

DOCTOR JACK.

By ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

Author of "Doctor Jack's Wife," "Captain Sam," "Baron Sam," "Miss Pauline," "New York," "Miss Cornelia," etc.

but just now he does not want to hurt Larry's feelings.

Again, there may be more grit to the square inch in this little body than most big men carry with them. Jack has not forgotten the scene in the hotel, where Larry knocked the big bully out who was trying to pick a quarrel with him.

"Besides Pedro, who else?" asks Jack, anxious to keep the other on the right track.

"There's the rascally old pasha—perhaps you know why he hates you so, for I don't."

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it, later on. It concerns a brother of Avis Morton's."

"What! Alec! The duse you say?"

"Go on, please. You shall hear the story when your own is done."

This is an incentive to urge Larry on, and he goes into further detail. "Besides, there is another in the deal—a man you have called a friend."

"Is his name Don Carlos?"

"That's it exactly. So you see here's a triumvirate plotting trouble. You must skip from this beastly city, doctor, and give 'em the slip."

Doctor Jack shows no sign of excitement—his manner is calm, and the hand that raises the glass without a tremor. The man who dared to conquer—unprepared for the encounter as he was—the terror of the arena twelve hours before, after the pride of Madrid had been tossed out on the horns of the mad toro is not at all to show the white feather because a new kind of danger menaces. He will meet it with the same unflinching front he showed the raging bull, quick to take advantage of an adversary's mistake, and always ready.

He has another question to put, though somehow he seems to hesitate about it, as if the subject were far from pleasant.

"Tell me, Larry, was there any hint dropped about a fourth party—a female?"

"Yes, to be sure—I had forgotten. What's coming over this head of mine? There is a woman in the deal—she said she was beautiful, and would make you forget all about Avis. See here, now that I think of it, she must be that darling you were with when I met you in the old curiosity shop they call a museum."

"It is Mercedes," says Jack, sadly, for somehow the thought that this beautiful creature, as though Larry realizes the plot against his life gives him pain—he does not understand why it should be so, but the facts are as plain as day.

What strange motive can Don Carlos and his niece have for their action? Surely it is not robbery, for in what manner would they profit by his death? There is some deeper, darker mystery back of all, and Jack cannot hope to pick up any crumbs from Larry—still there is no harm in trying.

"The Turk did not take you into his full confidence, I presume, old fellow?" he queries.

"No, but he gave promise of doing so if I would consent to join them. As I see, he talks broken English, and as I have not been furnished with any Turkish tongue lately, I did not get on as well as we might." Larry says this with a peculiar smirk, for, as a linguist, he is a dead failure, knowing nothing but his mother tongue, and previous little of the Turkish, that his acquaintances are fain to believe.

"I am bothered over one thing. Pedro has a cause for hating me—he is a Spaniard, and I am the man who supplanted him in the fickle affections of the public. As for the Turk, there is abundant reason why he should wish to see me sent, Mazepa-like, over the plains of Tartary on the back of a wild horse, but for the life of me I cannot understand why Don Carlos, whose life I have saved in the Pyrenees, and his lovely niece should conspire against me. Perhaps you can throw some light on the subject, my good friend."

But Larry shakes his head—he is unable to solve the mystery that puzzles Jack.

"It seems to me unreasonable that a man like this Spaniard should join in the hue and cry against you. He's of noble blood, and owes you much, because, as you say, you saved his life when bear-hunting. I have no crew that will open the mystery, but I am convinced there must be some deep secret back of it. Are you sure you have given him no cause for such undying hatred?"

It is Larry who turns cross-questioner now, and somehow Jack does not think it odd. He answers in all frankness.

"Never—I am sure of it. We have been good friends ever since we met in Paris. I cannot remember having offended him by word or look."

"What was the nature of your meeting?" Larry is endeavouring to probe around much the manner of a young surgeon searching for a ball which he hopes to hit by chance.

"Well, now that you speak of it, our meeting was a trifle singular. Let me briefly narrate it. I have spent many months in Paris, and am familiar with almost every part of the city, even beyond those places generally gazed upon by the average tourist."

One night I was returning to my quarters with a friend, who, by the way, is a Spaniard, the Duke Arroyo, when he proposed that we peep in upon a secret meeting of some sort, I've forgotten what. He had the entire, and I saw a good deal of mummery, and to this day I've never been able to decide whether the Spaniards in that den were plotting for or against the present dynasty in Spain—I know not whether they were republicans, followers of Don Carlos, the Pretender, or of the present government."

