POOR DOCUMENT

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THE FATE OF A CROWN

A STORY OF LOVE, INTRIGUE AND ADVENTURE

By SCHUYLER STAUNTON

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CHAPTER V.

Madam Izabel.

I slept well in my pleasant room, but wakened early, the bright sunshine pouring in at my open window and the songs of many birds sounding a lively chorus.

After a simple toilet I sprang through a low window to the ground and wandered away among the flowers and shrubbery. It was in my thoughts to revisit the scene of my first meeting with Lesba, but I had no hope of fining her abroad at that hour until I caught a glimpse of her white gown through a small arbor. The vision enchanted me, and after pausing a moment to feast my eyes upon her loveliness, hastily approached to discover her cutting roses for the breakfast table. She greeted me in her shy manner, but in a way that made me feel I was not intruding. After a few conventional remarks she asked, abrutly:

"How do you like Dom Miguel?"

"Very much," said I, smiling at her eagerness. "He seems eminently worthy of the confidence repcsed in him by his compatriots."

"He is a born leader of men," she rejoined, brightly, "and a rebel of us all would hesitate to die for him. How do you like my brother?"

I was sorry she asked the question, for its abruptness nearly took my breadth away, and I did not wish to grieve her. To gain time I laughed, and was answered with a frown that served to warn me.

"Really, donzella," I made haste to say, "if I must be quite frank, your brother puzzles me. But I think I shall like him when I understand him better."

"She Rose to Her Feet, Her Eyes Flashing."

She shook her head as if disappointed.

"No one ever understands Francisco but me," she returned, regretfully.

"Does he understand himself?" I foolishly asked.

The girl looked at me with a gleam of contempt.

"Sir, my brother's services are recognized throughout all Brazil. Even Fonseca respects his talents, and the suspicious Piexoto trusts him impilicity. Francisco's intimate friends positively adore him! Ah, senhor, it is not necessary for his sister to sing his praises."

I bowed gravely.

"Let me hope, donzella, that your brother will soon count me among his intimates." It was the least I could say in answer to the pleading look in her eyes, and to my surprise it seemed to satisfy her, for she blushed with pleasure.

"I am sure he likes you already," she announced; "for he told me so as he bade me good-by this morning."

"Your brother has gone away?"

"He started upon his return to court an hour ago."

"To court!" I exclaimed amazed at his audacity.

She seemed amused.

"Did you not know, senhor? Francisco Paola is Dom Pedro's Minister of Police."

I acknowledged that the news surprised me. That the Emperor's Minister of Police should be a trusted leader of the Revolutionary party seemed incomprehensible; but I had already begun to realize that extraordinary conditions prevailed in Brazil. Perhaps the thing that caused me most astonishment was that this apparently conceited and empty-headed fellow had ever been selected for a post so important as Minister of Police. Yet the fact explained clearly how I had received secret protection from the moment of my landing at Rio until I had joined Dom Miguel.

The girl was laughing at me now, and her lovelines made me resolve not to waste more of these precious moments in political discussion. She was nothing loath to drop the subject, and soon we were chattering merrily of the flowers and birds, the dew-drops and the sunshine, and all those inconsequent things that are wont to occupy youthful lips while hearts beat fast and glances shyly mingle. When, at length, we sauntered up the path to breakfast I had forgotten the great conspiracy altogether, and congratulated myself cordially upon the fact that Lesba and I were well on the way to becoming good friends.

Madam Izabel did not appear at the morning meal, and immediately it was over Dom Miguel led the way to his study where he began to acquaint me thoroughly with the standing and progress of the proposed revolution, informing me, meantime, of my duties as secretary.

While we were thus occupied the door softly opened and Izabel de Mar entered.

She cast an odd glance in my direction, bowed coldly to her father, and then seated herself at a small table littered with papers.

A cloud appeared upon Dom Miguel's brow. He hesitated an instant, and then addressed her in a formal tone.

"I shall not need you today, Izabel."

