

THE CHRONICLES OF DON Q.

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A THREE-CORNERED GAME.



It is not too much to say that there were two Don Q's. The one a sneering, vengeful, tiger-hearted brigand, who dealt in death, pain and blood-stained money; the other a charming, soft-spoken gentleman full of courtesy and culture. But one quality remained always, apparent, whichever side of his character happened to be uppermost—the man was a most terrible enemy. "He knows no fear," wrote a prisoner of his on one occasion, "nor do I think he has ever known it. Yet he carries an imagination that cuts like a knife to the heart of things. It is this faculty of placing himself in the position of his foes that has so long enabled him to shatter all designs made against his liberty and his life."

But of this particular point in Don Q.'s character Don Felipe Majada thought not at all as he lay at ease in a long chair and gazed up at the glorious blue sky of Spain—that country which only smiles when the sun shines. An ultimatum had that morning arrived from Madrid which said that if Don Q. was not captured or placed within seven days, the governorship would be given into more capable hands.

"Ah, most beautiful," said Don Felipe aloud, "life has many trials, but it is only when the heart is broken that one tastes despair."

The woman he addressed moved her fan a little faster. She looked handsome and defiant, this full-throated deep-bosomed Andalusian with magnificent sulky eyes.

"Have you no words, my Rosita?" he said again, with a piteous accent.

"What shall I say?" She raised her heavy eyelids. "How does one show despair? Does one grow fat upon it?"

"Do not mock me, I implore you!" continued Don Felipe. "It is on account of this carion bird of the sierra that I shall be thrust from my place. To-day I am one of the highest officials of the state, in seven days—certainly I shall be—"

"Without money, position or credit," concluded Rosita.

"Unless I got rid of Don Q. within seven days!" Don Felipe repeated. Don Q.

"Don Q., mark you, Rosita, the abominable brigand who has defied all efforts to capture him since before I became governor, for years, for decades."

Rosita's lip curled, showing her pretty teeth.

"Some men would not accept defeat so easily," she remarked. "Sooner than that you would go single-handed into the sierra?"

"I single-handed into the sierra? The saints forbid!"

"But think," she urged, still smiling, "how life will appear to you without money, position, honor, credit! Is it not worth the risk?"

"Ah, my most beautiful you do not understand!" he repeated helplessly. "You are far from understanding. This culture hates me. If I were in his grip!" he shuddered—"he would kill me. Not by an easy death, Rosita, by inches. He is a terrible man."

"He is at least a brave one."

"Brave!" echoed the governor. "He was born lacking the nerve of fear! He would face an entire army alone."

"Whereas you," she pointed her fan at him with a little mocking gesture, "would head the army in running away. Is it not so?"

be poisoned. This you must also do, and so prove my good faith in the eyes of the chief."

"It is a magnificent plan, my Rosita, and worthy of you," exclaimed Don Felipe in genuine admiration. "I have to conceal two or three scores of men in the gardens of the Casa de Segli—we will seize him."

"And you will remain governor," she added.

"With the most beautiful wife in Spain!" he gazed at her fervently.

So it came to pass that the letter of Dona Rosita de Rivo, which betrayed the plot of the convoy of poisoned wine intended to fall into Don Q.'s hands, lit in his mind a cold and deadly fury against Don Felipe.

"This over-gorged carion would endeavor a second time to poison me!" he reflected. "Am I a rat or a dog that he should do this? He must be taught. He has imprisoned this girl, moreover. Yes, he must be taught."

So for many hours the chief brooded in his cave, for when time permitted he liked to consider every possibility of the game.

After these hours of silence, he lay on a table that stood in a corner of his cave and began to write. They were but a few lines which ran somewhat as follows. He kissed the hand of the lovely Dona Rosita. He thanked her for the hint she sent him, and he would take steps for her deliverance on the coming Friday evening. He paused for a moment as if about to add more, then sealed the letter and called Robledo.

The young fellow came running up the pathway to the cave-mouth.

"Bring also Antonio," was the order.

Don Q. looked keenly from the worn, handsome face of Robledo to his companion.

"I am about to trust you. I pray you may prove yourself worthy of the honor. I am about to put my life in your keeping. This letter must be put in the hands of the lady whom you will find detained at the Casa de Segli. Take care that by no chance it falls into the hands of Don Felipe Majada—my life would pay the penalty. You understand?"

