was all for her father, as Talbot could see. The sound of galloping, first audible to Olivarez's fear-quicken bearing, could now be heard by all. A large number of mounted men, apparently, were riding hotly down to the beach.

Talbot, taking Olivarez in his arms, lifted him bodily into the boat, and then turned to assist the young lady. But Don Silvio was first. He handed her in, and quickly followed.

The girl seated herself beside her father, and drew the trembling man within the shelter of her arms, pillowing his head upon her shoulder.

"They shall not harm you, dear father. These brave Englishmen will defend us," she whispered, in the liquid Spanish, speaking to him as if he were a child to be consoled.

"Ah, Dolores, Dolores, they will murder me!" he quavered out, shaking spasmodically from head to foot.

"No, no! See, we are already pushing off! In a few minutes we shall be in the ship."

"Be a man, Olivarez!" said Castillo sharply. "You and your confounded valise are beyond their reach now—"

As if reminded of something by the young Mexican's words,

Olivarez thrust his hand hastily beneath his coat, saying: "Then he uttered a terrible yell, interrupting Castillo."

"It is gone!"

"Carambol! what is gone?"

"My valise!" moaned the old man.

Don Silvio gave a glare of consternation, and then started up, crying:

"Back—back to the beach!"

The boat was already some distance from the shore. Talbot was steering for the passage through the breakers.

Ashore, the horsemen were so near that their forms could be dimly seen in the darkness, sitting lithely and stiffer like shadows of the night.

"Return! return!" cried the banker feverishly. "Oh, if they take the bag I am a ruined man!"

"We will go back for it," Talbot said quietly.

Crack-ack-ack! Three red flashes in quick succession, and three splashes in the water of the oars.

"Good heavens! they are firing at us!" cried Talbot. "Who are these men?"

Don Silvio sank back upon his seat with a groan.

"Useless, Olivarez—they are too near! We cannot recover it. Better life than nothing. Keep on, señor."

But the loss of the valise, and what it contained, seemed to have completely maddened the old financier.

"Madman!" he cried. "We must recover it!" Throwing aside his daughter's restraining arms, he sprang up. With his open hands he wildly beat the air. "Señor, for the love of Heaven, return! Return, or I will throw myself into the sea!"

"Sit down!" snarled Castillo. "I tell you it's too late!"

"Father, father!" Dolores cried, "do not risk your life, and the life of each man here! What is your wealth? Let it go! They will kill you!"

"Back to the beach!" reiterated Olivarez, unheeding her.

Talbot turned the boat shoreward. He really believed that Olivarez would throw himself overboard if his precious valise were not restored to him. In a couple of minutes the boat jarred upon the sand.

"It is there—there! I must have dropped it when I heard their horses," cried Olivarez.

The reports of the firearms were now frequent. Bullets tore up the sand at Talbot's feet as he leaped ashore.

By great good fortune the bag was found at once, and Talbot flung it into the boat. Clutching it, the old Mexican began to fondle it, and to fumble with its fastenings, as if to assure himself that it had not suffered by such rough handling. Evidently Olivarez was a miser to the fingertips.

Talbot was in the act of springing back into the boat, when a babel of yells and shots rang behind him, and one bullet, better sped than the rest, gashed along his scalp, cutting off a piece of his skin. It was but a scratch, but the shock threw the younger seaman down. He gave a sharp cry, and splashed into the water.

"Push off!" cried Silvio Castillo.

"But Mr. Talbot!" began a sailor.

"They've killed him! Push off!"

"Hasten! hasten! We shall all be murdered!" shrieked Olivarez, his terrors rising anew now that his beloved valise was once more in his possession.

"For shame!" cried Dolores, scarlet with mortification.

"Would you desert a man struck down in your cause? For shame!"

"You're right, missy," said the sailor. "Them two Dago polecats kin say wot they like, but British seamen don't leave their officer sich a dirty trick as that. Ah, here he is! Come on, Mr. Talbot, sir!"

Talbot, submerged for a moment, rose beside the boat, and the sailor, grasping him, helped him in.

"Thanks, Bunt! Now give way, my lads!" And with a long pull and a strong pull the boat shoved off.

Just in the nick of time!

Several of the pursuers had now dismounted, and one had made a flying leap towards the boat. But its glide seaward caused him to fall short, and splash into the water.

Others of the horsemen rode boldly into the sea up to their saddle-girths in the heat of the pursuit.

The wide sweep of the oars overset those within reach, for the steeds' footing upon the wet sand was very precarious.

But one lithe fellow, eluding a blow aimed at him by Billy Bunt with a boathook, came headforemost into the boat, scrambling like a wild cat.

Silvio Castillo leaned towards him before he could rise. A poniard gleamed faintly in the gloom, and a low, horrid moan came from the bottom of the boat. The wretched man gave a convulsive shudder, and lay like a log where he had fallen.

The boat swept on.

Fierce curses were hurled after it, and the riders, realising the impossibility of pursuit, emptied their revolvers at the receding fugitives. But wind and darkness favoured the boat.

"Heartsease" Stories are Good Stories. The Complete Novel in this week's HEARTSEASE LIBRARY is entitled "Art Thou the Man?"

"But for this idiotic business we should have been across Cancer by this time!" the skipper fumed to Talbot.

"However, sir, three thousand pounds isn't picked up every day," the mate reminded him.

"That's true; but three thousand, or three million, won't compensate us for getting our throats cut," exclaimed Talbot.

"You do not look for further pursuit?"

"Surely we are secure upon the ocean?"

"What's to prevent them from getting a polacca, or a cutter? There are plenty to be had at Acapulco. If Olivarez has carried off anything very valuable, as I imagine, his enemies will not be deterred by a little sea-sickness from keeping up the chase."

A horrified gasp followed Captain Raleigh's words. Olivarez had come up the companion, and had heard all that the skipper said.

Both men turned and saw him—a picture of shivering fear, both pitiable and despicable to look upon.

Olivarez was a man of spare form, whose clothes hung loose upon his shrunken limbs. In his fear he seemed to crouch and grow smaller, and his eyes wandered about him fearfully. Talbot, in his mind, could not help comparing him to an ape. Not without difficulty did he restrain a cry of disgust.

"What do you say? What do you say?" exclaimed the miser. He had a way of repeating his words when he was terrified, as Talbot had already noticed. "You are only jesting, señor! Say you are only jesting."

"Nothing of the kind," replied Captain Raleigh, with almost brutal brusqueness. "I certainly anticipate pursuit. What have you in that bag of yours?"

"Only—only a few—some securities, and—and private papers of no value," stammered the banker.

"The lie was so palpable that a child could have detected it. 'Very well,' said the captain grimly. 'These private papers of no value will cause some blood-letting ere long, if the wind doesn't change.'"

"But it will change! it will change!"

"It may; but I don't believe it will."

"Oh, oh! don't say that, Señor Capitano—"

"Take courage, dear father!" It was the voice of Dolores, who had followed Olivarez from below. "There is no vessel in sight. And, after all, the ship is moving very quickly."

The poor girl saw the "Gadfly" tacking swiftly enough, and did not discern that in a direct line her progress was exceedingly slow.

Captain Raleigh concealed a grin. He had not the heart to deceive her.

"That's so, missy," said he. "The 'Gadfly's' a good boat, and we are getting along all right."

Dolores was nobody's fool; she saw that the skipper spoke thus in order to comfort her.

Silvio Castillo was not so considerate.

"Let us have the truth," he said brusquely. "The vessel is merely crawling—and you know it, Señor el Capitan. And if my eyes do not deceive me that is an Acapulco felucca I can see astern!"

All eyes turned in the direction of the Mexican's extended finger.

A small, clean-cut craft, lateen-rigged, was beating northward, almost in the wind's eye.

A seaman's oath burst from Captain Raleigh.

"What is that vessel, señor?" asked Dolores, with a protecting hand upon the old banker's shoulder.

"It's no use disguising the truth," abruptly said the skipper. "I saw that felucca in Acapulco yesterday morning. She was for sale, and the shipwright was cleaning her. The cleaning must have been left off in the middle, which proves—"

"Proves," interrupted Castillo, "that whoever sails in it was in a mighty hurry to get to sea. In short, that after we eluded them on the shore they followed us on the water."

Captain Raleigh nodded.

"I fear so," he said.

A lamentable cry came from Olivarez.

Charles Talbot stepped forward, and caught him just as he fell in a dead swoon.

"Oh, my father!" murmured Dolores, wringing her hands.

"I will carry him down, señorita," Talbot said gently.

He lifted Olivarez. The shrunken form of the banker was a mere featherweight to the stalwart sailor.

"Oh, I thank you, señor!" said the girl, following him.

And in a couple of minutes Talbot laid Olivarez upon his bunk, and loosened his collar.

"He is all right, señorita. Don't look frightened. He will come to in a few minutes."

The girl stood beside the bunk, her eyes heavy with unshed tears. Talbot felt his heart moved by pity; something impelled him to speak on:

"Danger seems to be at hand, Miss Olivarez. But there is aboard this vessel at least one man who is willing to die in your defence."

Too distracted by anxiety to be surprised at anything, the girl received this offer of service with a glance of gratitude.

"Thanks, señor, thanks! Heaven knows we need friends now!"

Talbot ventured to press her hand ere he returned to the deck. Her touch thrilled him.

In the companion he met Silvio Castillo, whose swarthy face wore an exceedingly disagreeable look.