She turned upon him with a fierce gesture.

"The letters to Piexoto are not finished, sir," she exclaimed.

"I know, Izabel; I know. But Mr. Harcliffe will act as my secretary, hereafter; therefore he will attend to these details."

She rose to her feet, her eyes flashing, but her face as immobile as ever.

"I am discharged?" she demanded.

"Not that, Izabel he hastened to reply. "Your services have been of inestimable value to the Cause. But they are wearing out your strength, and some of our friends thought you were too closely confined and needed rest. Moreover, a man, they considered—"

"Enough!" said she, proudly. "To me it is a pleasure to toil in the cause of freedom. But my services, it seems, are not agreeable to your leaders—rather, let us say, to that sly and treacherous spy, Francisco Paola!"

His face grew red, and I imagnned he was about to reply angrily; but the woman silenced him with a wave of her hand.

O, I know your confidence in the Emperor's Minister, my father; a confidence that will lead you all to the hangman, unless you beware! But why should I speak? I am not trusted, it seems; I, the daughter of delPintra, who is chief of the Revolution. This foreigner, whose heart is cold in our Cause, is to take my place. Very well. I will return to the court—to my husband."

"Izabel!"

"Do not fear. I will not betray you. If betrayal comes, look to your buffoon, the Minister of Police; look to your cold American!"

She pointed at me with so scornful a gesture that involuntarily I recoiled, for the attack was unexpected. Then my lady stalked from the room like a veritable queen of tragedy.

Dom Miguel drew a sigh of relief as the door closed, and rubbed his forehead vigorously with his handkerchief.

"That ordeal is at last over," he muttered; "and I have dreaded it like a coward. Listen, senhor! My daughter, whose patriotism is not well understood, has been suspected by some of my associates. She has a history, has Isabel—a sad history, my friend." For a moment Dom Miguel bowed his face in his hands, and when he raised his head again the look of pained emotion upon his features lent his swarthy skin a grayish tinge.

"Years ago she loved a handsome young fellow, one Leon de Mar—of French descent, who is even now a favorite with the Emperor," he resumed. "Against my wishes she married him, and her life at the court proved a most unhappy one. De Mar is a profligate, a rake, a gamester, and a scoundrel. He made my daughter suffer all the agonies of hell. But she uttered no complaint and I knew nothing of her sorrow. At last, unable to bear longer the scorn and abuse of her husband, Izabel came to me and confessed the truth, asking me to give her the shelter of a home. That was years ago, senhor. I made her my secretary, and found her eager to engage in our patriotic conspiracy. It is my belief that she has neither seen nor heard of De Mar since; but others have suspected her. It is hard, indeed, Robert, not to be suspicious in this whirlpool of intrigue wherein we are engulfed. A few weeks ago Paola swore that he found Isabel in our garden at midnight engaged in secret conversation with that very husband from whom she had fled. I have no doubt he was deceived; but he reported it to the Secret Council, which instructed me to confide no further secrets to my daughter, and to secure a new secretary as soon as possible. Hence my application to your uncle, and your timely arrival to assist me."

He paused, while I sat thoughtfully considering his words.

"I beg that you will not wrong my daughter with hasty suspicions," he continued, pleadingly. "I do not wish you to confide our secrets to her, since I have myself refrained from doing so, out of respect for the wishes of my associates. But do not misjudge Izabel, my friend. When the time comes for action she will be found a true and valuable adherent to the Cause—and now, let us to work!"

I found it by no means difficult to become interested in the details of the plot to overthrow the Emperor Dom Pedro and establish a Brazilian Republic. It was amazing how many great names were enrolled in the Cause and how thoroughly the spirit of freedom had corrupted the royal army, the court, and even the Emperor's trusted police. And I learned, with all this, to develop both admiration and respect for the man whose calm judgment had so far directed the mighty movement and systematized every branch of the gigantic conspiracy. Truly, as my fair Lesba had said, Dom Miguel de Pintra was "a born leader of men."