"Yes, lord."

"Then go."

Don Q. looked after the man with that quiver of his drooping eyelids which with him betrayed excitement or anger. "A very meagre intellect," he muttered. "That insect will do exactly as I calculate; he will endeavor to betray me."

Then he turned to the second of his followers, who stood waiting meekly. "For you, Robledo, I have a do-ble mission, the chief resumed in his soft, sibilant tones. "Go down to the shrine of San Pedro and beg one of the good fathers to come up into the mountains to the gorge of the torrent. Say that his presence will be urgently needed on Friday evening."

The sun had already passed overhead and was dropping in the fierce blue sky when the chief mounted his fragile frame on an anubling mule and led a body of his followers downward toward the plains. His many brilliant feathers tossed over wild scrub-grown areas, through glimmering summer woods, until in the splendid glow of evening they came to where a rugged path wound and tumbled through the lower ravines. Here a charcoal burner rose from a thicket in which he had been crouching.

With his eyes on the ground he told of the passing of a convoy with wine for the Casa de Segli. That was 16 hours ago. He had kept watch since.

"We have secured the convoy, and the soldiers," inquired Don Q.

"They also passed, my lord, in the dark before the dawn. I could count 60, but others went by in the gloom. There were more than 60."

"Good. You shall be rewarded, Tomas."

"And now, my children, forward. The soldiers will enjoy a quiet evening in the pleasant gardens of the Casa de Segli. We will not disturb them."

"It was deep in the night, in the streets of that white and ancient city where Don Felipe held office. The watchmen had just ended the hour with the facts that the night was black and the stars hidden, when six men in Indian file slipped noiselessly through the shadows under the sleeping houses, and passed by the wall of the governor's residence. Then the leader, drawing on more stealthily his long muffled cloak, delivered an order or two, something dropped softly down from the balcony above, and a slender figure passed by a rope ladder into the window overhead.

History is uncertain as to whether it was a man or a woman who not him, but, in any case, the accomplice—for Don Q. had friends everywhere, equally in the local courts of officials as in the huts of the goat-herds—holding the thin hand of the chief drew him through a passage or two, and left him before a high closed door.

Don Q. took from his belt a knife, turned the handle of the door, and walked in. A faint lamp burned beside the bed. The chief stepped up into the circle of its light, and tapped the sleeper sharply on the ear.

The governor awoke.

"Do not presume to utter a sound," commanded Don Q.

The governor's face, bulged with terror, peered from the bedclothes.

"Rise at once and come with me," went on the urbane, inexorable voice.

"The mountains, and I should never forgive myself if you were to contract a pneumonia."

At the word "mountains" Don Felipe's jaw fell. He found his tongue at last, but the sound it sent forth was like the beating of a kid.

"Who are you?—I refuse to go with you."

"You will not, I am sure, do anything so rash as refuse. You cannot know that it is Don Q.'s shadow which lies across your face. Corpses seldom tread by the foot of man."

Surprise saw the governor woe-begone and chilled, bound on a pony with rough paces, mounting higher and ever higher into those sierra he had hitherto beheld only in terrified visions of the night.

This was Friday—what had happened? It was the day on which Don Q. had promised in his letter to deliver Dona Rosita. What was going to become of him, Felipe?

They encamped in the gorge of the Torrent, a remote and lonely spot, seldom trodden by the foot of man.

Soon a sibilant voice called from the chozo.

"Bring the prisoner here, Robledo." And in a moment the governor stood transfixed under the heavy-lidded gaze of the great sequestered.

"You are Don Felipe Majada?" The fat captive quaked and bowed.

"I have received some complaints of your conduct toward a lady," went on Don Q. politely. "I trust you will find yourself able to demolish these accusations."

Don Felipe feebly shook his head.

"It pains me greatly," resumed the brigand, "to be obliged to touch on so delicate a subject, but I am given to understand that you have pestered a lady with your attentions. I trust for your own sake that gossip rather than truth lies at the root of these reports."

"They are false, señor," gasped Don Felipe in an agony of apprehension. "I swear they are false, señor."

"Then how can you explain this?" demanded Don Q., handing him the letter that he and Dona Rosita had concocted together only four days before.

Majada read it, wavered his head and grimacing in sheer terror as he strove to speak.

"It is all false. She loves me!" he blurted at last.