"What do you want with me?" asked Talbot, as the bank of the Mexican dropped heavily upon his shoulder.

"I want to speak to you."

"Be quick, then; I've no time to waste."

"Did you see what I did with the man who boarded our boat last night?" said Silvio, looking him in the eyes.

"You stabbed him."

"Exactly. You may have observed that I am somewhat dexterous in the use of the poniard?"

His manner was so threatening that Talbot could not help giving him a sharp retort.

"Yes, you handle it like an experienced assassin," he said drily.

The Mexican ground his teeth.

"Well, another blow of this poniard will be the reward of anyone whose eyes dwell upon Dolores Olivarez!" he said, in a low, hissing voice.

Talbot understood now. The looks and tones of Castillo were those of a jealous man.

It was with an unpleasant shock that Talbot recollected some words dropped by Captain Raleigh, in reference to Castillo probably being a lover of the old banker's daughter.

"A cat may look at a king, Don Silvio," he replied. "And I assure you that I shall look at whom I please. It is for the lady to complain—not for you. What right have you to speak?"

This was a "feeler." Talbot was curious to know upon what footing Castillo stood with regard to Donna Dolores.

"She is to be my wife!" fiercely answered Don Silvio.

"That alters the case, of course, if it is a fact."

"Do you doubt my word, señor?"

"I certainly require proof before I believe the young lady guilty of such bad taste," tartly replied Charles Talbot.

Castillo glared at him, and seemed to meditate an assault; but he restrained himself. It was fortunate for him, for a few more words would have made Talbot fling him down the ladder.

"It is useless to quarrel, Señor Talbot, when we may all be murdered before the morning. But if the danger passes—"

"You will find me quite ready for you," Talbot said disdainfully.

The Mexican drew away, scowling. Talbot joined Captain Raleigh by the binnacle.

"Been quarrelling with Castillo?" Raleigh asked.

"No; but he nearly quarrelled with me."

"He seems to be a beastly puppy. If those fellows yonder make an end of him I shan't grumble."

Talbot laughed.

"You are sure they are following us, sir?"

"Certain. You can see for yourself."

Talbot carefully observed the felucca, and soon came to the same conclusion as the skipper.

The Mexican craft tacked in the same way that the *felucca* did, and kept almost in a line with her. And an alarming circumstance did not escape Talbot's observation—the felucca was able to sail much nearer the wind than the brig, and consequently was steadily overhauling the "Gadfly."

"Yes, that's so," the skipper assented, reading Talbot's thought in his quick glance. "She's coming up hand over hand. We ought to have expected it, for she could not have left Acapulco till the gale went down, so we have had a great start, and yet she hove in sight. With our gammy topmast, we're making less way than we might; and those lateen sails, well handled, can sail awfully close to the wind. Charles, my boy, she sails three knots to the 'Gadfly's' two, and she can get two points nearer the wind. Which means—"

"That it will take her about an hour to run us down!"

"If the daylight holds out, yes."

"Ah," Talbot said hopefully, "it will be dark in half an hour, and there's promise of a rough night."

"In the dark we may throw 'em off," Raleigh said, in a doubtful way. "But I believe we shall find them near when the sun rises. If so, the game's up. But upon one point I'm determined: Old Olivarez shall spin the whole yarn, and let us know just how we stand, and what we have to expect from the landsharks yonder."

The felucca was well sailed by whoever had command of her. Ere the sunset was lost in shadow she was near enough for the English seamen to distinguish a spare, drooping form in the bows. Standing actively upon the bowsprit, the man surveyed the brig through a glass.

"ART THOU THE MAN?" is the Title of the Splendid Complete Novel in this week's "Heartsease." Price One Penny.

"Ah!" cried Silvio Castillo, as he saw the drooping figure. "It is he—himself!"

"It is whom?" Talbot curiously asked.

"Ximenes!" I know his bent back, curse him!"

And, with his swarthy face a shade paler, the young Mexican descended the companion to acquaint Olivarez with his discovery.

"Now, who on earth is Ximenes?" asked Talbot of Captain Raleigh. "The sight of him appears to scare our friend Silvio."

"Perhaps," the skipper said significantly—"perhaps the owner of something Olivarez carries in his valise."

"I can't say I like the situation," Talbot remarked. "It isn't pleasant to be helping an absconding banker to get clear off with his plunder. That seems to be what it amounts to. We may come to blows. Shall we, then, be killing honest men, who seek only the recovery of their own?"

"No man under my command shall strike a blow in such a cause," said the skipper. "I don't pretend to be over-particular if it's a question of helping a poor wretch to escape a convict prison. But killing is a different matter. I suspect, though, that yonder fellows are blacker sheep than even those we have aboard. But well, soon have the truth from Olivarez, or I'll know the reason why."

The sun sank in the bosom of the Pacific.

Blackness, hardly broken by a star, brooded over the ocean. The felucca disappeared from view. She showed no lights, so the "Gaddy's" men had no means of ascertaining whether she had lost the track.

"Shall we show lights, sir?" Billy Bunt, the stout boatman's mate, asked, as he received no order.

"No, Bunt, not a glim, port or starboard. But keep open your eyes, my lads, for lights on the sea. A collision in the dark will send us to Davy's locker in a trice of shakes!"

Dimly through the gloom the brig flitted, and one question weighed upon the minds of the crew—had the felucca lost scent, or was she still hanging like a bloodhound upon the track?

CHAPTER 3.

A Sailor's Chivalry—Good-bye to the "Gaddy"—How the Felucca Passed the Fugitives in the Darkness.

Captain Raleigh, in a very good temper, went down during the middle watch to interview Olivarez. No one, in the present state of tension, could think of sleep.

The skipper demanded an explicit explanation; but the miserable old Mexican shuffled and shifted incessantly.

"Very well," said the captain at last, "that valise seems to be what they are after. If they overtake us I will give it up to them."

The banker gave a sort of howl, and convulsively clutched his treasure.

"You shall kill me first!" he said, glaring.

"I dare say Master Ximenes will do that if you make trouble."

"He will in any case if he overtakes us," Silvio Castillo said quietly. "It is true that they desire that valise and its contents; but they thirst for our blood still more."

"Tell me who they are."

"They are smugglers of the Gulf—outlaws and out-throats every one. As for this valise, you may consider that we have little right to it. But Ximenes and his gang have none at all. In short, Señor Olivarez, when his bank failed, made off with all he could save from the wreck. Ximenes got wind of it, and, probably believing the amount to be greater than it is, has made up his mind to rob us of it."

"That sounds square; but why does Ximenes want to kill you as well as plunder you?" asked the skipper suspiciously.

"Because, in anticipation of his pursuit, we struck the first blow. I do not know how it is, but he is still alive."

"A precious set of scoundrels, the lot of you!"

"Did you think you were going to get a thousand onzas for ordinary passengers?" calmly asked the young Mexican. Captain Raleigh flushed. Silvio had him there.

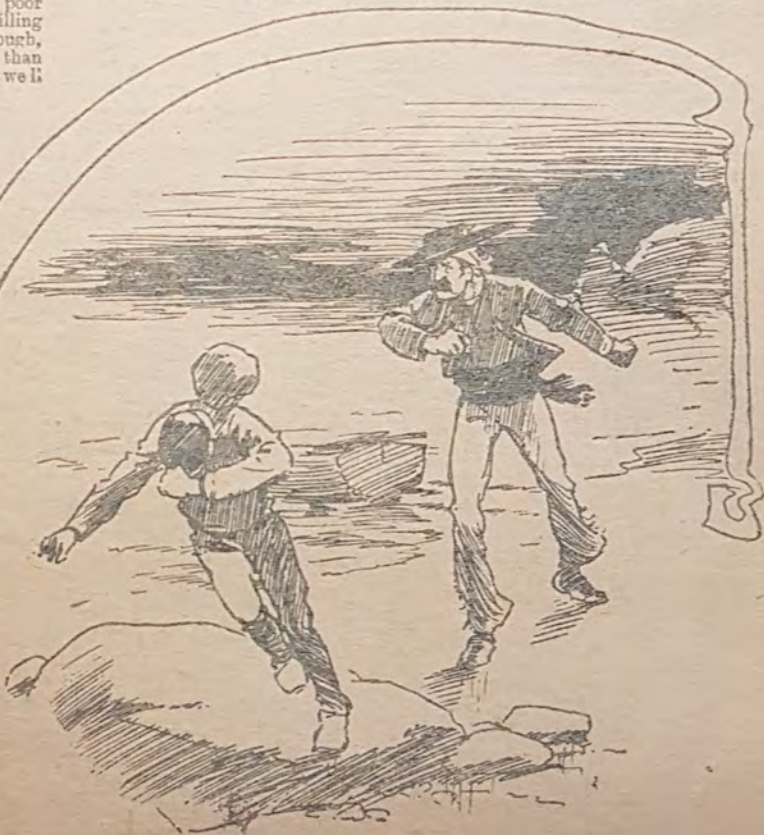
Talbot, who was present, broke the awkward silence.

"And Miss Olivarez—is her life also threatened?" he asked.

"Assuredly," answered Silvio, exchanging a glance of meaning with Olivarez. They knew this would appeal to the Englishmen.

"But what's to be done?" growled the skipper. "We are not armed. Resistance is out of the question if we are run down."

"Alter your course, señor. The enemy must know that you are bound for Frisco, as anyone in Acapulco could have told them. Stretch seaward, and let us lose ourselves in the Pacific. As for money, we shall not quarrel. We will buy



With a fiendish gleam in his eyes, the Mexican took a quick step after him, the piece of rock uplifted in his hand.