Night after night there assembled at his house groups of conspirators who arrived secretly and departed without even the servants having knowledge of their visit. During the counsels every approach to the house was thoroughly guarded to ward against surprise.

Strong men were those republican leaders; alert, bold, vigilant in serving the Cause wherein they risked their lives and fortunes. One by one I came to know and admire them, and they spoke freely in my presence and trusted me. Through my intercourse with these champions of liberty, my horizon began to broaden, thus better fitting me for my duties.

Francisco Paola, the Emperor's Minister, came frequently to the conferences of the Secret Council. Always he seemed as simpering, frivolous, and absurd as on the day I first met him. To his silly jokes and inconsequent chatter none paid the slightest attention; but when a real problem arose and they turned questioningly to Paola, he would answer in a few lightly spoken words that proved at once shrewd and convincing. The others were wont to accept his decisions with gravity and act upon them.

I have said that Paola impressed me as being conceited. This might well be true in regard to his personal appearance, his social accomplishments—playing the piano and guitar, singing, riding, and the like—but I never heard him speak lightly of the Cause or boast of his connection with it. Indeed, he exhibited a queer mingling of folly and astuteness. His friends appeared to consider his flippancy and self-adulation as a mask that effectually concealed his real talents. Doubtless the Emperor had the same idea when he made the fellow his Minister of Police. But I, studying the man with fervid interest, found it difficult to decide whether the folly was a mask, or whether Paola had two natures—the second a sub-conscious intelligence upon which he was able to draw in a crisis.

He certainly took no pains to impress any one favorably, and his closest friends were, I discovered, frequently disgusted with his actions.

From the first my judgment of the man had been influenced by his sister's enthusiastic championship. Lesba seemed fully in her brother's confidence, and although she was not a recognized member of the conspiracy, I found that she was thoroughly conversant with every detail of our progress. This information must certainly have come from Francisco, and as I relied absolutely upon Lesba's truth and loyalty, her belief in her brother impressed me to the extent of discrediting Madam Izabel's charge that he was a traitor.

Nevertheless, Paola had acted villainously in thrusting this same charge upon a woman. What object, I wondered, could he have in accusing Izabel to her own father in falsely swearing that he had seen her in conversation with Leon De Mar—the man from whose ill treatment she had fled? I was yet to learn that not one drop of de Pintra blood flowed in the veins of Madam Izabel. Of all the leaders in the Cause only Francisco Paola knew of her adoption when a child in arms. My perspective would have been different with this knowledge.

Madam Izabel had not returned to the court, as she had threatened in her indignant anger. Perhaps she realized that it would mean to place herself again within the power of her husband she had learned to hate and despise. She still remained an inmate of her father's mansion, cold and impassive as ever. Dom Miguel treated her with rare consideration on every occasion of their meeting, seeking to reassure her as to his perfect faith in her loyalty and his sorrow that his associates had cast a slur upon her character.

To me the chief was invariably kind, and his gentleness and stalwart manhood soon won my esteem. I found myself working for the good of the Cause with as much ardor as the most eager patriot of them all, but my reward was enjoyed as much in Lesba's smiles as in the approbation of Dom Miguel.

That the government was well aware of our plot there was no question. Through secret channels we learned that even the midnight meetings of the Secret Council were known to the Emperor. The identity of the leaders had so far been preserved, since they came masked and cloaked to the rendezvous, and by so many of the details of the conspiracy had in some way leaked out that I marveled the Emperor's heavy hand had not descended upon us long ago. Of course de Pintra was a marked man, but they dared not arrest him until they had procured all the information they desired, otherwise they would defeat their own purpose.

One stormy night, as I sat alone with Dom Miguel in his study, I mentioned my surprise that in view of the government's information of our plot we were not summarily arrested. It was not a council night, and we had been engaged in writing letters.