"And who?" questioned Don Q.

"Bring her a bottle, Robledo. It laid at his feet."

"No, no!" Majada almost screamed.

"Then will you gratify me by taking a glass of wine?"

"A glass of wine?" questioned Don Q.

"A long and heavy silence fell upon the gorge. Don Felipe exhausted by his efforts found himself crying dumbly. At last Don Q. spoke.

"This lady loves you?"

"She adores me! She would marry me in spite of myself," stammered the other.

"How fortunate for you."

"What do you mean?"

"That I am about to send for her, Don Felipe. If she loves you, she will come."

"It is impossible. My servants have her in charge."

"Take a pen and write to your major domo, or whoever happens to be in command at the Casa de Segli, ordering that the Senorita de Rivo be allowed to accompany the bearer of your letter. No more."

"I repeat," stammered Majada, "that it is impossible."

"How unlikely for you!"

"You are chivalrous—she is a woman," placed Don Felipe.

"Sénor," said Don Q., in his softest manner, "write the letter; and if you have any influence with Dona Rosita, as you say you have, use it to bring her here."

Resistance was hopeless. Majada's shaking hand produced the words.

"You have finished?" demanded the chief gently.

"Yes," puffed Don Felipe.

"Then add this postscript. If she loves you it will cause her to fly to your side. The exquisite courtesy of the brigand's manner only deepened with each sentence. "Write, Senor," Don Q. desired me to add that if you are not here by 8 o'clock, I shall be buried at a quarter past."

many of your old acquaintances came to me in the mountains, and—how some of them left me!"

But not even this program appeal sufficed to Don Felipe Majada. He drank wine, but more and more he steeped himself in the gloom of terror. Talk he could not, and the chief presently excused himself, saying he would indulge in a siesta. But no sleep came to the tired eyes of the governor.

What would be the result of Rosita's arrival. How much would she betray?

Soon the slight bustle of some arrival on the little plateau under the flex trees reached Don Q.'s ears. He waited but a moment before he called to Robledo. The young bandit, handsome, panting, travel-worn, appeared at the opening of the chozo.

"You have done my bidding?"

"The lady is here, lord."

"Good!" The chief pondered a short time, and gave some orders before he commanded that Don Felipe Majada and the lady should be brought before him.

Dona Rosita had never looked more handsome.

Don Q. rose and bowed before her, sweeping his sombrero to the ground.

"I crave your pardon, fairer senorita," began the chief with sibilant fluency. "I am to blame. This lovely-look gallant implored me not to put you to so much inconvenience for his sake. But a certain story he has told me requires to be investigated. Without your delightful presence I could do nothing. The sight of your beauty has refreshed my dim eyes, your amiability my poor heart."

Don Felipe feebly shook his head.

"What would you know of me? Ask your questions and let me be gone. Give me my liberty, señor."

But certainly, it will be my happiness to secure the liberty of the lovely Dona Rosita. Condescend to hear me."

Don Q. recited the story of the plot as it had been told him by Majada.

The lady did not speak for a long moment, she pined all the unhappy governor with a silent gaze.

"Grant me a moment, señor," she implored, "out of the hearing of all these ears," she waved a contemptuous fan at the guards who had accompanied her. "Let me enter the chozo and tell you all the truth."

Don Q. signified his acquiescence, and bade his men draw off.

"Order this traitor to come, too. Dona Rosita touched Majada on the shoulder. He shall be forced to tell the truth."

Don Q. threw some twigs upon the fire, till its flame lit up the three faces. Then with an apology to the senorita, resumed his hat as she began to speak.

"So," she cried, "this false man has dared to say many things to prejudice me in your eyes? He would save himself by throwing the guilt upon me. O, noble caballero! O, chivalrous gentleman! I thank you!"

She turned to spurn Majada.

"O, Rosita, Rosita!" moaned the governor.

"I hate you! You have torn me from my home. You would force me to marry you!—Lord of the sierra!"

She turned to Don Q. with a magnificent movement—"What is such a traitor worthy of?"

"It is indeed a most shameful affair, senorita. Shall I punish him? Pray command me," replied the brigand with an air of respectful sympathy.

"No—I will deal with him myself." Then springing to the side of Don Q. she added passionately:

"Give me your knife, señor—I will show you how we Spanish women deal with such a one!"