Crash! It was a sickening concussion. Dudley gave a single low moan, and fell upon the rocky bank, face downwards—dead or stunned. Castillo cared not which.

your cargo, whatever it is, and make you a present of it when you have carried us to a place of safety."

"Silvio—" began the banker, in horror.

"Shut up! Our lives are at stake now. Besides, you know you can easily afford it."

Talbot saw Captain Raleigh in doubt, and he hastened to speak.

"Does it not occur to you that Ximenes may suspect such a move, and sail west himself?"

"That's so," reluctantly said the captain. "There's no getting away from the fact, gentlemen, that the felucca can just walk round and round the 'Gaddy.' I believe they are near enough to keep us in view with a night-glass, and, in fact, it's only the swell on the sea that makes them afraid to run us down in the dark. Our only hope was a black and a rough night, and it is turning out neither. The sea's going down; there's no sign of a fresh gale, and the stars are coming out. In short, we can't give them the ship, and that's what we must make up our minds to."

"KING OF THE SCOUTS!"—COMPLETE, NEXT FRIDAY.

Silvio changed colour, while the banker trembled and shook as it smitten with the ague.

It was clear that both had looked for safety in the young man's suggestion, and Captain Raleigh's reply was a shock to them.

"What's to be done, then, to evade them?" Silvio demanded nervously and irritably.

"There is but one plan that promises safety," Talbot said; "that is, to leave the 'Gadfly'."

"How can we do so in the open sea?"

"In a boat."

"You are a madman!" Silvio answered, with a shrug.

"Not at all. In our longboat, with a couple of skilled seamen, you could easily reach the coast about Cape Corrientes. I do not say you would be safe there; but here you have only certain death to expect as soon as the sun rises."

Silvio looked at the banker. Olivarez nodded his trembling head eagerly. It was, after all, a chance.

Captain Raleigh at once seized upon the idea. He was feverishly anxious to rid himself of the passengers who had caused him such trouble and risk, and who seemed likely to cause him still more, unless by some means his ship were relieved of their presence.

"You can have the longboat, certainly," he said; "but about the men to manage it I'm afraid there'll be a difficulty."

"I don't think so, sir," answered the mate. "I will take command of her myself, if you will permit it, and the offer of a substantial reward will get volunteers from the crew."

"And you, sir, what would you require in the way of reward?" quavered the miserly banker.

"Nothing. I will be frank. If only you two were in danger Ximenes might hang you both, and I would not lift a finger to prevent it. But you have drawn a lady into danger, and it is for her sake that I will help you."

"You are indeed frank, senior!" scowled Silvio Castillo.

"Well, then, we refuse your aid!"

"Nonsense, Silvio!" broke in Olivarez. "The senior is generous. We accept his offer. Sir, I thank you!"

Talbot nodded indifferently.

He knew he was doing a rash, perhaps a foolish thing, in thus attaching himself to the banker's party. But his sympathy for Dolores was the cause. He was really in love already with this beautiful, sad-eyed Mexican girl; but chivalry towards a woman in distress was his chief motive.

Captain Raleigh looked a little grave. He did not want to lose his mate. Talbot was a valuable officer. But he, too, was concerned for Dolores, and he gave his consent.

The captain and mate returned to the deck to see about the necessary preparations.

"You're doing a fool's trick, Talbot," Raleigh said bluntly. "Think so, sir?" drily asked the mate.

"You bet! It's the girl's dark eyes at the bottom of it, of course, and I don't deny that she's a clipper; but look out, my boy! She belongs to the young Dago."

"I have only his word for that."

"Those greasers are queer cattle," candidly continued Raleigh. "The girl's half-English, it's true. I knew her mother—an English skipper's daughter. But there's Silvio. If you make sheep's eyes at the donna, look out for his poniard in your back."

"My fist against his poniard, captain! But while the danger lasts I reckon he'll keep clear of my hawse."

"No doubt they'll all be oily enough while the danger lasts. But how will you rejoin the 'Gadfly'?"

"You'll take me back, I suppose, if I rejoin you at 'Frisco'?"

"Gladly. But I doubt if we shall meet there."

"I shall have to trust to fortune for that."

The masts, sails, and oars were put in the longboat, also canvas for a tent, kegs of water, and provisions.

There was no telling how or when the castaways, for such they had now become, would land; and Talbot was long-headed enough to prepare for all emergencies, and the skipper was not disposed to be stingy.

Talbot called for a couple of volunteers to follow him, making no secret of the fact that the service was dangerous. There was, for a minute, hesitation among the crew. Then Billy Bunt, the stout, ruddy-faced bo'sun's mate, stepped forward.

"It's like this hyer, sir," he said, with deliberation. "Any of us would foller you, Mr. Talbot, to the door of Davy Jones, if that was all. But when it comes to blood-spillin' we should like to know the rights of the matter. Who are these here longshoremen we shall hev to fight?"

"They are outlaws—smugglers and robbers from the other side of Mexico. If they were police I myself would not fire a shot against them," Talbot answered; "but as the matter stands they intend not to arrest but to kill our passengers, including the lady. That is enough for me to know."

"And fur me, sir," Billy Bunt said heartily. "I'm your man, sir, if so be as you'll hev me, and the captain permits."

"Thank you, Bunt. I want one other."

Several offered, and Talbot selected a brawny Liverpool man named Dudley.

Without further delay, the effects of the three men and the small belongings of the passengers, were placed in the long boat, and the party boarded it after a general handshaking.

From the precious valise Olivarez produced bills to the value of the thousand onzas he had agreed to pay the skipper, and reluctantly handed them over.

"Good-bye, Charles, my boy!" said Captain Raleigh, as he grasped Talbot's hand in farewell. "You're doing a chivalrous and foolish action, but for the lady's sake I'm ready to do it. Those Dagos would never get her out of danger. I hope we shall meet again."

"I hope we shall, sir. Good-bye!"

The boat, without her mast raised—for Talbot wished to run no risk of being observed by Ximenes—shot off from the "Gadfly."

The brig loomed for a while dimly visible, but soon disappeared from view.

Talbot placed Dudley at the tiller, and with a glass he carefully scanned the shadowed sea.

Olivarez and Castillo sat together, Dolores at a little distance from them. The girl's eyes frequently turned to Talbot as the jealous Castillo noted with smouldering rage.

"Ah!" ejaculated Talbot abruptly.

"What do you see, senior?" asked Olivarez, in a trembling voice, his skinny fingers clenching the valise, which lay upon his knees. It was hardly for a moment out of his hands.

"Silence all! Not a sound! It's the felucca."

"Ah! Ximenes!"

"Silence!"

In breathless stillness the boat drifted.

The low murmur of the sea, the whisper of the wind, now mingled with new sounds, the creaking of spars, and the rustle of bellying canvas.

Like an enormous white bird, the felucca fitted by the boat within a cable's length, and vanished to the north-west.

So close was she in passing that a hum of voices could be heard, though words could not be distinguished.

The occupants of the boats felt their hearts almost cease to beat in the agony of suspense.

Talbot drew a deep sigh of relief when the huge lateen sails disappeared. Almost a sob broke from Donna Dolores.

"Safe at last! safe at last!" mumbled Olivarez.

"Don't deceive yourself, Don Pablo," coldly said Silvio Castillo. "We are not safe, by any means. It wants but two hours to sunrise, and then Ximenes will board the 'Gadfly.'"

"But he will not find us; he will not find us!"

"But his threats will wring from Captain Raleigh the tale of where we have gone. The felucca will track us down, unless we can make the shore first. Is it not so, Senior Talbot?"

"I foresaw all that," answered the mate of the "Gadfly."

"And with common luck we shall be ashore by the time the felucca boards the 'Gadfly.'"

"Did you also foresee," asked Silvio, with an insinuating manner, "what we are to do when we get ashore?"

"You will be alive, at least," sharply replied Talbot.

"And if you had remained aboard the brig, you would have died at dawn."

"The young senior will not desert us, Silvio," Olivarez said, in a wheedling tone. "These brave Englishmen will stand by us to the death, I am sure of that."

Dolores coloured with mortification, as Talbot had seen her do more than once before, at her father's meanness of spirit.

"We have no right to ask that of almost strangers, father," she said, in a low voice.

"You have every right, seniorita," Talbot said quickly. "We are here to die for you, if need be."

"You are too good, senior. We do not," she added bitterly, "deserve such consideration at your hands."

"Nonsense, child, nonsense!" said Olivarez nervously.

"What are you telling Senior Talbot?"

Talbot turned away to help Billy Bunt stop the mast. It was soon done, and the mainsail and topsail were both shaken out. The longboat bowled merrily along, with a stiff wind in her little spread of canvas, buoyantly riding the Pacific swell.

Had Talbot put her before the wind, she would have floundered; but that would have taken them in the direction of Acapulco. By keeping on a more northern tack, Talbot hoped to strike the Mexican coast somewhere about the twentieth parallel, in the neighbourhood of Cape Corrientes.

"Had we left the 'Gadfly' later, we might have made Lower California; but that's impossible now," he said to Olivarez, when the old banker began bemoaning the inevitable return to his native soil.

"Is there any chance of hiding there, senior?" asked Castillo abruptly.

"ART THOU THE MAN?" is the Title of the Splendid Complete Novel in this week's "Heartsease." Price One Penny.