"I suppose they fear to precipitate trouble between such powerful factions," he answered, somewhat wearily. "The head of the conspiracy is indeed here, but its branches penetrate to every province of the country, and were an outbreak to occur here the republicans of Brazil would rise as one man. Dom Pedro, poor man, does not know where to look for loyal support. His ministry is estranged, and he is not even sure of his army."

"But should they discover who our leaders are, and capture them, there would be no one to lead the uprising," I suggested.

"True," assented the chief. "But it is to guard against such a coup that our Council is divided into three sections. Only one-third of the leaders could be captured at any one time. But I do not fear such an attempt, as every movement at the capital is reported to me at once."

"Suppose they were to strike you down, sir. What then? Who would carry out your plans? Where would be the guiding hand?"

For a moment he sat thoughtfully regarding me.

"I hope I shall be spared until I have

Dom Miguel.

accomplished my task," he said, at length. "I know my danger is great; yet it is not for myself I fear, but lest the Cause be lost through premature exposure. I have taken care to guard against that, should the emergency arise. Light me that candle yonder, Robert, and I will reveal to you one of our most important secrets."

He motioned toward the mantel, smiling meantime at my expression of surprise.

I lighted the candle, as directed, and turned toward him expectantly. He drew a rug from before the fireplace, and stooping over, touched a button that released a spring in the flooring.

A square aperture appeared, through which a man might descend, and peering over his shoulder I saw a flight of stairs reaching far downward.

De Pintra turned and took the candle from my hand.

"Follow me," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

The Secret Vault.

The stairs led us beneath the foundations of the house and terminated in a domed chamber constructed of stone and about ten feet in diameter.

In the floor of this chamber was a trap-door, composed of many thicknesses of steel, and so heavy that it could be raised only by a stout iron windlass, the chain of which was welded to a ring in the door's face.

Dom Miguel handed me the candle and began turning the windlass. Gradually but without noise the heavy door of metal rose, and disclosed a still more massive surface underneath.

This second plate, or highly burnished steel, was covered with many small indentations, of irregular formation. It was about three feet square and the curious indentations, each one of which had evidently been formed with great care, were scattered over every inch of the surface.

"Put out the light," said de Pintra.

I obeyed, leaving us in total darkness.

Next moment, as I listened intently, I heard a slight grating noise, followed by a soft shooting of many bolts. Then a match flickered, and Dom Miguel held it to the wick and relighted the candle.

The second door had swung upward upon hinges, showing three iron steps that led into a vault below.

The chief descended and I followed; not, however, without a shuddering glance at the great door that stood suspended as if ready to crash down upon our heads and entomb us.

Just within the entrance an electric light, doubtless fed by a storage battery, was turned on, plainly illuminating the place.

I found the vault lined with thick plates of steel, rivited firmly together. In the centre was a small table and two wooden stools. Shelves were ranged around the walls and upon them were books, papers, and vast sums of money, both in bank notes and gold.

"Here," said my companion, glancing proudly around him, "are our sinews of war; our records and funds and plans of operation. Should Dom Pedro's agents gain access to this room they would hold in their hands the lives and fortunes of many of the noblest families of Brazil—and our conspiracy would be nipped in the bud. You may know how greatly I trust you when I say that even my daughter does not guess the existence of this vault. Only a few of the Secret Council have ever gained admittance here, and the secret of opening the inner door is known only to myself and one other—Francisco Paola."

"Paloa!" I exclaimed.

"Yes; it was he who conceived the idea of this vault; it was his genius that planned a door which defies any living man to open without a clear knowledge of its secret. Even he, its inventor, could not pass the door without my assistance; for although he understands the method, the means are in my possession. For this reason I alone am responsible for the safe-keeping of our records and treasure."

"The air is close and musty," said I, feeling oppressed in breathing.

He looked upward.

"A small pipe leads to the upper air, permitting foul vapors to escape," said he; "but only through the open door is fresh air admitted. Perhaps there should be better ventilation, yet that is an unimportant matter, for I seldom remain long in this place. It is a store-house—a secret crypt—not a work-room. My custom has been to carry all our records and papers here each morning, after they have been in use, that they may be safe from seizure or prying eyes. But such trips are arduous, and I am not very strong. Therefore, I will ask you to accompany me, hereafter."