Don Felipe covered, his hands over his blanched face, as the chief brandished the weapon to Rosita. She took it and faced Majada.

"Felipe," she said, with a sudden break into a caressing tone, "Felipe, look up and listen to me."

The governor, struck by the change in her voice, peered up at her. His hand only half withdrawn from his face.

"Felipe, you swore to marry me in seven days. If—something happened. Is that not so?"

"It," repeated the man, sulkily, "What's the use of talking of it now?"

"Because it is going to happen! Help me, Felipe, help me!"

Like as a wild creature, she flung herself upon Don Q. as she spoke, stabbing viciously at him with the knife. The chief flung up his arms and his dark cloak swirled about his head like the flapping of huge wings; but she pressed upon him, driving her knife deep as the folds of the cloak closed and settled in a heap upon Don Q.'s falling body. Nothing of him remained visible but one emaciated yellow hand, pale as death, grasping loosely at nothing.

Terrified by success, Rosita stood spellbound, gazing at the motionless and shapeless heap of black clothing, under which lay the body of the famous brigand. At last she drew a long breath.

"I have won! I have defeated even Don Q. There he lies, your conqueror killed and out-man-eaten by a woman! You allowed my first plot to fail—I don't know how—but my second has mastered him."

But Majada only moaned.

"Yes; it is all very well. You have killed him, now they will kill us—those wolves of his," he whimpered.

You coward! You thought all

was lost before, but I would not yield! As soon as I saw the wretch's weak body, his thin wrists, his pale, the idea of this trick came into my mind. I told myself I could not fail. I have won in spite of his subtlety and power, Felipe, you will remain governor, and I shall be your wife! Are you not happy now?"

But Majada made no response, he only gaped at her as she stood over him flushed and splendid in a storm of triumph. Suddenly an odd expression crossed his face, his mouth fell open blankly, and before she could comprehend what this meant, her wrists were seized from behind. She wrenched her hands toward her breast to free them, and looked back over her shoulder into the face of Don Q.

"Help, help, Felipe!" this time the cry was an agonized appeal. But Majada stood heavily apart.

A shrill whistle from the chief brought his men up. He charged them to strictly bind both prisoners.

You have condemned yourself, senorita," Don Q. said. "Had I not been on my guard—" he stooped and raised his hat from the ground, the knife transfixed through crown and brim.

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed bitterly. "I had hoped it was your heart!"

"It would seem that you and Don Felipe have been partners in a conspiracy against my life," pursued the chief. "How can the plains you permitted yourselves to compass my death. I am able to inform you that the soldiers still wait for my coming in the gardens of Segli."

Dona Rosita's eyes flashed.

"I should have retrieved that disaster, if the blood running in this creature's veins were not milk," she pointed at Majada. "Now do as you like with us."

"What does Don Felipe deserve at my hands?" asked Don Q.

"Spare me, sparer me!" cried Don Felipe, given over to fresh apprehensions.

THE MIRACLE—BY TROY ALLISON

Esther Blake felt certain that there were positions in life that she would have found less trying than that of only child of a popular minister. She loved the dear old rectory with its shabby furniture, she had grown up feeling that the beautiful gray stone church with the stained glass windows was part of the family possessions—but while these things helped make the condition pleasant, they did not keep her from wanting the things that other girls had, and to do the things that other girls did.

Christmas after Christmas her lips had quivered when she had received from one to a dozen handsome Bibles from the friends in her father's congregation. Her mother had a sense of humor, and when Esther on her twentieth birthday, received Bible number thirty-seven, she laughed and told her daughter that for Christmas she would buy her an adjustable extension bookcase.

There seemed nothing else that she needed quite so much.

The girl's face seemed half divided between a desire to laugh and to cry.

"I don't see why they think I don't want a trinket instead of a book, a bracelet, or something a little bit frivolous, mamma," she said. "I have nineteen Madonnas hanging in my room, and I have received at various times a copy of almost every religious picture ever printed. Of course I like them—but I wish I could be considered as a saint girl sometime, and not a part of St. John's Church."

She had, as a little girl, cheerfully given up the dancing lessons that she wanted, she was never invited to card parties because each and every hostess felt a tiny bit doubtful as to whether it would be suitable to extend such invitation to her.