"Yes, the part of the coast I am aiming for is almost a desert. I was wrecked there once, and I know it fairly well. Little more was said during the remainder of the night. Talbot's attention was devoted to the sails. The sun was beginning to gleam through the shadowy east, when Billy Blunt exclaimed suddenly:
"Land ah!"
There was no sign of the felucca upon the whitening sea.

CHAPTER 4.

The Disappointment of Ximenas—A Game of Bluff—Searching the "Gadfly" in Vain—The Place of Refuge—The Banker's Duplicity—The Felucca in Sight.

The reader will judge whether Captain Raleigh of the "Gadfly" looked for morn with anxiety. He had got rid of his dangerous passengers, and that was a weight off his mind. But how would Ximenas and his companions take it? Baffled, deprived of their victim when they deemed success certain, what would be the result of their rage and disappointment?

The skipper's uneasiness was shared by the crew. What weapons they could muster were handed out. A show of spirit might keep the Mexicans within bounds, Captain Raleigh thought. When the sun rose, and disclosed the felucca within a musket-shot, hearts beat hard aboard the brig.

As the early rays silvered the waves, the felucca ran down to the "Gadfly." The swell of the sea had nearly subsided now, and the vessels could safely approach.

"Heave to!" came the command in English, with a strong Spanish accent.

The "Gadfly" obeyed, and a single Mexican leaped from the felucca into the main-chains, thence to the gangway.

The drooping figure of the stranger showed Captain Raleigh that this was Ximenas himself.

A youngish man, of active form, but diminutive in size, and with a crook in his spine, which gave him something of the appearance of a hunchback. But his limbs were supple and muscular. His face was swarthy, almost to a copper tint, and his eyes, deeply sunken, gleamed like carbuncles. A dangerous and lawless-looking man, yet not without a certain sailor-like frankness and good-nature in his face. Captain Raleigh, after a look at him, felt more at ease.

"Pardon me, señor el capitano," said the Mexican, bowing with a graceful sweep of his Panama hat. "I am sorry to cause you trouble; shall be sorrier still to do you injury. But you have some passengers aboard whom I require of you."

"Passengers!" repeated Captain Raleigh, with a fine air of surprise. "Quite a mistake, señor. I carry none."

Ximenas smiled, showing his teeth.

"It is useless to attempt to deceive me, señor. Your vessel was seen beating off Balza Flai for hours that night. I have seen the half-caste who brought you Olivarez's letter at Acapulco."

"Search my vessel if you like, my dear sir," answered the skipper, with a wave of the hand.

Ximenas clicked his teeth. He saw that something was amiss, and began to fear that his prey had escaped him. His jetty eyes glittered round the deck.

"Your longboat is gone, señor," he said abruptly, fixing his glance upon Captain Raleigh.

"Since you are so observant, I will be candid. The three persons you seek are gone."

"When did they go?" asked Ximenas, with calmness.

"Last night, at the end of the middle watch."

"Whither? But that's a useless question; they could only make for the shore." Ximenas's brows contracted; under them his eyes scintillated with rage; he ground his teeth. "And you, señor," he cried—"do you dare to play this trick upon me?"

"As you see."

Ximenas swept his hand towards the felucca.

"Hombre, I have there a score of desperate men. Why should not I revenge myself by desolating your ship?"

"It would not be sensible. You could murder us all, I don't doubt. But we are British seamen, and we'd make a good fight. We could make it stiff work for you, señor. You would not go back so many as you came."

It was upon this circumstance that Captain Raleigh depended—that the Mexicans had everything to lose, and nothing to gain, by a conflict.

Ximenas knew it, too. His throat was only an idle one.

"It is no use making bad worse," resumed the English skipper. "Take it calmly; I've done my duty to my passengers; and, anyway, you can't undo what's done."

Ximenas's brow slowly cleared. He saw the solid logic of what the captain said.

"However, I shall search your ship, to assure myself," he declared.

It had occurred to him that the longboat might have been sent adrift to deceive him, while the fugitives remained hidden aboard the brig.

Captain Raleigh merely shrugged his shoulders.

"If you choose to waste your time, I've no objection to make," he answered indifferently.

Ximenas called half a dozen of his men aboard, and they made a hasty search through the "Gadfly." The chief was soon satisfied that the passengers were gone.

"But the valise?" said one of the Mexicans to Ximenas.

"May not Olivarez have left it here for greater security?" Ximenas shook his head, and laughed.

"You don't know old Pablo, if you think that, Arispo," he answered. "He would sooner part with his cunning old head. No. Wherever we find Olivarez, there shall we find the valise."

He turned to Captain Raleigh.

"Señor capitán, have you sent any of your men with my enemies? You may as well answer, for by reference to your books, and then counting your crew, I can easily ascertain."

"I have sent my first mate, Charles Talbot, and two seamen."

"You will probably never see them again. Adios, señor!" And the Mexicans returned to the felucca.

Heartily glad were the British to see the last of them. The felucca spread her white wings, and flew before the breeze. Rapidly the two vessels parted company.

"Why not have made him tell us whether they had fled, captain?" Arispo grumbled to his chief.

"He would have told us nothing but lies, Arispo."

"However, you do not know where to look for the scoundrels now."

"They will not dare return to Acapulco, knowing that some of our fellows will be watchful there. They will land somewhere upon the coast. Santa Maria! we are in a felucca, they in an open boat. Can we doubt that we shall run them down? And then"—the eyes of Ximenas flashed fire as he rubbed a bruise upon the back of his head—"then to pay the old fox for his treachery!"

A long, low promontory, stretching forth from a barren shore, ending in an abrupt precipice. Rocky islets and peninsulas about it, and upon its summit a growth of stunted vegetation.

This was where the longboat of the "Gadfly" found a haven.

Charles Talbot steered it into the maze of channels with a skilled hand, and laid it alongside a wharf-like shelf of rock.

Down went sail and mast, and the little craft, securely moored, lay snug, concealed from the sea by the formations of rock Talbot had left astern.

"Only a careful search will discover us here," Talbot said.

"Ximenas will not find us without trouble. The boat is not visible from the sea, and if they search the channels, we can, at a pinch, sink it. From the top of this promontory we can keep a splendid look-out."

Talbot had tacitly taken the command of the party, as the man best fitted to take it. Silvio Castillo, though he had already learned to hate the English sailor, did not dispute it.

The sullen dislike of Silvio, and the wheedling cordiality of the banker, were equally distasteful to Talbot. He despised both the Mexicans, and spoke to them no more than he could help. All he did was for Dolores' sake. This the quick-witted girl easily understood.

Talbot knew the ground very well. A difficult upward path led to the summit of the promontory, which at its extremity rose into a high plateau, by no means easy of access. To this plateau Talbot had the provisions and effects carried, in order to secure them, in case of disaster to the boat. Subsequent events made him bless this foresight. Between two big rocks he found a canvas shelter for Dolores, and this he made as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances. Sailors are ever neat and ingenious, and Talbot's work was very well done. Upon all this Don Silvio looked with sullen eyes.

And now elapsed three days, during which nothing occurred to break the tranquillity—nothing, till the third evening.

The dislike of Don Silvio and Talbot deepened; but they came to no quarrel yet. Talbot was by this time in love with the beautiful Donna, and aware of it, and Silvio could not help seeing it. But it was not spoken of.

No definite plan was formed for the future. An escape inland was practicable, and Ximenas could have been thus eluded. But Olivarez would not hear of it. The police were searching for him—as Talbot correctly guessed—and to fall into their clutches meant lifelong imprisonment for the wretched man, and the loss of his invaluable handbag. The

"KING OF THE SCOUTS!"—COMPLETE, NEXT FRIDAY.

banker's idea was to stay there among the rocks until the felucca had given up the quest, and then escape to sea again in the longboat. Some vessel would pick them up, and the captain could be induced by gold to carry them to a foreign land. In Europe the fugitives would be safe from the revengeful smugglers of the Mexican Gulf.

This was all very well, provided Ximenes did not discover their hiding-place on the promontory.

If he did, it merely meant a hopeless struggle against odds, and defeat and death.

For the present, the inaction did not displease our hero. He knew that Olivarez would shake him off as soon as he was of no further use. And then, when would he see Dolores again? This seclusion upon the lonely coast, with many hours every day spent in the society of the girl he had learned to love, meant happiness to Charles Talbot. The change in his life was complete, and his professional prospects were very likely to suffer from his neglect of his calling. But for the time he thought only of Dolores.

Three days, and no sign of the felucca! Olivarez lost his cowering look of fear, and became once more what he had been in his counting-house in Mexico—a pompous banker, with arrogant manners. The sneers of Castillo, to which he had hitherto submitted patiently, he now retorted, and he began to be domineering towards Don Silvio.

"You are not indispensable to me now, Silvio," Talbot heard him say on one occasion; "it is to the Englishmen I trust. Don't handle your poniard. You may be able to menace a feeble old man; but Senor Talbot will not see me assassinated."

Silvio scowled like a demon.

"Do you mean to break your promise to me?" he snarled.

"What promise?"

"Concerning Dolores."

"It was a conditional promise. Have you fulfilled the conditions?"

Silvio ground his teeth.

"You promised me Dolores on condition that I helped you to get rid of Ximenes, and to escape from Mexico."

"Admitted. And have you done it? Ximenes is still alive. If I am rid of him I owe it to Talbot, not to you. Have you helped me to escape from Mexico? We are here still; and it is Talbot who will take us away."

The young Mexican choked with fury.