"That I shall do willingly," I replied.

When we had passed through the door on our return the chief again extinguished the light while he manipulated the trap. Afterward the windlass allowed the outer plate of metal to settle firmly into place, and we proceeded along the passage and returned to the study.

Many trips did I make to the secret valut thereafter, but never could I understand in what manner the great door of shining steel was secured, as Dom Miguel always opened and closed it while we were in total darkness.

As the weeks rolled by I not only became deeply interested in my work, but conceived a still greater admiration for the one man whose powerful intelligence directed what I knew to be a gigantic conspiracy.

Spies were everywhere about Dom Miguel. One day we discovered his steward—an old and trusted retainer of the family—to be in the Emepror's pay. But de Pintra merely shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Such a person could do little to imperil the cause, for its important secrets could not be surprised. The grim valut guarded them well.

My duties occupying me only at night, my days were wholly my own, and they passed very pleasantly indeed, for my acquaintance with Lesba Paola had ripened into a close friendship between us—a friendship I was eager to resolve into a closer relation.

But Lesba, although frank and ingenuous in all our intercourse, had an effectual way of preventing the declarations of love which were ever on my tongue, and I found it extremely difficult to lead our conversation into channels that would give me an opportunity to open my heart to her.

She was an expert horsewoman, and we took many long rides together, during which she pointed out to me the estates of all the grandees in the neighborhood. Dom Miguel, whose love for the beautiful girl was very evident, seemed to encourage our companionship, and often spoke of her with great tenderness.

He would dwell with especial pride upon the aristocratic breeding of his ward, which, to do him justice, he valued more for its effect upon other noble families than for any especial advantage it lent to Lesba herself; for while Dom Miguel was thoroughly republican in every sense of the word he realized the advantages to be gained by interesting the best families of Brazil in the fortunes of his beloved Cause, and one by one he was cleverly succeeding in winning them. My familiarity with the records taught me that the Revolution was being backed by the flower of Brazillian nobility—the most positive assurance in my eyes of the justice and timeliness of the great movement for liberty. The idea that monarchs derive their authority from divine sources—so prevalent among higher classes—had dissolved before the leader's powerful arguments and the object lessons Dom Pedro's corrupt ministry constantly afforded. All thoughtful people had come to a realization that liberty was but a step from darkness into light, a bursting of the shackles that had oppressed them since the day that Portugal had declared the Province of Brazil an empire, and set a scion of her royal family to rule its people with autocratic sway.

And Lesba, sprung from the bluest blood in all the land, had great influence in awakening, in those families she visited an earnest desire for a republic. Her passionate appeals were constantly inspiring her fellows with an enthusiastic devotion to the cause of liberty, and this talent was duly appreciated by Dom Miguel, whose admiration for the girl's simple but direct methods of conversation was unbounded.

"In the Floor of This Chamber Was a Trap Door."

"Lesba is a rebel to her very fingertips," said he, "and her longing to see her country a republic is exceeded by that of no man among us. But we are chary of admitting women to our councils; so my little girl must be content to watch for the great day when the cause of freedom shall prevail."

However, she constantly surprised me by her intimate knowledge of our progress. As we were riding one day, she asked:

"Were you not impressed by your visit to the secret vault?"

"The secret vault!" I exclaimed. "Do you know of it?"

"I can explain every inch of its construction," she returned, with a laugh; "everything, indeed, save the secret by means of which one may gain admission. Was it not Francisco's idea? And is it not exceedingly clever?"

"It certainly is," I admitted.

"It was built by foreign workmen, brought to Brazil secretly, and for that very purpose. Afterward the artisans were sent home again; and not one of them, I believe, could again find his way to my uncle's house, for every precaution was taken to prevent their discovering its location."

"That was well done," said I.

"All that Francisco undertakes is well done," she answered simply.