However, it was here I met Don Carlos—we became friends under these rather peculiar circumstances, and he had stuck close to me ever since that hour. I cannot see any explanation in that account of our meeting to justify this strange enmity on his part."

"Pen 'em! now, but I do!" is the startling announcement of the duke makes much to the astonishment of Doctor Jack, whose respect for the monkey-man increases the more he hears of him.

"Explain it, then, my dear fellow," he begs.

Larry glances around cautiously, not that he has any idea of being overheard, but because what he is about to say might involve him in trouble if hostile ears did catch it, then close to Doctor Jack's tympanum he says:

"Those men you saw in council were the trusted adherents of Don Carlos, who has never given over plotting to snatch the throne of Spain. At the time, the Duke Arroyo was esteemed one of their most trusted friends, and any person acquainted with him could be greeted with warmth, and a feeling that he was true blue. Are you following me, doctor?"

Jack nods eagerly—the truth already begins to dawn upon his mind. He realizes that a strange freak of fate has hurled him into an arena far more dangerous than the one that held the black toro—the battle-field of human passions and plottings, where men—men, which he shakes with a gravity quite natural to him—for he is not impulsive in his ways.

"As sure as I live I believe you have struck the truth—it is a most reasonable explanation of this deep mystery. There is only one thing puzzling me now."

"What may that be? Perhaps I can prove to be a magician in that case also," laughs the strange little man.

"I am wondering how you, Lawrence Kennedy, of New York, come to know these things?"

The duke's laugh freezes on his lips, and when he turns directly toward Jack to look him in the face—they have removed their half masks long before—the athlete can detect the slightest shadow of anxiety upon the queer physiognomy, as though Larry realizes the fact that he is playing with fire.

"Doctor, there need be no secrets between us. To tell you the truth, I belong to the revolutionist party myself," he announces, with a forced grin.

"The duke you do. Really, you are the last person I should expect to find meddling with such dangerous business. Couldn't you find excitement enough in hunting or kindred sports at 46 to 47, and 800 of oats at 24 to 26 without risking your neck in this way?"

The other assumes an air of importance that ill becomes his small stature. "I preferred to engage in a game that required the exercise of brains, for you know I am something of a Richelieu in my way. These parties, though, as though Larry realizes the fact that he is playing with fire."

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"Perhaps I would be as badly off, only for one thing, and that has given me my point. I noticed the Pasha in the museum—watched him like a lynx out of the corner of my eyes, for I wanted to know him again wherever I might meet him. As a result I got on to a certain little trick he has of tossing his head in a peculiar way, as it—"

"There he goes now," interrupts Larry, with a gesture of delight—then drops his eyes as the masked monk turns that way.

"Yes, that is it. I know positively that this man is the pasha, and if so I'm afraid your disinterested kindness has gotten you into a scrape."

"Don't worry about me. I don't flunk when danger calls. There are ways of outwitting these bloody Spaniards. Trust a Yankee's long head for that, my boy. Have you any suggestion?"

"Let me think a minute."

So Doctor Jack reviews the situation, and sees things in something of a new light. He begins to realize how near he has come to falling in the pit dug for him—not only once at the house of Don Carlos, but in the arena for with his new vision he believes Mercedes was playing a deep game when with voice and eyes she urged him on to meet the bull—no doubt believing and expecting he would never leave the bull-ring alive.

Somehow this thought makes him feel cheap—he does not care for Mercedes, but he is a man, and does not like to have been made a plaything of a beauty's smile.

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"Come, we will go out of here," and Jack rises, settles the account, then passes beyond the portal.

"Look back, Larry—is he following?" he says.

"Yes, he has arisen, and walks this way, the old heathen. I'd like to see him, but we must do nothing rash. At all events, it is essential to the success of my plans that Abdullah Pasha live to return to Turkey, for he is the man who has been playing a tremendous game being played, the stakes of which are contained in a human life."

They pass along to the fonda near by, with the same merry crowd jostling them, the same frolicsome seniors pouring rice upon them from over-hanging balconies, amid shrieks and laughter that is always a part of the grand carnival.

At another time Doctor Jack might have joined in the mirth of the hour, but now he is in a different mood, and believes in getting a certain amount of pleasure out of this grim old world of ours, with its fleetings and shadows; but just now so many things are on his mind that he cannot find time to enjoy the music and laughter of the city.

He feels that a net is being spread about him, and not only does the danger menace himself, but that fair girl, Avis, as well as the American representative, and I joined them. Oh! I'm a double-dyed plotter, and don't you forget it, doctor. That is how I got on the track of your game—I knew about the duke, and previous little of the Turkish, that his acquaintances are fain to believe."

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