"In short, you will refuse me Dolores?" he hissed.

"I shall not keep to a compact you yourself have broken—or, at least, failed to keep."

Silvio looked as if he would spring at the cunning old banker. Olivarez stepped back towards Talbot.

"No violence, senor," said the sailor warningly to Castillo.

Without a word, but quivering with anger, Silvio Castillo turned away. He went slowly up to the highest part of the plateau, whence one of the party usually kept watch on the sea.

The banker and the sailor looked at each other for a minute in silence. Then Olivarez glanced round to ascertain that no one else was within hearing, and spoke in a low voice:

"Senor Talbot, you heard what just passed?"

"Unavoidably, since you spoke in my hearing."

"What conclusion did you draw?"

"That you made a scoundrelly compact with Silvio Castillo, to obtain his aid, and that you now play him false."

Olivarez did not even wince.

"Would you have me give my daughter—my peerless Dolores—to this Castillo, the associate of smugglers and outlaws?"

"By no means. It would be the extreme of wickedness," the sailor answered hastily.

"So I think." Then abruptly: "Senor Talbot, you love Dolores, is it not so?"

Startled by the sudden demand, Talbot coloured deeply, and his eyes drooped before those of the Mexican.

"Come, senorito, confess the truth. Surely it is nothing unusual to love so much beauty and goodness?"

Talbot raised his eyes, and looked steadfastly at the banker.

"I admit it," he said. "I am not ashamed of it. I do love Donna Dolores with heart and soul! What then?"

"I am glad to hear you say so. Senor, I am getting an old man now. Death perhaps will claim me ere long. When I go—and his voice grew quite pathetic—"it will be a consolation to me to know that you will be her protector."

Talbot looked puzzled—as he felt. He knew that if Pablo Olivarez really considered death near, the old wretch would be grovelling in terror, and howling to all the saints in the calendar. What new rascality was he planning, then?

"But," pursued Olivarez, "so long as Castillo lives he will never allow you to wed Dolores."

Talbot saw it all then.

Dolores had been used as a bait to Silvio. Now she was to

be a bait to him, to rid the banker of Silvio, who was of no further use, and whom he had begun to fear.

"What, then, do you suggest, senor?" asked Talbot, to make Olivarez clearly reveal his meaning.

"A fall from the precipice into the sea would be necessarily fatal," significantly answered Olivarez.

With all his cunning, he had entirely mistaken his man.

"Oh, senor," said Talbot, with biting contempt, "you do not know British sailors if you ask that of one. I am to assassinate Castillo—for what? To relieve you of your fear of your valise. And you promise me Dolores as a reward. And I have just seen how you keep such promises. You expect me to be both a rogue and a fool—a scoundrel and an imbecile. You have a poor opinion of my wits, senor."

Without waiting to hear a reply Talbot turned away, leaving the old schemer pallid with rage.

To be thus seen through by a simple sailor was galling to his self-love—he, the plotter, deceiver, and despoiler.

Talbot had not perhaps acted wisely in exasperating the banker; but it relieved him to speak his mind candidly.

He little dreamed that the whole that was said had reached the ears of Dolores herself, who was upon the other side of a pinnacle of rock close at hand.

Olivarez, moving away slowly from the spot, passed the elevation, and came upon Dolores seated upon a boulder, her graceful head drooping, her hands tightly clasped. He saw at once that she was aware of what had been spoken.

"Oh, father!" said she, with bitter accent, as her large, sad eyes fell upon him. "Is there no shame you will spare me?"

"What do you mean, child? Of course, I should not really have expected you to marry this Englishman," he answered testily.

"Do you think I would let an honourable man become my husband—I, your daughter?" she flashed out.

The shame, the bitter contempt, stung even the thick-skinned worshipper of mammon.

He was about to make an angry retort, when a cry from the upper plateau arrested the words upon his lips.

Silvio Castillo had been watching the sea. He now turned back to the others, standing out against the red of the sunset, as they looked up at him.

"The felucca! The felucca!"

That was what he was crying.

It was the enemy in sight.

CHAPTER 5.

A Night of Anxiety—Dolores Speaks—Talbot and Silvio Come to Blows—The Mexican's Revolt.

Talbot reached the side of Castillo in two bounds. His eagle eyes swept the sea. Yes, the Mexican was not mistaken; the felucca was in sight.

Afar yet; dim upon the horizon to the south. She was creeping up the coast. It would be hours before she reached the promontory.

With the aid of his glass, Talbot made out the vessel more clearly. There was no mistake about it—it was the craft of Ximenes. He even thought he could distinguish the crooked form of the captain among the hazy figures revealed at moments by the shifting of the sails.

He descended, and rejoined the others, looking very grave. The banker, all his arrogance gone, was once more the wretched poltroon Talbot had first met at Balza Flat. His terror-stricken face, chalky in hue, was pitiful to look upon. His frightened eyes wandered aimlessly from object to object.

Donna Dolores' eyes met Talbot's questioningly, and with an expression in their liquid depths he had never seen there before, and which stirred him strangely.

"It is really the felucca, senor?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say that it is."

The banker groaned.

"Oh, they will murder me! I am a dead man!"

"Don't despair yet, sir," the young Englishman answered quietly. "The felucca is creeping along the coast; but there is no reason to suppose that she will stop here. If she keeps on her present course at the same rate of speed she will pass this spot about midnight, and can see nothing. Even if she stays nothing here to excite suspicion, if we take care not to show ourselves. That they will minutely search all these intricate channels I consider unlikely. At the first sign of their doing so I will scuttle the boat, so that it shall not betray us, and these wild rocks afford us ample concealment."

The old banker brightened considerably.

"I do not say we are safe," added Talbot; "but every chance is, I believe, in our favour."

It was only a few minutes later that the sun vanished, and rapid darkness overspread land and sea.

Then the lights of the felucca flashed out. Talbot watched the gleams of green and red; they remained almost stationary.

The felucca was anchored, then.

"ART THOU THE MAN?" is the Title of the Splendid Complete Novel in this week's "Heartsease." Price One Penny.

Ximenas was not to pass in the night. But, after all, he would see nothing in the daylight, Talbot hoped.

"The felucca is waiting, Don Pablo," remarked Silvio, taking a cruel pleasure in the terror of the old banker. "They will search round here in the daylight. May I ask, Señor Talbot, what you will do if they discover us—as I believe they will; for Ximenas is not easily baffled."

"We are armed," answered Talbot. "We have a magnificent position for defence. We could hold this plateau for a long time."

"But when the food gives out? We have enough for some weeks, true. But Ximenas would not abandon the game, even if he had to wait months or years."

"We might make terms—say, at the price of surrendering the valley and what it contains."

"Never!" cried Olivarez fiercely. "Attempt to rob me, and I will hurl myself into the sea with it in my arms!"

Talbot shrugged his shoulders, and remained silent. The selfish folly of this miserable wretch disgusted and angered him. But he could have borne still more for Dolores' sake.

After the frugal evening meal, Talbot ascended the upper plateau. He wished to think of Dolores under the stars of heaven, alone. Leaning against a mossy rock, not far from

day, in which you are sure to fall, as I fear. Are you willing to risk your life—to die for people of whom you know nothing?"

"For your sake, senorita, I would gladly die," Talbot said, almost involuntarily, "or for Señor Olivarez's, because he is your father. For Don Silvio I do not pretend to have any regard."

A rich flood of colour made her face so divinely beautiful that Charles could not remove his eyes from it. She did not notice his gaze; her mind was full of troubled thoughts.

"Yet, Mr. Talbot, I want you to know who and what we are before you so definitely ally yourself to us."

"I will not deny that I am curious," Talbot said frankly. "It appears to me that Señor Olivarez did not tell us everything."

"He deceived you, as he deceived everybody, including myself, up to a short time ago," the girl said bitterly. "I was educated in a convent. I saw my father seldom, and my mother—a countrywoman of yours, senor—died when I was a child. I knew nothing of my father except that he was a great financier and banker, and reputed to be enormously rich."

"The name of Olivarez, the great financier, was known upon both sides of the water," Talbot remarked.

"It was about a year ago that I left the convent school, and came to live at my father's house in the city of Mexico. For a time I knew nothing of his circumstances. Gradually I learned that reckless speculation had dissipated his great fortune—that he was tottering upon the brink of ruin. Worse than that, I discovered that a great part of his income was derived from secret dealings with the smugglers of the Gulf."

Silvio Castillo was the principal agent between my father and Ximenas, the chief of the smugglers. It was a month ago that the blow fell!"