This faith in her perplexing brother was so perfect that I never ventured to oppose it. We could not have remained friends had I questioned either his truth or ability.

Madam Izabel I saw but seldom, as she avoided the society of the family and preferred the seclusion of her own apartments. On the rare occasions of our meeting she treated me with frigid courtesy, resenting any attempt upon my part to draw her into conversation.

For a time it grieved me that Dom Miguel's daughter should regard me with so much obvious dislike and suspicion. Her sad story had impressed me greatly, and I could understand how her proud nature had resented the slanders of Francisco Paola and writhed under them. But one evening an incident occurred that served to content me with Madam Izabel's aversion, and to suspect that the Minister of Police had not been so guilty as I had deemed him.

It was late, and Dom Miguel had preceded me to the domed chamber while I carried the records and papers to be deposited within the vault.

After raising the first trap my employer, as usual, extinguished the candle. I heard the customary low, grating noise; but before the shooting of the bolts reached my ears there was a sharp report, followed by a vivid flash, and, turning instantly, I beheld Madam Izabel standing beside us, holding in her hand a lighted match and peering eagerly at the surface of the trap.

My eyes followed hers, and while Dom Miguel stood as if petrified with amazement I saw the glitter of a gold ring protruding from one of the many curious indentations upon the plate. The next instant the match was dashed from her grasp and she gave a low cry of pain.

"Light the candle!" commanded De Pintra's voice, fiercely.

I obeyed. He was holding the woman fast by her wrist. The ring had disappeared, and the mystery of the trap seemed as inscrutable as ever.

Dom Miguel, greatly excited and muttering imprecations all the way, dragged his daughter through the passage and up the stairs. I followed them silently to the chief's study. Then, casting the woman from him, De Pintra confronted her with blazing eyes, and demanded:

"How dare you spy upon me"

Madam Izabel had become cool as her father grew excited. She actually smiled—a hard, bitter smile—as she defiantly looked into his face and answered:

"Spy! You forget, sir, that I am your daughter. I came to your room to seek you. You were not here; but the door to this stairway was displaced, and a cold air came through it. Fearing that some danger menaced you, I passed down the stairs until, hearing a noise, I paused to strike a match. You can best explain the contretemps."

Long and silently Dom Miguel gazed upon his daughter. Then he said, abruptly, "Leave the room!"

She bowed coldly, with a mocking expression in her dark eyes, and withdrew.

As she passed me I noted upon her cheeks an unwonted flush that rendered her strikingly beautiful.

Deep in thought, De Pintra paced the floor with nervous strides. Finally he turned toward me.

"What do you see?" he asked, sharply.

"A ring," I answered. "It lay upon the trap, and the stone was fitted into one of the numerous indentations."

He passed his hand over his brow with a gesture of despair.

"Then she saw it also," he murmured, "and my secret is a secret no longer."

I remained silent, looking up him curiously, but in deep sympathy.

Suddenly he held out his hand. Upon the little finger was an emerald ring, the stone appearing to be of no exceptional value. Indeed the trinket was calculated to attract so little attention that I had barely noticed it before, although I remembered that by employer always wore it.

"This," said he, abruptly, "is the key to the vault."

I nodded. The truth had flushed upon me the moment Madam Izabel had struck the match. And now, looking at it closely, I saw that the stone was oddly cut, although the fact was not likely to impress one who was ignorant of the purpose for which it was made.

The chief resumed his pacing, but presently paused to say:

"If anything happens to me, my friend, be sure to secure this ring above all else. Get it to Paola, or to Fonseca, or Piexoto as soon as possible—you know where they may be found. Should it fall into the hands of the royalists the result would be fatal."

"But would either of your associates be able to use the ring, even if it passed into their possession?" I asked.

"There are 200 indentations in the door of the trap," answered De Pintra, "and the stone of the ring is so cut that it fits but one of these. Still, if our friends have time to test each cavity, they are sure to find the right one, and then the stone of my ring acts as a key. My real safety, as you will observe, lay in the hope that no one would discover that my ring unlocked the vault. Now that Izabel has learned the truth, I must guard the ring as I would my life—more, the lives of all our patriotic band."