Even the dinner parties and ice cream festivals had failed to be particularly interesting to her—for if there were a cake or a turkey, she was sure to be assigned to her. As a school girl she had stolen furtive glances at the college boys who wore their hair long and played football—there was something fascinating in the jolly way they laughed—and she had wished that her hostesses would make her a little more like them, occasionally, the girl's face would light up with a smile, and she would eat a philopona with a foot-ball youth. But they never did understand and she continued to discuss with curates the last Sunday's sermon, or a new plan for decorating the church next Easter.

There had, however, been one glorious period of freedom—she had spent two years at a boarding school, had played basketball as hilariously as any girl on the team, had eaten Welsh rarebits, cooked at midnight behind covered transoms and chinked doors, with the same temerity shown by the girls who had lawyers or doctors for fathers.

And best of all—she had become acquainted with vivacious Elise Bourland, whose mother was French and whose father considered life worth living, and the world a jolly place to live in.

Contrary to the idea that like seeks like—the two girls, so different, had formed a fast friendship.

When Dick Bourland, who practised law in a city neighboring the school, gave the weekly visits to his sister, he pronounced dear little Esther Blake altogether charming. At the close of school he told her so—and finding that she admitted it, he exactly the same opinion of him, he had taken the long journey to reach the little South Carolina town and state the case to the

Dick's mother had, upon the announcement of the engagement, written a little note and invited the girl to come for a visit that she might get acquainted with her future relatives.

The girl stood in the library by the window watching the rain that had been steadily pouring all the forenoon,

Don Q. held up his hand for silence.

"You deserve to die," he paused, "but the lady loves you."

"No! He is a coward. I would kill him rather than marry him!" Rosita cried hotly.

"Lady, you have courage enough for two; thus, when you and this poltroon are made one that will be no hindrance. To become his wife has been your desire. You deserve punishment as certainly as he."

"But I have heard you never hurt a woman," she protested.

"True. But when I can give them their heart's desire, which occasionally serves my purpose equally well." He turned to Robledo. "Bring hither the good father."

"I will not submit. I will not be the wife of Don Felipe!" she exclaimed.

"Will you permit me to kill him instead?" inquired the chief sadly.

She turned away from her fellow-captive with a coldness.

"I pray you to do so."

Don Q. considered her for a long moment.

"You have shared his guilt; you must, therefore, share his punishment," he said. "Choose, and remember, in choosing for him, you choose for yourself."

She met his eyes, a red spark seemed to glow under the drooping lids. The fiery spirit died within her. This terrible man was capable of anything. She shrank back with a gesture of compliance.

An hour later the couple were about to start for the lower passes. As they mounted Don Rosita on a mule for her ride, Don Felipe approached the chief.

"I should have forced me to marry a tigress," he complained.

Don Q. was once more the amiable gentleman.

"But a beautiful tigress," he amended. "Pray accept my warm congratulations. I cannot answer sure the Senora Majada will make for her qualities as a wife, but I am very charming widow."

plucking her forehead in anxious plannings of the possibilities of the case.

"I really don't see how I can go, mamma," she said, finally. "It is impossible for papa to afford it now you."

Her mother tapped her pen meditatively against the inkstand and tried to help plan.

"You get your railway fare at half fare, you know, my dear—that helps some, and you could alter my new grey crepe and make it look youthful enough for a calling dress. Then you have your white commencement dress. Esther came over and sat on a stool by her mother's knee.

"I can't help wanting his people to think I'm nice—and for him to be proud of me. You understand, don't you, mother?"

"Mrs. Blake patted her on the back, and her eyes grew misty.

"Yes, yes, dearie. I understand perfectly—but I also remember that Dick loved my girl for herself—when she didn't have half the pretty clothes the other girls were able to afford. The thing to keep in mind, little daughter."

Esther kissed her impulsively. "You are the best kind of a comforter, mother—mine. Come, let's look over the remnants of our wardrobes and see if we can't accomplish some of those wonderful things one reads about on the Woman's Page. How to make a handsome evening dress if one of an lace curtain, or a dressing sacque out of a silk handkerchief trimmed with your father's old neckties plaited into tiny edgings."

Mrs. Blake laughed and followed her up stairs. They soon had the girl's bed covered with odds and ends ransacked from both wardrobes.

Esther finally sat down, an old-fashioned lavender and white delaine dress that had belonged to her mother's more youthful days, lying in her lap.

"I really can make up a lovely little evening dress out of this,"