Donna Dolores paused, but resumed after a few minutes:

"One night my father ordered me to prepare for instant flight. He said his bank was about to close—that he must fly across the sea to avoid arrest. We fled from the city at night. I found that Silvio Castillo was to be our companion. I remonstrated with my father. He frowned me into silence. Without servants, without rest, hardly stopping for food and shelter at night, we travelled by the most unfrequented roads, always in fear of the police. She shuddered and trembled. "Oh, the horror of those weeks! Shall I ever forget them? It was terrible! By what my father and Silvio said at times I slowly learned the whole tale. When my father found ruin inevitable he collected all the valuables he could take away. These included a large sum of money, in securities valued at several million dollars, belonging to Ximenas and his band, which my father had charge of, in his capacity of banker. This he stole. The securities are in his

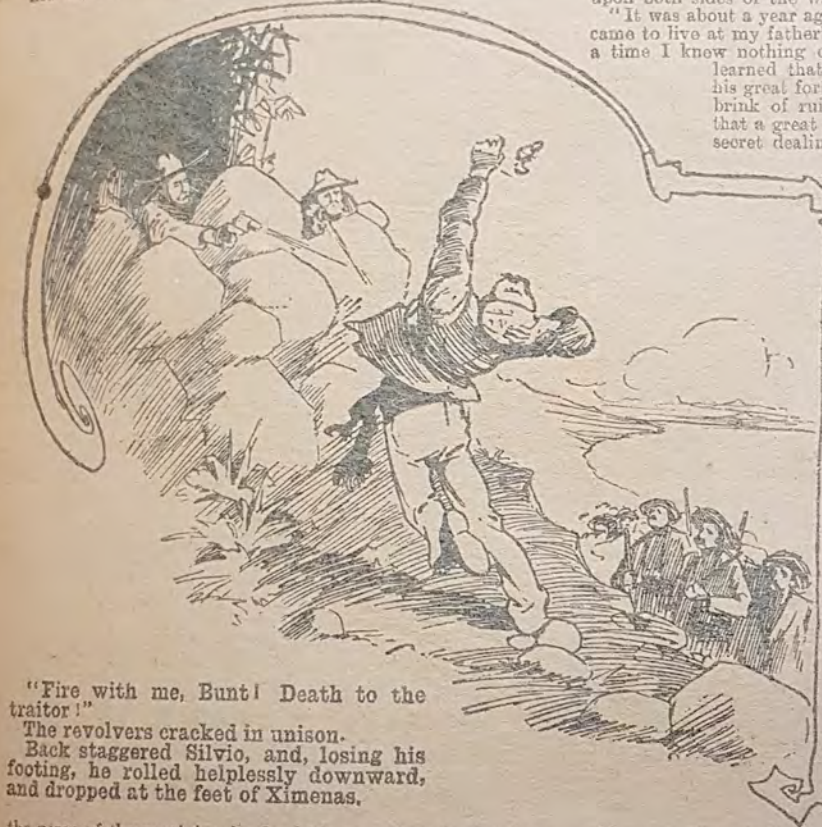
valise now, along with other papers representing various sums he banked abroad in anticipation of his failure. But even that is not the worst. Ximenas's determined and revengeful nature was known and feared by Silvio and my father. They agreed to prevent his pursuit by assassinating him. They tricked him into passing over a trapdoor, through which he was hurled into a cellar. They boarded it over and left him to die; even now they know not how he escaped."

Dolores' voice broke.

"And that is my father," she murmured.

"My poor lady, I cannot say how I feel for you!" Talbot said, with tender gentleness.

"They soon found that not only the police, but the followers of Ximenas, were tracking us, and Ximenas himself, as Silvio afterwards ascertained. They had feared only arrest at first; now they dreaded assassination. We had approached Manzanilla. My father was afraid to enter it; we turned away to Acapulco. There we hoped to get a vessel to take us away. Silvio entered the town in disguise, and returned with the news that the 'Gadfly' was in port there. This was joyful tidings to my father, who seems to have had dealings with Captain Raleigh in earlier days. A message was sent



"Fire with me, Bunt! Death to the traitor!"

The revolvers cracked in unison.

Back staggered Silvio, and, losing his footing, he rolled helplessly downward, and dropped at the feet of Ximenas.

On the verge of the precipice, he fixed his eyes upon the dancing, twinkling lights of the felucca—specks upon the illimitable sea.

Down at the bottom of the cliff the seaman Dudley was on the watch in the longboat.

Billy Bunt, who was to relieve Dudley later, was sleeping, curled up in a tarpaulin under a sheltering rock, on a bed of moss, and near him Castillo and Olivarez lay down, though neither thought of sleep.

Talbot, dreamily gazing out upon the shadowy sea, was lost in reverie, when a light footstep startled him.

He gave a start as he saw Donna Dolores, wrapped in her cloak, at his side.

"You here, senorita?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"I wished to speak to you, Mr. Talbot," she said, in an unsteady voice. And Charles was almost certain that he saw the glimmer of tears in her beautiful eyes.

"I am entirely at your service, dear Donna Dolores," he said gently. His heart was beating fast.

"Mr. Talbot, you have taken up our cause like a chivalrous man, and I admire you for your courage and generosity. Tomorrow may come a death-struggle, in which you may fall—

"KING OF THE SCOUTS!"—COMPLETE, NEXT FRIDAY.

aboard by a peasant, and you know how you picked us up at Balza Flat, and how narrowly we escaped the foes who had tracked us to Acapulco."

She ceased. Talbot could have listened to the sweet voice for ever. There was a short silence; but the thoughts of both were busy.

Dolores had said little of the shame, the humiliation, she had suffered, or how sorely her duty and affection for her father had been tried; but Talbot understood it all.

The companion of the grasping, dishonest banker in his cowardly flight, what agonies this proud spirit must have endured!

And, through it all, filial tenderness had been uppermost. She had loved and supported the parent for whom she could feel only the contempt of a high, honoured nature for a small, mean one. But contempt had been tempered with pity.

And what did Olivarez give in return for this disinterested love? Selfishness, meanness, cold-heartedness! As Talbot felt his love for Dolores grow intenser, so deepened his dislike of the wretched banker.

"And now you know for whom you are about to risk your life," Dolores concluded.

"It does not alter my resolution, Donna Dolores. I am ready to die for you, and for Senor Olivarez because he is your father. But you have said that to-morrow may bring death to us. May I plead that in excuse for what I am about to say, which otherwise, perhaps, should be left unsaid?—Oh, Dolores, I cannot die without telling you that I love you!"

The girl trembled.

"What are you saying, senor?" she stammered.

"I love you! If we escape with life from this danger may I hope some day to win your love? I ask only for a word of hope," Talbot said eagerly.

There was a long silence.

"I do not know what to answer," Donna Dolores said at last.

"I esteem you very much, senor, but—but—"

There was little in her words, but much in her manner, which brought delicious hope to Talbot's heart.

"I ask only that I may hope, dear Dolores," he said. And he kissed her hand tenderly, but with great respect.

"But, senor," continued she slowly, "do you remember my father—who and what he is?"

"I would not ask you to desert him were he ten times worse. You give him more of duty than he has a right to ask, but I honour you the more for it. His safety shall always be my first care."

"Do I interrupt?" broke in a mocking voice.

Silvio Castillo stood before them.

The young Mexican's face was distorted with malignant passion. He trembled with rage; but he spoke with a forced calmness which was more threatening than unrestrained anger.

Talbot dropped Dolores' hand, and stepped towards the Mexican, his brows contracting.

"What do you want here?" he said sternly.

"Is the cliff your property, senor? I heard voices, and came to see what pretty love-scene was in progress. Oh, senor, have you a hundred lives that you dare to cross me thus?"

Talbot made a gesture of supreme contempt.

"Will you oblige me by going back?" he asked.

Silvio burst into a shrill, dissonant laugh.

"I am not in an obliging mood, senor. Do you know that Donna Dolores is to be my wife?"

"It is false!" cried Dolores.

"You told me that about the 'Gadfly,' and I gave you the lie, Don Silvio," answered Talbot calmly.

"English dog!" hoarsely said the Mexican, "swear that you will never speak again to Donna Dolores, or die where you stand."

Talbot laughed with contemptuous amusement.

"I will neither swear nor die!" he replied, keeping his eyes fixed upon the face of the Mexican.

No more was said. Castillo gave a growl like an enraged wild beast, and sprang at Talbot. In the starlight was seen the glimmer of bare steel.

Dolores shrieked and reeled against the rock; but Talbot was quite prepared for the attack.

Straight from the shoulder his clenched fist shot, and ere he could stab Don Silvio measured his length upon the ground.

It was a tremendous blow. He lay dazed and stunned for several minutes. Talbot picked up the poniard and threw it into the sea, and calmly waited for him to recover.

When Silvio Castillo rose he felt for his dagger, and, finding that he was disarmed, seemed about to spring at Talbot and clutch his throat with bare hands.

"I warn you that I shall handle you roughly if you don't take yourself off," Talbot said, in a tone of menace.

And Silvio, still dizzy and clouded, thought better of it. He gave the Englishman a demoniac look, and strode away.

Talbot could hear him hissing out curses as he descended towards the anchorage of the longboat.

"I am sorry this should have occurred in your presence," Donna Dolores, observed Talbot, looking at the pale and trembling girl.

"You are not to blame, Mr. Talbot; but—but—"

"You fear Castillo?"

"I fear he will injure you."

"I shall take care that he does not," Talbot, whose opinion of the Mexican was of the poorest, attached but little importance to the episode.

He did not know to what lengths envy, hatred, and jealousy can drive a man accustomed to yield to lawless impulses.

Silvio, despairing of gaining Dolores, whom he loved in his own wild way, and maddened by the humiliation to which he had been subjected in her presence, had come to a desperate resolution.

He picked up upon the shore a chunk of rock, about the size of a brick, and then entered the boat.

The seaman Dudley gave him a casual glance.

"Mr. Talbot wants you, senor," said Silvio. "I am to mind the boat while you are gone."

"Ay, ay!" answered Dudley, nothing doubting, and not sorry to stretch his legs a bit.

He stepped upon the flat rock to which the boat was moored, turning his back to Castillo.

With a fiendish gleam in his eyes, the Mexican took a quick step after him, the piece of rock uplifted in his hand.

Crash!

It was a sickening concussion. Dudley gave a single low moan, and fell upon the rocky bank, face downwards—dead or stunned, Castillo cared not which.