"Since you suspect her loyalty, why do you not send your daughter away?" I suggested.

"I prefer to keep her under my own eye. And, strange as her actions of tonight seem, I still hesitate to believe that she would conspire to ruin me."

"The secret is not your own, sir," I ventured to say.

"True," he acknowledged, flushing deeply, "the secret is not my own. It belongs to the Cause. And its discovery would jeopard the revolution itself. For this reason I shall keep Izabel with me, where, admitting she has the inclination to betray us, she will not have the power."

After this night he did not extinguish the light when he entered the vault, evidently having decided to trust me fully; but he took pains to secure the trap in the study floor so that no one could follow us. After watching him apply the key several times, I became confident that I could find the right indentation without trouble should the occasion ever arise for me to unlock the vault unaided.

Days passed by, and Madam Izabel remained as quiet and reserved as if she had indeed abandoned any further curiosity concerning the secret vault. As for my fellow-rebel, the Senhorito Lesba, I rode and chatted with her in the firm conviction that here, at least, was one secret connected with the revolution of which she was ignorant.

CHAPTER VII.

General Fonseca.

One evening, as I entered Dom Miguel's library, I found myself face to face with a strange visitor. He did not wear a mask, as did so many of the conspirators, even in the chief's presence; but a long, black cloak swept in many folds from his neck to his feet.

My first thought was to marvel at his size, for he was considerably above six feet in height and finely proportioned, so that his presence fairly dominated us and made the furnishings of the room in which he stood seem small and insignificant.

As I entered, he stood with his back to the fireplace confronting Dom Miguel, whose face wore a sad and tried expression. I immediately turned to withdraw, but a gesture from the stranger arrested me.

"Robert," said Dom Miguel, "I present you to General Manuel Deodoro da Fonseca."

I bowed profundly. General Fonseca was not only a commander of the Emperor's royal army, but Chief Marshall of the forces of the Revolutionary party. I had never seen the great man before, as his duties required his constant presence at the capital; but no figure loomed larger than his in the affairs of the conspiracy.

Seldom have I met with a keener or more disconcerting glance than that which shot from his full black eyes as I stood before him. It seemed to search out my every thought, and I had the sensation of being before a judge who would show no mercy to one who strove to dissemble in his presence.

But the glance was brief, withal. In a moment he had seized my hand and gripped it painfully. Then he turned to Dom Miguel.

"Let me hear you read the rest of your story," said he.

"There is nothing more, General. Izabel has learned my secret, it is true; but she is my daughter. I will vouch for her faith."

"I BEHELD MADAM IZABEL STANDING BESIDE US"

"Then will not I!" returned Fonseca, in his deep, vibrant tones. "Never have I believed the tale of her estrangement from that scoundral, Leon de Mar. Men are seldom traitors, for they dare not face the consequences. Women have no fear of man or devil. They are daughters of Delilah—each and every one."

He turned suddenly to me.

"Will you also vouch for Senhora Izabel de Mar?" he saked.

"No," I answered.

"And quite right, sir," he returned, with a grim smile. "Never trust a woman in politics. But how about Francisco Paola? Do you vouch for him?"

I hesitated, startled by the question. "Answer me!" he commanded.

"I cannot see that I am required to vouch for any one, General," said I, nettled by his manner. "I am here to serve the Cause, not to judge the loyalty of its leaders."

"Ugh!" said he, contemptuously; and I turned my back upon him, facing Dom Miguel, over whose features a fleeting smile passed.

Fonseca stalked up and down the apartment, his sword clanking beneath his cloak, and his spurs clinking like castanets. Then he planted his huge figure before the chief.

"Watch them both," said he brusquely: "your daughter and your friend. They are aware of our most important secrets."

De Pintra's face reddened.

(To be continued.)

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