

THE SEÑOR

BY THEODORE ROBERTS, AUTHOR OF "HEMMING THE ADVENTURER"

CHAPTER XI

One man's joy is his friend's despair;
And only the lucky may win the fair.

SNOW began to fall while Ned Harrison was eating his breakfast, on the morning of the twenty-fourth of December. The big, leisurely flakes clung to the windows and blotted out the drifted landscape. Harrison scarcely noticed the storm, for his thoughts were with the final chapter of his novel. He fairly bolted his coffee and toast, and then leaving the dishes to take care of themselves, he went to the sitting-room. He drew the curtains at the windows and lit his lamp, then with a pile of blank paper before him he projected his heart and spirit to the land of his own imaginings. Page after page was scrawled over and pushed aside. Composition, usually so hard for him, now seemed child's play. Every sentence ran to his satisfaction, and the right word seemed to be always ready, lurking in the ink. Solomon gnawed at his slipper, but failed to attract his attention. A stick of maple, burned through the middle, broke and fell from the andirons to the hearth, and from the charred ends a streamer of smoke wavered into the room; but the worker gave no heed. The clock chimed, and struck valiantly; but for all the effect its commendable industry had upon its master it might just as well have been a cream cheese. Solomon curled himself against the inattentive slipper and went to sleep. He was wakened by a step in the hall; and then the door opened and Da Santo walked in, mantled in clinging snow. He barked absurdly, and advanced upon the intruder, who received him with wounding familiarity.

"Just a moment," murmured Harrison, without raising his head. He scribbled three lines more, read them over, and scrawled his signature and the date with feverish haste.

"There," he exclaimed: "*Finis—finis—finis*—and thank God for that!"

He looked up and stared at his friend, and then at the lamp at his elbow,

"Hullo! what time is it?" he exclaimed.

"Nearly twelve," replied Da Santo, throwing aside his cap and coat.

Harrison stood up and held out his hand.

"I've finished this yarn," he said. "I've done a whole chapter since breakfast."

Da Santo congratulated him cordially.

"And now we must have a drink," said the novelist. "Excuse me a moment, will you?"

He soon returned with a tray containing a bottle and glasses, and a jug of water.

"By-the-way, where's your horse?" he asked.

"I walked," replied Da Santo.

"You seem to be doing a lot of walking lately."

"Yes, I like it. Well, here's power to your elbow, Ned."

"Good hunting," replied the other. The glasses met with a tinkling clash and then were drained.

WITH this ceremony over, Da Santo took a seat by the fire, and Harrison read him the completion of the novel.

"It will do," said Da Santo, quietly. "You seem a

bit weak with the women, but the men are well done. It strikes me as a ripping good story."

"I'm glad you like it," said Harrison, modestly. "You're right about the women—they are lightly done, and no mistake. You see, old chap, I don't know much about that subject."

"You're not too old to learn," replied the other; "and I hope to Heaven you'll take your lessons like a man."

Harrison glanced at him enquiringly; then he took a slip of paper out of a note-book.

"Here are some verses that I may use as a dedication," he said.

"Fire away," said Da Santo. "Though, I must say, a dedication is a weakness."

The novelist cleared his throat nervously, blushed a little, and then read three admirably tender stanzas, in which he offered the book, with all his heart, to the nameless inspirer of his work. His voice shook ever so slightly as he read.

For nearly a minute after the reading of the verses Da Santo made no comment; then he said—"That dedication may be a weakness, but it is certainly not a weakness against literature."

He got up and walked over to the book-case, on the top of which he found a package of cigarettes. Lighting one of these, he returned to his seat.

"I hope you may find a woman some day with heart and brains enough and love enough to appreciate those verses," he said, gravely.

Harrison slipped the paper back between the pages of the note-book, and laughed softly.

"I am sure of the heart and the brains," he said, with some confusion.

Da Santo nodded.

"But love is the greatest of the three, to insure understanding," he replied, "and I hope, to God, you'll find it along with the heart and the brains; but remember, Ned, that there are more desperate places in this world than Venezuelan battlefields, and worse casualties than broken knees."

As Harrison had nothing to say to that he suggested that they should look for something to eat.

IT was mid-afternoon by the time Da Santo thought of returning to town. Snow was still falling. Harrison wanted to drive him in, but he would not hear of it. He turned up the collar of his heavy coat, pulled his fur cap well down about his ears, and lit his pipe.

"By-the-way, I came out to invite you to dinner, to-morrow night," he said, turning on the threshold. "Don't tell Vivia that I so nearly forgot it."

"I'll be there," replied Harrison. "But I wish you'd change your mind, old chap, and let me put the mare into the punga," he added.

"What rot! It's only three miles," exclaimed the other.

"Very well, my son, have your own way. Promise that you will trot straight home, and not dawdle along the road."

"All right, papa," laughed Da Santo.

Harrison returned to his sitting-room and began the work of revising the earlier chapters of his story. Here