To unmoor the boat, and push off into the channel, was the work of a minute.

The tide was on the ebb now, and Castillo had only to keep the boat clear of the reefs. This he did with some difficulty, and soon he was in the open sea.

Straight towards the glimmering lights of the felucca the traitor steered.

To Ximenes he was going, to betray the refuge upon the promontory, careless of what might be his own fate, so that he obtained revenge upon those he hated—the banker who had played him false, the girl who had scorned him, the Englishman who had proved his successful rival.

CHAPTER 6.

Betrayed—Facing the Foe—Ximenes Offers Terms—No Surrender!

Billy Bunt stretched himself and rose.

The first gleaming of dawn was in the sky; a chilly wind blew over the promontory from the sea.

"Why, that coon Dudley has been on the watch all night," Billy exclaimed, in dismay. "Why didn't the critter call me, as was arranged? He'll be fair fagged!"

And Billy hastened down the rocky path to the anchorage of the longboat.

"Jerusalem!" cried he suddenly. "Whar's the boat?"

It had disappeared!

The shout of Billy Bunt was heard by Charlie Talbot.

After Donna Dolores left him, our hero remained upon the cliff, half-wakeful, half-dozing, for the remainder of the night.

He was wide awake, trying to pierce the sea-mists and discern the felucca, when Bunt's cry startled him. He hurried down the slope, and found Billy the picture of horror.

The longboat had vanished; but it was needless to ask what had become of the watchman. He lay stark and stiff by the water's edge.

"Dead!" said Billy Bunt, in a hushed voice. "Pore Tom Dudley! A good shipmate he was; and to die like this 'ere, with his skull knocked in from ahind! Mr. Talbot sir, whar cuss can have treated him like this?"

Talbot's first idea was that some of Ximenes's men had come into the channel during the night. But they would not have rested content with killing Dudley and capturing the boat. The true solution was soon found.

"Where is Castillo?" Talbot asked abruptly.

"Do you suspect, sir—"

"Let us find him."

But Castillo was not to be found. The truth was clear. He had gone off in the boat.

And Olivarez, when he found out what had happened, became a prey to the bitterest fear.

"He has gone to obtain pardon from Ximenes by betraying us," the old banker cried, wringing his hands.

"Will Ximenes accept him as an ally?" asked Talbot doubtfully.

"Perhaps not; but he will learn all that he can reveal."

"It is true," said Dolores. "We are lost."

"Not yet," answered Talbot tranquilly. "We are not dead yet, and while there's life there's hope!"

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He rapidly ascended to the high plateau, and looked towards the felucca. The mists were clearing off the sea now, and he could plainly make out the graceful vessel. Her anchor was up, and with one of her lateens set, she was closing in towards the shore. With the aid of his glass, Talbot could see that she was towing the longboat astern. He had had a faint hope that Silvio had only deserted them, and had not boarded the felucca. This hope was now dissipated. The place of concealment was betrayed, and they had now to reckon with Ximenes and his hand back to face.

"What can we now look for but death?" Talbot said to himself. "Oh, my poor Dolores, must I see you murdered, then?"

He called his friends to the plateau.

"Here," he said, "we can make some sort of a defence. You see how difficult is the path up from the water. We may hold out a long time here."

The banker was too palsied with fright to be of any assistance; but Talbot and Billy Bunt worked with vigour, adding to the strength of a naturally strong position.

By displacing rocks in some places, piling them up in others, they made the ascent of the promontory a work of difficulty for even active men. And as both Talbot and Bunt were excellent marksmen, and had abundance of cartridges, it looked as if they had a very fair chance of keeping the enemy at bay.

It was necessary to bury poor Dudley, and Talbot had no implements for excavating a grave, so the pockets were filled with heavy rock, which sufficed to sink the body below the surface, and then the tide carried it out to sea. It was a true sailor's burial.

This sad task over, Talbot resumed his watch upon the plateau, and saw that the felucca had again come to anchor. She had approached as near the reefs as Ximenes considered prudent. He meant to make the landing in the longboat the traitor had placed at his disposal.

Talbot, with grinding teeth, saw the "Gadfly's" boat filled with swarthy Mexicans, armed with pistols and poniards, and observed Castillo himself at the tiller.

Ximenes, standing up in the boat as it pushed off from the felucca, glanced up at the precipice, and saw the Englishmen looking down upon him.

The swarthy face wrinkled in a grin. He waved his hand mockingly. The boat, with her mainsail drawing, entered the narrow channel, amongst the reefs and rocky islets.

"We could pick off that sea-lawyer, if we had a rifle," Billy Bunt remarked regretfully. "But a pistol wouldn't carry."

"We don't want to begin the killing, Bunt."

"No, that's so, Mr. Talbot."

Ximenes does not look such a scoundrel as Olivarez has led me to expect," continued Talbot thoughtfully. "After all, he is a smuggler, which is very far from being a pirate, and there's no reason why he should be a monster. Olivarez and Castillo painted him in the blackest colours, but—"

"It was to their interest to do that same; and they're a pair of rascals, anyway," Billy Bunt said sagaciously.

They turned back from the precipice, to keep watch at the top of the ascent from the water-channel.

"Look at the old scamp, sir," whispered Billy, in disgust. "He don't deserve to be saved, sir, does he?"

Old Olivarez sat on a boulder, the precious valise in his hands, the picture of misery and dread. Talbot had given him Dudley's revolver. It lay unheeded on the ground beside him.

"Rouse yourself, man," Talbot said sharply. "Will you let them butcher you like a sheep?"

Olivarez only mumbled something inarticulately. Terror seemed to have almost deprived him of his reason.

"My poor father!" said Dolores, with tears in her eyes. "Pity him, Mr. Talbot; he is old, and worn out by anxieties."

A shout from the landing-place rang out.

"Senores, will you respect a flag of truce?"

"Certainly, if no tricks are attempted," was Talbot's reply.

Ximenes, with a white slip fluttering from his raised cutlass, advanced nimbly up the acclivity.

The boat was moored in its former place, by the flat shelf of rock, upon which the Mexicans had landed.

They were a fierce-looking crew, with their dusky faces and glittering eyes, their slouched hats and crimson sashes.

Ximenes stopped when only a jagged boulder separated him from Charles Talbot.

The Englishman and the Spanish-American stood face to face, looking at each other.

Ximenes made a graceful bow, not without an air of irony, and showed his teeth in a smile.

Talbot nodded in return, but his face remained very grave.

The Mexican's eyes passed beyond Talbot, and he saw Billy Bunt, pistol in hand; and, further back, the old banker, by

whom Dolores stood, as if she would protect him. At sight of the valise, Ximenes's eyes snapped greedily.

"Senor, I salute you," he said, his eyes returning to Talbot. "I see that you are prepared for battle; but I come to offer you peace, if you are sensible enough to accept it. I ask only what you must admit to be just."

"What do you ask?" questioned Talbot guardedly.

"Our friend Olivarez speculated rashly, or, rather, dishonestly, and failed for twelve million dollars. To compensate himself, he fled with securities representing three millions, belonging to me and my comrades. Can you expect men to sit down and bear such a loss patiently?"

"If the money be handed to you, then, will you leave us in peace?" asked Talbot.

"Not in the least. I desire not only money, but revenge," the Mexican answered, and his eyes gleamed. "Senor, perhaps you do not know the story. After dealing honourably with that sly old fox for years, he turned upon me, for no other reason than that he had robbed me, and feared my vengeance. Senor, he invited me into his house, and by a trick hurled me into a cellar, which he fastened up, leaving me to die of hunger there. I lay stunned for hours. I awoke to despair."

Ximenes's voice grew hoarse and savage.

"But for the suspicion of my Lieutenant Arispo, which led him to search for me, my bones had now been gnawed by rats in that dark den. Are you mad enough to ask me to forgive that?"

"You seem to have pardoned Castillo, a sharer in the crime," Talbot observed.

"I have made him no promises," Ximenes significantly answered. "I have availed myself of his treachery, as who would not? But my vengeance only waits."

"Look at the wretched old man," Talbot said; "is he not suffering enough? Take his treasure, and be satisfied."

Ximenes shook his head.

"Never! Gold is nothing to vengeance!"

"Only spare his life, and—"

"Understand me, senor—if I would do so, my men would not. Pablo Olivarez never will leave this spot alive!"

Talbot felt a chill. There was no hope, then?

"For you," continued Ximenes, "I have no enmity. I admire your courage in taking this quarrel upon yourself; though I can easily see your motive. And he glanced at Dolores. "Senor, let me advise you to abandon a hopeless cause. To you, to your comrade, and to the senorita, I will give safety. You shall have your boat, and go whither you will. Only Olivarez is my foe, and him I will hang!"

It was a great temptation. Life and love and happiness unbounded, if only he surrendered this swindler, this attempted assassin, to a fate he richly deserved!

But Dolores? Charles Talbot shook his head.

"You refuse?" asked Ximenes, with a gesture of rage.

"I must. I have engaged to defend that man against you. I loathe him; but I am bound in honour."

Ximenes looked steadily in the Englishman's troubled but unflinching face. This wild Mexican smuggler was not without an admiration of courage and chivalry.

"I am sorry, senor," he slowly said. "I can offer you no other terms. Surrender of Olivarez, or unsparing death and destruction. And you refuse my offer?"

"I cannot accept it."

"Tain't no yearly use, Seenyour Zimmynar!" struck in Billy Bunt. "British seamen never count odds; and our motto is 'No surrender!'"

"Then prepare for death!"

Ximenes turned, and descended to the landing-place.

Talbot stepped back, and joined Dolores. The girl was pale and wan, but showed unusual courage.

"All is over?" she whispered.

"I fear so. But we'll die hard!"

Dolores, blushing scarlet, held out her hands to Talbot.

Billy Bunt discreetly turned his face towards the enemy.

Olivarez, mumbling in terror, saw nothing. Talbot clasped the slender hands, and drew the unresisting girl to his heart.

"My darling!" he whispered, for he knew then that she loved him; and their lips met in a tremulous kiss.

"We are to die, but you shall know first that my heart is yours!" she murmured.

"They're comin', Mr. Talbot, sir!"

It was the voice of Billy Bunt.

Talbot imprinted a kiss upon Dolores's red lips, and released her. With a quick bound he was at Billy's side.

The Mexicans were advancing. Foremost came Castillo. This surprised Talbot, until he saw the reason. The smugglers, with threatening weapons, forced the young man to lead.

"The post of honour is yours, Don Silvio," Talbot heard Ximenes say mockingly. "There is the enemy you would be revenged upon—advance, then!"

"KING OF THE SCOUTS!"—COMPLETE, NEXT FRIDAY.

Silvio did not lack a certain amount of courage. He had bought his revenge at the cost of risking almost certain death, for he did not expect pardon from Ximenes. Yet now, too late, he perhaps repented—with death behind, and death before.

"Forward!" cried Ximenes, cocking his pistol. Desperate, Don Silvio bounded up the acclivity. The eyes of Talbot burned as he saw the assassin of Tom Dudley come within range of his revolver. "That he is, the murderer!" hissed Billy Bunt, his ruddy face for once darkened with hatred and revenge.

"Fire with me, Bunt! Death to the traitor!" The revolvers cracked in unison. Don Silvio came to a sudden stop. Both bullets struck him full in the breast. He reeled, flinging out his hands wildly. "He has it!" Talbot muttered, with grim satisfaction. Back staggered Silvio, and, losing his footing, he rolled helplessly downward, and dropped at the feet of Ximenes—dead!

CHAPTER 8.

The Success of Ximenes—The Banker's Doom—Conclusion.

Talbot looked for a desperate rush up the acclivity; but the death of Silvio had shown the Mexicans the danger of it, and instead of advancing they receded to the longboat.

"The critters don't like the smell of powder, Mr. Talbot," Billy Bunt remarked. "One lesson's enough for them."

Talbot shook his head. "They don't want to throw their lives away, that's all," he answered. "They'll be at us again soon."

Hours passed. The Mexicans remained in or by the boat, rolling cigarritos and smoking them, and playing at monte.

Ximenes and Arisipo sometimes looked up from their cards to scan the promontory, and whenever the former saw Talbot looking down he waved his hand in ironic salute.

"They are waiting for night," said Talbot. "And they'll hev us then, sir," Billy Bunt observed, with a shake of the head. "That's only two of us, ye see, and that's so big a place to be watched."

"Keep your weather-eye open, that's all." It was a day of horrible suspense.

The old banker remained in the same attitude, hardly stirring as the hours went by, the valise upon his knees, his head bent over it. He had given up all hope, and despair crushed him to the dust.

Dolores was white and wan, but she kept a firm spirit, and tried to smile, to cheer Talbot.

Food was hardly tasted all day. The morsels seemed to choke them. Their nerves were strung to the highest tension.

In the afternoon Ximenes, under the flag of truce, repeated his offer to Talbot.

Olivarez, hearing the dreaded voice, shrieked out entreaties to Talbot not to abandon him.

"We sink or swim together," Talbot replied to Ximenes. "You must spare all or spare none."

Ximenes shrugged his shoulders, and retired.

The day wore on. A smell of garlic ascended to the nostrils of the watchers of the plateau. The Mexicans below were eating, drinking, and making merry. They looked like men assured of ultimate success, and content to wait for it.

Talbot soon longed for night—anything to end that agonising inaction and suspense.

He was glad when the sun sank down beyond the blue, sparkling Pacific, and shadows closed in upon the shore.

"Now look out for squalls, Bunt!" he said.

A sound of loud singing rose from below. It puzzled Talbot at first; but he soon guessed the cause. It was made to cover any noise of the climbers, who were already ascending the rocky sides of the promontory.

The darkness was intense. Talbot and Bunt kept keen watch, but could discern nothing.

They were far from guessing how the cunning Ximenes was outwitting them.

A second boat had come from the felucca, and it was manned by Ximenes and five or six of his best men. They pulled round the promontory, and stopped the boat under the sheer precipice. Almost perpendicular as it was, its rough and jagged surface offered secure hold for nimble climbers. And these men were smugglers, accustomed to such work. Led by Ximenes, they commenced the ascent of the precipice.

It was slow and perilous work. A single man at the summit could have hurled them back with ease. But there were only two defenders, and they were on guard at the place they deemed most vulnerable.

Talbot fired two or three shots at random down the slope towards the longboat, to show that he was on the watch, and the Mexicans, ceasing their singing, returned a fusillade. The crackling detonations made a fearful din, and Talbot, though he felt sure that the enemy were scaling the promontory at some point, could hear no sound.

It was close on midnight when a sudden scream came from Donna Dolores.

"Don Charles! The enemy!"

Talbot turned, in startled amazement.

A number of dark figures were advancing over the plateau, from the direction of the precipice, at a rapid run.

Passing Dolores unheeded, they threw themselves upon Talbot and Billy Bunt.

Taken so utterly by surprise, the Englishmen were seized before they could fire a shot, and, with three Mexicans grasping each of them, their resistance was futile.

They were dragged to the ground, and the voice of Ximenes was heard ordering that their lives should be spared.

Ropes confined their limbs; a couple of minutes sufficed to render them perfectly helpless.

"Ximenes! Ximenes!" cried Talbot desperately, wild with fear for Dolores.

The drooping figure of the smuggler appeared before him.

"What would you ask, Senor Ingleso?"

"Let no harm come to Donna Dolores, as you are a man!"

"As I am a man and a sailor, not a hair of her head shall be harmed!"

Talbot felt an unspeakable relief.

"Oh, thanks! thanks!" he cried. "But—"

"Ask no mercy for Pablo Olivarez!"

The Mexicans who had stayed in the longboat now came clambering up to the plateau, and lanterns and torches cast a lurid light upon the scene.

A strange and terrifying scene! Dusky faces, glittering eyes, bare poniards, and fierce words upon every lip!

Talbot and Bunt, placed, bound, against a rock, could see all that passed. They saw Dolores place herself between her father and his foes, and Ximenes, not ungently, force her aside.

She struggled. Then abruptly her face went white and set; her eyes closed. She was fainting.

Ximenes passed her to Arisipo. Tenderly enough the fierce-looking smuggler bore her to the canvas shelter, and placed her there—unconscious.

Olivarez, without protection, without hope of escape, fronted the man he had robbed and tried to assassinate.

"My turn now, Don Pablo!" snarled the smuggler.

Olivarez did not ask for mercy. He stood like stone—dumb with fear.

Only when Ximenes grasped the treasured valise a howl of anguish left his colourless lips.

"It will be of no use to you, Don Pablo, where you are going!" said the smuggler, with a ferocious smile.

He made a sign. Two of his men seized Olivarez, and bore him to the edge of the precipice.

The banker's moans were horrible to hear.

Taking him by the head and feet, the two men swung the wretched victim on the very verge of the cliff.

"Away with him!" cried Ximenes.

Talbot, shuddering with horror, closed his eyes. When he reopened them, the two men were hastening back from the precipice. Olivarez had disappeared.

From far below the echo of a splash was faintly heard.

Morning dawned upon the Mexican shore and the Pacific Ocean.

'Twas a sad-faced trio that stood upon the plateau watching the vanishing sails of the felucca.

Ximenes had gone, bearing in his craft the valise, for the contents of which Olivarez had sinned in vain.

Dolores, when her senses returned, released Talbot and Bunt from their bonds. The trio were free and unhurt.

Talbot had told Dolores, as gently as he could, of the fate of Olivarez, whereat the girl wept bitter tears. She had always loved, though she could not respect him.

"Let us leave this ill-omened spot," Talbot said abruptly.

"They have left us the boat, the weather is perfect, and a day's sail will bring us into the track of the 'Frisco ships.'"

Glad enough were all of them to feel once more the blue water surging beneath them.

The weather held good, and upon the following day a vessel from Acapulco took them aboard, and all was plain sailing.

In a week they landed in San Francisco, where Talbot found the "Gadfly."

Captain Raleigh's greeting was very hearty.

"I thought you were in Davy Jones's locker long ago, my boy!" he declared. "Tell me how you pulled through."

When Talbot had spun the yarn, the skipper of the "Gadfly" looked very thoughtful.

"Of course, your place aboard my ship is ready for you," he remarked. "But what are you going to do with Donna Dolores? These women are a nuisance, ain't they?"

"Not particularly, sir," Talbot replied, with a smile.

"Donna Dolores has promised to become my wife, and—"

"I thought it would end that way. Well, I wish you joy. And I must say she's a well-found and well-appointed clipper, though her dad was a landlark."

And so Dolores became a British sailor's wife.

THE END.

"ART THOU THE MAN?" is the Title of the Splendid Complete Novel in this week's "Heartsease." Price One Penny.